Inspector Gadget: ReInitiated

by Silver_Warrior_Wolf

Summary

In the year 2087, there is a sudden chaos as the previously weakened M.A.D. suddenly starts to reassert itself. One detective and his team must be called upon to stop this evil!

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Thursday, July 8, 2083

Metro City Suburb

It was a bright summer morning in suburb of Metro City. The sky was clear and there was a feeling of peace to the air. It helped that the area was securely protected, both by its own city police and the World Organization of Mega Powers, or W.O.M.P., which had its headquarters located within the city. Indeed, it seemed that nothing at the moment could break the peace for the inhabitants.

Well, almost nothing.

"Uncle Gadget, stop!" Penny called out to her guardian. "You can't take out toast like that!"

Her warning was, unfortunately, too late. The inspector had already inserted a fork into the toaster in an attempt to dislodge a particularly stubborn piece of toast out of the machine. The shock that, by necessity, followed, was enough to give credence to his niece's warning.

Rushing over to the shocked detective's side, Penny and her dog, Brain, carefully helped him back to his feet. "Uncle Gadget, are you alright?" the girl asked, worry clear in her tone.

"I'll be alright," he responded, trying to steady himself. "Just remind me never to do that again." He rubbed his head and glared at the toaster. "Remind me to get a new toaster, too. That one's been causing trouble ever since I tried to fix it."

"Maybe we should just have some fruit for breakfast today," Penny suggested, looking for an opportunity to keep her notoriously danger prone relative away from any potentially dangerous household appliance.

He smiled at the suggestion. "Good idea. Fruit is a very important part of a balanced diet, after all." Moving over to the fruit bowl, Gadget selected a particularly good looking apple and took a bite.

That was when the ringing started up. "Wowzers!" the detective declared. "That shock must have hit me harder than I thought. Now I'm hearing things!"

Penny giggled and shook her head. She loved her uncle dearly, but she wondered if he'd ever fully get used to the gadgets he used on a daily basis. "I think that's the Super-Secret Gadget Phone, uncle."

"Oh, yes, quite right. I'd forgotten about that." He set the apple down before extending the antenna hidden in his right thumb. Setting his thumb to his ear and his pinky to his mouth, he listened in.

Penny picked up her computer book and pretended to read it, while Brain feigned interest in a chew toy. In reality, they were listening in on her uncle's call. If he was receiving a mission, then it was important that they understood what was going on.

"Hello, Chief? Is that you?" the detective was saying. "You're where? Alright, I'll be there in a moment."

Replacing the antenna to its former position, he wandered over to the kitchen window and opened it up. Outside, hidden in the shrubbery outside, was Chief Quimby.
"Chief!" Gadget said excitedly, as if he had never seen the chief in one of his odd hiding places before. "I didn't know you had an interest in gardening!"

Quimby rolled his eyes, already well used to his rather ditzy underling. "We've got an important mission for you, Gadget," he said, handing a sheet of paper through the window. "Read this."

"'Doctor Claw has kidnapped Dr. Freymore, one of the world's most brilliant technological geniuses,'" the cyborg inspector read, bringing the paper close to his face. "'He is going to use the doctor's knowledge and technology to hack into the world government's most private files. He is hiding in a system of caves near the Hoover Dam, where he will use the energy to power his computer system. If he gets that information, the results could be catastrophic. You're assignment is to go out there and stop his plans. This message will self-destruct.'"

Looking up from the piece of paper detailing what he was to do, Gadget smiled. "You don't have to worry about a thing, Chief." He crumpled up the paper as he confidently turned to get his coat. "After all, I'm always on duty." The inspector tossed the paper over his shoulder as he walked back, not noticing Quimby's shock as he did so.

As the paper exploded in his face once again, Quimby groaned. "I wanted to get the paper that merely dissolves after a few minutes, but no, explosions are more in the budget!"

"Penny," Gadget called as he turned to the door, "this is one where I'll be heading out solo. I'll see you tonight."

"Alright, uncle," the girl called back. "See you then!"

Lowering her voice, she turned to her dog. "Brain, you had better follow him there. I'll take a bus and catch up with you once I have the time."

The faithful dog saluted before rushing out to hide in the back of the Gadgetmobile. Yep, it seemed to be the makings of an ordinary day for the Gadget household.

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Hoover Dam, Clark County, Nevada

"How are you doing, Brain?" Penny's voice came over the transmitter attached to the dog's collar. "Can you see Uncle Gadget?"

The faithful creature gave a ruff of affirmation, as well as a salute to the camera. He was currently wearing the outfit of a dam worker: blue overalls and a white hard hat. Nearby, Gadget was examining one of the maps he had been given of the surrounding area, completely oblivious of his pet's presence.

"Good," the girl responded. "I've found the specific tunnel systems Claw is hiding out in. I'm going in to investigate. Get a lock on where I am, and see if you can't bring Uncle Gadget here."

The dog wuffed again before turning to figure out a way to fulfill his task. Inwardly, he gave a small sigh. This wasn't going to be easy. It never was.

"So," the inspector muttered quietly under his breath, "if I'm here, and Claw's hiding somewhere around this area, but the power supply can only be routed in that direction..." It was clear that, left to his own devices, the detective would be here all day.

Brain sighed as he realized what he was going to have to do. There was only one surefire way to get
Gadget's attention, though it was never very fun.

Rushing over to the table, the dog snatched the map away. Semi realizing what was going on, Gadget snapped to attention. "Hey!" he called out. "I was using that! Give it back!"

Crumpling up the map, Brain tossed it away and stuck his tongue out at the detective and took off running. He knew the chase wouldn't be far behind.

"He must be a M.A.D. agent, and he's trying to impede my investigation!" Gadget said aloud, taking up the chase. "Hey, you! Get back here!"

Adjusting his collar so he could pick up on Penny's signal, the dog adjusted his direction so as to join the girl on her own investigation. He just dearly hoped the good inspector wouldn't catch him first.

Meanwhile, Penny's own little investigation had not been all that fruitful. While she had discovered the area where Claw was hiding out, there was nothing that she had uncovered that would give her the ability to do anything.

She had wirelessly connected her computer book to the main processor and was running a sweep of the tech that took up most of the main chamber when she heard footsteps coming up. Without hesitation, the ten-year-old rushed behind one of the larger computers, squeezing into an area where she hoped no one would look.

In walked two men. Both were dressed in lab coats. One of them was an older man with a close trimmed white beard. With him was a younger man with black hair and glasses who was handling an electronic notebook.

"Claw will be here within the hour, Nicholas," the older man stated. "What's the state of the upload?"

"Well," the younger man, Nicholas, stammered out, "we've got the systems set up to go online in a short while. Once we're up, we can access just about any information from any computer on the face of the earth."

"That's good!" the older man declared. "Soon, M.A.D. will have access to whatever they need."

"Well, sir, there is one little problem," the assistant said in a nearly inaudible voice. Penny had to strain to understand what he was saying.

"Which is?" the man in charge ask.

"Uh, it's Inspector Gadget, sir," came the explanation. "Some of the M.A.D. agents saw him wandering around the caverns, led by a dam worker. It seems W.O.M.P. has taken an interest."

"Don't worry about Gadget," the other man snorted. "That's what the traps are for."

"That leads to another issue," Nicholas said, his voice still unusually quiet. "Dr. Freymore, why are we working with M.A.D.? I thought they were the bad guys in these sorts of situations."

Penny had to swallow a gasp of shock from what she heard. So, the doctor wasn't kidnapped, but was working with Claw willingly? She'd have to find a way to let her uncle and W.O.M.P. know.

For now, though, she had to stay quiet, since neither man had left.
"That's all from how you see it, Nick," Dr. Freymore said confidently. "You see, what's being done here is for the greater good. Information, after all, is best in the hands of those who can use it to its highest potential."

"But if a police officer is being sent after us-" Nicholas tried to argue.

"Let's even look at our opponent," the older man interrupted. "Detective John Brown, AKA Inspector Gadget. Strangely good at his job, but never went through college, even flunking out of community college. He barely got through high school, and has an IQ of 74, just barely high enough not to be considered mentally retarded. Yet this is the man being trusted with the supposed safety of not only this, but other governments as well. What does that say about W.O.M.P.?

"Uh, well-" the assistant tried to speak, but was cut off again.

"It says they have no business with the authority they claim." Dr. Freymore tapped a few keys, and several screens showing images of the good inspector popped up. "When they appoint an imbecile like this to a position of guardian of the peace, instead of kept in his proper place, then it becomes clear that new management is in order. That way, those with the highest intellects are kept in charge, while everyone else is put in their proper positions." He motioned to the screen right as the detective, while in the pursuit of what was clearly Brain in overalls, proceeded to lose control of his skates and crash into a wall. "Claw had the right idea. Men like the inspector are good only for lab rats and disposable muscle."

Inwardly, Penny fumed. She hated it when her uncle was insulted like that, and she knew enough of what had happened to him at Claws hands to be utterly disgusted by the comment. She had to find a way to stop these people, and fast.

She began wiggling out from behind the computer, hoping to be able to make it out and get help without being detected. She had almost made it to her goal, when the slip up happened. Her foot landed on a wire when she wasn't expecting it, and she slipped, falling out into clear view.

"It's a spy!" Freymore cried out. "Catch her! Don't let her escape!"

With a swiftness born of experiences with escapes, Penny jumped to her feet and took off running. Several M.A.D. agents came and attempted to catch her, but she was used to such pursuits. Taking the first opportunity, she dodged into a small crevice, and the none too observant agents ran right past her hiding place.

Relieved about her close getaway, she crept out of her hiding place. "This is bad," she muttered quietly to herself. "I'd better get Chief Quimby on the line." She began working with her watch to attempt to call the Chief in, devoting her attention to the task. She was so concerned with what she was doing, she didn't notice where she was going until she ran into someone.

Knocked back by the hit, she stumbled backwards. It took her a moment to realize who she had run into, and by then, it was too late.

"Well," Dr. Claw said, laughing maliciously. "If it isn't Inspector Gadget's little niece."

Penny attempted to make her escape, but it was too late. Claw grabbed her by the back of her shirt, hefting her into the air. "Don't leave now," the villain laughed. "Don't you want to see your uncle?"

With that, he dragged her off, back to the main cavern.

"Hey! Get back here, you!" Gadget had, by now, abandoned the idea of keeping up the chase with
his skates (the walls were just set up too close to each other for that) and was now pursuing what he thought was a M.A.D. agent on foot.

He had seen the agent round the corner into a larger chamber of the cave and disappear. Not one to be lost, the inspector took off to follow him into the larger chamber. However, much to his disappointment, there wasn't anyone in there.

That was when he spotted the computer screens. Playing on them were images from other area of the cavern. "Ah, security cameras!" Gadget exclaimed cheerfully. "Those should help me figure out where that pesky agent got to!" He wandered over and examined the keyboard.

Frankly, he could only recognized a few of the commands written on the keyboard. It was very different from the keyboard he had at home, and he sometimes made mistakes with that one, too, and Penny had to come and fix it. Come to think of it, he had to ask Penny for explanations about the computer a lot at home.

Ah, well, Penny wasn't here at the moment, she was safe and sound at home where he had left her. "This can't be too hard to figure out," he said, setting to the control panel. "Let's see, if I press this key, it should take me to the home web…I think."

He set to working the buttons and keys for a few moments. Nothing seemed to happen for the first few minutes. After a while, messages started popping up, mostly telling him that there was an error or asking him if he wanted the download to be aborted.

Gadget didn't understand these messages, and thus ignored them. However, they were soon replaced by other messages, spouting shouts of "Warning! Systems overheating! Warning!" He tried to ignore these too, but they became impossible to ignore when fires started spouting around the computer.

"Oh, so that's what systems overheating means," the detective stated. "Well, I know what to do about that. Go-go Gadget Water-Gun!"

In a deeper part of the cavern, Gadget's actions were not going unnoticed. "That idiot is destroying everything!" Freymore called out. "We need to stop him! Or everything will be for naught!"

Claw scowled. "It's too late. He's already destroyed everything." The villain turned, yanking the now captive Penny up with him.

"Wait, what are you doing?!" The mad scientist was in shock over what he was seeing.

"I told you," Claw responded. "All this here is already gone." As if emphasizing his words, there was a loud explosion caused by the water hitting the electrical fire. "We need to leave. Gather what you can salvage and meet me later. I am going to send a message to the good inspector."

When Gadget was aware of what was happening again, he was outside and Chief Quimby was helping him to his feet. "Congratulations, Gadget!" his superior exclaimed. "You stopped Claw from hacking into the world's governments, and destroyed his hideout! I don't know how you did it!"

"That makes two of us," the cyborg laughed. He was somewhat in a daze, and really couldn't remember anything that happened after he withdrew his water cannon.

"We didn't find Dr. Freymore," Quimby continued, "but we will continue our search."
Gadget was about to respond when a familiar rumbling started up. They didn't have much of a question of what was going on. Claw was getting out, and there wasn't much that could be done to stop him.

Something was different this time, though. As he flew by, Claw flew low, allowing for a clear look into the window. Gadget saw, and the blood drained from his face when he saw.

Penny. He didn't know how she got there. Maybe Claw had taken her while he was away. Right now, the exact how didn't matter. All that mattered was that the message was sent loud and clear.

I have your niece, and there's nothing you can do to stop me.

Gadget was determined that the second half of that statement was wrong. The villain might have taken Penny, but it wasn't too late. It would never be too late.

Acting more on instinct than rational thought, the inspector shot into action. "Go-go Gadget Arms!" He shot out his arms, entwining them around the car as tightly as he could. Once he had a firm grip on the car, he struggling to pull it back. "Go-go Gadget Magnets!" he called out, anchoring himself further to the ground. He couldn't lose his grip. He wouldn't lose his grip.

That did the trick. With a sharp tug, he pulled the car back, causing it to smack hard into a rock wall. Once the car had fallen and was immobilized, he rushed over, tore it open, and pulled his niece from the wreckage.

She was alright. A little bruised and shaken but otherwise none the worse for wear. He hugged her close, just relieved that she was alright. "I've got you," he said, reassuring himself as much as he was reassuring her. "I've got you."

"Uncle," the child sobbed. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault," he responded. "It's going to be okay."

While Gadget and Penny were reuniting, Chief Quimby ordered his men forwards, and something though near impossible happened. For the first time, the nefarious Dr. Claw was placed under arrest.

Wednesday, July 21, 2083

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Sir, you can't be serious!" Gadget exclaimed, desperation clear in his voice. "Retirement?! I'm barely forty one! I can't retire yet!"

Quimby sighed. "I'm sorry, Gadget. I didn't come up with the plan, it was given to me. I'm just the messenger here."

This was the truth. The message of retirement had been an order sent from some of the higher ups at W.O.M.P. There were more than a few people who would have liked to have handed the good inspector a pink slip years ago, but as long as M.A.D. was a threat, it was considered that he was too important to let go of, considering his unexplained success record.

That all changed with Dr. Claw's arrest. The villain was caught and was currently on trial, with more than a few people predicting the death penalty. M.A.D. was still around, but without Claw to lead them, the threat had diminished immensely.
Thus, it had been considered safe to get rid of the nuisance of a cyborg. Of course, firing a hero shortly after his biggest success wouldn't look very good, so instead, the case of a mandatory retirement had been decided on.

"But what about Penny?" Gadget questioned. "I need to have a steady source of income if I'm to going to be able to keep custody. I can't lose her to the state!"

"You'll continue to receive your paycheck in the form of a stipend," the chief answered. "You'll keep your income and the custody."

"Come on, Chief!" the cyborg continued, desperate to find some way to hold on to his job. "There's got to be something I can do. Claw might be put away, but M.A.D. is still out there! The jobs not finished yet. I can't retire now!"

Quimby sighed. "Look, John, I'm sorry," he sighed. "If I had it my way, this wouldn't be happening. You one of the best men on my team; I don't know of anyone who has a success record like you. For some reason, however, it has been decided that, without the threat of Claw himself, it would be better to keep you on reserve and not in active field work. I just don't have any say in the matter."

Hearing this, Gadget's face fell. "Oh. I see. I'll just clean my office out then."

Feeling incredibly guilty despite his lack of a choice, Quimby put a hand on the other man's shoulder. "Don't take it that way," he said. "After all, you haven't been fired, just given early retirement. Lots of people dream of this."

That didn't seem to help all that much, though Gadget tried to smile, at least for his friend's benefit. "Thanks," he said, trying to sound happy and failing miserably. "I'll try to enjoy myself."

Quimby sighed. "Hey, if it wouldn't make you feel any better, I can try to get you a position in training. You wouldn't be out in the field, but at least you'd have something to do."

"That's alright, thanks." The now ex-inspector gave a more genuine, though still mournful smile. "I'll try to figure something out."

"Hey, Gadget," Quimby called as the other man turned to leave. "Take care of yourself."

"You too, Chief," Gadget responded.

Thursday, January 6, 2084

Metro City Suburb

"I'm leaving for school, Uncle Gadget," Penny said as she came into the kitchen to grab her packed lunch. "Do you have any plans for today?"

The ex-inspector shook his head. "Not really. I can't believe none of those places I applied to have called back."

The girl sighed. She could tell her uncle was miserable with his retirement, but it didn't seem like there was much that she could do. "Why don't you take Brain to the dog park?" she recommended. "I'm sure he'd enjoy the time out."

Brain shot her a look that made it clear that he would not appreciate such a trip, but it went
"Maybe, maybe," Gadget responded. He gave a chuckle. "You don't have to worry about me, Penny," he said. "I can take care of myself. After all, if years of dealing with M.A.D. didn't hurt me, I'm sure a bit of time to myself can't hurt either."

Penny gave a small smile as the many times she and Brain had protected Gadget from dangers he hadn't even been aware of flooded her memory. "Alright," she said. She kissed him on the cheek before running to grab her backpack. "Just please, don't just stay home today," she pleaded. "I don't think it's good for your sanity." With that, she turned and hurried to catch her bus.

Once she had left, Gadget laughed. "That girl worries about me far too much," he said quietly to himself. "Come to think of it, her mother did, too." He gave a wistful smile as the warnings about overly heavy work schedules came back to him. "She's becoming more and more like Andrea every day."

Shaking off the feeling of nostalgia, he turned to the small pile of mail left on the counter. He knew it was mostly junk and bills, but it gave him something to do.

That was when he spotted something he didn't expect to be there. In the pile of junk mail was a note which was addressed to Inspector Gadget. He looked it over, confused as to why it was using his former code name. "Huh," he murmured as he turned it over in his hands. "No return address."

The tone in the human's voice caught Brain's attention, and he lifted his head to keep an eye on Gadget. It was probably nothing, but the dog was naturally cautious. A good trait considering the man had very little caution.

"'Inspector,'" Gadget read aloud out of habit, "'there has recently been having some issues with thefts from weapons shops going on. I believe that the remnant of M.A.D. is involved. I've tried to take this to the police and to W.O.M.P., but no attention has been paid to me. I recently found out about your retirement. I hope you are interested in the case. If you are, meet me at 639 Firebird Row at eleven o'clock.'" Finishing what was written, he turned the letter over again. "Huh, no signature. Strange."

Smiling, he shoved the letter in his pocket. "Well, a weapons' theft issue, huh?" He smiled. "Well, Brain," he said to the dog as he retrieved his coat and hat, "it looks like I will have something to do today after all." With that, he hurried out to the garage and started up the car.

Brain had a bad feeling about this. He wasn't sure what the mysterious note sender had in mind, but he doubted that was case was the real issue. Firmly planning on contacting Penny as soon as she reached her lunch break, the dog hurried after and snuck into the back of the car, determined to make sure that nothing bad happened to the man.

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Hours later, Penny arrived back at the house after her school had ended. All in all, it had been an uneventful day, and she was eager to get back home.

As soon as she entered the house, she could tell something was off. She was usually greeted when she got home, either by her uncle or by Brain, both of whom usually called out to her first. Today, there was nothing but silence.

"Hello?" she called out, hoping her worries were groundless. "Uncle Gadget? Brain? I made it back."

No one answered her calls. Worry filled the girl as she wandered from room to room of the house.
No one was there. There wasn't even a note detailing where they might have gone. The entire house was empty.

At first, Penny decided that her uncle must have gone to the store or something and forgotten to leave a message, and went to the phone to try to call him on his Gadget Phone. Once, twice, six time she called. None of the times were ever answered.

She did what she could and waited through the evening to see if anyone would come home, but all through that night, neither hide nor hair of either of them turned up. Eventually, reality hit the poor girl, and without any other options, she called in to report the remainder of her family missing.

To be continued…
Assignment 2.1: A Mission Begun

Tuesday, March 4, 2087

Metro City

It was a cold night that felt more like late winter than early spring. On the ground, the wet slush left from the last blizzard coated the ground. It had been plowed and salted away from the roads for the most part, but there was still a good amount coating the alley sidewalk that the three teens were walking through.

They looked both ways to make sure that there wasn't anyone to see them as they approached their destination. Once they were confident that they were pretty much alone, they moved in.

One of them, a short girl with black and magenta hair tied back into two buns, knocked at the door. A slot opened up in the door, and another teen peered out.

"Password?" the door guard asked.

"We don't have a password," the Goth girl responded, a tone of annoyance in her voice. "We have a sign." She and her companions all touched a fist to their temple in demonstration.

"No password, no entry." The response was clear.

"You'd better let us in now," the girl snarled, "seeing as you like your teeth where they are."

"Oh, Moxie," the door guard laughed, "you know I just have to mess with anyone who comes."

"Be careful who and when you mess with someone," the girl, Moxie, sneered. "Had I been Talon Scolex, you wouldn't have come out of things so easily."

"Oh, no one kids with Talon Scolex," the boy responded. "And lives to tell about it, anyway. He's got the family patience. Come on in."

Moxie then motioned to her companions, a taller girl whose neon green hair covered her eyes and a hulking boy wearing a bandana. "Zalla, Tank, c'mon."

The three moved into the building and worked their way into an inner door. On the door, there was a symbol painted in the shape of a demonic looking cat. Underneath it was three letters: M.A.D.

They moved through the door into a room full of similarly dressed teenagers. They were mingling around, and there was the stench of smoke and alcohol on the air. All in all, the atmosphere wasn't too unlike most other underground gatherings. Most were just there to hang out a bit, while a couple had come to peddle their ill-gotten wares.

It was to one of these folks that the three teens went up to, a thin boy with bleached hair. Realizing he had some attention, the boy shot up straight. "Well, from the looks of you, you're interested customers," he said, trying to give a slick grin. "You can call me Crank-Shaft. What can I get you? Speed, Snow, Ecstasy? You want it, I got it!"

Moxie gave a small smirk. "I'm not looking in the recreational area," she responded, "but I've been told you do have something I'm interested in. What do you have in the way of animal protection?"

Crank-Shaft gave a knowing smile. "Ah, I see," he replied. "You're more into something in the area
of attack animals. I get it." He looked both ways before continuing. "Follow me."

He turned to another passageway that led to the back of the building. "We can't keep the animals in the main party area, of course," he said, in a rather matter of fact way. "Bad for business, you see. But we've got plenty of what you're looking for. Here we are."

He motioned to a room that was barred by a large wire gate. "Everything's in there. Take a look and tell me what you like."

The room was filled with various animals of all shapes and sizes. Of course, as would be expected, it was mostly a variety of dogs, but there were other creatures there. Cats and birds of different kinds were locked up in cages, and it appeared that, despite their small size, they were no less dangerous than their canine companions.

There were also other creatures of more exotic variety. Bears, wolves, cougars, and the like were also locked up. There were also animals of a variety that couldn't be identified. Whoever had stocked these animals were clearly not messing around.

Right in the back, a single animal did catch the attention of the teens present. It was a large yellow and white dog that had been chained up in his cage.

"So, Mox," Zalla asked, tapping the shorter girl on the shoulder. "Is that the one we're looking for?"

Moxie shook her head. Upon seeing the yellow dog, she had frozen for a moment. Shaking herself, she nodded. "Yeah," she said, weakly at first, but gaining confidence as she went on. "I think that's what we want."

She then turned to the dealer. "We've got an interest in that one," she said, pointing to the dog. "We'll want a closer look, though. Why don't you let us in and we'll tell you what we think from there?"

"That one?" Crank-Shaft shrugged when he heard the decision. "Nah, you don't want that one. He's big, but he's not compliant. Comes from being a chimera. Doesn't do as he's ordered and has a tendency to attack his trainer. Why don't you take a look at some of the other, non-chimera beasts?"

"That's the one," the girl insisted. "I know it. Just let me in to take a closer look."

The boy shrugged. "Alright. Take a look if you want. Don't blame me when he rips your hand off."

When the gate was opened, the three teens went over to where the dog was laying. Tank went first, making it clear to the girls to run in case the dog was dangerous. The dog, noticing him, gave a low growl of warning.

Disregarding her friend's caution, Moxie pushed past him and went up to the dog. Without waiting a moment, she went over and placed her hand in front of the dog's nose, palm up.

The dog looked at her with distrust for a moment, until he smelled her hand. Then a look of shock and realization came into his eyes, followed by one of joy. He immediately moved in an attempt to jump on the girl's shoulders and lick her face.

She gently pushed him down, petting the animal's head as she did so. "Not right now," she said in a hushed voice.

The dog let out a low whimper and she gave a sad smile. "I know, Brain," she said quietly. "I missed you too. However, I'm under cover right now. If we're going to get out of here, I need you to pretend not to know me."
The dog whimpered again for a moment before giving a very human-like nodded. He then backed up and gave another growl, albeit a more half-hearted one.

Having said her piece, Moxie turned back to the dealer. "Yeah, this is the one we want," she said firmly. "He's strong, and I'm pretty sure I can get him to do what I want. What are ya askin'?"

The boy looked in surprise for a moment, but apparently decided to accept it. "Alright," he said finally. "That's the one you want, you got it. Asking price is about eighteen hundred, unmarked bills. You got the dough, the dog's yours." The look on the boy's face made it clear he didn't believe they'd be able to pay.

"Eighteen hundred?" the girl asked. She gave a smile. "Fair enough." Much to the dealer's surprise, she dug a large wad of money out of her backpack and began counting out the bills, before handing them over to him.

The look of shock came and went quickly. He shrugged and pocketed the money. "If you can pay, you can pay. Nice making a deal with you."

With that, Moxie turned to undoing the dog's bonds. However, before she could do all too much, the dealer spoke again.

"Just between us," he said, as if speaking secretly, "I have something else you might be interested in. It's something very rare, but it's clear you'd be able to pay, if you like what you see. Want to take a look?"

The girl looked a bit nervous for moment, glancing to her companions. Zalla shrugged. "I say we go."

"Ah-ah-ah," Crank-Shaft interrupted. "It'd be just the lady." Here he motioned to Moxie.

She took a breath, petting the dog as she thought. "You know where to take him?" she said finally, looking up at her companions.

Tank nodded. "Go," he responded, taking the lead from her. "You know how to reach us."

Moxie then turned and nodded. "Show me."

The two of them turned and walked through another hallway, a thin one that she wouldn't have even noticed had she not been directed to it. This area was in an even more dilapidated state, as if no one had been in it in ages.

Crank-Shaft came up to a door and motioned to it. "It's in here," he said. "Now, there's something I need to handle before we can make any transaction. Feel free to take a look while I'm gone." With that, he turned and left, leaving her alone outside the room.

Moxie turned to the door, undecided if she wanted to venture into the room. After a few moments, she took a deep breath and went in, prepared to fight if need be. She had no idea what to expect, and braced herself for almost anything.

She was not ready for what she did see. There, injured and chained up to a back wall, lay the unconscious form of Inspector Gadget.

Surprised played on the Moxie's features for a moment when she realized who she was looking at. Shock soon gave way to resolve, however, and she when over to where Gadget lay. Moving slowly and carefully so as not to harm him, she began examining him to see the extent of his injuries.
The first thing she noticed was that he looked aged beyond his chronological forty-four years. Lines of care had appeared in his face, and hair once black was now of a more salt and pepper coloring.

Much to her relief, this seemed to be the extent of problems with his organic parts. Unfortunately, the same could not be said of his cybernetics. Much of the machinery used in the process of movement had been tampered with or outright torn out, rendering the poor man partially paralyzed. Furthermore, there were openings in the mechanics that had clearly been meant for the gadgetry of his trade. These gadgets were completely missing, including his entire right hand.

Thankfully, the machinery used for life support had mostly been left mostly untouched. They had, however, been dampened, probably for the purpose of keeping him in an induced coma. Well, she could do something about that.

Rolling up her sleeves, she revealed two objects that had been previously obscured. One of them, on her left wrist, was a high tech watch-like object with a bright screen. The other, on her right, was a charm bracelet, which oddly enough, mostly only had repeats of the same charm in the shape of a gear. Only a slight color difference separated each from the others.

Selecting one of charms from her bracelet, she pressed it to the screen of her watch. It was scanned and the watch let out a beep, signaling that the process had been finished. Moving fast, she moved to the base of the cuff binding the unconscious inspector to the wall. Pressing two buttons on either side of the watch, a laser came out and she sliced through the cuff.

Now that he was free, she set to undoing the induced coma. Quickly but carefully, she adjusted the settings on the life support machines to allow for conscious actions. Finishing her work, Moxie backed up for a moment and waited.

At first, it didn't appear as if it had done much. Other than his breathing becoming deeper, there wasn't much of a change. However, soon there came more noticeable movement, especially in his face. In a moment, he began to come to.

"Oh," he groaned. "Wh-what's going on?"

Seeing him come to consciousness, Moxie rushed to his side. "It's alright," she said, rummaging through her pack and pulling out a bottle of water. Pouring some into his mouth, she continued. "I've come to get you out of here."

Glancing over at her, a look of relief and confusion came into Gadget's eyes. "Thank you, miss. Do I know you?"

"You don't recognize me?" A look of dismay crossed her face, but was quickly followed by one of realization. "Oh, right. The disguise. I forgot I was wearing it. Go-go Gadget Alias, code word: Off."

Once "Moxie" had said these words, the colors surrounding her hair and face flickered, before going off. Her makeup, which had been the white and black, blinked to a more pink color, and the black and magenta of her hair soon gave way to blonde.

Recognition came to Gadget in a moment. "Penny!"

Penny smiled and hugged her uncle. "I know, Uncle Gadget. It's been a long time, and I've missed you a lot."

"Well, well," a dark voice spoke up from the entrance. Standing at the entrance to the room stood a boy who appeared to be slightly older than Penny. He pointed an energized staff at her, but continued to speak rather casually. "Pretty Miss Gadget. Imagine meeting you here."
"Talon." Penny broke off from the hug took a defensive position when she heard the boy's voice. Snatching another charm, she quickly scanned it, causing an energy shield to form.

"What, who is this?" Gadget asked, struggling to see who was speaking, and extending his neck in an attempt to get a look at the newcomer. "Is this a friend of yours?"

"Hardly," his niece answered, keeping focus on the unwelcome arrival. "He's Claw's nephew and a self-made assassin." She frowned, never turning her eyes away from her enemy. "We've had a few unpleasant run-ins."

"Unpleasant!" Talon said, making a face of mock injury. "And here I thought you enjoyed our little outings."

"I don't know how you found me out," she growled, "but you will stay back. I won't let you hurt my uncle."

Talon shook his head. "You've always been rather smart, Gadget. I would have thought you would know me better than this by now."

"But I've never met you before in my life," Gadget commented.

A look of annoyance came into the young assassin's face. "Not you, her. The other Gadget." He shook his head again. "This is going to be so much easier once we're rid of the both of you." With that, he charge at Penny, swinging his staff as hard as he could.

She countered by raising her shield. The two weapons clashed, and there was a bright shock of light as both opponents were tossed by the burst.

Recovering from the push, Penny acted first, shooting the shield off at her opponent before attempting to help Gadget to his feet. "Can you stand?" she asked as she worked.

"I think so," he responded, attempting to do his best to help her.

Their attempt was interrupted as Talon, who had knocked aside Penny's attack, came back and attempted to strike her in the back with his staff. Thankfully, she caught the charge from the corner of her eye and was able to move out of her way, pushing her uncle so that he too was away from the initial danger.

This was only a brief respite, though, and Penny could tell that she wasn't going to be able to face her enemy and get her uncle out of here. Not on her own at least.

Generating another shield, she raised her wrist, both to defend and to bring her watch to her face. Touching a button, she spoke into it as she moved to block the attempted blows. "Guys, you busy?"

"We've got our hands full at the moment," "Zalla" answered. "They caught onto us pretty quickly. Thankfully, they weren't expecting me and Firewall to be prepared. What's up on your end?"

"Talon," Penny answered. "This was a set up. See if you guys can join me soon."

"Got it! Be there in a minute," the girl called out.

The call ended, Penny adjusted the way she was holding her shield, catching the staff with edge. With a sharp turn, she was able to yank it out of Talon's grasp and send it flying across the room.

"Not bad," he smirked, withdrawing two small knives in the process. "How long do you think you'll
be able to keep this up?"

"Long enough." The blonde girl charged ahead, taking a more offensive position. Using the shield as a blunt object, she attempted to force her enemy back.

As the two fought, Gadget tried his best to call something up so that he'd be able to assist. "I can't let her get attacked like this. Go-go Gadget Mallet." Nothing. "Go-go Gadget Laser!" Nope. "Go-go Gadget Fly-Swatter?" No.

While this struggle was happening, Talon soon found his opportunity. Realizing that the girl's shield could only defend a half of her body at a time, he struck forward with the knives as if aiming for the upper portion of her body. When she responded in turn by raising the shield, he lowered his attack, striking at her legs.

Penny was only just able to dodge the attack, and the sudden movement threw her out of balance. This allowed an opening for the assassin to strike in.

Seeing the imminent danger, Gadget grew desperate. There had to be something he could do. "Come on!" he groaned. "Go-go Gadget whatever I still have left!"

That finally did the trick. A slot opened up in his chest, revealing a small bean bag gun. This he fired straight, striking Talon in the chest with the small bags.

This didn't do a lot, but it did earn Penny the time to recover her footing. Striking forward with the shield, she succeeded in pushing Talon out into the hallway.

Taking the small victory, Penny slammed the door shut. Swiping another charm, she pointed her watch to the door lock and hinges. This time, a blue beam shot out, and the lock and hinges were frozen solid.

"There," she muttered once her work was finished. "That should keep him and any of his goons at bay, at least for a little while.

Turning back to Gadget, she helped him to his feet. "We've got to get out of here fast. That barrier won't hold forever, and we don't want to be here once it breaks."

"Penny, what's happening?" Poor Gadget was horribly confused as to everything that was going on. "Where did you get that watch, and how were you able to look so different before?"

"I'm afraid a lot has happened since you disappeared, Uncle," Penny answered, helping him move to what she hoped was a thinner wall. "I don't have time to explain everything right now, but I promise, as soon as we're out of here, I'll tell you everything."

Before any more could be said, a loud pounding started at the door. It soon became clear that the ice blocks weren't going to last much longer. Whoever was trying to get in would make it in pretty soon.

Penny raised her watch and Gadget prepared the bean bag gun, preparing for the worst.

The door buckled a few times before finally slamming open. However, it wasn't Talon who charged in, but rather "Tank," with Brain and "Zalla" right alongside him, though they too had dropped their disguises, revealing that they had both darker hair and complexions than their disguises had portrayed.

Before anything could be said, Brain practically sprang up on both Penny and Gadget, sending the three of them sprawling to the floor. For a moment, the two humans who had not been a part of the
dog pile looked on anxiously, worried about what the dog was doing, until it became clear that this was merely an overjoyed family reunion.

"Yes, I know, Brain," Penny laughed, struggling to speak for the enthusiastic dog kisses. "I missed you too."

"Brain?" Gadget said, somewhat alarmed by what he was hearing. "How did you get so big?" The question was not answered, but was somewhat forgotten in the enthusiastic greeting.

It took a few minute to untangle the two humans from the excited dog. Once it was done, though, then surprised reactions were not at an end.

"Oh my gosh!" "Zalla" exclaimed once she got a clear look at the cyborg, who "Tank" was helping to his feet. "You're Inspector Gadget! We actually found you!"

"Uh, yes," he responded, still somewhat confused. "Penny, who are they?"

"These are my friends," his niece answered. "Uncle Gadget, these are my friends, Cypher and Firewall. They were helping me to look for you."

"Oh," Gadget responded, still confused but returning to his normal level of acceptance. "Thank you, then."

Turning to her friends, Penny turned grave. "I had just pushed Talon out of the room a few moments before you guys arrived. Was he outside when you got here?"

"Afraid not," Firewall answered while he was still working to help the Inspector stay on his feet. "By the time we got here, no one was out there. We thought there might be trouble in here."

"Well, there's definitely trouble, that's for sure," Cypher commented. "Talon's not just gonna run away. He's got to have something unpleasant up his sleeve."

"We'd better get out of here before he gets it out," Penny replied. Touching her watch, she activated the communicator. "Gadget to Gadgetmobile 2.0, come in!"

A girl a little older than her appeared on screen. "Linc and I are here, Gadget. Did you guys find Brain?"

"We found him and Uncle Gadget," Penny responded, "but we also found trouble. We think Talon leaked that tip to bring us here. We need to get out of here fast. Update, do you have any of the G-units on line? We're going to need backup."

Another boy appeared on screen behind the girl. "I've got G-5 and G-8 up. Those should keep those M.A.D. punks off you. I also sent out a signal to W.O.M.P., which means we'll probably have backup."

"Thanks, you guys," Penny said. "We'll meet you at the rendezvous point. Over and out." With that, she turned back to the group. "We'd better get out now. Most of the people here are partiers, not goons, but Talon wouldn't have come here alone. It's not going take long for Talon to rouse the M.A.D. thugs who are here."

With that, the group moved out as quickly as they could. Admittedly, that wasn't as fast as they might have liked, but considering the state that poor Gadget was in, there wasn't much of a choice.

Their prediction had proved true as well. Nearly as soon as the small group had made it out of the
small hallway, they were met by a group of armed teens, four boys and three girls. "Well," one of the boys sneered, "if it isn't Gadget and her team of do-gooders."

"Never thought you'd actually make it in here," one of the girls laughed, "not that it matters much. None of you are making it out." With that, they charged at the group.

Before anyone else could make a move, Brain charged ahead, striking out at the first of the boys to charge. Biting down on the weapon arm, he forced the M.A.D. member to drop his weapon.

The other M.A.D. members were not as slow on the uptake, opening fire with the small, pistol like weapons they had.

In response, Penny scanned another one of her charms, causing it to open up a bit, reshaping into what looked like a laser aimed at a magnifying glass. The "laser" shot out, and a balloon like shield appeared, covering up the group from the fire.

"This won't hold for long," she said. Looking over to Cypher, she smile. "You know what to do?"

The other girl smiled. "I've been dying to give this a try." Stepping outside of the protective shield, took out a small object that looked like a rather large whistle. Touching a few small dials that were on either side, she raised it to her lips and blew.

At first, nothing seemed to be occurring other than a high pitched whistling sound. However, after a few seconds of the high pitched shriek, the pistols the M.A.D. agents were wielding began to spark. The thugs were forced to drop their weapon, which continued sparking and sputtering even when dropped.

Once the weapons were dealt with, Penny dropped the shield, and the group attempted to move on. Three of the disarmed thugs attempted to physically stop them from making it out.

Brian charged again at the first of them, heavily knocking his down and pinning him. The dog snarled, making it clear that any attempt at continuing attack would be very unwise.

One of the others made it to Penny and attempted to grab the blonde by her hair. However, Penny was too fast, ducking out of reach and grabbing the other girl's arm. Spinning around, she tossed her attacker aside. The M.A.D. agent smacked a wall and fell down, stunned and unable to attack.

The final one rushed Cypher, aiming to hit her in the stomach. Dodging to one side, she missed the blow by inches, swinging in several punches of her own. While these hits did not land in and of themselves, they did force her assailant to dodge away, sending him within arm's reach of Firewall. It only took a simple backhand from the larger boy to knock the thug unconscious.

The remaining three, seeing those who had been defeated laid out, ran off, allowing the rescue group to move out.

As they moved out, confusion hit Gadget even harder. "They were M.A.D.?" he asked as they ran out. "But they couldn't have been older than you."

"M.A.D.'s recruiting age has gone down since you disappeared, sir," Firewall commented as they moved. "Nowadays, most of their thugs are around our age, considering most M.A.D. people from your time are in the Cistern."

"The Cistern?" The poor man was losing track of the narrative at a rapid pace. "What's the Cistern?"

"You'd probably know it as the Elliot Ness Maximum Security Penitentiary Center," Cypher
answered. "Most people call it the Cistern now, though, considering what you have to do to get sent there."

This really didn't help all that much. Seeing her uncle's befuddled look, Penny smiled and patted his should. "A lot has happened since we last saw each other," she said. "As soon as we're safe, I'll explain everything."

By now, they had made it out of the building. There was still an air of tension, but for the most part, they had made it out.

A minute after they had made it outside, a beat up old van skidded up to the corner and stopped. In the driver's seat was the girl who Penny had called over her watch. "Made it!" she beamed. "Another perfect stop." Looking out the window, she smiled at the others. "You found Brain! Yay! This must also be Uncle Gadget. Hi! I'm Therese Tran, but most people call me Rheeci, but on missions, I'm Download. Gadget's told me so much about-

"We can do introductions later." This scolding came from a boy about Penny's age who had opened up a door in the side if the van. On either side him were two robots, a hawk with the number five painted on it, and a monkey with a similar number eight. Both had weapons at the ready, though not pointing at the group.

Reaching out to help Firewall get the injured Gadget into the van, the boy turned to Penny. "Bad news," he said. "We were able to pick up a summons from Talon to his thugs. He's calling in After-Shock and Joltwave."


"Cyber?" Gadget asked.

"Oh," Rheeci responded. "That's right, you don't know yet. Rogue cybers are like you, but evil."

"Like Gadget said before," Cypher commented as she climbed into the passenger seat of the van, "a lot's gone down in three years." Now that everyone was in the van, she turned to Rheeci. "Step on it. If cybers are being brought out, then you know W.O.M.P.'s gonna respond."

"Gadget?" the inspector responded in confusion, but his question went unnoticed.

"Stepping on it," Rheeci responded to Cypher. She pressed down on the on gas and the van took off.

As they were moving, the younger boy turned to the robots. "G-5," he said to the hawk, "take holographic protection. G-8, the roof. Prepare for cyber defenses."

The robotic animals gave a whir in response before moving to fulfill their ordered positions. The hawk flew out, and soon another, identical van materialized, before going off in another direction, veering onto a road headed to the country while the real van detoured into tunnel under the city.

"There," the boy sighed. "Thankfully, cybers aren't chosen for their great intellect, except for maybe Malware. That should fool After-Shock and Joltwave."

"Okay, I'm lost here," Gadget said, his head spinning from the higher than normal amount of concepts he didn't understand. "What's going on?" Brain gave whine of agreement, for once just as befuddled by everything as his human pack member.

"Long story short," Penny answered, settling down next to him, "M.A.D. is back. After Claw was arrested, there were others who tried to take his place, but none of them were very successful until
his nephew, Talon, appeared."

"Yeah," Rheeci added. "Apparently, evil management skills runs in the family."

"We're not quite certain how he's doing it," Firewall continued, "but things have gotten bad again. W.O.M.P.'s been doing what they can, but no one's really sure how Talon's doing what he's doing. We've been chasing what leads we can get a hold of under aliases, thus the weird tech names." He smiled. "We do have real names; it's just not a good idea to mention them around M.A.D."

"Well, we've been able to help tip off W.O.M.P. to what crimes we can find out about," Update commented. "However, we have yet to find out who's supporting their operations. Without that, we haven't made any real discoveries or put any progress into stopping them permanently."

"Until tonight," Penny said wrapping her arms around both Gadget and Brain. "Now that we've found you, everything will be alright. I know it."

Suddenly, there was the sound of a loud pop, followed by a louder sound more akin to a boom. The road suddenly began to shake, and with all the tremors going on, Rheeci lost control of the van. "Hold on, everybody!" she called out. "It looks like we've been found!"

The passengers could only hold on for dear life as the van skidded, smacking into the side of the tunnel.

Standing outside stood two teens, a boy and a girl. Both looked incredibly alike, dressed in black cloths, with the only mark of color being a silver emblem of a devil-cat pinned to the shirt. The boy was leaning over, and where his hands should have been, there were two pile drivers, which he had been hammering into the ground.

"So, sis," the boy said, standing up and transforming the pile drivers back into hands, "now that we've got their attention, shall we have a bit of fun?"

"It'd be a shame not to," the girl responded, her own hand shifting into a knife like shape that gave off sparks. "After all, Talon said to make sure they were busy while he set up his surprise."

To be continued…
Inside the van, the group were still recovering from the forced stop. They didn't have much time to recover, however, when a glowing knife came through the back of the van, slicing through the back.

"Crumbs," Penny groaned, grabbing a charm and scanning it. "Looks like they both are here. You guys ready for a fight?"

Cypher and Firewall stood straight as they attempted to join her near where the new door was being made. "We gotta be," Firewall responded. He grabbed what looked like a pair of thin gauntlets, touching a few dials and putting them on. "M.A.D. doesn't play around."

"Besides," Cypher grinned, her own fingerless gloves lighting up, "you made sure we were more than prepared to handle these dorks."

Penny nodded. "Good. Download, Update, you guys try to get by G-5 and G-8 and try to give us some backup."

Seeing the danger that was at hand, Gadget attempted to force himself into a standing position and Brain, assisting his pack member, attempted to assist. However, Penny saw what her family was attempting and shook her head. "Please," she said, turning to them for a moment, "you're both hurt. Please stay back here. We can handle it."

"Penny, I-" Gadget started to argue, but he was cut off as the new hole was opened up.

As soon as the opening was finished, the girl, Joltwave attempted to push her way into the vehicle. Cypher responded first, charging at the M.A.D. cyber and catching the glowing blade. It appeared that her gloves protected her from both the blade and the electrical charge running through it, which allowed her to get in close and shove the rogue back.

Once the way was cleared, Firewall charged through. Just in time, as it turned out, to catch the boy, After-Shock, before he could attempt to punch his way into the van to take out the less battle-ready members.

After-Shock took the first attack, attempting to grab a hold of Firewall's throat and strangle him. He was a good deal shorter and leaner than his enemy, but when it came to cybers, size wasn't too much of an issue. Had the M.A.D. rogue made his catch, he would have also made his kill.

Thankfully, he never made his catch. As soon as he could see the attack coming in, Firewall grabbed a hold of the cyber's arm and tossed him away from the van with a heavy shove. The gauntlets had leveled the playing field, so to say, giving Firewall the opportunity to take down his opponent with minimal risk.

Not that this really caused anything more than a moment's hesitation to After-Shock. The rogue cyber soon recovered his footing and charged again at Firewall, changing his hands back into pile drivers as he rushed.

Before he could make it, however, G-8 sprang up, catching the M.A.D. thug on the back. After-Shock was forced to blast it off using his pulse shock attack, which allowed Firewall to get in and
Meanwhile, Penny charged out, joining Cypher in her face off. Having already scanned her charm, the blonde raised her watch, which had a circuitry panel exposed. "Cypher, see if you can't hold her still," she called out to her team mate. "I'll try to siphon off her electricity."

"Easier said than done, Gaj," Cypher responded, holding one of Joltwave's arms back. "She's kind of trying to kill me."

Penny rushed forward, grabbing the rogue cyber's free arm, pulling her around. This gave Cypher the opportunity to kick out at Joltwave's legs, knocking the cyber flat on her back. Moving in, Penny pressed the circuit on her watch to one of the glowing blades, which flickered out and became a normal blade.

Before she could attempt to do the same to the other blade, however, Joltwave recovered from the knock down and was able to move her still charged blade just enough to get a hit in on Cypher with the flat of the blade. Cypher was only shocked by the hit, but it was enough to knock her back.

Now that one of her opponents was stunned, the M.A.D. killer was able to slip away before lunging at Penny with the uncharged blade. "Nice try, Gadget girl," she taunted, "but uncharged or not, this can still hurt you!"

"If you can catch me," Penny responded, moving away. Dodging back to the van, she swiftly picked up a pipe wrench that had been lying on the floor and charged ahead with it.

Inside the van, Update and Rheeci were busy controlling the G-units. "Uh oh," Rheeci said after a moment. "I lost contact with G-5. Something must have hit it!"

"Not a lot I can do, you know," Update responded. "Keeping this guy off my brother is tough. We'll have to look up the bird later."

Seeing all this happening, Gadget once again began to attempt to force himself to his feet. He wasn't completely paralyzed; indeed, only his arms were completely immobile. Leaning against the side of the van, he could push himself up into a standing position. He'd figure out what to do next from there.

Brain soon took notice of what his human was doing and attempted to convince the inspector to lie back down.

"Not now, Brain," Gadget responded, determined not to just sit back and watch. "I can't leave this to them. I've got to do something."

"A noble sentiment," an unpleasant voice remarked, "but utterly futile."

Everyone in the van turned when they heard the voice. "Talon!" Update called out.

"You get out of here, you-you meanie!" Rheeci practically shrieked as she and Update began searching for something to fight the M.A.D. assassin off with.

Talon was too fast, though. Firing off a weapon he had on his side, he hit both the girl and boy in the arm and face with some strange goo, which expanded, pinning them to their stations and covering their mouths. Furthermore, he also fired off some sort of electrical dart, which struck Brain in the chest as the dog rushed at him in an attempt to protect the humans. The dog fell and went limp, and would have looked dead if it wasn't for the steady breathing that was still apparent.
"Don't worry," Talon smirked. "I'll deal with you three later. Right now, I have some important business with the Inspector."

"I don't really know who you are," Gadget said, trying to steady himself to face off against his much younger enemy, "but you need to call all of this off. Please, call this off, or I'll be forced to stop you."

"Stop me?" Talon laughed. "Oh, that's just a riot. You can't even stand up straight!"

Gadget attempted to fire off another of the bean bags at the teen again, but this time it was simply deflected. This seemed to amuse Talon all the more. "You really think that actually worked on me the first time? Look, I had my reasons for letting you get away the first time, but I'm not letting you get away again." He fired off a grappling hook from his wrist, hooking it around Gadget's waste.

Once this was done, he pulled out a small remote and pressed a button. This called a motorcycle to the van. Hopping on it, Talon hooked the line to the vehicle. "We're going on a little trip," he commented before dashing off, dragging Gadget after him.

This happened just in time for Penny to look up and see it happen. "No!" Lunging ahead, she momentarily forgot about her own battle with Joltwave, only to be sorely reminded when she was almost hit with the energized blade.

Spinning around and dropping her wrench, she was able to grab the rogue's wrist and force the blade to de-energize, turning it into a regular knife. "I've got Joltwave depowered," she called out to Cypher, who had recovered by now, "but Talon's got my uncle. Can you take her without me?"

"'Course I can," her teammate responded, shoving the cyber to get her attention. "You go teach Claw Jr. what happens when you mess with family."

"Thanks!" Penny called out, snatching up her wrench again. "Go-go Gadget Motor-Blades!" With that, two sets of inline wheels appeared from her shoes, and she took off in the direction Talon had taken Gadget.

For those who remained in the original fight, it had now turned into one on one. Firewall and Cypher could handle their opponent in this way, having figured out how to exploit the weaknesses of their opponents.

Realizing this, Joltwave broke away from her own fight with Cypher. Instead, she rushed at Firewall, who was currently busy holding After-Shock back. Jumping up on his back, she attempted to stabbed down on his shoulder.

Cypher reacted quick enough to grab Joltwave and pull her off of Firewall before the blow could land, but the cyber girl's actions had already given After-Shock the moment to land a hard blow on the other boy, sending him into Cypher and knocking the rest of Penny's team back to her wrecked van.

With Penny busy, Brain unconscious, and the team members disabled in one way or another, it seemed like victory was all but certain for the M.A.D. cybers. Which is why it was confusing when they both looked up, and then turned to run.

"It's been fun," Joltwave called. "We'll have to finish this some other time, though." With that, they turned and left.

"Wait a minute," Update commented, finally tearing off the gagging goo and helping Rheeci to do the same. "They were kicking out butts. Why would they go?"
"Who cares?" she asked. "At least we're not dead!"

Her celebration was soon cut off. "This is Chief Quimby of W.O.M.P.," a familiar voice called out over a megaphone. "We've got you surrounded. Come out of the van with your hands up."

"Oh, great," Firewall groaned, turning to Update. "It's Grandpa Quimby. We are so dead."

"Wait, Chief Quimby's your grandpa?" Rheeci asked.

"What does that matter?" Update snapped. "Gramps is going to kill us, and then he's going to tell Mom and Dad, and they're going to kill us again!"

"Well, It's probably best just to get it over with," Firewall groaned. He stood up and slowly got out of the van, hands raised in the air.

Chief Quimby couldn't have been more stunned when he saw who got out. Raising his hand, he signaled to the officers around to hold their fire. "Elijah?" he said, addressing his grandson by his proper name. "What were you doing in there?"

The other children climbed out one by one. A redheaded woman agent turned to Quimby, a look of confusion in her eyes. "Chief, who are these kids? Do you know them?"

"Agent Connelly, meet my grandsons and their friends." Quimby touched his forehead, feeling the all too familiar feeling of a headache. He glared at the two boys. "What they are doing here, I don't know, but I will find out."

"Well," Rheeci said, trying to find the bright side, "at least things can't get worse."

That was when a hoarse scream rang through the tunnel. Agent Connelly moved first, racing in the direction of the sound, followed by several other W.O.M.P. agents. Whatever had caused the scream, they doubted it could have been anything good.

The drag that Gadget had been pulled on had been mercifully short, as Talon seemed content to just pull him out of eye-shot of the kids before stopping. However, the cyborg was still too injured to do anything in the way of self-defense.

He attempted to get back up on his feet, but found himself slammed heavily against the wall by the young M.A.D. assassin.

"I had to get you away from any prying eyes," the boy said, grinning maliciously. He pulled out a long, dagger like object. "Frankly, I would have done this a long time ago, but Freymore was convinced he needed you alive for some reason. Well, he can't stop me here." With that, the boy raised his weapon and prepared to strike.

Before he could, however, he was hit heavily in the side and knocked away. For a moment, Gadget couldn't tell what had saved his life, but it soon became very clear.

"Uncle Gadget, are you alright?" Penny asked, kneeling down by her injured relative's side. She had a pipe-wrench in one hand, and she had previously used to it knock her uncle's assailant away.

"I'm fine, I guess," Gadget answered. Before he could say anything more, she wrapped her arms around him, pulling him into a tight hug.
The danger hadn't passed, however. Having recovered from the unexpected blow, Talon charged at Penny, planning on stabbing her in the back while she was distracted.

Thankfully, this attack did not go completely unnoticed. Seeing the charge, Gadget moved what little he could, moving his legs in a way that sent the attacker sprawling.

Realizing that the fight was still at hand, Penny turned and faced her enemy, wielding her wrench both to block Talon's attack and to make attacks of her own.

Eventually, Talon realized that he had a slight disadvantage. His dagger was shorter than her wrench, thus meaning that he needed to be in closer range to her to land a blow. However, he did see one shot left open to him.

He tossed the dagger, sending it flying in his target's direction. Penny was only just able to dodge out of the way in time.

"You give up your weapon," she couldn't help but comment, smirking at him, "and you miss. What kind of strategy is that?"

"Who said I missed?" the boy asked, mimicking her taunting tone.

Penny, realizing what he was saying, turned pale and spun around. To her horror, she saw that his statement had range true. Talon had not been aiming at her; he had been aiming at Gadget, who now had the dagger buried in his chest.

"No," she almost whispered, rushing to her uncle's side.

Talon was prepared to attack the girl, but was cut off as After-Shock and Joltwave came through. "W.O.M.P. decided to interrupt the party," the girl cyber called out. "We've got to floor it."

"Good choice," Talon called to his minion. Turning to Penny, he grinned. "Well, I've gotta run. It's been fun. Hope to do this again." With that, he jumped on his bike and rushed away.

Penny was left, gripping her uncle close. She had hoped removing the blade would bring him back, but she found to her dismay that the blade had contained a nanotechnology transmitter, purposefully designed to deliver a virus that would shut down his mechanics. His life support had stopped.

"No! Please, no!" She shouted out in a hoarse cry before slumping down and weeping over his body.

She was still like this when Agent Connelly found her. "Miss, what…" the redhead began. However, she left off when she saw the body. "Oh, no." Turing to her radio, she called to Quimby. "Agent Heather Connelly to Chief Philip Quimby, we have a murder victim. Help is required." With that, she bent down to do what she could to comfort the grieving teen.

Bradford Tech, Metro City

It had been quiet that evening at the lab, all things considered. Of course, it was almost always quiet now. Ever since Inspector Gadget had been retired from active duty, W.O.M.P. never really made all too much contact with Bradford Tech. This meant that the people working there often had time to themselves to make their own developments.

Other times, they just hung around, not really having anything to do. This was one such night, as the
few people there other than Dr. Brenda Bradford herself really were just kind of there in case they were needed. The good doctor was usually working on something or other herself, but few people had her total devotion to her work, and thus tended just to hang around for lack of better plans.

Two such people were the doctor's personal assistant, Myron Dabble and Johan Von Slickstein, the former a Swiss tech genius and the latter the grandson of one of her former mentors, Otto Von Slickstein, and both recent graduates. Both were geniuses in the area of robotics and technology, but they were also young men having recently graduated from college. Thus, they were both engaged in an activity common to their age group.

"Yeah!" Johan declared cheerfully. "Smash Ball! Eat Giant Sword!"

"Aw, c'mon!" Myron scowled. "How the heck am I supposed to dodge that?"

They fought it out, but the result was already decided. Charizard was blasted off the stage. "The winner is," the announcer declared, "Kirby!"

"Yeah! I win!" Johan pumped his fists in victory.

"There is no way a little pink bubble like that can be so powerful." Myron crossed his arms.

"Oh, you're just jealous I wiped the floor with you." Johan finished his victory dance. "Another round?"

Before Myron could answer, an alarm went off on a nearby computer screen. Both assistants rushed over to see what it was, found to their dismay that they didn't recognize what was written on the screen.

Thus, the alarm went on like that for several minutes, catching Dr. Bradford's attention. "What's going on?" she asked, joining the two men by the computer.

"We can't tell," Johan answered. "This program's really old."

"Yeah, and it keeps going on about opossums," Myron added.

Brenda leaned down and examined the screen, and she soon realized what it was. Shooting up, she rushed to grab her coat. "C'mon," she shouted at her assistants. "We need to make it to W.O.M.P. HQ, right now! It's a matter of life and death!"

"Life and death?" Myron asked, startled by her intensity. "What do you mean?"

"I'll explain on the way," was all the doctor said. As she headed down to the little beat up van she usually drove, she couldn't help but mumble under her breath. "Oh, John," she sighed, "what trouble are you in now?"

Elliot Ness Maximum Security Penitentiary Center,?

The Cistern was one of the most heavily guarded prison complexes on the face of the Earth. It had to be. It was a prison designed to hold some of the most dangerous prisoners on the planet. Its prison population, almost as a rule, had life sentences with no chance of parole. This is not the sort of place one would go to of one's own volition.

That was, however, exactly what Dr. Frederick Heidrich was doing. He had done a lot of work and
research on the premise of crime and mental illness, and had come to the conclusion that crime was simply a mental illness that had no root in will, and thus with the right therapy and medication, any criminal could be reformed into a productive member of society. With this premise, he had decided to begin testing his theory using the population of the Cistern.

He had intended to arrive at the prison earlier, but a freak snowstorm had made his arrival rather difficult, and thus it was dark by the time he has arrived at the prison. Going up to the guard's entrance, he pressed the buzzer.

"Yeah?" a gruff voice said over the intercom. "State your business."

"Dr. Heidrich," the doctor answered. "I am here to do some work with the prisoners."

There was a chuckle on the other end of the line. "That's right, the shrink. We were told you'd be showing up. I'll come and let you in."

After a few minutes, the door was opened by a man dressed in a prison guard's uniform. "Come on in," the man said. "You can call me Jack. I'll show you to where your room is."

"Actually, Jack," Heidrich put in, "I was hoping to see the…problem case a bit first before I settled in. Get to know his situation a bit more personally, you might say."

Jack gave him a look. "At this time of night?"

"I presume there is no problem with that?" The psychiatrist looked on with some questioning.

"No," Jack answered. "It's just that no one really wants to go into the prisoners' area after dark."

"Well, I assure you I do," the doctor insisted. "It helps to bring up some respect with the patient."

Jack gave a snort-like laugh at this. "Well, alright, but you're not getting any respect from this guy, I can tell you that."

As they walked down, they passed several hallways lined with guards, mostly men but a couple of women making transports from the woman's wing of the prison. All were dressed identically to Jack.

As they came up to where the prisoners were held, they came up to a heavily reinforced steel door. "Hey, Jack!" Jack called to the guard at the controls. "The shrink here wants to see one of the prisoners. Buzz us in, will you."

The guard nodded and opened up the door. As they passed, the doctor couldn't help but question what he heard. "That fellow is also named Jack?" he asked his guide.

The guard shook his head. "In reality, none of us are named Jack, but for safety reasons, we all are Jack. There's no being too careful when it comes to M.A.D."

As they passed by the cells, the doctor noticed rows and rows of men, each sitting in their own cell. "They all belonged to M.A.D.?" he asked. "That can't be right. There's no way all these men could have earned such prison sentences."

"Believe it," Jack answered. He pointed over to a particularly elderly prisoner. "That is Elias Hult, more commonly known as the Cuckoo-Clock Maker. Looks like you're common grandfather, but personally murdered sixteen people on one occasion. Or how about Gulliver Strackmore, AKA Presto-Chango. Underwent experimental procedures to gain the ability of disguising himself as any person alive. Used that ability to disguise himself as a delegate and bombed a world peace meeting in
London. One hundred and fifteen killed, twenty-five of them children. Whether you want to believe it or not, Doc, everyone in this prison is a cold-blooded killer who wouldn't think twice about snapping your neck. I'd keep my distance if I were you."

"I'll keep that in mind, thank you," Heidrich commented, inwardly finding his guide to be a very small-minded individual. Well, the doctor could ignore that for now. His work would prove Jack wrong.

As they came to the last door of the corridor, which was another heavily reinforced steel door, Jack gave one last warning before pressing his thumb to a panel to unlock the door. "Doc, keep this in mind. You know everything I said about those other guys? Yeah, well, they take orders from this one, and he rules them all by fear. Be careful."

Heidrich didn't bother to respond, turning instead to the door and entering in. Inside, there was a cell within the cell, separating the area the doctor was in from the prisoner. The doctor's side was rather neat and pristine, but the other side had scraps of newspapers and magazines scattered everywhere. In particular, there were pictures of a single man repeated everywhere, and all of them in some sort of state of damage.

The prisoner was sitting in a seat facing away from the doctor, focusing on mangling another picture. The psychiatrist was forced to speak up to try to get attention.

"Excuse me? Irving Scolex? My name is Dr. Frederick Heidric. If you wouldn't mind, I would like a moment of your time."

The prisoner stopped. For the first time, the doctor could see he didn't have his own arms, but rather cheap prosthetics of the kind that could be shut down by remote control. "The name is Claw," the prisoner snarled, his voice more like a cross between a growl and a hiss than a voice.

Ignoring the comment, the Doctor went on. "Now, Mr. Scolex, I've come to speak with you about your mental state." Heidric looked around with some unease at the photos. "You seem to have a rather…intense obsession with Detective John Brown."

Claw laughed when he heard this. "I see. You're one of those people who believe I had something to do with that imbecile's disappearance. Well, as much as I would like to take the credit for Inspector Gadget's disappearance and likely demise, I could not have had a hand in it. I was here, serving out the first months of my sixteen life sentences."

"Now, Mr. Scolex," Heidrich put in, "it would be better for your therapy if you referred to people by their proper names. His name is not Inspector Gadget; that is merely a codename. His name is Detective Brown."

"Do not believe me a fool, doctor," Claw growled. "I know what you want to do here. Know this: it will not work. You cannot change my mind. I have made my decisions, and I will stand by them."

"I see." Heidrich stood up. "Well, I will come back tomorrow, and we will work some more."

Claw made no response as the doctor turned to leave. Before he had gone out, however, the villain called out one more thing. "Also remember this," he commented, his voice completely calm and level. "I will kill you. I don't know when or where, but when the time comes, I will kill you."

To be continued…
Tuesday, March 4, 2087

W.O.M.P HQ, Metro City

In all their time they had spent fighting M.A.D., the teens had seen and faced all sorts of criminals. Bank robbers, kidnappers, thugs, just about any sort of criminal the syndicate could attract, the little band had faced. Currently, they would have preferred to face all those thugs put together than the combined forced of the Washington parents and Lucy Tran.

"What the heck do you boys have to say for yourselves?" Jacob Washington scolded. "Really, going after criminals?! You could have died!"

"Sorry, Dad," both Firewall and Upgrade, real names Eli and Linc Washington, said in unison.

"And you, young lady!" Lucy yelled at Rheeci. "We got that van so you could go to and from school without paying train fair! Where is it now? Smashed against as freeway tunnel wall, chopped to bits by a cyborg criminal! Imagine what your parents would say if they weren't working night shifts!

"But, Gran, that wasn't my fault!" the girl tried to argue. "If After-Shock hadn't caused an earthquake, everything would have been fine."

"And you, young lady," Elle Washington said, turning to Cypher. "You were in a knife fight with one of them? Why were you in a knife fight?"

"I totally had her on the ropes," Cypher, real name Kayla Connors, started, but couldn't bring herself to finish. "Sorry," she said simply, eyes turned to the ground.

The only kid who had been somewhat left out of the scolding was Penny, who sat nearby, her face buried in her knees. The Morning Glory Girl's Home had already been called in regards to their whereabouts, but it would be a while before Maybelle, the older lady who ran the home, could come to pick her and Kayla up.

All she could think that all of this was her fault. The fact that her friends were in trouble. The fact that Talon and his goons got away. The fact that her uncle was now really and truly dead. It was all her fault.

Looking up at her, Brain nudged his head beneath her hand in an attempt to provide some comfort. The gesture was appreciated, but didn't help all that much.

"I'm so sorry," Penny finally said aloud. "I was the one who wanted to go looking for them. If it wasn't for me, this would have never happened." She then broke down crying again.

This caused a momentary quiet. Most of the adults couldn't think of what to say. After all, she had been at fault for a part of this, but it had been well meant, and no one could really bring themselves to yell at a heartbroken orphan who had just watched the last little bit of her family die in front of her.

"Hey, it's all of our faults," Kayla said, trying to provide some condolence.

"Yeah," Eli added. "You didn't want us to help you from the start, but we insisted."
Chief Quimby, Agent Heather, and their boss, Colonel Alphonse Nozziare, looked on in rather awkward silence. They had been present supervising the situation, but had thought it best not to speak up.

Now, Quimby changed his mind and broke the uncomfortable silence. "Well, whoever was at fault, there will be repercussions. Whether or not you used your real names, M.A.D. will recognize you now, and there's no telling what will happen after that. We'll have to try to figure out some way to make this alright before something catastrophic happens."

"You don't think they're in any immediate danger, do you, Dad?" Elle asked.

The chief sighed. "There's no telling. From what we already knew and what the kids told us, the majority of M.A.D. is made up of teenagers. However, they had some support, and we have no idea who or what that support is. We'll have to move slowly on this."

Any more discussion was cut short as the doors were slammed open, and Brenda Bradford stormed in, followed closely by her assistants. "Where's John Brown?" she asked immediately, not bothering to start with any sort of small talk.

"Do you mean Inspector Gadget?" Heather asked. "We just found him—well, sort of. Wait, how did you know we found him?"

"I'll explain that later," the doctor responded quickly. "Right now, if we are to save his life, we need to move fast. Now where is he?"

"Save his life?" Quimby asked, questioningly. "Brenda, I'm sorry to say this, but he's already dead. We were preparing to send him to the morgue, and then to make arrangements with the crematorium."

"No, he's not dead," Brenda snapped. "If he was than the Opossum Contingency wouldn't have gone off. Now, we need to get him to the hospital. I've already called and they are setting up the equipment I'll need. I repeat, where is he?"

"He's in the back room," Quimby answered, not quite finished yet. "Opossum Contingency'? Dr. Bradford, what are you talking about?"

"Myron, Johan, take a gurney and bring him out to the van," Brenda instructed. Turning to the group of confused people staring at her, she waved a hand. "Come now, chief. You know what the Opossum Contingency is. So do you, Colonel. It was in the manual you both were given when he took his job here. You know, the book containing all the information pertaining to John's bionics." She soon realized she was getting blank looks. "You two did read the manual, right?"

"Well, Brenda, you see…" Quimby responded, rubbing the back of his head as he attempted to think of an answer.

"In all fairness, that book was over eight thousand pages long." Nozziare tried to argue.

Brenda froze for a moment before removing her glasses and pinching the bridge of her nose. "And because you didn't read it, you risked burning the poor man alive!"

"My uncle is alive?" Penny asked. Her heart had lifted the moment it was suggested that he might not be dead. "What is the Possum Contingency?"

"The Opossum Contingency," the scientist answered, "was a safety mechanism that my dad came up with for more intense bionic implants. In the case that a life support machine would fail to work due
to damage, the machines around it would work to keep the damaged organs in a temporary state of stasis while triggering an alert back to us. That way, even though the victim would appear to be dead, they would be kept alive and a tracking signal would be sent out and bring us to where they are and allow us to do the necessary repairs."

"I see!" Rheeci exclaimed. "Kind of like how the Virginia Opossum, when it is attacked, will go stiff and still, and even give off a stench that smells like rotting to convince a predator that it is dead."

Brenda nodded. "Exactly. However, the Opossum Contingency won't keep him alive forever, which is why we needed to find him immediately, and why we need to be heading to the hospital right now."

"Right here, Dr. Bradford," Myron said as he and Johan wheeled Gadget out. "We've found him and are ready to go."

"Alright, let's head out then," she responded. Turning back, she placed a hand on Penny's shoulder and gave her a small smile. "I'll be sure to call with the results when we're finished. It's going to be alright." With that, she hurried off.

Deboir Enterprises, Main Building

"You lost him?!” To say that Dr. Charles Freymore was angry at the moment would be an understatement. "You lost him?! Do you know how many millions of dollars' worth of research and study we've taken from that man?! How many billions more is waiting to be taken?!"

"Yeah, yeah, spare me the lecture," Talon said, rolling his eyes in response. "It couldn't be helped; Gadget had to die."

"But there was still so much we could have taken from him!" The scientist was practically fuming. "There was so much in cyber development that we needed to take! Look at the developments we've already made! If that man hadn't been here, we would never have come anywhere close to developing you or your cyber-soldiers!"

"I still don't see why he had to be alive to take it," the boy responded with a shrug. "Considering all the trouble he was for Claw, letting him live seemed to be a goof move."

"Well, we h-had to let him live." Nicholas Kramer, Dr. Freymore's assistant began fumbling with papers. "You see, if he had been dead, we wouldn't have had such a close look at how the cybernetic interacted with the organic and-"

"And blah de blah de blah," Talon responded. "Hey, I did my job. I used him to lure the new Gadget out of hiding and attempted to take her out. She was too determined to save 1.O, though, so I had to finish off one or the other. Otherwise we'd have had two Gadgets running around causing problems." He laughed. "I almost got 'em both, too. If Chief Mustache and his cronies hadn't interrupted, Gadget 2.O would be gone too."

"Besides," he shrugged, "if you're so smart, why do you need to copy the original Bradford-Slickstein model? Why not come up with your own."

"A wise man once said, 'If it's not broke, don't fix it,'" another man said as he entered the room. He was a well-dressed young man who appeared to be the type with a lot of business sense and confidence. "We already have a model we knows works; we just needed to find out how to utilize it for ourselves."
"Yeah, and a nice bit of work you're doing, Richie Rich," Talon sneered. "At least Doc here has the argument he's actually doing something, and I'm getting tossed all your dirty work."

"May I remind you that ever since Dr. Claw ended up in the Cistern and I bought Scolex Industries, I've been the one funding your little escapades?" Richard Deboir turned and gave Talon a look. He had spent a long time as a successful businessman. As such, was used to getting exactly what he wanted and knew how to get it. "Or did you forget you work for me now."

Talon snorted. "M.A.D. will take pay, but you are no Dr. Claw."

"The kid isn't wrong." The four people in the room turned to see that four screens had come on, each showing the faces of the few M.A.D. lieutenants who were still out of prison. The person who had spoken was Dan Montan, head of the U.S. black market. The others were Anna Reyas, a successful South American drug cartel queen, Ichiro Waruda, head of the Tokyo Yakuza, and Huang Chow, master of the Chinese Triads.

"You've got a long way to prove you're more than a poor man's substitution, Deboir," Montan continued.

Upon seeing the arriving lieutenants, Deboir dropped the hostel tone, adopting the one he had picked up in his time as a businessman. "Ah, Mr. Montan, good to see you. Mr. Waruda, Ms. Reyas, Mr. Chow. You all are looking very well."

"Spare us the small talk," Reyas sneered. "You know why we called."

"Yes, yes, you want to know how your little investments are coming along." Deboir casually pulled out his phone for the notes. "The men each of you have sent in have been picked up and given welcome, they are in the process of receiving their upgrades as we speak. However, as I'm sure you'll understand, these things take time. There's the surgery to be done, recovery time, testing, all those formalities. All of this is quite worth it, I assure you, and as soon as their cybernetic enhancements are finished, I'm sure you'll see I'm more than a quality replacement for Claw as the head of M.A.D."

At this mention, Talon gave a loud snort of derision. Deboir turned for a moment to glare at the boy, but was interrupted before another argument could break out.

"Do not get ahead of yourself, Deboir," Waruda warned. "It took Claw a long time to reach his goal of respect, and had his syndicate formed back when he was still Scolex. Empires are built slowly, and it is very difficult to steal one, especially when the emperor is still alive."

"Claw might be alive, but he might as well be dead," Deboir responded, struggling to keep a cool tone. "M.A.D. was in shambles before I came and picked up the pieces. If anything, you all should be thanking me."

"Watch your mouth, boy," Montan scowled. "Remember, you work for us, not the other way around. All of us can and have done fine without you."

"And can continue to do well without you," Chow said, the threatening tone quite clear.

Catching the vibe, Deboir gave a nervous laugh. "Right, off course. I wouldn't dream of recommending anything else."

"Now, how is the other matter," Waruda said, turning the conversation. "Where are we on the signal?"
"Very close to being done," Deboir answered. "Kramer, do you wish to give the explanation?"

"Uh, yes sir." The assistant stepped forward. "Well, as you know, Deboir enterprises is responsible for the majority of technology supplies shipped out. Car parts, hospital machines, cyber parts, both legal and illegal…"

"Get on with it," Reyas snapped.

"Oh, uh, yes ma'am." Kramer shuffled his notes, trying to look busy. "Well, we now have developed the ability to hack into just about any machine on the face of the earth, using a simple signal. We still need to find a way to channel the-"

"As you can see," Duboir stepped in, cutting Kramer off, "we have everything covered. Now, if you excuse me, I have a dinner date plan." With that, he turned to leave, followed closely by Freymore and Kramer.

The lieutenants, however, did not leave when the three had gone. As soon as they were alone, Montan turned to Talon. "How did your mission go?"

"I carried through on my end," the boy responded. "The virus was downloaded into Gadget's systems. W.O.M.P. got the body, but the only way they'll be reviving him is if Bradford gives him a total re-haul, and that's only if she can get to him in time."

"And the girl?" Chow asked.

"Regrettably, she escaped." Talon shrugged. "I had to choose one of them, so I went with him."

"You've done well," Reyas said, "but don't be quite so confident. Both Gadgets have escaped inescapable traps before."

"Well, if he is still alive, he'll have the signal to deal with," Talon answered.

"True." Waruda nodded. "Time is becoming ripe for the true return of M.A.D. to power." With that, the four screens flickered off, leaving Talon on his own.

Saturday, March 8th, 2087

Metro City General Hospital, Metro City

When Gadget started to come to, he had absolutely no idea where he was or what had happened to him. He could tell that he was in a hospital room of some kind, and there were all sorts of machines and monitors around him. It all kind of gave him a sense of déjà vu, though he couldn't think of where he had felt this all before.

As he woke up even further, he could now here voices around him. Most of them he didn't recognize, but there was one he did know.

"Alright, it looks like the new hardware has settled in and been accepted," Brenda said to her companions. "He should be coming too any time now."

"Brenda?" Gadget question, pulling himself up as he spoke. "What's going on?"

"John, it's alright," the doctor said as she helped him to sit up. "You had a bit of an incident, but you'll be fine now. How do you feel?"
Now that she mentioned it, he realized that he felt a bit off. Not bad, per say, but incredibly different. His body didn't feel like his body. Well, it was attached to him, but he knew his gadgetry well enough to know that what he had now was not the same as what he had been given before.

In fact, now that he thought about it, it was pretty much the same sensation he had when he first woke up as a cyborg. Just how many times was he going to wake up with a body that wasn't exactly his body?

"It's different," he answered, still trying to comprehend what's going on. "Incident? What do you mean…?"

That was when the events from the other night flooded back to him. Waking up half paralyzed and being rescued by Penny and her friends with the strange names. Brain was there, too. Being attack by young cyborgs who apparently worked for M.A.D. Penny ending up in battle against some kid who was Claw's nephew. It didn't really make sense, but he could remember it.

"Penny, where's Penny?" he said, pushing himself up out of the hospital bed. "I need to find her. She might be hurt!"

"Easy, calm down," Brenda said, gently pushing him back down. "Penny's alright. She's right outside, but you can't go out right now. There are details about your new cybernetics you need to know first."

"I need to see her," Gadget responded, getting up.

Brenda laughed and shook her head. "Alright. I suppose I can give you the briefing after you've seen her. You'll need to do one thing first, though."

"Yes?" He was now willing to do just about anything if it meant he would be allowed to see his niece.

"You'll need these," Brenda said, handing him a package before heading out, followed by her assistants.

Gadget looked down at the bundle and realized that it was a shirt and a pair of pants. He had been in such a hurry to get out that he hadn't noticed that he was only wearing some underwear. Feeling very glad that the blanket hadn't fallen off in his previous attempts, he pulled the clothes on.

As he hurried out, he happened to hit his head hard on the lintel of the doorway. Turning around with some annoyance, he found that the doorway had been much shorter than he expected it to be. In fact, most things in the room were somewhat shorter than he thought they should be.

"Huh," he murmured, rubbing his bruised head. "I guess there's a new building code in effect."

In a side room that had been set aside for the meeting, Brenda was speaking to Penny and an older woman who Gadget didn't recognize. Quimby was there a well, though he was standing off to the side, along with a redheaded woman who Gadget also did not know. As soon as Penny caught sight of him, she jumped up and rushed over to him. "Uncle Gadget, you're alright!" Running over to him, she threw her arms around him and buried her face into his chest.

Gadget responded in turn, bending over so he could have an easier time reaching her. Now that she was safely with him once more, other questions began to pour into his head. "How long have I been gone? What's happened since then?" He paused for a moment and looked over at the redhead and the woman who had been sitting with Penny. "Who are you?"
As they broke off, Penny smiled. "For the first question, it's been over three years. It's now March of 2087. As for what's changed since the last time we saw each other, I'm afraid that is a much longer, more complicated answer. We'd better sit down."

After a moment of trying to think of how to start things off, Quimby sighed and decided to at least try to start things off. "Well, I hate to give an answer that starts with a question, but how much can you remember of what happened before you woke up that night?"

"Nothing, really," Gadget answered, taking a seat on a couch. "I remember getting a note to meets someone about an investigation, but as soon as I got to the meeting place, Firebird Row, everything blanked out. I'm afraid that's all I've got."

"We're not really much better," the chief commented. "We have no idea why you were kidnapped, other than it probably had something to do with your gadgetry and that it was done by a fledgling segment that was trying to revive M.A.D."

"That leads into the second important area," the redhead picked up. She turned to Gadget and held out her hand. "My name is Heather Connelly. I'm a recently arrived agent at W.O.M.P."

"Pleased to meet you," the cyborg responded, shaking her hand. "As well, I'm sure," she responded with a smile. "Well, getting back to M.A.D., as Penny and her friends updated you about, most of the old members of M.A.D. were caught and are in incarceration. However, there has come another sect that wants to restart it. At the moment, all we know is that it appears to be headed by Talon Scolex, the nephew of Dr. Claw. Considering Talon is only fifteen, we suspect he must have some sort of adult support and financial assistance, but as to where it's coming from, we have yet to know."

This news lead to another question to come up, and it was one that Gadget wasn't quite sure he would like the answer to. "How did you and your friends even know about M.A.D.?" he asked. "Why were you there, and how did you get what you were using."

The girl sat down next to him and sighed. "I'm afraid that's the longest answer. To start, I guess, I just wanted to find you. After you disappeared, there were search parties sent out, but after a couple of months most people lost interest in finding you."

"It was red tape, I'm afraid," Quimby added. "We had difficulty getting funds to put into a search, and a lot of people weren't enthusiastic with funding a search for a non-active agent."

Reaching up, Penny played with the end of her braid as she spoke. "Since no one was really going to look that hard into finding out where you and Brain disappeared to, I was going to. At first, it was just me doing the investigation. Then, I met Kayla at the girls' home, and she went along with me. After that, I met Rheeci, Linc, and Eli at the Riverside Prep school, and when they figured out what was going on, they wanted to help, too. After a while, we just really settled into our fight against Talon's thugs. Linc and I designed a lot of the tech we used, and Rheeci, Eli, and Kayla focused more on researching past gang events that might have been related to M.A.D."

"Wait a moment," Heather said, raising her hand. "Those robots we found, the bird and the monkey. You're saying you and your friend made those things?"

"Those would be G-5 and G-8." Penny shrugged. "Linc and Eli did the actual putting it together. They're pretty handy with tools. I just set up the blue prints and did the programing. That's about how it worked for most things, except for my watch and one other device." She rolled up her sleeve, revealing the watch again. "This I've had for ages, though the connection it holds with my charm
bracelet is relatively new."

"You're saying you designed eight of those robots?" Brenda asked. "I know from experience, those materials aren't cheap. How are you affording this?"

Penny was growing rapidly uncomfortable with the conversation, but continued to answer with as much honesty as possible. "There are actually twelve of them, though only ten are online. I'm still working with G-11 and G-12. As for how I made the money, well, I sold some of my old programs that I had come up with."

"Oh, I remember that," the old woman said. "That was those nice men from those clothes stores who offered to buy that little game you and Kayla were playing."

"Game?" Gadget asked. "Penny, I didn't know you designed games."

"Well, I wasn't really a game," she answered, leaning back. "It was the Chrono Program."

"What is the Chrono Program?" Gadget asked. He had been aware of his niece's skill with computers, but he had never guessed she was making programs on her own.

"It's just a cross referencing system," she responded. "It takes a picture scan to take measurements, and after judging through a set of preferences that are entered beforehand and going through weather forecasts, it will make recommendations for fashions, as well as stating where you can buy it." Touching her watch, she pulled up a few legal forms that back up her claim. "It originally for historical artifact scans, but Kayla came up with the idea to use it for clothes, so when we sold the program for royalties, we went in on it together."

There was a moment of stunned silence. Almost everyone in the room was stunned that two fourteen year old girls could have come up with such a system.

There some exceptions, though. "You designed this all by yourself?" Gadget asked, pursing the files. Frankly, he didn't really understand what he was seeing, but he was rather impressed. "This is a very good job. Well done."

"You really think so?" Penny asked. She blushed at the praise. "It was just an old system that I had."

"Okay, getting back on track," Quimby interrupted, a bit annoyed that Gadget was treating this revelation as if it was a particularly well done drawing. "So you apparently have royalties to a program used by department stores, and you decided to use this money to investigate into M.A.D. on your own. Is this correct?"

"That sounds right," the girl answered, slumping over as she did so. She turned to Gadget and took his hand. "I just wanted to find out what happened to you and if you were alright. I missed you. You're not mad, are you?"

Gadget sighed. "Penny, I'm not mad, but I am concerned. What you and your friends did was very dangerous. I understand you were worried, but what would have happened if you had been caught, or worse? What if they had found out who you are?"

"I'm afraid it's already too late for that." Quimby sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "There's no doubt that Talon Scolex, at the very least, has had a good look at all of them, and probably would be able to identify them on sight."

Hearing this, Gadget turned pale. "Can't anything be done?" he asked, his voice trembling in shock. "There's got to be something we can do to keep M.A.D. away from them."
"We've already talked some with Jacob and Elle Washington and Matthew and Alyssa Tran, and it is why Mrs. Tomblin is here as well," Heather answered, motioning to the elderly lady. "We'll find something that can be done to keep them safe, but it's pretty clear that it's not going to be easy."

Before anything else could be said, there came the sound of loud commotion out in the hallway. "Oh, yes, of course we are all super excited about this new development!" A woman's voice could be heard over the chatter. "A hero of this status being found again after three years is of great interest, which is why we came to see him so quickly."

Upon here the voice, Quimby groaned and buried his face in his hands. "Oh, great, who told the Evil Gidget?"

"Who?" Gadget asked.

Before anyone could answer, a middle aged woman in a dress suit stormed into the waiting room, followed by a variety of reporters and camera men. Spotting Gadget, she waltzed over to the couch and shoved her way between him and Penny. "Oh, Inspector Gadget!" she said in one of those fake happy voices that people typically used on TV. "I can't tell you how relieved we are that you were found."

"Uh, um, great," he responded, flabbergasted by the woman's familiarity. "Uh, who are you?"

"Oh, yes, I quite forgot my manners there," the woman giggled, as if this had been a slight faux pas instead of busting into a private conversation. "I'm Lillian Wilson, mayor of this fair city. As I said, everyone was so relieved to hear that you were found by your niece. Why, this must be her!"

With that, the mayor got up and moved over to Heather. "You must be Pebby Dolan! So happy to meet you!"

"Actually," the agent responded, "the inspector's niece is named Penny Dollar, and she's over there. My name is Heather Connelly, and I'm not related to him."

Mayor Wilson turned, as if noticing Penny for the first time. "Oh. I wasn't expecting you to be so young. How old are you, ten?"

"I'm fourteen," Penny answered, holding out her hand. She had a mixture of relief and annoyance over the interruption, but had enough knowledge about the mayor's past actions not to have shock.

"Yes, that's nice, I'm sure," Wilson said, briefly given Penny attention before turning back to Gadget. "Now, I'm sure we're all dying to here just what happened, so-"

"Okay, okay, that's enough," Quimby said, deciding that this circus had to stop. "Wilson, we've told you this before. W.O.M.P. H.Q. might be located in Metro City, but that does not mean its employees are at your beck and call. Now, Detective Brown has recently been through a traumatic experience, and it would really be best if only those connected to his situation was here at the moment."

"Oh, that's alright," the mayor answered. "I'm sure this Detective Brown is a nice fellow, but I want to speak with Inspector Gadget right now."

The look on the chief's face made it clear he wanted to find the nearest wall and bang his head against it. "You do realize that his name isn't actually Inspector Gadget, right? He has a real name."

"Oh, he does?" Wilson chirped, as if she was being let in on a deep secret instead of something that was common knowledge. "And that is?"
"John Brown!" Quimby snapped. It was pretty clear he was doing everything in his power not to blow up right at the politician. "As I said earlier, he was through a very traumatic situation, and it would be best to hold back on the paparazzi for a while! Everybody out!"

"But this would be the perfect time to-" the mayor tried to argue.

"Out! Now!" the chief snapped. "If anyone is still in this room in five minutes, I'll arrest you all for harassment of W.O.M.P. employees!"

That did the trick. It seemed that the mayor and her entourage couldn't get out of the hospital room fast enough. Soon, the room was private once again.

Quimby sighed. "Sorry about that, Gadget. That woman seriously needs to learn about boundaries."

"Now, I know this was all a lot to take," Brenda said, stepping in. "It's probably best that you get some rest now."

"Oh, that's quite right," Maybelle Tomblin said, sitting up. "We'd best be getting along home, Penny."

Neither uncle nor niece was particularly in a hurry to be separated again, but Penny found herself swept up and hurried off. "Goodbye, Uncle Gadget!" she called back. "I'll see you in the morning!"

"But wait-" Gadget called, but it was too late. He now noticed, for the first time, that it was early evening, and there was a good amount of people leaving due to the ending of visiting hours. Penny and her caretaker had already been swallowed up by the crowd.

"It'll be alright, John," Brenda said, trying to usher him back to the bedroom. "She'll be at H.Q. tomorrow afternoon. Please try to get some rest, and we'll explain everything then."

Gadget sighed. He wasn't pleased with the situation, but really couldn't think of anything he could do. "Alright," he said, turning into the room, "but I want a finished account by tomorrow."

"You'll have it," Quimby assured as he and Heather turned to leave.

To be continued…
To Gadget, tomorrow seemed to take forever to finally arrive, but when he had been assured that the time had come, he had hurried off as fast as he could move. This turned out to not be such a good idea, considering it appeared to him that all the door lintels had been lowered, and each and every one he had an encounter with took this fact out on his forehead.

Not that it mattered to him at the moment. All that he could think was that there was finally going to be some answers given, and he'd finally be allowed to rejoin his family.

Upon making it into the W.O.M.P. building, it didn't take too long for him to find them. "Uncle Gadget!" Penny called out, trying to attract her uncle's attention. "Over here!"

"Penny, where-" he started to ask, but was cut off when something rammed right into him, excitedly jumping up and knocking him down.

He looked up to realize that it was Brain who had knocked him over, though a much larger Brain than he remembered. He wasn't able to get a question in, though, considering the dog had taken the moment to start licking his human's face.

"Down, Brain, not right now," Penny said, pulling the dog off of her startled relative. "You can't just knock him over like that."

Brain looked back at her and whimpered apologetically.

"Here, Uncle," Penny said, taking the prone cyborg's hand. "Let me help you up."

"Thank you." He glanced over at the dog with some amount of confusion. "Has Brain gotten bigger in the three years I've been gone?"

Before Penny could answer, someone else intervened. "Indeed he has," Rheeci said, stepping next to Penny and shaking Gadget's hand. "Hi! I'm Rheeci Tran. We've already met, but considering how that night ended, I suppose reintroductions are necessary."

"Rheeci, don't you think that it might be more appropriate for Penny to do introductions?" Eli asked, as he, Linc, and Kayla walked up to join them. "After all, he is her uncle."

"That's alright, but thanks," Penny laughed. Turning back to Gadget, she motioned to the newcomers. "Uncle Gadget, these are Eli and Linc Washington and Kayla Connors. You've already met Rheeci. They're my friends from school and the girl's home. I was just updating them about the details from yesterday."

"Nice to meet you all," the cyborg responded. "I do hope you don't make a habit of having evenings like that."

"Only when we have to," Rheeci chirped, saying the phrase in such a way that Gadget couldn't tell if it was a joke or not.

Before anyone could say anything else, they were joined by Dr. Bradford. "Ah, we're all here, then," Brenda said with a smile. "We had better head inside. Everyone is waiting for us, and we have a lot of explanations to do." She motioned to the group to follow her into an inner room.
Inside, there was already a group of people gathered. Along with Chief Quimby, Heather, and Mrs. Tomblin, the Washington and Tran parents were also present, as well as Colonel Nozziare, General Sir, Brenda's young assistants from before, and a few people who Gadget didn't recognize but supposed had been hired after his departure.

"Ah, Gadget, good to see you again," the general said, going up to him. Chief Quimby and Nozziare followed closely behind, and Brenda stood close by. "I hope you are feeling well, all things considered."

"Good to see you too, sir," Gadget said, saluting. "I well as can be, though I'm still in the dark as to what exactly is going on."

"That's what we're here to talk about," Brenda said. "First, there's something we'll need to ask you about." Lowering her voice, she edged him away from Penny, who was discussing something with the other teens. "You weren't all that surprised to hear that Penny had been designing her own programs."

"How long have you known that she was a technological prodigy?" Quimby asked.

"A technological prodigy!" Gadget said in a rather indignant tone. "I'm surprised you'd ask me that to my face! She has never had any technological parts at all! I'd think I'd know the difference between my own niece and a robot!"

"Gadget, you buffoon," Nozziare grumbled. "Saying she's a prodigy means that she can do things kids usually don't know how to do. We're asking you how long you've known she was a genius."

"A genius!" This surprised Gadget, though pleasantly. "Wowzers! I always knew she was a smart girl, but a genius! Not that I'm not happy about that, but, wowzers! How did you find out?"

"You mean," Quimby asked, "you never had a clue? Then why weren't you all too surprised to find out that she designed Chrono Program yesterday?"

"Well, that was a nice little program," Gadget responded, "but aren't all kids her age doing that sort of thing? You know, make little programs and play with them. I mean, it's nice that she's gotten a bit of pocket change off of it, but I don't see what the big deal is."

There was a moment of silence before Brenda spoke up again. "That's right, you've been gone too long to know." She sighed before explaining. "Gadget, the Chrono Program isn't a little system a few mom and pop's use, it's a high level cross referencing system used in multiple department store chains worldwide. It's up to a quality most businesses dream of reaching and pay millions in royalties to use, millions that Penny is likely worth now. On top of it all, the info from the legal work she gave us states that she designed it at age nine. This is highly above average child behavior."

"It is? Huh." Gadget smiled, and there was a tone of pride in his voice. "Well, that's good to know."

"What's not particularly good," Quimby said, hoping to move into a topic that might be a bit more productive than the previous one had been, "is what she used her abilities for. Wandering over to a computer station, the chief called up a file full of various notes and records. "This file," Quimby said, "states everything we know that Penny and her friends got up to in the last couple of years. There's nothing criminal, so to speak, but were afraid they've gotten themselves tangled up in the reformed M.A.D. on repeated occasions."

"Yes, I remember that being mentioned," Gadget said, his face falling as he remembered the danger his niece had put herself into.
"Now, as it was mentioned before," the chief went on, "we've already talked it over with the other parents and guardians, and we suppose there is a solution in order. It's not ideal, but considering the circumstances, it'll have to do."

"What was suggested," Brenda picked up, "is that they come to work here, in the role of junior volunteers here at HQ. They would not be sent on missions or anything of that caliber, but they would be trained in self-defense, and it would allow them to contact us in the case of an emergency."

Gadget took a deep breath, and tugged his hat down over his eyes as he thought. He hadn't really wanted to admit to it, but a part of him had always somewhat hoped that Penny wouldn't get pulled into this. While he never regretted his job or the path he had taken in life, it had already cost him so much. The thought that Penny might follow him into that field, the very field that had taken the lives of her parents, had stung, but he had always been able to wave it away before.

Well, there didn't seem to be any other option. "I suppose," he said, "if there really isn't any other way to be sure of their safety. There will be no missions, right?"

"You will have full say in what she does and does not do," General Sir assured him. "The details will be discussed later, once we have more time to reflect on the situation."

"Alright then," Gadget sighed, and he couldn't help but look a bit crestfallen.

Seeing his expression, Brenda put a hand on his shoulder. "It'll be alright," she assured. "Now, why don't we move on to other business? We still have to talk about the differences in your new gadgetry."

The cyborg gave another forlorn glance over to his niece before nodding. "I guess that's a good idea," he said.

"Good." The doctor gave a smile. "Now, we'd better gather together, and we'll discuss what we've done."

Downtown Metro City

In a somewhat deserted section of the city stood a comparatively nice business complex. It had been built years ago by a philanthropist who had supposed that the best way to bring in revenue for poorer sections of the city was to make nice office complexes in the place of old, worn down buildings, which would attract businesses to come in and make their headquarters in such areas. Alas, the building did not attract the attention he had predicted it would, and while it was eventually sold to be used as a warehouse, the own hardly ever used it, and what was intended to be a sign of improvement started to show signs of neglect.

Of course, those signs were not totally correct.

The building, though not used for its initial purpose of an office complex, nor its secondary one as a warehouse, it did serve a very important purpose to those who were currently utilizing it, such as the six cyborg teens who were waiting inside.

"I'm bored!" Joltwave grumbled. She slumped back on a couch. "Why don't we go out and do something?!!"

"I'm with ya there, sis," After-Shock responded, finishing off a can of soda. "There hasn't been a thing to do since Talon took ol' Gadget Sr. out, and even that didn't take." He placed the can on the
ground and, with a quick movement of a pile driver, crushed it into a flat disc before tossing that into a pile of other discs. "There's gotta be something a cyber can do for some fun."

"You heard Talon," another boy, who was somewhat on the smaller side said. "We stay here and wait. Especially since the Gadgets got away, there's bound for us to be something to do pretty soon."

"Easy for you to say, Malware," a second girl, who was leaning against a vending machine, sneered. "You actually have something to do! Some of us haven't had a real rush for weeks!"

Malware gave a smile and adjusted his glasses. "Well, I did, anyway." He casually pressed a file on the computer, prompting several news article and picture PDFs to come up. "Names, numbers, ID's, we've now got just about anything anyone want on Penny Gadget and her team."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, you know her name, age, and birthday now, whoop-dee do," a third boy grumbled. "I wish we could just knock over to convenience store or something."

"Patience, Drillbit. Everything will fall into place all in good time." All the teens turned to see Talon come in. He tossed his coat over onto a lamp and grabbed a can of pop before reclining on a couch. "So, Malware," he said, "what do have on those goody-goodies?"

"Tell me something I don't know," Talon snorted. "How about the others? You can't have spent all this time on something she herself gave away."

"Well, it took a bit more time to determine," Malware went on, "but we have the other identities as well. They are Elijah and Lincoln Washing, Kayla Connors, and Therese Tran. The only connection we could find them was that they attend Riverside Preparatory High School, except for Kayla, who lives in the same girls' home as Penelope."

"That school for squares?" the last boy, who had not yet spoken up, laughed. "Makes sense that those Gadget dorks would be coming from there. Only teacher's pets and kids rich enough to bribe their way in go there."

"Doesn't Talon's brother go there?" the second girl asked.

"If that was right, you'd only be proving Wildfire's point, Syreen," Talon laughed. "Luckily, Billy doesn't go there. Since we got cut off, there's no way Mom would be able to afford to send him there, and there's no way he's skilled enough to be a charity student." Turning back to the screen, he gave a grin. "Still, I guess it couldn't hurt to schedule a visit to Riverside Prep someday, considering it's become a gathering place for troublesome losers."

"Yeah! Now we're talking!" Drillbit cheered, smacking his hands together and changing them into the drill he took his name from. "Let's go have a bit of fun!"

"Not quite yet," Talon interrupted. "We have new orders from his high royalness first."

"Aw, come on!" Drillbit exclaimed.

"Yeah!" Syreen grumbled. "We never had to play Deboir's attack dogs when we were average M.A.D. grunts."

"I'm not any happier with it than you are," Talon responded, "but like it or not, until my plan works out, we're gonna have to do whatever Deboir and Freymore want."
"Fine," Wildfire said, speaking for the rest. "What do we gotta do now?"

"Well, you know how the virus didn't work? It actually did, but old lady Bradford apparently had some sort of plan-B. Gadget-1 got himself a shiny new body."

"And this has to do with us why?" After-Shock asked.

Talon grinned. "Because Doc Freymore sees this as the perfect time for us to test out the virus signal. You know that big pep rally the mayor is having tomorrow to promote her re-election?"

Joltwave grinned. "I like where this is going."

The leader nodded. "We've been given orders to shake things up there and in other areas of the city in order to split W.O.M.P.'s strength all around. Once Gadget's arrived, the fun will really begin."

W.O.M.P. H.Q.

It didn't take long to gather the others together, and soon scientists could begin the description of the alterations. "So, if I can direct your attention to the screen," Dr. Bradford said as she began her explanation, "I'll show you the extent of the changes that were done."

The explanation and demonstration honestly didn't go on for all that long. In reality, it was only about a half an hour later by the time that Brenda and her two assistants were wrapping up the explanation. However, considering most of the people in the audience were not of the mindset to be devoting a lot of time into understanding all of the latest technological terminology (and indeed, some were just there to learn what was going to happen with their families), almost everybody had been lost over the course of the explanation. Even Penny, who had held her attention better than most, was looking on rather questioningly on some of the more convoluted explanations.

"…and I believe that covers everything," Brenda said, flipping a switch to end the slide show. "Any questions?"

"Uh, yes," Quimby said, trying to find the best way to phrase that he had understood almost nothing of what he had been told. "Where will we be able to look to figure this stuff all out again? In the case of emergencies, of course."

"Everyone who might need to know of this information will receive an updated version of the manual," Johan answered as he put up some of the equipment.

"I do hope it will actually be read this time," Brenda commented, shooting a glare over at Quimby and Nozziare. The two men mumbled out what they hoped sounded like affirmation.

At that moment, there was a bit of an interruption as someone knocked on the door. "Hey, I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" Heather asked, leaning into the door. "I need to see the chief for a moment."

At that moment, it seemed as if Cupid's arrow had shot out and struck Myron Dabble hard. Rushing over, he took the agent's hand, shaking it hard. "Of course not! You're not interrupting anything. We were just finishing up as it is," he said. "My name is Dr. Myron Dabble, at your service. May I be as bold as to ask how I am to address you?"

"Uh, Heather," the redhead responded somewhat hesitantly. "My name is Heather Connelly. Nice to meet you, Myron."
"Likewise I'm sure," the scientist beamed.

"You wanted to say something to me, Agent Connelly?" Quimby said, stepping ahead to come between the love smitten scientist and the object of his affection.

"Yes, and it's rather urgent," she responded, recovering from the somewhat over enthusiastic greeting. "It's about that Pep Rally tomorrow."

Hearing this, the chief put his face in his hands. "Oh, sweet sugar, tell me she isn't here."

"Thankfully, I can say that," Heather laughed. "Mayor Wilson did try to get in, but we were able to convince her to just send a message."

"What does she want now," Quimby sighed.

"She's insistent that there be W.O.M.P. agents present to provide security, but that's not all." Here, she turned to face Gadget. "She's insisting that you, in specific, show up."

Despite the fact that this comment had been addressed to Gadget, it was Nozziare who responded. "What!" the colonel exclaimed. "No! No way! He doesn't even work for us anymore! That is utterly out of the question!"

Hearing this, Gadget slumped back in his seat a bit. He had forgotten that last bit of information. That was right. He was still out of a job.

General Sir, however, responded in a different manner, however. "Well, I don't see the harm. I mean, if you're fine with it, Gadget. Would you like to come out of retirement?"

"Well, I-" Gadget started, though he was cut off.

"What do you mean, sir?" Nozziare asked, clearly not pleased with the idea of reinstating the cyborg. "It was clearly decided that without the threat of Dr. Claw himself, Gadget's specific...uh...abilities were no longer needed."

"True," the general shrugged, "but this isn't a mission, so to speak. It's a publicity stunt, more than anything else. A mission of goodwill, so to speak. It will please Wilson and get her off our backs, at least of a little while. What do you think, chief?"

Quimby gave a small smile. "I was against retiring Gadget from the start. If this is something he can do in absence of any other important business, I'm all for it, provided he's alright with it. Gadget?"

Gadget smiled. "I've been wanting to get out of retirement since I went into it. I'm on the case!"

Monday, March 10, 2087

Metro City Square, Metro City

Penny had never before been so thankful for a field trip. When she had heard the proposal the her uncle make an appearance at the political rally the mayor was holding, a part of her couldn't help but be anxious that Talon and his cronies might attempt something. She didn't say anything, of course, because she doubted she'd be listened to, but a part of her couldn't ignore that nagging feeling that she'd need to be there to help.

It was a school day, however, and with her and her friends extracurricular activities having recently
come to light, there was no way she would ever be exempt from school ever again unless something earth-shattering happened.

A miracle did happen, however. Her history teacher, Miss Hastings, was incredibly politically driven, and had decided that the pep rally would be the perfect opportunity for her students to get some exposure to governmental campaigns. Thus, that Monday morning, she had given her class two options: stay at the school and take an extra credit pop quiz, or go to the political rally for the same extra credit.

Of course, Penny had sprang on the opportunity. This was perfect. She could now go and make sure that everything turned out alright, and no one would ever question why she was there. Her only regrets were that she'd have to do this alone. None of her friends had the same history class, and dogs were just not allowed at such events, so Brain couldn't be there, either. Oh, well. She could work with these limitations.

Unfortunately, the whole place was packed. People might not always be interested in politics, but they loved a spectacle, and if Mayor Wilson was good at one thing, it was setting up a spectacle. This, combined with the fact that she had to stay with her class through the whole event, meant that Penny had difficulty in keeping an eye on everything and, even more to her dismay, she couldn't find her Uncle Gadget at all.

"Isn't this quite the experience, kids?" Miss Hastings asked, enthusiasm clear in her voice. "I know you can't vote now, but just think about it! In a few years, you too will be able to participate fully in such dealings!"

At the moment, political procedure was the last thing on Penny's mind, and it was pretty clear that the classmates that accompanied her were in agreement. Still, the hustle and bustle of the rally were more interesting than the pop quiz back at the school would have been.

At that moment, however, Penny did get excited. She finally caught a glimpse of her uncle, standing near a podium that had been set up in front of town hall. Since he was still staying in the hospital, she hadn't seen him since yesterday, and they really hadn't had a moment to talk. She was also relieved to see that Agent Heather had been sent with him, since it meant there would be someone to make sure that his words weren't twisted around too badly.

"Miss Hastings," Penny said, calling over to her teacher. "Do you think I could go get us seats for the big speech? It won't be too long before it starts up, and I want to get a good spot."

"Oh, don't worry about that, we've got reserved seating," her teacher assured. "If you want to settle in, though, it's in the third row. You might be able to get some pictures that way."

"Thanks," the girl responded, waving before hurrying off to the seats. Keeping her hands low, she plucked a charm off of her bracelet and scanned it too her watch. She couldn't shake the feeling that something bad might happen, so she'd keep an eye out to make sure no one would be hacking the broadcasting.

Settling in to her seat, she adjusted the settings on her watch. No one would be getting by her this time.

As she sat, someone came up and sat next to her. He was dressed in a heavy hooded sweatshirt and had the hood pulled over his head. Since it was rather cold, this seemed to make sense, so she didn't pay him any heed.

The newcomer, however, was determined to be noticed, so he nudged the girl's shoulder several
times. Finally, not wanting to be nudged again, she turned to the newcomer. "Yes?" she asked, trying to mask an amount of annoyance.

When she turned and saw who it was, though, her expression changed. "Brain!" she said, happily but as quietly as possible. Reaching over, she hugged the dog. "I didn't think you'd make it."

Brain shrugged. There was no way he'd miss a chance to help his girl. He just had to make sure no one figured out he was a dog, which was easy enough as long as he stayed quiet and in disguise.

Penny smiled. "Nothing should happen," she explained, "but I can't help but feel something will." She glanced down at her watch and frowned. "I really hope I'm wrong."

"Wowzers, there sure are a lot of people out there," Gadget said, leaning out. "Did they all come here to hear Mayor Wilson talk?"

"Well, it's more they came here to see the show," Heather answered. "Ever since Deboir put his name on the running ballot, they've both been making a show of themselves."

"Deboir?" Gadget asked. "Who's he?"

"That's right; you've been gone for three years." The agent shook her head at her own forgetfulness. "You know George Scolex?"

"Yeah, he was Dr. Claw's brother," the inspector answered. "I never met him, but he seemed to be nice."

"He was also who took over Scolex Industries after Claw went on the lam," Heather explained. "Scolex died about three months after you were taken, and since Scolex's widow had no knowledge about how to run a business, a businessman named Richard Deboir took over the whole company, renaming it Deboir Enterprises."

"Oh, that's so sad," Gadget said, genuinely dismayed. "Didn't George Scolex have two sons?"

"And three daughters. You had a run in with one of the boys." Heather gave a dry laugh. "Talon's got a lot of his uncle in him. The other boy, William, seem pretty alright, though I'm a bit hesitant. I heard he might be coming to work for Dr. Bradford pretty soon. I hope that's a good idea."

"I don't see why not," Gadget responded, giving a bittersweet but optimistic smile. "Brenda's a good influence, and I'm sure working with her will help to keep him from following his relative's model of criminal behavior. After all, prevention is the best way of keeping crime down in the first place."

Heather smiled. "You're awfully optimistic, especially since you don't have any real personal knowledge of the issue."

"I prefer to look to the bright side until the darkness is obvious," he responded. "If you were to assume the worst at all times, well, you'd never be able to trust anyone, and that's just not a world I'd want to live in."

"You're a good guy, Gadget Boy," the agent responded, shaking her head, but giving a small chuckle. "Naive, maybe, but a good guy."

"Alright, alright, are we all ready?" The two W.O.M.P. agents turned when they heard the mayor speak. She was addressing everyone backstage. "We're going on in just a few minutes. Remember,
I'm counting on you all to do this just right! My campaign is depending on this. We want to make a good impression."

"Of course we do! It is always good to make a good first impression!" Gadget responded. "Ladies first," he said, motioning for the mayor and Heather to move ahead of him. As he turned to follow, he promptly stepped on his own coat, slid to a side, and began falling over backwards. The only thing that kept him from crashing through the stairs completely was Heather rushing in, grabbing the front of his coat and pulling him back into a standing position.

"Uh, yes," the mayor said, now somewhat unsure about having such a klutz nearby. "Maybe you two should stand in the back."

"Whatever you say, ma'am," the inspector responded, giving a smart salute.

By the time the speech was starting up, there was a good number of people in their seats. They mostly weren't politically driven, but those who were had begun acting more like they were at a concert, enthusiastically shouting and holding up signs in support. The more lukewarm members of the audience were thus swept into the excitement and energy of the crowd. By the time the mayor got out, there was an intense cheer let out.

Penny, who was too concerned with keeping an eye one everything to get swept up in the emotion of the crowd, ducked down to see if there were any attempts at hacking into the rally's tech. Thankfully, there didn't appear to be anything, so she looked up to watch what was about to happen.

It was pretty clear that Mayor Wilson was enjoying every minute of this. The applause and the enthusiasm, this is what she went into politics for. She walked up to the mike and began her speech.

However, it was not her words that came over the PA. "My fellow Americans," a falsetto voice said, clearly mocking the mayor's own, "I have come up to say that I am so wonderful, and you are all my ditzy sheep who I only bother to speak with to get attention!"

"What?" Wilson exclaimed in shock. "I didn't say that! Who's saying this! I demand you reveal yourself!"

Penny looked down in panic at her watch. Something was wrong. Someone hacked the equipment, but her watch said that nothing was wrong. Whoever was doing this had found a way in that was undetectable.

"Furthermore," the mocker went on, "I believe that all of you will just do whatever I say because I am a celebrity of the highest caliber. As such, I declare that all of you should go take a trip right where you all belong: a circus! After all, where would it be better to keep all the dancing monkeys?"

There was a loud murmur of confusion that went out over the crowd. No one had any idea of what was going on.

They soon got their answer, though. The screen, which had, until then, been showing the mayor and her confused entourage, flickered off, and when it sprang back to life, it had only a single image on it. It was the image of a demon cat.

"Now, now, I'm sure you all are questioning what's going on," the voice said again, now dropping the falsetto. "If I may turn your attention to the back of the seating, I'll be able to explain this all."

All eyes turned in the direction the voice had stated. Standing at the back was Talon, with three other teens standing right beside him. "Hello everyone," the boy said with a wicked smirk. "If you've been watching the news lately, you'll probably recognize me as Talon Scolex. My compatriots here are
Syreen, Wildfire, and Malware. We regret to inform you that the regularly scheduled programming has been interrupted for a very important message, directly from M.A.D."

To be continued…
School was school, no matter how you put it, and there was no way school can really be made all the more interesting. This was especially true when you didn't go to the same school as a lot of your friends.

This was the situation Kayla currently found herself in. Sure, she had plenty of friends at P.S. 246, but considering the other members of Team Gadget went to Riverside Prep, there were times she was horribly bored with the old public school. If the others were there, at the very least she could discuss the issues of Team Gadget with them.

Of course, if they weren't at Riverside, there probably wouldn't have been a Team Gadget. Penny and Linc were tech wizards and Rheeci knew just about everything zoological, both of which had saved their skins against M.A.D. on multiple occasions. Heck, even Eli's football scholarship came in handy at times.

It wasn't that Kayla felt bad around them. She was just as much a member of the team. No, it's was quite the opposite. When you've saved the city, and maybe even the world, on multiple occasions, talking about what new lip gloss color was coming into style suddenly loses its appeal.

She was currently sitting in third period biology, staring out the window. The teacher was droning on about mitosis or something like that, but with everything that had recently occurred, it was rather difficult to pay attention.

Unfortunately, something would soon come up that would make a boring lesson look downright desirable.

"So once the DNA has separated completely," the teacher, Mr. Englbaum, was saying, when he was cut off by a sudden earthquake. The whole building shook, sending everything into a state of panic and chaos.

"Alright, everyone stay calm!" Mr. Englbaum shouted out, not taking his own advice. "I'm sure there's a reason we are having a major earthquake. Just get under your desk and everything will work itself out!"

Most of the students, including Kayla, followed his advice, ducking beneath their desks, but a couple of others rushed to the window instead. "Hey!" one boy cried out. "There's a guy out there with robot arms! I think he's-" Another tremor cut the speaker off, sending everyone who wasn't already on the ground sprawling.

Hearing this, Kayla scowled. So After-Shock was behind this. If only she still had her gear, she could go do something about him. However, she didn't have even the slightest shield with her. She had to figure out some way to get help.

Pulling out her cell phone, Kayla quickly dialed out the numbers, starting up a group call. "C'mon guys," she said through gritted teeth as the phone rang. "Please pick up!"

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At the rally, chaos reigned. As soon as Talon and his cronies had decided to reveal themselves, everything turned into a big panic. The police officers present attempted to rush in to face off the threat, but the present and panicking civilians made their jobs incredibly difficult.
"Well, well, it look like they want to play," Talon said, giving a smirk. "Syreen, why don't you give us some mood music."

"Gladly," the girl responded. Touching a dial on her throat, she took a breath and let out an unearthly shriek. Everyone who had been rushing around was forced to stop and grab their ears to block out the horrid sound.

Indeed, even back on the stage, the two W.O.M.P. agent present were struggling just as everyone else. "Go-go Gadget Hearing Protection!" Gadget called out, desperate to have some sort of relief. A bar, not unlike a smaller copy of his Copter, popped out of his hat and bent down, coving his ears with dome-like coverings.

"Ah, thank you," he said with a smile to his hat. Noticing Heather struggling next to him, he turned back. "Any extra?"

Heather was hardly aware of what was going on when she felt a pair of large earphones place over her head. Looking up, she saw Gadget, who was now trying to help her to her feet. Much to her relief, the earphones he had placed on her drowned out the horrible screech.

"So," he said, motioning to the troublemaking teens. "Looks like we've got a bit more work than we expected. You feeling up to it?"

The agent gave a small smile. "You go on ahead. I just need to get something and then I'll join you."

Thankfully, Gadget and Heather were not the only ones with defense against the sonic attack. Near as soon it was unleashed, Penny ducked down to the ground, trying to concentrate through the pain. "Go-go Gadget Earrings!" she called out. "Code Word: Hearing Protection!" At her words, the angel-wing cuff earrings she was wearing expanded out, covering her ears and filtering out the offending signal.

Now free from the onslaught of the sonic attack, she was able to reach into her backpack and fish out some extra hearing protection. "Here," she said, showing them to Brain. "These will filter out the sound and let us stay in contact."

The dog nodded, allowing her to put them on him. Once he had them, he nodded over to where the M.A.D. cybers were attacking.

Penny smiled. "You got it. Let's go show those guys why you don't attempt an attack like this."

Of the defenders, Gadget made it out first. Not wasting any time, he moved over to where Syreen was still making her sonic attack. "Young lady!" he called out through a megaphone that had come out of his hat. "I order you to cease and desist your attack, and you and your friends will accompany me back to a W.O.M.P. facility."

"Cease and desist this!" Wildfire called out. His hands shifted in form, and twin streams of fire shot out in the direction of the inspector, along with any unfortunate civilians who happened to be in the way.

"Go-go Gadget Snow Gun!" Gadget called out, shooting out a stream of snow to counteract the flames before they could harm anyone. "Now, young man, that was at truly unsafe thing to do! Someone could have gotten hurt!"

"That's the idea, Gramps!" Wildfire snapped. He was prepared to unleash another stream of flames when someone in a hoodie came and wrestled the M.A.D. cyber to the ground.
Gadget wanted to make in to assist his new coming helper when he was knocked aside by a heavy piece of equipment. He looked up and realized that it was the other boy, the one who had been called Malware. He had taken over one of the huge stereos and had transformed it to be a more attack based weapon. "You and me, old-timer!" Malware shouted out.

"I'm not old!" Gadget called. "I'm forty-four!"

Seeing two of his teammates thus engaged, Talon prepared to move in to help Wildfire when he was heavily shoved aside. The blow wasn't enough to knock him down, but it was unexpected and did knock him back a few paced. When he looked up, he wasn't surprised to see who it was who had launched the surprise attack.

"Well, if it isn't Pretty Penny Gadget," he laughed. "After our last encounter, I might have supposed you'd be locked in your room. Seems I underestimated you somewhat."

"You tried to kill my uncle," the blonde responded. "There's no way I'm letting you get in another attempt."

"What makes you think you can stop me?" he asked, and he lunged at her. She responded as fast as she could, having already scanned a chip. As she dodged out of the way, several long spikes emerged from her watch, which she used as both weapon and defense.

That left only Syreen without a personal opponent, though not for long. As the female cyber stood, enjoying the havoc she was wreaking, she was hit with a hard blow from behind, forcing her to stop with her sonic assault.

The cyber spun around to see Heather standing there, armed with a small gun. "Forgot about you, red," Syreen said with a smirk. "You gonna read me my rights, too?"

"He seemed to do a thorough enough job of that," the agent responded. "I say we get right to the point. You choose. We can do this the hard way or the easy way."

Syreen responded by charging at Heather, two long blades emerging from her arms. The agent jumped back and fired off a few shots. The bullets found their marks on the long blades…and bounced right of.

"Well, crud," Heather sighed. "Looks like we're doing this the hard way."

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Riverside Preparatory High School

Rheeci and Linc were in the middle of an English class when both their cell phones went off. The twin sounds of a mingling ringtones shattered the once silent classroom.

"Miss Tran, Mr. Washington," Mr. Ekles, their English teacher said in a scolding voice. "What is going on?"

"Sorry, sir," Rheeci said glancing down at her phone. "It probably-oh." On her screen, the word "Emergency" was flashing in bright lights. "Uh, sir, this looks like this is important. Do you mind if we take it."

"If it is such an emergency, Miss Tran, then the whole class can hear it." Mr. Ekles was one of those old fashioned teachers with the intent belief that publicizing the privet would discourage such interruptions.
Rheeci glanced down at the panicking phone and decided to risk it. "Alright, sir." She answered the call and handed it up for all to hear.

"Rheeci?" Kayla's voice came clear over the speaker. "Thank goodness I got you! Penny, Linc, and Eli aren't picking up!"

"That, young lady, is because they are in the middle of class, as I suppose you should be," Mr. Ekles responded in a scolding voice. "What do you want?"

"Huh-what?" Kayla said, surprised by the new voice. "Oh, never mind. The thing is, there's big trouble! Talon and his cyber goons are attacking all over the city! After-Shock's over here, which is what broke up my class. From what we've heard, the others are out there, too!"

"Now, young lady, it is very reprehensible of you to be making up stories to make calls," the teacher scolded.

"I'm not making it up!" Kayla insisted. "Just look up any news sight."

Mr. Ekles snorted skeptically. "If it will get you to go away," he said, calling up the local channel seven news on the classroom computer, "but I'm sure it's all...nonsense...oh."

There, in bold words on the screen, was the headline "Teenage Cyborgs attack Political Rally. Other Areas of the City also Under Attack." Underneath, there was link for a live feed of the action, taped by the few brave or crazy souls who would stick around to get a good shot.

"Oh, my," Mr. Ekles said, turning pale as he saw the headline. "Well, young lady, it appears I owe you an apology." He then quickly turned to his own phone to call the principal to see what to do.

Rushing to the front of the classroom, Linc and Rheeci pressed for more information. "Linc here," the boy called out, turning down the volume and looking to make sure the other students were focusing on the news report. Thankfully, they were. "We can hear you loud and clear. Can you do anything about the earthquake problem?"

"I'm afraid not," came the response. "All my tech is back in my room."

"We're down on personal tech here, too," Linc said, a downcast tone in his voice. "There's got to be something we can do."

"Wait!" Rheeci said. "Penny's lab isn't too far from here. It's in the bunker. We'll probably be heading down to the storm shelters anyways. If we can make it there, we might be able to take the tunnel and activate some of the G-units."

"That way, we'd be able to deal with our cyber problem more remotely!" Linc said, catching on. "Just hold on, Kayla," he said, turning back the phone before hanging up. "Help will be on the way soon."

Nearly as soon as they had hung up, Mr. Ekles came back. "Alright, students, I just got confirmation from the Mrs. Lienwin. We are all to move in a calm and orderly fashion to the emergency bunkers. We'll get more information later."

With that, the students got into line, waiting to head out to the bunkers, most of which hadn't been used since the 1950's nuke scare. Linc and Rheeci both kept an eye out for Eli with the intent of bringing him into the plan.

They could only hope that Penny, wherever she was, wouldn't be in too much trouble.
"You're getting slower, Mini-Gadget," Talon taunted as he swung again at Penny. The girl had ducked in time to avoid a hard blow to the head. He did end up clipping her, though, and she could feel a stream of blood trickling from her forehead.

She chose to ignore the taunt, instead using her lowered position to use the opportunity to ram into his stomach. This tactic succeeded in knocking him back, but also put her in his reach.

Responding to her blow, he reached down and grabbed one of her pigtails. He yanked her back, and she gave a yelp of shock and pain.

Penny wasn't helpless, though. Reaching up, she stabbed with some of the spikes in her watch. This succeeded in forcing her opponent to drop her hair. It also revealed something else about him.

"That was metal!" she exclaimed in surprise. "You're a cyber!"

Talon smirked. "What did you think, kitten?" he asked, the sparking wound in his robotic arm showing clearly. "Do you think a team of cybers would listen to me if I wasn't one?" Without waiting another moment, he charged again. This time, though, she was more prepared, and responded by maneuvering around him.

Wildfire was now reduced to firing off random blasts, trying to shake his surprisingly strong opponent. "Why. Won't. You. Just. Fry?" he growled in an irritated manner.

The opponent didn't answer, holding on to the pyromaniac with the best of his abilities. Eventually, however, one of the fireballs hit its mark. The fighter was forced to release his hold and jump back with a yelp. He tore off the hoody as quickly as possible, which revealed his identity.

"You're a dog? Fighting on two legs?" Wildfire said questioningly.

Brain snorted. It was clear he didn't see why his species should be that confusing.

The cyber scowled. "Oh, I get it. You're one of those mutant animal freaks that wild-man doctor whipped up. Well, dog or not, you're still toast!" With that, he whipped along, searing hot chain, which he attempted to strike Brain with.

The dog moved out of the way, alternating between running on two legs and running on four, depending on which was more convenient. Once he got in close enough to make an attack on his opponent without getting a face full of broiling hot metal, he lunged at his opponent, biting down hard on the arm, right where the fuel line of the flame thrower was.

Wildfire was shook that arm hard, eventually shaking the canine off. However, Brain's attack had already made its mark. While the cyber still had intense strength, the access to the fire abilities was gone in that arm.

Not that this would make the fight any easier for his attacker. Brain recovered from the toss in a matter of minute and straightened out, raising his hackles. This fight was now on, and since he didn't have to hide the fact that he was a dog, he was fighting like a dog.

Heather's battle with Syreen had reached similar levels. Both soon found themselves at and advantage and at a disadvantage. With the hearing protection that Gadget had passed on to her, the agent was immune to any of the special attacks that the female cyber would try to use. Unfortunately, the only weapon that Heather could get a hold of for herself was the little gun, which Syreen had her own protection against, as it turned out.
"Gonna keep firing shots off like that, cop?" the cyber laughed. "How long before you run out of ammo?"

The agent gritted her teeth. She soon realized her rough position. These were the type of thugs they were now going to be dealing with, and unlike Gadget, she wasn't a cyborg with similar level of weaponry. She made a mental note to ask Dr. Bradford about upgrading her armory.

Of course, assuming she got out of this alive. She fired off another couple of rounds, only to be rewarded at the end with a sickening click.

"Ohh, looks like you're out of bullets!" The teenager laughed. "Luckily for me, I'm not out of knives! What'cha gonna do now?" She lunged at the redhead, attempting to land a stab at her head.

Heather jumped back and did the first thing she could think up. Taking the empty gun, she whipped out with it, tossing it hard. "This!" It met its mark at the side of Syreen's face, leaving a large dark mark.

It was then that the agent realized her opponent's weakness. For all the weapons she had, the cyber was light on defenses, other than those knives. She might be able to use the big knives to block smaller projectiles like bullets, but if Heather could get in closer with some a larger form of attack, that would be more likely to leave a mark.

She didn't have all too much time to process this realization, however, since Syreen had by now recovered from the unexpected attack. "That's not fair!" she shrieked, lunging as Heather in rage. "You're not supposed to hit me! I'm a lady!"

"You're lots of things, sister," Heather laughed in response, "but I doubt a lady's one of them."

Meanwhile, Gadget was having a much harder time dealing with Malware than he had expected. It appeared that the boy's cybernetics gave him the ability to assimilate and adjust any technology he came in contact with to suit his own purposes. Thus, every time the older cyborg got any sort of advantage over one weapon, all Malware had to do was abandon it and turn to a new system of attack.

Frankly, this was starting to wear on the inspector's endurance. Not that he'd ever willingly let that show. "Just surrender now," he called out. "I'm sure if you don't put up too much of a struggle and help to stop the rest of your group, the courts can work out some sort of plea deal."

The cyber just laughed. "You're slowing down, old timer. It's won't be too long now."

Why does everyone keep calling me old? Gadget couldn't help but think to himself.

He didn't have too much time to think, though, as he had to dodge out of the way of a controlled motorcycle that his enemy had sent his way. He got out of the way just in time, only to move right in to the path of a pincer-crane, which had been brought for the decorations. The detective was trapped, both arms clamped to his side.

Now that the older cyber was trapped, Malware smirked. "Get ready," he said into a microphone clamped onto his uniform. "He's about to be all yours."

Moving in front of the inspector, Malware acted fast. Tossing aside the inspector's hat and grabbing both side of his head, the teen gave a cruel grin. "There all sorts of tech in you, isn't there. Let's see what I can do with that."

Gadget desperately tried to think of something he could do to escape his enemy, but it was too late.
As soon as Malware had laid hold of him, a metal membrane spread over Gadget's eyes and the top of his head. There was nothing he could do to stop it. In a moment, there was a searing pain as he could feel wires being shifted and extended. He screamed in pain and horror.

"Alright, guys, we made it," Eli said as he, Linc, and Rheeci slipped out of the tunnel that lead to Penny's private workshop. It was one of the old nuke bunkers from the 1950's that had been empty for a long time, but never really abandoned. The tunnel that lead to it connected to the school storm shelters, so it was perfect for setting up a secret area to do her work.

Going up to one of the primary monitors, Linc pressed several keys. "Alright," he said, scanning the information he was getting, "it looks like we've got the locations of all of Talon's band of thugs. Along with After-Shock, who we already had a memo on, we've got Joltwave at the pier and Drillbit in the subway tunnels. Other M.A.D. goons are at different areas, but hopefully W.O.M.P. and the cops can handle them."

"Got it," Rheeci said, sliding the seat of a secondary monitor. "G-5 and G-8 are still down for repairs, and Penny hasn't finished G-11 and G-12, but the others are all online. Who should I bring out?"

"I'll send G-9 and G-10 to deal with After-Shock," Eli responded as he got online to help her with the robot controls. "They're our heaviest hitters. G's 2 and 3 three are the only ones with water capability, so it's probably best to send them at Joltwave. That leaves G-4 and G-7 to deal with Drillbit."

Rheeci nodded. "What about the four at the rally?"

"Penny, her uncle, and that agent woman are there," Linc replied. "Hopefully, the three of them can handle those perps." He gave a dry laugh. "'Sides, there's really not much help we can give them. The only 'bots left is G-1 and G-6, and considering that 1 is modeled on a hare and 6 on a fox, I don't think they would help much."

"Let's go," Eli said. "I'll take 9 and 10. Let's go!" As he spoke, a robotic dog and a robot bear shot out.

"I'll take 2 and 3," Rheeci commented. "Let's go guys!" Two more robots, this time a dolphin and otter, were launched out into the stream that passed by the school. "We're making our way to the pier!"

"Guess that means I'm on 4 and 7," Linc said. "I'm on it!" A huge robotic bat flew out, carrying a smaller robotic porcupine with it. "Let's go kick some bad guy butt!"

Penny's heart stopped the moment she heard her uncle cry out. Something was happening, something worse than she could have predicted. She attempted to get away from her own fight with Talon and make her way over to help him.

Talon wasn't about to let that happen. "Ah-ah," he started, grabbing her by her arm. "There-"

He didn't have a chance to finish his taunt. With a strength born of fear for her loved one, Penny spun around and stabbed down hard with her watch spikes. She struck even harder than she had intended, and the blow cut deep, damaging important circuitry to the limb.
Talon let go, almost more in shock from the sheer intensity of the attack then from the pain. She had never attacked this fiercely before, and the blow had caught him off guard.

Not wasting any time, Penny rushed away from Talon over to where Malware was still tormenting Gadget. Swinging with as much strength as she could muster, she punched the distracted cyber, forcing him away from her uncle. She then bent down and hugged Gadget. "Please, Uncle, I'm here!" she cried. "Please, respond to me!"

Talon stood back, prepared to spring at Penny again, but he glanced over to Malware. Despite being stunned by the punch, the other boy looked confident. The message was clear. The mission was a success. Let Miss Gadget do what she wanted now; there wasn't going to be much she could do soon. The two of them would be distracted, and Syreen and Wildfire kept the other two goody-goodies busy. There was other business to attend to.

Gadget was breathing hard by the time he finally heard Penny's voice. He still couldn't see, or get the film covering his face off. Furthermore, there was something wrong with his head. He could just feel it. Malware had changed him in some way. He just wished he knew how.

"Penny…?" he said weakly, trying to break free from the immaterial bonds that held him back.

"I'm here, Uncle Gadget," he head, faintly feeling that she was trying to remove the film covering his face.

He heard another voice, too. "Her attempt is valiant, but futile. You belong to me now, detective."

"What? Who are you?" Gadget asked the voice, getting an odd and disturbing feeling of déjà vu.

"It's me! Penny!" She was pleading by now, and becoming more desperate by the moment.

"Oh, don't worry about my identity, detective," the voice said. There was a mocking tone in the laugh that followed. "All you need to know is that I know all about you, and as of now, you are in my control."

While this was going on, Talon made his way onto the stage. Picking up the microphone that had been discarded by the mayor in her panicked flight, he turned back to the crowd. "Alright, all you eggheads, listen up!" he shouted out. "As of now, this city belongs to M.A.D.!

He extended his arm, and suddenly the huge screen changed, showing images of computers and televisions all over the city, as their screens changed to match. "Thanks to our own special signal, all forms of communication and electronics belong to us. That's computers. That's TV's. That's the trains. Heck," the boy said, giving a dark laugh, "that's even the good inspector over here."

"Alright, detective, give an example," the voice that only the cyborg could hear said. Gadget's blood ran cold when he heard the order. "Please, no," he begged.

Despite his desperation, there was nothing he could do. He could only feel with horror as he became aware that he had shoved Penny aside.

Seeing their puppet forced to do their will, Talon smiled. "Have fun. All hail M.A.D."

To be continued…
"That's right!" After-Shock shouted out. "Run, all you weaklings! Run before my power! There's nothing you can do to stop me!" He laughed out loud, thoroughly enjoying the havoc he was wreaking. "Nothing!"

He was startled when he was struck from behind by something large and solid. Confused as to what might have been able to hit him while he was in full force, the cyber spun around. He saw before him two robots, one modeled on a large dog with the number nine painted on it and one based on a small bear with the number ten on it.

Seeing them, he laughed. "Well, I was wondering when some of you would come out to stop me. Didn't have the backbone to come in person, though. Figures."

G-10 let out a roar and lunged at the cyber, while G-9 ran around, attempting to get in a good shot from behind. After-Shock was ready for them, however. Reaching up, he landed a heavy pile driver hit to the bear's torso. He wasn't however, ready to dodge the robot dog, and was thus knocked over once G-9 could get in a good shock.

Compensating for this, After-Shock reached down and struck a blow to the ground, sending out an earthshaking quake. The sudden shake up was enough to cause both bots to lose their footing.

They recovered quickly, however, and sprang back up. Soon, they were back up and prepared to launch another attack.

That attack never came. The robots had picked up a strange signal, and suddenly, they could no longer function.

Looking at the defunct robots, After-Shock laughed. "We'll, it looks like part one worked." For the amusement of it, he smashed in the head of the bear robot and tore off the dog 'bot's. "Time to head home, I guess," he said, looking into the camera, hoping whoever was controlling it could still see. "Not that it's over. Oh, no, our fun has just begun."
She smiled. "Well, I was wondering when anyone was going to attempt to stop me. It's fun seeing them run, but not nearly as much as when they put up a fight!" Using the supercharged dagger, she cut through the net and lunged at the bots.

The otter responded in turn, jumping up with teeth bared. It latched on to her right arm and bit down, pulling as much of the electrical charge out as it could. At the same time, Joltwave cut down as hard as she could on G-3's back. The metal was tough, but she was breaking through.

G-2 shot out another cable, this one wrapping around the cyber's legs, and attempted to pull her to the shoreline. There wouldn't be enough water to drown in there, but if they could get her wet, then maybe they could get rid of the charge that was making her so dangerous.

The plan was solid, but interrupted. A signal went out, and suddenly, both bots went limp and released their grips. Seeing the dead robots, Joltwave grinned. "Well, Doc Freymore's plan worked. Looks like this city is ours." She kicked the limp G-3 into the water, where it sank, joining G-2 at the bottom.

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**Metro City Subway Lines, Metro City**

Bits of rubble and dirt flew everywhere as Drillbit tore through as much of the subway line as possible. The security guards there did what they could in an attempt to stop the maniacal cyber from wreaking his havoc. Their attempts, however, were in vein. They soon found that their standard issue Tasers did little against his armored body, and thus were little more than an annoyance.

Realizing their error, they took off running, desperate to get away from the psychopath. He laughed as he heard them flee and prepared to tear into more of the rail line.

Before he could have his fun, however, he was struck by something, not from behind, but from right ahead. He was knocked back by an unexpected sonic bolt, which sent him flying backward.

Shaking his head, he looked up to see the large metal bat with the number seven painted on it. On the ground underneath the bat stood a robotic porcupine with the number four clear to see.

Unlike his teammates, Drillbit had not been amused by the robots' sudden appearance. He was annoyed, since his fun had been interrupted. Sneering, he launched himself at the bat.

G-7 responded fast, letting off another sonic pulse. The rogue responded by pulling his drills up and together to defend from the blast.

This, however, gave G-4 the opportunity it needed. It launched off several quills from its tail, pinning the two drills together and keeping them from being used.

Not that this hindered Drillbit all that much. Lunging again, he swung the pinned drills like a club, attempting to knock the robotic bat out of the sky.

G-7 returned the charge, gripping the weapon with its claws. Pulling hard, it attempted to pull the M.A.D. cyber out of the tunnels. Before it could get far, however, it suddenly jolted out, losing its power and falling to the ground.

As he pushed himself up, Drillbit saw that both robots were lying limp and still. "Huh, the signal must have gone out. Guess that means it's time for more fun." Tearing the quills apart and turning back to the subway, he continued his destructive amusement.
"What's the heck just happened!!" Linc cried in surprise. "I had that guy, and suddenly I lose contact! What's going on?"

"I lost contact, too," Rheeci said in dismay.

"Me too," Eli responded. "In fact, nothing's responding. It's like the whole computer system isn't working anymore."

Right after he said that, the screens flickered black before coming back online. However, on each monitor, there was a single image that was most certainly not comforting. It was the image of a demonic cat.

"Oh, crud," Eli murmured. "We're all doomed."

At the moment, Penny could only look on in horror. Her uncle had never laid rough hands on her before, so she wasn't quite sure what to do when he pushed her heavily aside. She knew he wasn't doing any of this by choice, but that knowledge didn't make the shock any less severe.

As for Gadget himself, he could only helplessly sense what he was doing. Since the film still covered his eyes, he couldn't see anything of what was happening, and he could only hope and pray that whatever it was, it wasn't too bad.

It didn't take too long for the other fighters to notice what was going on either. Smirking at Heather, Syreen jumped back. "Well, looks like it's time for me to beat it. Have fun, red."

"Wha-come back here!" Heather exclaimed. She attempted to take up the chase after the female cyber, but her charge was halted when something wrapped around her waist. She was jerked back, and she soon realized she had been caught and pulled back by Gadget.

"Brown, are you nuts?!!" she exclaimed. "They're getting away!"

"I'm so sorry!" he called back. "I can't stop!" With another sharp movement, he tossed Heather aside, causing her to collide with Brain, knocking the both of them over.

While the chaos was going on, Talon's face appeared on every screen, all over the city. "Breaking news, folks," he said with a grin. "The city is ours. Try to do anything against M.A.D., and, well, you can see for yourself what will happen." With that, he vanished from the screen. There was no need for their presence now. W.O.M.P. would be busy dealing with the rogue Gadget.

This had been time enough for Penny to recover from her own shock. She sprang up to her feet and lunged ahead, jumping onto Gadget's back. Locking her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist, she hoped this would give her the position to try to reason with him.

"Please, Uncle Gadget, you can fight this!" she exclaimed. "You're not just a machine! You can stop them!"

"Penny?!!" Gadget's heart stopped. He had hoped she had run away when she was pushed aside. It
seemed he had no such luck. "Penny, please, don't try to fight me!" he called out, helpless to stop himself as he was forced to reach back to try to wrench her off. "I don't know what he'll have me do to you!"

While this struggle was going on, Brain and Heather both recovered from the blow that had knocked the two of them back. Seeing his two pack-mates in a desperate struggle, the dog leaped up and bit hard on Gadget's right arm. This forced the controller to split attention between both the girl and dog, but Gadget's sheer strength was more than a match for Penny and Brain put together. They were both soon tossed away. Neither was hurt too badly, but it was clear the situation was getting worse and worse.

Meanwhile, Heather looked around for something, anything, that she might be able to use to at least stall the controlled Gadget. Seeing his hat laying abandoned, she decided to see if that might be able to do something. "Alright," she said as she snatched the fedora up, "how do I turning this thing on? Oh, yeah. Go-go Gadget…uh…laser?"

The hat responded, but not the expected manner. As soon as the trigger words had been said, it sprang to life, going crazy and spitting just about everything out in a random, haphazard manner. This forced the agent to drop the hat and duck for cover as everything shot out everywhere.

Thankfully, this did help somewhat. One of the items shot out was a heavy wooden mallet, which barreled right into Gadget's torso, knocking him back off his feet.

Heather looked on in confusion, wondering how a mallet would fit into a hat, but she decided not to question her fortune. Instead, she snatched up the mallet and prepared to land a hit before he could get back on his feet.

Before she could land the hit, though, she was interrupted. "No, please!" Penny called out, running between the two. "Don't hurt him! He's not choosing this!"

"I'm sorry kid," Heather responded, pushing past the younger girl, "whether he's choosing this or not, he's putting a lot of a people in danger." She thus resumed her attempt at a strike.

The attempt, however, did not go as well as hoped. Before the agent could land a hit, Gadget had already sprang to his feet. Wrapping one arm around her waist and tearing away the mallet with the other, he hauled her up into the air, both his arms and legs extending out.

Heather wasn't about to just give up, though. Lashing out, she punched at his face, hoping that might force him to release her. That did not succeed, but she did tear through the film that was encircling his face. Through the rip, she could see a single, terrified brown eye.

"I'm sorry," he said, sounding even more frightened and distress than she felt. "I don't want to do this. He won't let me stop. Please, stop me."

"Gladly," she said, struggling to escape the constricting arm. "If you'd only tell me how."

"I don't-wait!" A look of realization came into his eyes. "The NSA chip!"

"The whaty-what chip?" Heather asked.

"It was in my old cybernetics, so it might be in the newer one," he said again. "It's in my chest, and is responsible for all of my cybernetics. If you could somehow short circuit it, I'd be paralyzed."

"Alright, how do I-whoa!" She was interrupted in her questioning, since something happened to knock the cyber off his feet.
It was Brain, who after recovering from his own blow, began looking for something to do to help. This came in the form of the large banner than had been set up for the rally. Taking one end of the banner, he wrapped it around the elongated legs, which knocked the cyber off balance and sent him crashing to the ground, trapping one arm beneath him.

This blow loosened the grip that Gadget had on Heather. Now freed, she grabbed the free arm and pulled it back, racing to a nearby truck and pulling the limb under the tire. She hoped that might hold him still for a bit.

Meanwhile, Penny had been watching the whole event. She had even heard what went down between her uncle and the agent. She realized what she had to do, though she hated it, and almost hated herself for having to do it.

Plucking one of the charms off of her bracelet, she scanned it with watch. The watch then sparked as the center rose up, revealing a small EMP generator. "Okay, not what I wanted, but this will work," she muttered under her breath. She raced over to where her uncle was still trapped. "Please, forgive me, Uncle Gadget," she said, tears streaming down her face. She moved as fast as possible, slamming the watch down hard on his chest. There was an intense burst of power, and Gadget let out a tremor before calming down.

It took him a minute to understand what had happened, but when he did, he smiled up at her. "You did well," he said with a smile, before leaning back and becoming horribly still.

Penny didn't halt in her movement, though. As soon as he went still, she moved as fast as she could, tearing open the front of his shirt. Touching a few panels that would have been hidden from those who did not know how to look for them, she opened up the shielding on his chest, revealing an amount of delicate technologies. The control system now exposed, she set to working on the wiring.

As she worked, Heather came up to her. "Kid, are you-

"Not right now, please," the girl said, never diverting her eyes from her work. "If he's going to make it, I need to focus."

Brain limped over and, realizing that his girl was busy with important work, laid down near Heather. "Make it?" the agent asked.

Penny nodded. "The NSA chip is important for all voluntary movement, as well as for some vitals. However, if I can rewire some of his more vital life support, it should be enough to keep him alive until Dr. Bradford can fix whatever it was that was done to him." It was then that the girl finished her work, and she leaned back. "There, that should hold him.

The eye of the hurricane had arrived, but it was clear that the storm itself was far from over.

Duboir Towers, Metro City

"I lost the connection!" Freymore snapped. He tossed away the microphone and processor that was supposed to be giving him control of the Inspector's movements. "What happened to the connection? Kramer, answer me!"

"We--well, sir," the assistant said, scanning over the computer screens for the information his boss was demanding, "it really can't be said for certain, but it looks like he's no longer online. He's either dead or in a coma, or something similar."
"They wouldn't have either the guts or ability to kill him," the scientist mused, "so something must have happened to short him out. This is a setback, but at least, we have the guarantee we won't have any cyborg problems. If he is dead, then the problem has been solved permanently, and if he lives, he won't be able to take a step out of a concrete bunker without us being able to take control again."

There was the sound of a door opening and closing, which announced the arrival of their benefactor. "Well, gentlemen," Deboir said, "I have just seen the reports on the television. It seems our little experiment was a success."

"Indeed," Freymore said with a nod. "The signal is working better than we could have ever expected. Anything with any sort of internet connection is now under our control. Computers, televisions, personal devices, even automobiles!" He laughed. "You'd need to be miles beneath the surface of the earth to even dream of getting away from us."

"And Gadget?" the businessman asked.

"I'm afraid we lost contact," Freymore said, "though it was because something happened to him. The rewiring Malware did in the detective's head made him more than susceptible to the signal's influence. If he's dead, then we're done, and if he's alive, he won't be able to do so much as take a walk without us finding out about it. All we have to worry about now is finding a host for the DElPHI unit, and the whole world will be ours."

"Well, get it done," Deboir said, a tone of impatience in his voice, "but be discreet. I can't be seen by anyone when you're setting it up. If this don't work, then my campaign is plan B. There can't be any connection between me and M.A.D."

"Which is exactly why we're broadcasting the signal from my lab, and not your tower. Not that it matters, really." Freymore shrugged. "Without the ability to utilize their tech, there wouldn't be anyone who'd be able to trace the signal, anyways. Not the police, not W.O.M.P., heck, even if any government tried to get in, there'd be nothing that they could do, once DElPHI is running. Only those who are linked up with M.A.D. would have hope of doing anything."

"Speaking of, I'd better go send out our errand boy to get the next component," Deboir commented, turning to a communication device. "Talon, come in, do you read me?"

A picture of the cyber flickered on the screen. He was now dressed in more casual clothes, and was holding his arm still as Malware repaired the damage that Penny's attack had done. "Reading you loud and clear, bossy man," he responded. "Everything went just as planned."

"Good," the businessman replied. "Has your team reassembled? We'll need you all to be ready for stage two."

"Just about," the boy responded. "The only one we're waiting on is Drillbit, who's probably out having a good time. Can't blame him; it's been ages since we've been able to actually do anything fun."

"Well, get him back here soon!" Deboir was in no mood to be kept waiting. "W.O.M.P. is on the ropes. If we want to keep them that way, then we need to launch the attack now, and to do that, we'll need you to pick up the next instrument for the doctor's machine. If someone find out what you are doing-"

"Chillax, man," Talon laughed. "With Gadget-1 down for the count, there's not a whole lot Chief Mustache can do. As for Gadget-2, well, she's gonna have a lot on her plate, no doubt." He gave a
sly smile. "I almost hope she tries something while I go on your shopping spree."

Suddenly, Talon's phone began to buzz. "Oops, got another call," he said. "See ya later, Dicky-boy."

"Don't you hang up on-" Deboir tried to insist, but it was too late. Talon had already hung up, and answered the incoming call.

"Saw the work you did today, kid," Montan said as he appeared on the screen. "Well done. Looks like trusting you with that mission was the right idea."

"It worked alright," the boy responded. "Freymore and Deboir still think we're on their side."

"How far along have you come on the mission we gave you?" the lieutenant asked.

"Pretty far," Talon answered. "We've already gotten the troops ready and the weapons in place. Now all we need to the location of The Cistern."

"That was always going to be the hard part," Montan mused. "That secret's been locked up tighter than a crazy, one-eyed mustang."

"Once we have DEIPH, we can hack into W.O.M.P.'s files. From there, it will be easy as pie."

Talon shrugged. "Only problem is, from the info I got on what, or more accurately, who I need to get for Doc's part two. It seems he's going to need a smart non-cyber volunteer for a special procedure."

"You've got plenty of recruits, don't you?" the superior asked.

"Yeah, but most of 'em don't have the history with tech and computers that would be necessary to hacking into the databases. Thing is, while consent isn't necessary to get results, the actual knowledge of computers and what they're being ordered to do is. No computer knowledge means even forced orders wouldn't get results, only jumbled up bits of garbage. And that's if we're lucky. Unfortunately, of the people I know, only I and Malware have the skills in those areas, and we're already excluded due to our prior advancements." Talon gave a snort. "Maybe if my brother hadn't been so spineless, he'd could have volunteered."

Suddenly, the genius of the idea hit him. "That's...actually not a bad idea. Maybe I should pay little Billy a visit." He then turned back to the screen. "Don't worry, sir," he said. "We'll get the volunteer and the data we need real soon. You can tell the other to be ready for the true return of M.A.D."

"We'll be waiting," Montan answered before hanging up.

To be continued...
Assignment 3.5: Martial Law

Tuesday, March 11, 2087

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"What do you mean, I'm not allowed to see him?" Penny exclaimed. She was standing at the front desk, confronting the secretary. "He's my uncle, for Pete's sake! After all that's been going on, I think I'd at least be able to find out what's going on!"

"I'm sorry, miss," the secretary said. "I was given strict orders. You were not to be allowed anywhere near him. It was by his own request."

"That's a load!" The girl slammed her hands onto the desk. "Why would he want to keep me away?!"

"I don't know," the man responded dryly. "It's just my job to follow orders, and my orders were that one Miss Penelope Dollar was not to be allowed in the back, and it was on request of the inspector himself. Frankly, we've been having enough trouble as it is, dealing with the sudden loss of all our technology, without having to deal with hysterical kids."

"I'm not hysterical!" she snapped. "Now let me in there!"

This outburst did not help her case, and she was promptly escorted out of the building. Outside, Brain sat waiting for her on the building steps. When he saw his girl coming out, he wandered up to her with a look that seemed to say so, how'd it go?

Penny sighed and sat down on the stairs. "They wouldn't even let me in to go see him," she said, tears welling in her eyes.

In all the chaos after the attack, both her uncle and Heather had been pulled back to W.O.M.P. without the girl, and she had yet to receive any news about either of them. Furthermore, with the whole city thrown into a panic, she hadn't been able to find any of her friends, either. She felt all alone, and the weight of the situation was starting to get to her.

"I don't know what to do," she sobbed into her knees.

Seeing his girl cry, Brain nuzzled the side of her leg. She reached over to stroke his head, but didn't let up crying. It was just getting to be too much.

"Hey, miss, are you alright?" a voice that was vaguely familiar and not all that welcome asked. Penny jumped, surprised by the question and unnerved by the voice. She turned, only to find that is was a boy who appeared to be about her age. He had light brown hair and an olive complexion, and was wearing a pair of glasses. Her worry had been in vain; she had never seen him before in her life.

When she didn't answer, the boy asked again. "You seem to be really upset. Is everything alright?"

" Doesn't matter," she responded in a huff. "There's nothing that anyone can do about it anyway."

"Whatever it is, I'm sure if you tell someone, they could do something to help," the boy insisted, sitting down next to her.

Penny sighed. She really wanted to be done with it all, but it might help to just get it off her chest.
Normally, she would have done so with Kayla or Rheeci, but since she couldn't find either of them, she guessed the boy could help.

"They've got my uncle in there, and I can't go in to see him," she said, her voice shaking. "I don't even know what's happening to him, and they won't tell me anything. I can't even see Chief Quimby, or Dr. Bradford, or anyone who might be able to tell me what's going on!" The tears began to flow anew. "If I had any idea about what was happening, I might be able to help. With how things are going, however, I don't even know if he's alive or dead."

"Hey, did you say Dr. Bradford?" the boy asked. "As in, Brenda Bradford?"

Looking over at him, Penny nodded. "Yeah. She's his physician."

"Well, if that's the case, there might be something I can do to help." The boy smiled and pulled out an ID for Bradford Tech. "I'm actually one of Dr. Bradford's new assistants. I was coming over from Bradford Tech to find her. There's something wrong over at the lab, and they need her help. If you'd like, I can ask her about your uncle."

"You'd do that?" The offer surprised her.

"Sure," he responded as he put the ID away. "I'm headed in anyway. I'll just need to know his name."

"John," she replied. "It's John Brown, though most people know him as Gadget. My name is Penny Dollar, by the way."

"William Cortez," the boy said, giving his own name. "Your uncle wouldn't be the Inspector Gadget, would he?"

"The one and only," she responded. "I suppose you saw what happened yesterday."

"Who didn't," he responded. "Don't worry, though. If there's something you need to know, I'll help you out. Where should I meet you?"

"Well, do you know where the Deboir building is?" she asked. When he gave the affirmative, she continued. "Out by the tower, in about three hours would be great." She gave him a tearful smile. "You're a lifesaver, William."

"Don't worry about it," William said as he got up. "See you then." With that, he rushed into the building.

As she watched him go, Penny smiled. Well, that was one worry off her head, at least for now. However, there had to be more she could do.

That's when it hit her. "They're not letting him out because that signal might get him again," she said, "but if I could find a way to block the signal…"

She thought for a moment. "No good," she hissed under her breath. "Even with how deep it is, the computers in my lab will be down. Without some sort of computer, there'd be nothing I can do. Not even one will be working." She sighed as she prepared to leave.

"Unless it wasn't online when the signal went out." She frowned in thought when it hit her. It might not work, but it might also be her only chance.
Almost three miles beneath the pavement, the inspector himself sat in a solitary confinement chamber, trying to work out just what was happening. He had come here willingly, since it seemed to be the one place where that horrible signal and the controlling voice that came with it couldn't touch him.

He had also given the request that Penny not be allowed in to see him. He didn't like being separated from her again, especially just days after they had been reunited, but Gadget knew his niece too well. She wouldn't like what was going on and would try something risky, especially if she found out just what was being proposed.

"Are you quite certain about this, John?" Quimby asked. The chief, along with Dr. Bradford, Agent Connelly, General Sir, and a few others had been invited to discuss just what was going to happen, and were standing just outside of the cell, where they could see and hear him but not come into close contact. "That's a rather extreme solution. If you go there, you may not come out of it alive."

"What choice do we have?" Gadget looked down. "I don't particularly want to go to the Cistern, especially considering the majority of its population. However, it might be the only way to keep him from taking control of me again, and making me hurt people." He could still feel the moment he had been forced to push Penny down. He never wanted to have a feeling like that ever again.

"There are other options," Dr. Bradford put in. "They're using some sort of electronic signal to gain access and control of the machinery. Thankfully, it seems to have its limits. That's why you, along with the rest of the W.O.M.P. database, are safe down here. If you just wait here until we can come up with some way of countering and blocking the signal, then we should be safe."

"And if they come up with some way to enhance the signal before then?" Gadget asked. "This might be able to hold me for a few minutes. What after that, if they get me out, if they make me hurt anyone, if they make me kill anyone?" He froze, shuddering at the very idea. "I'm sorry. You might be willing to risk that, but I'm not. At least at the Cistern, even if I lose control, they have ways of containing me, away from the innocent."

"This is your choice, John," General Sir sighed. "I don't think anyone here really likes it, but if that's what you want, we'll respect that decision. There won't be the opportunity to move you for a while, though, so you'll have to wait."

"I understand." Gadget slumped down, depressed by what seemed to him to be his only option.

At this moment, a secretary came down on the stairwell. "Dr. Bradford," she said, leaning in, "one of your assistants is here, and he says there's trouble at the lab that needs you."

"Tell him I'll be there in a moment," she said with a nod. Turning once more to the cyborg, she sighed. "I'll arrange things so that we can have as safe a transfer as possible," she said, clearly not happy with the decision, but resigning herself to honor it.

He smiled. "Thank you. I really hope something can be done about all this."

"I assure you," Quimby said, he face the picture of determination, "It will. We might not have tech, but every agent we have will be doing everything in their power to figure out how to stop M.A.D."

With that, the meeting ended, and Gadget was left by himself.

As they left, Quimby turned to Heather. "Do you have any leads yet, Agent Connelly?"
She nodded. "I'm going over to the southern docking area. There have been some reports about strange sounds over there. It's not much more than hearsay and speculation, but right now, we'll need all we can get."

Quimby nodded. "Good. Update me on what you find."

"Will do, chief," the redhead said with a salute as she turned to go.

As they exited into the main lobby, they found a teen boy standing there, waiting for them. "Ah, William," Dr. Bradford said, forcing a smile, "I was told you had a message for me?"

The boy jumped back, as if suddenly noticing their arrival. "Oh, uh, yeah. Professor Slickstein asked me to tell you that nothing is working. It's all in the black, and we'll lose some of the projects soon if we don't hurry."

"I understand," she said with a smile. "Thank you for telling me. I'll take back the response myself. Why don't you head back home? It's not going to be safe very soon, and I'm heading back to the lab now, anyways."

"Sure," he replied as he turned to go. Before he could get far, however, he turned back. "Oh! I almost forgot! Actually, Dr. Bradford, I've got to ask-"

"Dr. Bradford! There you are!" Myron Dabble shouted out as he burst through the doors. "Things are worse than we expected! You've got to come with us now!"

"I'll be right there, Myron," she called out. Turning William, she smiled. "You can ask me next time," she said. "I've got to run now. Stay safe." With that, she hurried out the door.

William sighed, but left the building despite being near empty handed. He had heard somewhat, something about a cistern, and going to it, but he didn't really know what that meant. It didn't sound good, though, and he supposed telling the girl something that was really vague was better than just leaving her hanging.

"Well, I hope she's not too disappointed," he muttered to himself as he headed in the direction of the library. He supposed he could try to figure out just what it was that he heard before meeting up with Penny again.

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Penny's Lab, Metro City

As Penny pushed her way down into her lab, excitement and anxiety filled her every step. She almost didn't dare hope that her idea could work, but at the same time, she couldn't let go of it. If she was wrong about this, then there might not be anything anyone can do.

Nearby, Brain trotted faithfully after the girl, and she was thankful for the canine's company. All the recent occurrences were getting to be just about overwhelming, but with his presence, it almost felt like old times once again.

What she was going to retrieve would make things even more like old times. "Alright, Brain," she said as she began digging around in the boxes. "It's got to be around here somewhere."

They didn't bother with any of the computers; they'd be wrecks. Even G-1 and G-6, her robotic hare and fox, would be down for the count at the moment, considering they had been online at the time of the signal. No, she was looking for something much older than that.
She soon found it. It was a thick blue-bound book with the words *Mysteries of the Ancient World* printed on the spine with bold words. "Got it!" she just about squealed as she pulled it off the shelf and flipped it open.

It had been a real book, once upon a time, but by now, only the margins of the pages still existed. The rest had been completely hollowed out, and nestled into the pages was the computer Penny had made, so many years back. With the base of ancient toy tablet, it had been built up over the years with whatever bits and pieces of tech she could get her hands on. It was truly one of a kind, and she had been hesitant to set it aside two years ago, even when she had come up with her new computer system.

Penny played with the settings so that the Computer Book would not go online once activated and flipped it on. To her delight, it started up beautifully, as if it had only been shut off a day ago.

"I've got it!" she called out to Brain. "It's still works! We've got a chance!"

The dog called out a *wuff* of encouragement and rushed over to her side. He then sat, awaiting the instructions he knew was bound to come. The dog knew well what was going next, and he was prepared to help in any way he could.

As she worked on her computer book, Penny lost track of the time. All that mattered to her at the moment was isolating the signal that was the cause of all this pain and distress, and coming up with a way to block and defend against it. The first part was easy enough to do; with all the infected tech laying around her lab, it was child's play to pull up the individual signal that was causing the problem. What wasn't easy was coming up with a counter code, one that could mend damages already done and defend against the problem happening again. Thus, she devoted every out of concentration and determination into solving the riddle and applying the cure where she could.

As a result, she was not paying all to close attention to her surroundings, and was taken totally by surprise when she heard someone call out her name.

"Hey, Penn, are you down here?" Kayla called out as she, Eli, Linc, and Rheeci entered in.

"Oh, hey guys!" Penny called back with a smile. "What's up?"

"What's up?" Linc asked, a tone of annoyance in his voice. "What's up is that the world is falling to pieces outside, and we haven't been able to contact you at all. Why aren't you a bit more concerned?"

"I was," the blonde replied, "but I think I know what's going on." She pulled her book out and held it up so that it would be easier for the others to see. "I've gotten the control signal isolated, and I've figured out just how the frequency is working. Thus, I was able to come up with a counter frequency that works as an encryption code, making whatever has it impossible to hack into." She laughed. "It works great! I've even been able to test it out."

She motioned to one side, where four robots were standing. Two of them were G-1 and G-6, now up and running without any problem. The other two were clearly new; they were identical humanoid robots with screens showing simplistic faces. Modeled in the shape of men with dark fiber optics hair wearing button down shirts and ties, the only features that distinguished them were the colors of the faces on the screens and their ties, with one being blue with a traditional tie and the other orange with a bow tie. "Unfortunately, I haven't been able to download it into my watch yet," she said with a shrug.

"Aww!" Rheeci cooed, going over to examine the orange robot closer. "They look just like little versions of your uncle."
“Yeah,” Penny chuckled. “I started work on G-11 and G-12 a while back, and I thought they should be modeled on someone who represented the ideal they were to uphold. They’re not quite done, but with everything that’s going on, we’ll need all the help we can get.”

“Great work,” Eli said, looking over the four robots, who were clearly unaffected by the offending signal. “What now?”

“I’ve met someone who’s agreed to get me information on what’s going on with my uncle,” Penny responded as she stared to gather her things. “We can’t go after M.A.D. on our own quite yet, but we might be able to find information if we split up. I was thinking each of you would take a G unit and see what you could find with them. I’ll use my computer book to do the same. Brain,” she said, turning to the dog, “do you think you could track down Agent Connelly, and see what you can do to help her?”

The dog gave a salute before going off to do his assigned task. After all, this was just exactly what he had always done before. Rushing out, he headed in the direction of the W.O.M.P. building. He’d be able to catch the scent from there, and the rest would be child’s play.

“Thanks,” his girl called out as he left. “Now,” she said, turning to her remain companions, “each of you will need to take a G unit.”

“Oh, oh!” Rheeci called out. “I call the orange Gadgetini!”

“Gadgetini?” Kayla looked at her friend, a look of amusement and somewhat of disbelief on her face.


“We’ll work on the name later,” Penny laughed. “Alright, Rheeci, you’ve got G-12.” She went over to a nearby table and picked up a remote that had been laying on it. “Here,” she said, handing it to Rheeci, “this will give you complete control over G-12, as well as keep you in contact with the other three.”

“Pretty cool, Penn,” Eli said. “I guess I’ll take Bluey with me then.”

“I’ll take the fantastic Mr. Fox,” Kayla said, picking up the fox robot. “I’ve always liked the little guy.”

“Guess that leaves me with G-1,” Lin sighed.

“Aw, don’t be so glum,” Penny laughed as she handed out the remote units. “It might be a hare, but you might find G-1’s got more to it than you’d think.”

“Now,” she said once she handed out the remotes, “remember, we are only doing reconnaissance. I’m not sure what would happen if we got caught crime fighting again.”

“Got it,” Linc responded. “Get pictures and get out. Leave the hero work for another day.”

“Exactly,” Penny responded with a nod. She looked down for a moment at her computer book and jumped when she saw the time. “Oh, crumbs! I’m going to be late to meet my contact!” She hurried off. “Good luck! I’ll try to contact you guys tonight!” she called back as she ran.

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Deboir Towers, Metro City
It had taken Penny fifteen minutes to make it to the Deboir building, making her twenty minutes late. She had been detailing the instructions for her encryption chip along the way, since she had yet to do so, and had worried that the added distraction had caused her to further lose time. By the time her destination came into view, she began to be more and more concerned that William might have already left by the time she got there.

Thankfully, when she reached her destination, he was still standing there. He didn't look all too concerned, which she hoped meant good news.

"Hey!" she called out, waving over to the boy. "Sorry I'm so late. I was working on something and lost track of the time."

"Don't worry about it," he said with a shrug. "I'm afraid I wasn't able to find out too much. Everyone seemed to be in a bit of a hurry over there. I was able to find out something about your uncle, though I'm afraid I don't quite understand it myself."

"Oh, that's alright," she responded. She was disappointed she wouldn't have a lot to work with, but she would improvise with what she could get. "What did you hear?"

"Something about a cistern, and going to it," the boy responded. "Huh, that's a funny word to hear nowadays. How often do people had the opportunity to use the word 'cistern'?"

When she heard this, Penny turned deathly pale. "What a minute. Do you mean the Cistern?"


"Oh, gosh, this is bad," she said quickly. "I've got to get this chip to him now, there's no time to lose!"

"Wait, what's going on?" William asked, becoming more and more worried by her response.

Penny bit her lip. Of course he didn't know what the Cistern was; it was top secret to anyone who was not in law enforcement. "It's a very, very bad place," she said in response, "and if my uncle goes there, he might not come out. I have something that might be able to stop them from sending him there, though. It's this chip." She quickly took the chip out before reinserting it. "I've got to get this to him right now!"

William still wasn't quite sure what was going on, but if the girl was so scared by this she was willing to try to rush into a military organization, it couldn't be good. "Come with me," he said. "I might be able to talk Dr. Bradford or one of her assistants into helping you."

She gave a smile, though she still looked very pale. "Thanks, but I'll be fine," she said. "I've got problems that often end in fighting. I'm grateful for the help you've already given me, but you probably don't want to get too tangled up with my involvements."

"By now, I'm just as involved as you are," he protested. "I might not be familiar with all the crime fighting stuff, but I live in Metro City, too. If these psychos are allowed to win, I'm just as doomed as anybody else in this city. If I have an opportunity to help, I want to take it."

Penny was about to protest, but had to admit to his logic. "Alright, you've got a point, there. Besides," she sighed, "I'm pretty certain things are set up to lock me out, so having some support would help. Let's get a move on, then. No need to take longer than necessary to get things patched up."

"Why, Penny, you've been talking to other guys behind my back?" a sneering voice said from
behind them. Both teens spun around to see that they had been joined by Talon, who was leaning against his bike. "And here I thought what you and I had was special."

Seeing her enemy, Penny backed up and instinctively her hand went to her wrist to activate her watch. Unfortunately, she had set it aside earlier, because of the signal, and it wasn't there anymore.

Still, she wasn't about to let Talon get the best of her. "What do you want," she scowled. "Don't think that just because you pulled that underhanded trick at the rally yesterday I can't take you on."

"Without those fancy little trinkets, you can't take me on, Gadget Girl," the dark boy laughed. "Don't worry, though. I'm not interest in you right now. I'm here to have a word with my brother."

"Brother?" Penny looked between the two boys with disbelief. With the exception them both looking like they were Latino, at least in part, neither of them resembled the other much at all.

Seeing her look, Talon smirked. "What? You never knew I had a twin brother? Fraternal, thank goodness." He laughed again. "I thought you'd be more up on your homework than this."

Penny turned and gave William an incredulous look, but then it hit her. It was why she had jumped when she heard William's voice for the first time. It was nearly identical to Talon's. "Is this true?" she asked. "I thought you said you name was Cortez."

William considered lying, but decided against it. "Cortez is my mother's maiden name," he answered, looking at the ground in shame. "I changed my name to that a while ago. The Scolex family legacy has never been something I was proud of."

Talon clicked his tongue. "Ashamed of your past, huh? I really would have expected better, Billy. Not that it really matters, though." He shrugged. "Now, I need your help, and you will be coming with me."

"Who says I'm going anywhere with you," William said, backing up.

"You don't seem to understand," his twin responded. "That wasn't a request."

He lunged at William, who ducked out of reach just quick enough to avoid capture. Talon prepared another strike, but was thrown off balance by a trash can lid that had been hurled at him.

"Run!" Penny called out to William. She was currently in the process of grabbing a nearby rock to use in defense. "I'll deal with him."

Seeing her, the M.A.D. cyber laughed. "Really, Pretty Penny? A rock? You forget." He lurched at her, grabbing her and tossing her heavily into one a pile of garbage bags. "You might not have your tech, but I have mine."

He scanned the area, looking for his target. "Is this really where we've come to, Billy? Allowing a girl to fight your battles for you?"

Despite Penny's advice, William had lingered behind, looking for anything he might be able to use to ward off his evil twin. He found it in the form of a broken piece of skate board. Wielding his makeshift weapon, he sprang from his hiding place and attempted to strike Talon with it.

Unfortunately, the other boy was prepared for this move. Jumping back out of the reach of the broken board, he snatched it flung it far away. Grabbing William by the back of his shirt, the cyber laughed. "Well, it looks like you'll be playing a role in the family business after all."
By now, Penny had recovered from being tossed, and could see what was going on. While she was still confused to discover the relation, she also realized she couldn't let Talon kidnap William. He didn't ask to get born into that family, and it seemed he really did want to help her. In addition, he might be the only hope of getting the encryption chip to Gadget.

Thus, she hastily made her decision. "Wait!" she called out. "Take me instead!"

Both boys froze when they heard the call. "What?!" William cried out in shock. "Penny, no-!"

"Shut it, four eyes!" Talon sneered, tossing his brother away. Turning to Penny, he got a predatory smile. "Go on, I'm listening."

"I'm sure whatever it is you want him for, I can do too," she said, walking forward. "You have my word, I won't fight you or try to escape. Just let him go."


"Penny-" William cried, trying to make a move to help the girl.

She, however, shook her head. "Get it to them!" she called out as she was taken away. "It's the only chance we have!" With that, both she and Talon drove off, and William was alone.

Looking around, he tried to process what she meant by "get it to them." That was when he spotted the computer book, which lay abandoned where it had been dropped. Snatching it up, he hurried off in the direction of the Bradford Tech building, hoping that he'd find Dr. Bradford there.

"Don't worry, Penny," he said, despite the fact that there was no one around to hear him. "I'll get help. We won't leave you there."

To be continued...
Tuesday, March 11, 2087

Freymore's Lab, a half-hour outside Metro City

Penny kept her eyes down as she was half led, half dragged, through the halls of what looked to her to be a laboratory. By now, her hands had been bound behind her, and two guards who had met her and Talon at the entrance of the lab had a firm grip on either arm. Even if she was willing to try, escape would now be impossible.

"You know, Pretty Penny," Talon said as he walked alongside them, "this was a much better idea than mine. I mean, Billy would have been useful, don't get me wrong, but this way, not only will M.A.D. succeed, but you'll have lent a hand in everything." He gave a taunting smile. "So, thanks for that."

When she didn't respond, he reached over and pulled on her pigtail just hard enough to hurt. "What? Didn't your uncle ever tell you it was rude to ignore someone who's talking to you?"

"Ah, Talon, you're late. We'll have to start immediately if we are to be ready for tonight." It was only when she heard the man's voice that Penny looked up. She soon recognized the newcomer as Dr. Freymore. She was surprised by his sudden appearance, though she couldn't say she was shocked. After all, the police had never figured out where he had disappeared to so long ago.

When Freymore saw her, the emotion on his face told a similar story. "Penelope Dollar? But I thought you said you were getting your brother."

"I was, Doc," Talon responded with a shrug, "but Penny here volunteered as tribute. Who was I to say no?"

Freymore looked her over, and Penny couldn't help but feel as if she was being treated as some sort of show animal. When he was finished, the scientist spoke again. "She's much shorter than the average for her age. We'll have to take her measurements to adjust before we begin." He made a motion for the guards to follow him.

"Talon," he said as they were leaving, "go back to your band. We'll contact you if we need anything."

"Ten-four, good buddy," the boy responded with a mock salute. He then waved at the captive. "See ya soon, Gadget girl."

Penny didn't respond, but she wouldn't have had time to even if she wanted to. She was soon dragged off and pulled into a back room. Out there, several people in scrubs stood waiting.

Turning to a female nurse, Freymore pointed out Penny. "Take her in back and prep her for the augmentation. Take her age, height, and weight, too, and send them to me over the com. That'll determine how much of the prepping agent she'll need."

Without so much as a word to her, the nurse did as she were told. When they were a distance off, the nurse turned to the prisoner. "How old are you, girl?" When Penny didn't respond, the nurse pulled out a small device that looked eerily like a Taser. "I would recommend you answer. It will make things much easier."
Looking down at the weapon, Penny sighed. There was no doubt in her mind that she wasn't going
to be able to stall anything by staying silent, and that the torture implement would be used.
"Fourteen," she answered in a quiet voice.

"Good," the nurse responded. She removed the handcuffs and shoved a bundle of cloth into the girl's
hands. "Change into this in this," she ordered, pointing out a bathroom. "Once you're done, we'll
take height and weight, and then the procedure will begin."

Once again, Penny silently obeyed. Moving into the bathroom, she undid the cloth bundled and
found an operating gown, though it was oddly closed in the back. There were pockets, however, in
strategic areas so as to allow what could only be assumed to be needles and knives to reach their
targets.

She didn't want to think of what these pockets were for, so she slipped into the gown as quickly as
she could before turning to sit on the toilet. She might not be able to stall for too long, but that didn't
mean she was going to cooperate 100%.

As she sat, Penny turned over the options in her head. Personal escape was out. Even if she had been
allowed to keep her own clothes, there was nothing she had that could help. Her watch was sitting in
her lab, awaiting the time when she could apply her encryption to it. William had her book, and had
hopefully gotten it to W.O.M.P. by now. She was well and truly empty handed.

As she sat, she heard a hissing and noted that the air was becoming increasingly hot. "Well," she said
dryly to herself, "I guess that means I'm being summoned."

When she had exited the bathroom, she was immediately taken to a device that looked like a big
kitchen scale. She was unceremoniously shove onto it, and a beam came out and scanned over her.

"Height: four foot ten inches," the nurse said aloud as she calculated the data. "Weight: a hundred
and eighteen pounds."

"What? No calorie count?" Penny retorted.

The woman frowned. "I'd watch that mouth," she snapped. Taking Penny's arm, she handcuffed her
hands again and brought her into the main room again.

"She's ready for the procedure," the nurse said to Freymore.

"Good," he responded. "At this rate, we'll ready to bring DEPHI online tonight. Now, bring me the
prepping agent." Another nurse, this time a male one, handed a cup to Freymore. Penny didn't have a
good feeling about the silvery substance that was inside it.

Not that she had much time to worry about it. She once again had the handcuffs removed, only to be
pushed into a nearby chair and restrained again, this time by the wrists, elbows, ankles, and forehead.
Once she was secured, of the assistants came up with a pair of scissors and cut her hair to the base of
her neck.

"Hey!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Do you know how long it took to get my hair to that length?"

"Be thankful we don't have time to shave you completely." Freymore went up to her and put the
strange cup by her mouth. "Drink it."

Once again determined not to fully cooperate with her captors, Penny squeezed her lips together as
tightly as she could to keep out the offending cup. There was no way on earth she was opening her
mouth willingly.
Seeing her resist, Freymore laughed. "You can try to stall us, Miss Dollar, but the result is inevitable. You'll immature defiance is easily subdued." When she didn't respond, Freymore shrugged. "I warned you." He motioned to one of the guards, who brought over a long strip of plastic. The plastic was placed over her head, up to her nose, so she could no longer breathe out of it.

Penny had been anticipating this, and did her best to hold her breath. A minute passed. Two minutes. Three. Finally, it was just too much, and the girl was forced to open her mouth to take a breath.

As soon as she did so, the liquid was poured in, and several of the nearby guards clamped a hand over her mouth.

She tried to keep the concoction in her mouth, but it tasted foul. It had a highly offensive and rather metallic taste to it, and after a moment she swallowed just to get rid of it.

As soon as the liquid had gone down, her mouth and nose were released. She sucked in large amounts of sweet, cool air, before turning to her captor. "Funny," she said. "You go to all this trouble to kidnap and imprison me, and all you do is poison me? Seems like a waste of effort."

"That prepping agent was merely getting you ready for the rest of the procedure," the doctor said, smiling at her in a way that would have been considered friendly, under other conditions. "Once we are finished, you will help to bring a new era to this city, and this world. You should feel honored that you could receive this opportunity."

Penny could feel her consciousness ebbing away. With the last of her strength, she spat on Freymore. "Go take a long walk off a short pier," she said as she slipped into a drugged sleep.

Once she had fallen under, Freymore turned to one of the nurses. "First, make sure she can never run away." He picked up a strange, rather alien tool. "Use this. The remote blades will make it more precise. Doing more damage than necessary will be more work for us."

The nurse seemed shocked by this order. "But, sir, that is a rather drastic course of action. Is it really…necessary?"

"She will resist, even once the procedure is finished," the mad scientist replied. "Escape attempts are almost a guarantee with this one. With the fact that she will soon be the most advanced computer system in the world, we need assurance she will never be able to get away."

"Alright, sir," the nurse responded, though it was clear in his voice he still didn't like what he was going to do. Taking the tool, he turned to the unconscious girl and did as he was ordered.

Bradford Tech, Metro City

"Dr. Bradford?" William called out as he entered into the large building that house the workshop. "Are you there?"

As he moved in, the boy was soon spotted by a door guard, who seemed to notice him. "Hey, kid, what are you doing? Nobody's supposed to go back there."

"I have to see Dr. Bradford," William said quickly, holding up the computer book as he spoke. "It's an emergency, and I'm one of her assistants. You see, there was this girl, Penny, and she wanted me to show the doctor this book-"

"The doctor doesn't have time for a book," the guard said, trying to hurry the boy out of the door.
"Now if you'll just run along…"

"It's not the book," William tried to put in. He pulled the chip out of the book. "It's this chip. It's an emergency! You see, Penny was-

"Kid, no one is allowed to go back there. Even interns can't be here right now," the guard said. He took the chip from William. "If it will make you relax, I'll give this to Dr. Bradford later. Now, just go home, kid." With that, he practically pushed the teen out the door.

William looked back for a moment. He wondered if he should try to go back in and try again, but decided against that course of action. The security guard had apparently already decided he was some sort of delusional little kid and wouldn't give him the time of day.

Sadly, his attempt to get help from the police didn't go over any better. They were already swamped with trouble, and a fifteen year old kid was just way too easy to overlook. It was getting to be early evening when he finally had to go home.

As he walked home, the boy went over what his options were. No one would believe him, either about the chip or that Penny was kidnapped. Which, as he guiltily reminded himself, was his fault in the first place. "I can't just leave her there," he muttered to himself. "There's got to be something I can do.

He was so focused on what he was going to do, he hardly comprehended it when his mother reminded him to help his younger sisters prepare for evacuation in the morning. As he went through the motions of preparation, William then remembered he still did have something. Penny's computer book. The computer book that works, despite the virus signal. He might be able to use that to track the signal back to its source, and he was certain that would be the place Talon had taken Penny.

Well, he finally thought to himself, if no one is going to help me, I'll have to find her myself. He'd go late that night, once everyone was asleep. He wasn't quite sure where he'd go from there, but he was sure something would come to him.

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Downtown Metro City, Docking Area

By the time Heather had finally gotten an amount of information to actually help her with her search, a thick fog had already started to spread over the area. It was evening, about six o'clock, but the change in atmosphere wasn't too uncommon for an area so close to the water.

She had been asking around the neighborhood, trying to find out anything that might lead her to the source of their M.A.D. problems. However, things had been difficult. Not many people wanted to talk to a W.O.M.P. agent, and even those who seemed to want to help were too afraid to try.

Eventually, she did find some help in the form of an older lady who ran a flower stand. She mentioned how a group of teenagers had gone into and pretty much taken over an abandoned building no too far from where she lived. The lady also went on to complain about the music, and give other details that generally wouldn't be helpful. Heather had been quick to thank her for her assistance and hurry off in the direction of the building.

So it was now that the agent was now creeping along the side of the building, looking for anything that might be out of the ordinary. She wasn't quite sure what it was she should be looking for, but she kept her eyes open.

It was then that she noticed that she was being followed. Whoever was doing the following was big
and Heather had no doubt that he was there to interfere with her search. Deciding to deal with the
interloper before he could do much to stop her, she slowed her pace and hid.

Her ploy appeared to work. The figure soon appeared, a bulky person shrouded in a heavy jacket.
There was something off about the way he was standing, but Heather couldn't put her finger on what
it was.

Not that it mattered all that much. All that mattered to the agent at the moment was keeping her back
clear. Taking a deep breath, she jumped out, tackling her follower to the ground.

The fight was a lot more difficult than she had anticipated. Because her opponent was so big, she
didn't expect him to be fast. Fast he was, though. Nearly as soon as she had jumped out, the
newcomer leaped ahead, and she was only just able to grab a hold of their legs.

Thus, they both tumbled down in a struggle. In it, Heather was able to grab a hold of the jacket and
pull hard. The other person was forced to squirm out of it to be able to get away.

It was at that moment that the agent was able figure out about her opponent's odd posture. "You're a
dog?" she exclaimed in shock. Sure enough, now that he was uncovered, she could clearly see that
the other person was, indeed, a large yellow dog. A large yellow dog who was standing on his hind
legs, not unlike a person, and able to move around in that position continuously.

The dog sighed. It was clear he had experienced this kind of shock before.

"Wait, I've seen you before," Heather said. "You're Penny Gadget's dog, Brian, is it?"

The dog shook his head before pointing to the bright red collar he was wearing. The word "BRAIN"
was printed on the tag in bold letters.

"Well, you'd better head along home, Brain." Heather turned to the building. "I have an investigation
to do here."

Without responding, Brain shook off the remainder of the disguise, dropped onto four legs, and
started to trot towards the building. When he reached the doorway, he turned to her with a look that
said, I'm going in. Are you coming?

Heather thought about trying to send the dog back again, but then thought better of it. She didn't
know what was in there, and didn't have any other backup. Brain, however, was a dog, and a huge,
probably strong dog on top of it. Scents and other clues that would be invisible to her were not be to
him. Besides, if push came to shove, having a giant canine for help in a struggle could come in
handy.

"Alright," she said, holding her own weapon up. "Just stay close. I don't want to mistake you for the
enemy." Brain nodded, having more than his fair share of experience with that scenario.

As they crept within the building, one thing became clear. This place had, once, been inhabited. The
piles of garbage lying around gave testament to that. However, anything that might signify recent
occupation had already been cleared out.

"Well, it looks like we're already too late, pooch," Heather commented, picking up a flattened soda
can disc. "They've moved shop."

Brain, however, was still sniffing around, and he soon came up to an area on the wall, which he
began to examine with a ferocity. After a moment of sniffing around the wall, he looked and let out a
back, as if to call Heather over to look at what he found.
"What is it?" Heather asked, coming over next to the dog.

When she was next to him, the dog straightened into a bipedal standing position and began examining the surface with his paws. As she watched, Heather made a mental note to ask Penny or Gadget later why their dog could do something like that.

After a moment of searching, Brain found it. There was a slight discoloration in the wall that just looked like a stain, but when pushed, caused the entire wall to swing open with a swish.

"Not bad, wonder dog," Heather laughed, patting the dog on his head once he had dropped down to quadruped position. "Now we're going somewhere."

As the two of them moved down into the passageway, it soon became clear that they had, indeed, found some place of interest. As they moved further into the passageway, several voices became clear.

"Can you believe those cybers sent us to clear out everything for them?" the voice of a teen complained.

"I wouldn't fuss too much, Tyrone," another teen said. "Us grunts have always gotten the short end of the stick. Besides, as soon as we get all this stuff loaded up and Talon's gotten that info, we'll be on our way to the Cistern. Once we join up with gen-one there, then the fun will really begin."

Hearing the voice, Heather motioned to Brain and pointed out the two thugs. Sure enough, there were two teens loading up boxes into a van. Creeping up, she attempted to silently approach the teens.

Unfortunately, they weren't quiet enough. One of the kids looked up and noticed her. "Hey, man, heads up!" the thug exclaimed. "It's a W.O.M.P. stoolie!" With that, both teens whipped out a blaster each and took aim.

Heather and Brain moved fast, having to counter that attacks before they were hit. Already having her own weapon out, Heather took aim and shot the blaster away from the teen who had spoken. She was then able to make it over and knock him to the ground before cuffing him.

The other teen was more successful in getting several shots off at Brain, but his hand was shaking so much that his aim was horrible. The dog was thus able to jump forward and grip the weapon in his teeth, smashing the delicate wiring. The thug fell immediately into a quivering heap.

"Alright," Heather said. "You both are going to tell me what Talon is up to."

"Ha!" the thug she had cuffed laughed. "You really think you're hot stuff, red, but you've got rules. There's no way we'll tell you anything."

"I'll talk!" the other boy squealed, still cornered by a snarling Brain. "I'll talk! Just keep that mutt away from me!"

"Tyrone, you wuss!" the other boy exclaimed. "Don't tell me you're afraid of a dog! I've seen you handle those snakes and spiders we were collecting."

"Snakes and spiders don't chase you down the block, promising to rip out your throat," the boy, Tyrone, responded. "C'mon, miss, just call 'im off! I'll talk!"

"Brain, heel," Heather called as she walked over. The canine gave a look that made it clear he didn't appreciate the command, but backed down anyway.
Alright, he's back," she said, approaching the teen. "Now, talk."

"I don't know exactly what Talon and Doc Freymore are up to, but I do know where they are," the kid responded. "They're at some lab setup under an old power station. That's where that signal's been coming from."

Heather smiled. "Good. Now you're going to lead us there, alright?"

Tyrone looked nervously over at Brain and gulped. "Whatever you want, Ma'am."

"You wimp," the other thug growled.

Freymore's Lab

"Uh, sir," Kramer said as he ran alongside his boss. "I was just going over the files about the conduit, and I noticed something extra about her preparation."

"Your expertise is in the mechanical, not the biological," Freymore said shortly.

"W-well, yes, that's true, sir," the assistant stuttered out, "but I did notice, there was an extra incision made, and I'm not quite certain that it was all that...necessary." As the older man tuned on him, Kramer backed up. "You see, sir, that was kind of a drastic, permanent method, and I'm not quite sure it was...appropriate to perform on a teenage girl."

"Apparently, you haven't gone over this teenage girl's profile," Freymore responded, completely dismissive of his assistant's discomfort. "She has been captured on multiple occasions over the course of her childhood, to the point that there is really no original M.A.D. member who had not captured her at one point or another. The problem was that she kept escaping. It didn't matter who caught her, she escaped. She was restrained with rope, chain, handcuffs, cages, even locked in boxes, it never mattered. She always escaped. Guards would be threatened with extermination if they allowed this girl to get away. M.A.D. lost a lot of guards that way. We can't afford to let DElPHI get away. Now tell me, Kramer, if you have a bird that will not stop flying the coop, what do you do to keep it in?"

"Uh," the younger man gulped. "Uh, you invest in a better lock?"

"You clip its wings." Freymore laughed. "It's no different here. Now that the process has been done, we could leave the door wide open. She can never leave, no matter how badly she wants to."

"Now, there is some technical issues that I need to deal with to be ready for tomorrow." With that, the doctor left without another word.

Kramer had heard what his boss had said, but it still didn't get rid of the aching guilt in his stomach. Hoping there might be something that he could do that might make it a little better, he decided to visit the prisoner.

Not that seeing Penny personally helped all that much. It had been the first time he saw her in person since the incident over three years ago. She was lying in a bed that had been placed in her cell. She had a brace on her back, bandages wrapped around her head where the procedure had been performed, and there were tear stains streaking her face. It would have been a pathetic picture, if it wasn't for her eyes.

The girl's blue-green eyes seemed to flash with an intense fire. There was defiance, showing a fierce determination. They may have imprisoned and mutilated her body, but her spirit was far from
Indeed, Kramer might have been more comfortable going into a room with an angry lion than with this teen. At least the lion wouldn't have be one hundred percent correct in the look pure rage in its eyes.

"Uh, hi there, Penny," he said as he stumbled in. "Uh, it is Penny, right?"

"What do you want?" she responded.

"I, uh, just wanted to make sure you were comfortable," he responded, trying desperately to think of something that wouldn't make him come off as either condescending or patronizing.

"What do you think?" Penny frowned, crossing her arms. "I mean, you guys have clearly spent a lot of time in prepping your bedside manner."

"He he, yeah, I guess you're right," he responded awkwardly, desperate to look anywhere by at those eyes. "I'm really sorry about what happened. Is there anything I can get you? A magazine, maybe?"

"I'm fine," she responded, the bite still heavy in her voice. "Just leave me alone."

"Uh, alright then," Kramer stammered out. "I'll just be on my way then. Um, uh, bye."

As soon as she was alone again, Penny sighed. She wished there was something she could do to escape. However, the throbbing pain in her lower back reminded her of her current helplessness. It would have been worse, she knew, if it wasn't for the numbing agent, further reminding her that there was nothing she could do. She could only hope the others were having better luck then she was.

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Firebird Row

"This is awesome!" Rheeci communicated through her controller. Each of the four teens were each in their own rooms at home. Through the G units, however, they were out and about, searching for any clues to just what the enemy was planning.

"What made you think of Firebird Row?" Kayla asked as she directed G-6 through the docking yard.

"Well," Eli responded through G-11, "this was the area that Inspector Gadget said he went to when he was kidnapped. It seemed like an easy place to find some clues."

"This place sure seems to reek of bad-guy hide out," Linc commented, directing G-1 to explore around some ruined boxes. "Empty trashed up warehouses, broken windows, creepy fog. Yep, this is perfect villain hangout material."

"Now, if only we could find the villains," Kayla responded.

After a moment more of searching, Rheeci suddenly turned. "Hey, did you guys hear that?"

"Hear what?" Linc asked.

"I didn't hear anything," Kayla responded.

"It sounded like animal sounds, and they were coming from that box." Rheeci frowned in
concentration. "I'm going to check it out." Directing G-12, she opened up the box and peered in. "Bingo. Hey, guys, come over here! I found a trap door."

"Nice find." Linc peered down into the tunnel before having G-1 hop in. "What do you say we have a little bit of a look see?"

"Right after you, bro," Eli responded, following suit.

Once all four of them had lowered down into the tunnel, they examined their surroundings. There were animals, hundreds of them. Birds, monkeys, snakes, spiders, cats, dogs, just about any creature that crawled on the ground or flew in the air was present and accounted for.

"Weird," Kayla commented. "What does M.A.D. want with these guys? I mean, petting zoos never seemed to be their M.O."

"I know what these are," Rheeci breathed in shock. "These are Chimera!"

"Chimera?" Linc asked. "Rheeci, please stop making up names for these things and tell us what we're looking at?"

"Back when M.A.D. was really in its heyday," the girl explain, "Claw hired a scientist by the name of Bernard Wildman to come up with hybrid mutant animals that M.A.D. could use as weapons. It took a long time to get these creatures perfected, but after a while, Wildman came up with specific blends that seemed to work. I thought you guys would know all this, considering Penny gave us this info when she discovered Brain's whereabouts."

"Brain? You mean Penny's dog?" Kayla asked.

"Yep," came the responds. "He's a Canis militus, a blend of several dogs and other creatures that were meant to act as soldier dogs."

"Wait, you're telling us that there are dogs could have hawk or snake in their blood?" Linc asked. "Girl, what kind of dope are you smoking?"

"Didn't you see him standing up and fighting on his hind legs in the video from the rally?" Rheeci asked. "Now, there couldn't be any bird or reptile, as only those creatures in the same class could blend; mammals with mammals, and so on. Normal dogs are physically incapable of doing that, but bears do that all the time. I never said what Wildman did was good; he was a psycho who mangled thousands of animals to get these hybrid, and most of them are crazed killers. I think Brain was rescued before he could turn out that way, but others are infamous for how dangerous they are." She suddenly turned pale when she recognized an animal. "Like that one."

The others came over to look at what she was pointing to. It was a big, fluffy black, grey, and white tom cat. He didn't look all too intimidating, though he also didn't look too friendly.

"That," Rheeci explained, "is a Felis sicarius, Claw's personal bodyguard. It was blended with several type of cats, along with shrew and platypus, to make a deadly killer."

"Wait," Eli said. "Shrew and platypus in a kitty-cat to make a killer?"

"Shrews have toxins in their teeth that can paralyze a snake five times its size and the spurs of the male platypus contain venom that would leave a man in agony for days." Rheeci's voice was dead serious. "One bite or scratch from that cat, and you're dead. If M.A.D. is gathering these things together, we're in trouble. We have to warn W.O.M.P."
"Hey, what are those doing over there?" Just about all the kids jumped when they heard the voice.

"Crud, we've been spotted!" Linc called out. "Beat it!"

"Stop them!" the guard who had seen them called out. "Catch those robots! Don't let them get away!"

This kids rushed as fast as they could direct their bots away, but trouble came. The long guard who had called brought lots of them down on the bots, and before long, G's 6, 11, and 12 were overwhelmed. When a bot was captured, the teen in control quickly disconnected, lest they be personally caught as well.

Soon, only Linc was left with G-1, who had the advantage of being small and fast. "We lost contact with the girls," Linc said, turning to his brother once he'd gotten the robot hare far enough away. "What now?"

"We get the footage we got to W.O.M.P.," Eli responded. "If Rheeci's right about those things, Grampa's going to need everything he's got to prep for what's coming.

To be continued…
Assignment 3.7: Reconnection

Tuesday, March 11

Bradford Tech, Metro City

It was just about chaos in Bradford Tech, despite the fact that night had fallen. Just about everyone was running this was and that, trying to figure out what could be done to recover what had been shut down and how to bring everything back online. It was panicking enough that no one noticed the woman who came in so late.

"Hello," the woman said. "I need to speak to Dr. Brenda Bradford. Please, it is very important.

"Ma'am," the security guard began, "no one's supposed to be-"

"It's alright, Fred, I can take this." Both the woman and the guard turned to see Brenda come up, looking frazzled but trying to seem alright. "Mrs. Scolex, nice to see you."

"Please, call me Maggie," the woman responded. His smile faded in a moment, though. "Dr. Bradford, this is very important. Is William here right now?"

"William?" Brenda frowned. "No, the last time I saw him was at the W.O.M.P. building, where I sent him home. He's not there now?"

"No," the other woman responded. "He came home, and we were preparing to try to leave to join some relatives. I noticed there was something wrong with some of the suitcases, so I went to ask him for his help, but he wasn't in his room. I thought he might have come here, but if he's not here, I don't know where he might have gotten to."

"After he went home, I hadn't heard anything from him." Brenda touched her chin in thought. "Now that you mention it, though, right before I was about to leave, he did want to ask me something, but I was kind of in a rush."

"Wait, was that kid a teen?" the security guard piped in. "Maybe thirteen, fourteen? About this tall? Brown hair and glasses?"

"Yes, that's him!" Maggie responded as fast as she possibly could. "Do you know where he is?"

"Right now, no," the guard replied, "but earlier, he came in here, in some sort of panic over some girl. He said her name, oh, what was it? Patty, or Prissy, or something that started with a p…"

"Was it Penny?" Dr. Bradford put in. An anxious feeling had started growing in her stomach.

"Yeah, that was it," the guard replied, snapping his fingers. "Penny. He came in here shouting about some Penny kid, and insisting that you needed to see some chip. I told him I'd get it to you. It's here somewhere…" he said as he began fumbling in his pockets. "Ah-ha, here it is."

As the anxious feeling continued to grow in her stomach, Brenda took the chip and turned to Maggie. "I'm going to have to ask you to come with me," she said.

"Alright, but where are we going?" the other woman asked. "And who is Penny?"

"To W.O.M.P.," was the response. "If we're going to find out where your son is, we'll need to examine what's on this chip, and W.O.M.P. is currently the only area that has tech buried deep
"Furthermore, Penny is another child, who may have gotten in way over her head," the doctor continued. "We're going to need to include her guardian in on this as well."

Freymore’s Lab

At the moment, Penny sat, looking down at her hands. She felt so helpless. Soon, she was to be taken out and forced to do who knows what to help these maniacs continue their plans. No one had felt it necessary to tell her what those things were going to be, so she was utterly in the dark about her fate.

Her one relief was that she had been left mostly alone. A few people had come to jeer at her, and there had been that one guy who she couldn't tell what he wanted. Other than that, though, most everyone had better things to do than bother with the hostage. Thus, she had a few moments to close her eyes and attempt to get some rest.

As such, when she heard the door swoosh open, she didn't bother looking over to see who it was. Thus, she was taken totally off guard when something leaned on the bed with her and began licking her face.

"What the-!" she exclaimed trying to steady herself. "Who's there?"

There was a brief moment of calm, and she realized who she was looking at. "Brain!" she just about shouted in joy. She threw her arms around the dog's neck. "Oh, Brain, I can't tell you how happy I am to see you!"

The huge dog responded in turn, alternating between licking and nuzzling his girl. He was overjoyed to see her as well, but at the same time, something seemed off. It seemed like she was weakened, as if someone had hurt her, and he was determined to make it clear he was going to protect his human.

The reunion was interrupted by a voice. "And he didn't come on his own."

"Agent Connelly," Penny said, looking up. "Boy, am I glad to see you."

The older girl smiled. "Please, call me Heather." She wandered over and patted Brain on the head. "That's some dog you've got here. I wouldn't have been able to make it here without him."

"I know," Penny said, smiling through tears. "I couldn't ask for a better friend."

"Now," the red head said, "we've got to get moving. We still haven't found out how the bad guys are transmitting the signal, and the sooner we get that taken down, the sooner we can call for backup."

Here, Penny's face fell. "I'm afraid I can't."

"Of course you can," Heather encouraged. "These wackos can't hold you here anymore."

"No, I mean I literally can't." The blonde girl looked down, as if ashamed. "I can't walk anymore. They damaged my spinal cord to paralyze me."

There was a pause, and the atmosphere became almost sensibly colder. Brain started to reflexively growl, and it was clear that Heather shared his sentiments.

"Paralyzed you?" she asked. "Why those scummy little…" She cut herself off lest she say words that
weren't quite appropriate for a teen to hear.

Taking a deep breath, she thought of something more productive to say. "Alright, I think I saw some office chairs a few rooms back. We can get one of those and use it as a wheelchair for the time being. Brain, you had best stay here and keep Penny safe."

The dog let out a bark of affirmation before laying his head on Penny's lap. No one was going to be hurting his girl as long as he was there.

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W.O.M.P. HQ

Gadget had been attempting to get some sleep for the last few hours. It felt terrible to be unable to do anything to help his friends, but as long as that fiend might be able to take him over and use him, there wasn't much the cyber could do.

Thus, he tried to ignore the voices as they came closer to where he was being held. Since what little amounts of tech could still be used was housed in this area, people had been coming and going all day. He mostly filtered out what was said, but this time, he had to take notice of the conversation.

"Brenda, are you sure this is entirely important?" Nozziare asked. "We have only so much resources left after that last blow, and we'll need to direct them to where they will be the most beneficially."

"True," Brenda responded, "but Penny wouldn't send us something if she didn't think it would help."

"Yes, but we didn't get it from Penny," the Colonel argued. "We got it from William Cortez. Even if he was telling what he believed was the truth, we have no verification. No one has seen either William or Penny in hours!"

"Which makes it all the more important that we find out if this is the real deal or not," the doctor retorted as she went up to the main computer.

Hearing his niece's name, Gadget looked up and examined the group that had gathered. Along with the two arguers, Quimby, two of Brenda's lab techies, and a woman Gadget didn't recognize had all come together.

"Penny? What's going on with Penny?" the cyber asked. He had been under the assumption that she was being watched over, and the thought that she was missing, even for a short time, concerned him.

Everyone turned to look at the speaker. After a moment of awkward silence, Brenda spoke. "John, you are awake. Good." She tried to give a smile. "I was hoping that would be the case."

"You mentioned Penny, and said that she hasn't been seen," he persisted. "Where is she? Is she hurt?"

Here, Quimby decided to step in. "I'm afraid we're not sure. We have reason to believe that she attempted to contact us about a chip that was delivered to Bradford Tech by another teen, William Cortez. He claimed to have gotten it from her, but we didn't find out about this message for several hours. Now, neither William nor Penny can be found, and we are trying to see if this chip might hold any information as to where they are."

"It looks like there's a video and another file on here," Brenda said, after setting things up. "I'll run the video first, and see if that gives us any information."
She pressed play, and immediately the picture of Penny filled the screen. "Alright, is this on?" the
girl mumbled to herself as she fiddled with whatever she was recording with. "Okay, it is, good."

She held the recording device father back, and they could now see that she had been recording as she
was walking outside. The girl smiled as she spoke into the camera. "Hi, Uncle Gadget! If you are
seeing this, that means that I was successful in getting this to you, and we now have hope. I have
good news: I cracked the signal."

Just about everyone in the room had been paying close attention from the start, and this phrase was
just confirmation of what they had guessed. "It's probably pretty obvious from where I am," she
continued, "and I'm sorry if I'm pointing out the obvious, but I'm just a bit excited."

"Now, down to business." Penny's face grew more serious as she spoke. "On this chip is another
file. That contains the encryption code. I've tested it, and it works. The device I am recording this on
has it, and I have downloaded it into the remaining G-units I have. You should be getting some
information from Kayla, Rheeci, Linc, and Eli soon with those."

"Just download the code into any mainframe, and it will be defended from the hacking signal." She
looked as if she was going to continue, but she looked up and saw something. "Can't say anything
more. If you have any questions, you'll be able to contact me on this number." She pressed a sheet of
paper with a number on the screen. "That will contact me on this device. Good luck, and I hope to
hear from you soon. Hey!" With that, the video ended.

For a moment, there was silence. It was finally broken when Gadget spoke up. "She came through
for us," he said, a note of pride in his voice. "She figured it out."

"It appears she did," Brenda said, examining the second file on this chip. A series of patterns and
waves appeared on the screen as she spoke. "We knew she had a knack with tech, but this is
incredible. She not only blocked the signal, she also revealed who made it."

"Alright, Doc, could you explain what's going on here?" Quimby asked. "Keep in mind that to most
of us, this means nothing."

"Look at these lines. They are the virus," Brenda responded, pointing out the upper contours. "These
lines are always shifting, never having a consistent pattern. That's what was making it so hard to
catch on to. Unlike other hacking signals, it doesn't have consistency. It's like it was designed to
constantly shift, which means by its very nature, it will work and adapt around defenses." The doctor
pushed up her glasses. "Only one person had ever developed a program of this caliber. This was
designed by Charles Freymore."

"You mean that scientist I was trying to rescue those years back who actually turned out to be
working for M.A.D.?" Gadget asked.

"Well, we never did find out where he got off to," Nozziare mumbled. "But what are those other
lines?"

"These," the doctor responded, "are Penny's defenses against Freymore's signal. Look how they are
also shifting and flowing as well. She's come up with a program that matches the original hack and
pushes it out. Every time the hacking program finds or makes a hole to get in by, the encryption
matches it. Somehow, she was able to come up with a spyware blocker of an amazing degree."
Brenda gave a small smile as she looked over the numbers and graphs. "I will really need to speak
with her about this once this all blows over."

"So," Gadget piped up, "will it work?"
"Undoubtedly," Brenda responded. "That recording already proved it does block out the hack."

"Then I'm ready," he said. "Download it into me, and I'll take things from there."

Freymore's Lab

"Okay, I'm in. Now to figure out where to go." William scanned around the empty hallway, looking for his next move. It hadn't been hard for him to find the lab where the signal was coming from. Penny had already locked into the area using her computer book. All he had to do was trace the signal back to the cell tower. Having gotten there by bike, he was able to follow several people in without being seen. Thankfully, it appeared that most of the people in the lab were too busy to take too much interest in smaller details, so it didn't take too much to hide. Now came the hard part.

"Come on," the boy murmured under his breath. "Where'd you stash her, Talon?"

Hiding away behind several crates, he turned back to the computer book, which had proven to be invaluable. "Alright, it looks like I'm not too far from one of the sources of the signal. Good; maybe I can shut things down and call for help. But I can't find any place where a prisoner might be held. Maybe I should call for help first, and then focus on trying to find Penny once help is on the way?"

William stopped his contemplation when he realized that there were footsteps coming closer. No voices were accompanying them, so had absolutely no clue as to who was coming by or what they might want. As such, he pressed himself back further in his hiding place and hoped he wouldn't be found.

The ploy seemed to work. The passers moved through the room, and didn't seemed to take any notice. That is, until one of them stopped. William could tell because the soft plodding that had signaled their steps became quiet. Then the steps started up, and got closer and closer.

Tension was broken, however, when one of the other passers spoke up. "Brain? Can you smell something?" That was most defiantly Penny.

"Is one of Freymore's men back there?" another woman's voiced asked.

Deciding to take the risk, William jumped out. "Wait! I'm not with this Freymore guy!" he shouted out, raising his hands to show his lack of weapons.

"William?" Penny asked. She was currently seated in a rolling office chair and seemed to be wearing some sort of back brace and had bandages around her head. "What are you doing here?"

"You know him, Penny?" the other woman, a redheaded adult, asked.

Penny nodded. "Yes. Agent Heather, this is William Cortez. He agreed to help me with something."

"You know him, Penny?" the other woman, a redheaded adult, asked.

Penny nodded. "Yes. Agent Heather, this is William Cortez. He agreed to help me with something." She was quick in turning back to the boy. "Did you get the chip to Uncle Gadget?"

"I got someone to bring the chip to Dr. Bradford," he answered, "but I couldn't go in myself. I kept getting brushed off."

The blonde shook her head. "I should've expected it. Thank you for your help, anyway."

"It doesn't look like I helped much," he responded. "Are you alright?"

The girl waved her had as if her injuries weren't a big deal. "I'll be fine, but we have bigger things to
deal with. May I see my book?"

"Of course." William took out the computer book and handed it over to Penny.

She was quick in flipping it open. "Alright, there are multiple areas where the signal is coming from, and it looks like we're not too far from one of them. We'll just need to make it into the next two rooms over. Heather, Brain, do you think you can handle any guards we might find in there?"

"Just watch me," the agent responded, and Brain let out a *ruff* of agreement.

Penny smiled. "Good, then William and I can focus on tearing the signal down and trying to contact W.O.M.P. Once they've got an idea of what's going on, they can come and send backup."

Her companions agreed to the plan, and they hurried off in the direction of the control room. Once there, Brain and Heather prepared to go in first and deal with anyone who might be waiting.

Much to their shock, however, the room was empty. No one, not even a lone sentry, was waiting inside.

"Well, this is all sorts of weird," Heather mumbled, keeping her weapon close at hand.

"Maybe," Penny responded, "but we have to work fast."

Before they could get started, however, the computer book began to buzz. "I'm getting a call," the girl said, looking in confusion. "Who could be trying to contact me?"

She switched the screen, and soon, the image of a W.O.M.P. control room came into view. The room was full of people, gathered about a computer screen.

Just about as soon as the connection was made, one individual pushed ahead into the screen. "Penny, are you there?" Gadget asked. He was currently lacking his hat and coat, which wasn't much of a surprise, but he also had his shirt unbuttoned revealing several downloading ports, as if he had been receiving some sort of treatment. "Where are you? What's going on? Are you hurt?"

"Is William there?" a dark haired woman Penny had never seen before asked.

"Mom?" William said, leaning over Penny's shoulder to look in the screen.

"Penny, what is going on?!!" Gadget repeated, tension clear in his voice.

"Uh, that's kind of complicated," Penny replied. "Long story short, we're at a lab hidden in a cell tower that M.A.D. is using to broadcast the signal. It was programmed by Charles Freymore, who also appears to be the one masterminding this whole thing."

"We've figured that out, thanks to your message," Quimby said. "We're still waiting on the messages from your friends, but thanks to you, we've now got a good idea of what's going on."

"William, Agent Heather, Brain, and I are going to be taking down the signal now," Penny continued. "You can track us back to our location now, and we could use the reinforcements."

"I'm coming, Penny," Gadget said, extending his arm up to touch the screen. "Just hold on, I'll be there soon."

Penny smiled. "I believe it, Uncle. I look forward to seeing you." Suddenly, that smile faded and she made a face. "Ugh, what's that smell?"
"I don't know," Heather responded, "but it's getting strong. Man, it's getting..." she trailed off as she burst into a fit of coughing. Penny and William, too, began coughing furiously, and soon, all three of them passed out.

Brain, however, seemed unaffected by that gas. There was the sound of a door opening, and the dog spun around to face the intruder. However, he was shot in the chest with an electrical dart, and he dropped to the ground.

"Forgot the gas doesn't work on you, chimera," Talon muttered, adjusting his gas mask as he walked over. The other cybers were there as well, and they set to binding the unconscious rescuers. He himself went over and took the computer book off of Penny's lap. He smirked into the camera. "Well, well, if it isn't Gadget Sr. Looks like pretty Penny was making a long distance call."

"If you hurt a hair on her head..." Gadget growled.

"Oh, don't worry, old timer," Talon laughed. "I don't want to hurt her. Quite the opposite. I need her alive for what I want, considering that she's now DElPHI."

"Delphi?" Quimby said. "Kid, speak straight."

"Oh, I didn't realize the W.O.M.P. bigwigs were listening in." The teen laughed. "I'll put it this way. You good-goodies have something I want, and now, Miss Penny here is going to help me get it." He casually placed one of the girl's hands on the computer book and the other on what looked like a portable computer. "Whether she wants to or not." With that, he raised a remote. "Arrivederci," he said, flipping it on. With that, the computer screen at W.O.M.P. flickered off for a moment, before beginning to flash.

Immediately, Brenda jumped to the control panel and began hitting keys. "Oh, gosh, this isn't good," she muttered under her breath. "Quimby, is there an emergency shut-off panel anywhere near?"

"Yes, but it's under lock that I don't have the key for," the chief answered. "What's going on?"

"I don't know what he did," the doctor answered, continuing her work, "but Talon somehow got into our system. Not only connected to it, but is actually inside, and he's copying everything down! He's already got a third of the database, and I can't seem to slow it down!"

"Will Penny's program stop it?" Maggie asked. Hearing the suggestion, Gadget nodded in agreement and pulled the chip from the downloading port in his chest.

"I don't think so," Brenda responded. "To do so, it would have to be recognized as a threat, and whatever is being used is trusted by the systems. The security program doesn't even categorize it as a virus or worm. It's just like someone from a legitimate source within is copying everything down. We need to get to that panel now!"

"It's to the right, underneath the steel shielding," Quimby replied. "Gadget, see if you can't tear it off."

"Got it." It took the cyber less than a minute to rip the panel open, revealing a bright red switch. Moving as fast as he could, he threw the switch and the entire computer system went dead.

"Okay, that wasn't good," Brenda said. "They didn't get everything, but they got most of it. Maybe three quarters of it. I can't think of any program that can work that fast."

"Do you think it had something to do with that Delphi thing that was mentioned?" Maggie asked.
"We don't really have any way of knowing right now," Brenda responded glumly.

Gadget bit his lip and turned to the door. "I need to go," he said, his voice firm with determination. "I have to get there and stop everything."

"There's no questioning that," Quimby replied. "The game's really changed now. We'll have to take every advantage we can get now."

As everyone set to going where they might be the most assistance, Brenda touched Gadget's shoulder. "Before you go, John, I have something that will help."

"Show me," he replied.

She nodded, and headed to a small closet. "I keep a few things here when they have particular use to W.O.M.P., and that goes for things that would be helpful to you. I started on these when you were found, a few days ago. They're far from finished, but right now, we don't have time to wait."

She pulled out a long grey trench coat and fedora. "I thought you're old ones might be due for an update."

He smiled when he saw the gear. "Thanks," he said. "I have no doubt I'm going to need these."

Freymore's Lab

Everything had been going well for Talon and his band, when all of a sudden the portable computer screen flashed a message that read "connection lost." Seeing the screen, Talon scowled and swore.

"Something wrong, boss?" Wildfire asked as he and Drillbit finished tying Heather and William to a nearby pole, using rope to bind their wrists together.

"They cut off their power supply," Talon answered. "We couldn't get everything."

"Are we going to have to back track?" Joltwave asked.

Talon shook his head. "No, it looks like we've gotten exactly what we want." The head pocketed the portable computer. "Come one, we'd better hurry."

Once the others had headed out, he was about to leave himself, but was interrupted when three guards who were specifically in Freymore's pay rushed in. "Hey, kid, the doctor got the message that DEiPHI was activated. What's going on in here?"

"Oh, several W.O.M.P. goons got in and tried to activate the program on their own," Talon shrugged. "Don't worry, though, we took care of them." He pointed over to where Heather and William lay, tied to the post, and Brain was muzzled and chained nearby. "I'm sure you guys will think of something to do with them. As for DEiPHI herself, she's right over there." He pointed a thumb to Penny, who was slumped over in the office chair. "She's in one piece, but considering her little stunt, I would recommend the Doc get a move on."

"Right," the first guard said. "I'll bring her to the main harness and alert the doctor. Stay here with the prisoners," he directed the others.

"I'll just leave you boys to your work," Talon replied, slinking out the door.

He had business of his own to attend to and no time to waste. "Alright, Jefferson, are we ready?" he
called into a communicator. "Gadget-1 and his cavalry will be here before too long, and we've got to be on our way by then."

"We're all set," came back the response. "All troops are ready to go. We're just waiting on you and the other cybers."

"Good," Talon smirked. "Everything's going exactly as planned."

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When Penny came too, the first thing she noticed was that she couldn't move her arms. They had been tied to either side, and her hands were pressed against something cold and hard.

"Well, good evening, Miss Dollar," she could hear Freymore saying to her. "I presume that will be the last of your little escape attempts."

"What?" She blinked, realizing where she was. She was chained up to some sort of machine, and there were technicians everywhere. However, it wasn't who she saw that concerned her, but who she didn't see.

"Brain? William? Heather?" Penny looked around in panic as she searched for her friends.

"Oh, I assure you," Freymore said in a mocking tone. "Your companions have not abandoned you. However, they couldn't be in the room as our little experiment began."

"You won't get away with this," she growled. "W.O.M.P. will stop you."

"Oh, Penelope, could you have chosen a more obvious cliché?" The mad scientist laughed. "After today, however, I won't have to answer to W.O.M.P. Or to M.A.D., for that matter. Everyone will be answering to me, and it's all thanks to you, dear DEIPHI."

"DEIPHI?" Penny said questioningly.

"It stands for Database for Electric Photo-imaging and Holistic Integration, but I wouldn't worry too much about it," Freymore responded. "Very soon, it's not going to matter all that much to you."

"Sir, we're ready to begin," one of the technicians called out.

"Very well," Freymore responded with a nod. "Let the new order begin."

Penny struggled against her bindings for a moment, but with a jolt, everything changed. It seemed that information was flowing through her, using her as a conduit. She could see and hear information from all over the country. Everything that had an internet connection was being channeled through her and brought into Freymore's possession. She was being used to bring in everything that her enemy wanted, and there was nothing she could do about it.

She was so entrapped in the experience that she didn't notice the scream that tore itself out of her throat.

To be continued…
Assignment 3.8: Recovery

Freymore's Lab

"So, we've got the prisoners here. What do you think the boss'll wanna do with them?" The two thugs who had been left to guard the trio were now starting to grow bored, and with boredom came a sense of malicious curiosity. This was not comforting to the trio, who had stated to come around by then.

"I dunno," the second one said. He motioned to Heather. "She's probably the one he'd be most interested in. The kid and the dog are disposable, but a W.O.M.P. agent?"

"Yeah," the first one said with a mean laugh. "I'd bet she's got some secrets in that pretty head of hers that would be worth quite a bit to find out."

"Of course," the second pointed out, "once the doc's plan pans out, he's not going to need to interrogate anyone to get the info he needs. Blondie up there will give him anything he wants."

"Well then," the first said. "Maybe he won't mind if we go ahead and start a personal interrogation." He went over and placed a hand on Heather's waist. "What do you say, Red? You got something to tell me?"

"Yeah," she scowled. "Go get a breath mint."

"Ha ha, real funny," the guard said with a snarl. "You're a real comedian. Now, I'm only going to tell you this once." He pulled out a knife and held it against the woman's cheek. "We can't kill you now, but you'd be surprised at what you can live through. You'd better get to talking, pretty miss, or else you might not come out of this as pretty as before."

Heather's two companions struggled to think of something they could do to help her, but considering they both were bound, and Brain was muzzled, nothing foolproof came to mind. However, a risky thought came to William, and seeing the desperation of the situation, he decided to try it.

"It figures you'd wait until now to do anything," he said aloud in the most disdaining voice he could manage. "It's not like you would have done anything before."

This did act did its job in attracting attention away from Heather. "You saying something, runt?" The second guard growled.

"William, what are you doing?" Heather tried to whisper, but he didn't listen to her.

"Only that it makes sense that you two would wait until now to actually try to interrogate her." William shrugged, making a face as if what he said was common sense. "After all, you two really don't have what it takes to face her in actual combat."

"Are you calling me weak?" the first guard asked, turning his knife against the boy. "Because if that's what you're saying, kid, you'll soon regret those words."

"Oh, I'm not saying that at all." William fought to keep his voice steady as he spoke. "After all, you have all the appearances of someone who hangs out in the gym all the time. I'm sure you could bench press three of her. It's pretty clear that, between the two of you, none of us would hold a hope of every stopping you."
"Good," the guard said, turning away from the captive.

But William wasn't quite finished yet. "All I'm saying is, if you had more feathers, we'd be able to sell you to KFC. Not that even they would want such ugly chickens." The boy smirked. "I'd bet you be even too afraid to take me on in combat."

That did it. With several quick swipes, the guard with the knife cut the ropes binding the boy to the pillar and grabbed him. "That's it, you little runt!" the guard snarled.

Reacting as fast as he could, William kicked the guard's stomach, forcing him to drop his captive. As soon as he was free, the boy took off, racing out of reach of his pursuers. Not that it did him all that much good. The kid's pursuers were much faster and stronger than he was. His only recourse was the fact that he was able to dodge between two computers, where his enemies couldn't reach.

"Just you wait!" One of the guards yelled. "When we catch up to you-!" He was never able to finish his sentence, since at that moment, he was knocked to the ground by two hundred pounds of yellow fur. He attempted to whip his knife at Brain, but the dog was faster, biting down hard on the man's weapon arm and forcing him to drop the weapon.

"Huh, what-?" His companion spun around to see what was going on…in time to get pistol whipped across the face by Heather, who had retrieved her gun. He was knocked unconscious by the blow.

"Not a bad plan, kid," Heather laughed as she helped William out of his hiding place. She then turned to tying the two guards together, with Brain standing close to keep the conscious one from attacking. "Get 'em so mad they forget that we were tied together. It's kind of ingenious"

"It feels like the stupidest thing I've ever done," he responded with a chuckle. "If it hadn't been for you and Brain, I'd have been dead meat."

There was a sudden jolt of power, shunting off before coming back on. "I don't think that's anything good," Heather said, anxiety in her voice.

Spotting the computer book a distance away, William raced to it and opened it up. "It's wiped clean!" he exclaimed as he looked at the screen. "It's like everything's been pulled out and deleted. Even the most basic of programs has been pulled off and its data wiped out."

"I'll bet that brown-out had something to do with that," the agent responded, and Brain gave a snort in agreement.

"We'd better find out the source of this, and fast," the boy said as he closed the book. "I'd bet my life Freymore's behind this, and he's using Penny in some way."

There was a sudden scream followed by another jolt, this time a physical one, and the whole structure vibrated with a thundering crash. "Something tells me that's going to be major, too," Heather commented with a frown.

After the jolt, Brain's head shot up and he sniffed the air. A look of excitement came to the dog's face and he took off running. Since there was no way for him to communicate why he was so excited, the two humans just had to follow to find out what had happened, and why he was in such a hurry.

Just minutes ago

"Is this the place?" Gadget asked he hovered over the cell tower.
"It has to be." Brenda's voice came over the Gadget-phone, which he held to one ear. "This was where Penny had tracked the signal too, and it was where we were getting her message from."

"Then I'm going in." The cyber looked down on the building, determination shining in his brown eyes. If his niece was in there, there wouldn't be anything in the world that would be able to keep him out.

"Good." This time it was Quimby who responded. "Try to shut down the virus signal while you are in there, Gadget. It will make it easier for us to send back up."

"Got it," Gadget responded before hanging up the phone. He settled down, coming close to a door settled on the side of the tower. It was heavily locked, but at the moment, that really didn't matter all that much. Gripping either side of the door, he yanked hard, ripped the whole thing out of its frame, and tossed it aside without so much as a second thought.

Inside was what looked to be an elevator. He stepped inside, and near immediately the room moved, gliding down its shaft. "Well," the cyber murmured to himself, "at least the elevator attendant is attentive." He scanned around, looking for where the attendant might be hidden. "Wherever they are."

The elevator soon slid to a stop, and he was able to step out into a large room of different machines, which were wrapped around the room in a circular pattern. In the center there was a stairwell, which spiraled down into a long pit. In the room, guards and technicians ran about, and only paused when they realized that he had entered the room.

"Go-go Gadget Megaphone," he called up, deciding to take the matter into hands. "Alright, everyone freeze!" he called out. "My name is Detective John Brown, but you might also know me as Inspector Gadget. Right now you are all under arrest for the assisting of a conspiracy, the kidnapping of several people, and whatever other crimes I currently don't know about but will soon discover. Now, if you would all make things easy and come quietly, we might be able to work out some sort of deal."

There was a sudden jolt of power as the energy went out and sparked back on. Several of the guards, taking note of this, attempted to use that as an opportunity to charge the inspector and capture him. It almost worked; the ambushers were successful in taking him by surprise and grabbing him. They may have even succeeded in killing him, had it not been for a sound that pierced the air.

A scream.

Gadget recognized the voice instantly. "Penny!" he cried out. Almost not even noticing his attackers, he shook them off and raced to the stairwell. That had been where the scream had come from. He had to get down there, and fast! Without slowing down, he vaulted over the railing and plummeted down to the bottom floor.

He landed hard, shattering the linoleum and some of the concrete of the floor. Straightening himself, he turned towards the various hallways, his mind totally focused on finding where these maniacs were holding Penny.

Exiting the crater, he turned his attention to where he was going to go next. Unfortunately, there were several hallways, and not much of a sign as to where to go next. While the upper level had been near swarming with technicians and guards, this bottom floor was near abandoned, and there really was no sign as to where to go next.

Not that this was a discouragement. "Wherever you are, you had better come out right now!" he
called out. "Cooperation will make things easier for you!"

"Hey, Gadget Boy! Up here!" The inspector jumped and turned quickly to see who it was that had called him. Thankfully, it was Heather, followed closely by a teenage boy who seemed to be around Penny's age. They were both following Brain, who was barreling down the stairs right in his direction.

"Agent Heather, Brain, you're alright!" Gadget exclaimed. "I'm glad you are alright, too, young man, but I'm afraid I don't remember your name."

"I can't tell you how glad we are to see you, but we've got big trouble right now," Heather said, running up to Gadget.

Brain had already arrived, and was attempting to drag the man by his coat down one of the hallways.

"You can tell me later," Gadget replied. "Right, I need to find where they're keeping Penny."

"I'm afraid she's part of the issue," the redhead responded, taking his hand. "I'd follow Brain's lead; out of all of us, he's the most likely to know just where she is."

Without hesitation, the three humans followed behind the dog, who made a beeline for the hallway on the farthest left. They moved along in silence until they reached a doorway at the far end. Once they made it through, there was no question they were in the right place.

Within, Penny had been hooked into some sort of machine. Her eyes were rolled up in her head, and she didn't seem to be very conscious of what was going on around her. There was also a number of people all around, manning the computers and devices, but the rescuers took notice of only the man in charge.

"Well, well, Inspector Gadget," Freymore said with a smirk. He was standing on a platform near where Penny was imprisoned, several feet above everything else. "You actually decided to brave a big hero moment."

"Get her out of there now," Gadget said, his voice almost more a growl then spoken words. "I won't ask twice."

"Now, detective, the last time we spoke, you weren't in control, and you're not in control now." The mad scientist pulled out a microphone. Speaking into it, he smiled. "Now, you are going to kill Agent Connelly, Mr. Cortez, and the chimera, and then you will go to destabilize what is left of W.O.M.P."

There was a moment where they all waited to see what was going to happen next. Gadget, especially, waited in fear. He had heard the voice echoing in his head, like he had before, so he waited to be forced to do what he didn't want to.

But nothing happened. Even though he heard the voice, he didn't have to obey it. Penny's encryption chip had worked; he was now defended against hacking attacks. Gadget realized this before anyone else, and a broad grin spread over his face. He shot his arm out, snatching the microphone away and crushing it in his hand. "No."

"What?" Freymore scowled. "You can't defy me!"

"I said, get my niece out of that piece of garbage," the inspector growled, extending his arms to pull himself to Freymore's level, "or I tear this whole place down, brick by brick. This is your last warning."
Sudden realization about who was really in control hit Freymore. Without warning, he shoved Gadget, causing the inspector to lose his grip for a moment and fall back. "Take them!" the mad scientist shouted, pointing to the heroes. "Don't let them get to the girl!" With that, he turned to run out a back entrance.

Responding to the call, several of the guards charged at them, firing off weaponry as they did. They were aiming to kill, or at least wound, first. None of them liked the idea of facing Gadget full strength.

"Go-go Gadget Shield!" the cyber called out, and immediately a force field pop up around them, shielding them from the fire. Wordlessly, he then moved up the staircase to deal with the foe. Brain moved along with him, and majority of the guards were handled between the two of them.

"Kid, do you think you can shut these things down?" Heather asked, motioning to the computers on the lower floor.

"I think so," William responded. "But I can't be interrupted."

"Just leave that to me," the agent replied with a smile.

The guards were not the issue at the computers. Due to the double threat Gadget and Brain were posing, the thugs were currently held back and unable to deal with anything that was going on at the tech. There weren't many technicians left either, considering a good amount had run away when Freymore bolted. By the time they made it there, only a single man had been left behind.

"Get out of the way," Heather growled, holding up her weapon. "Kid needs to work here."

"I'm sorry! I won't bother you!" the man, who had wiry hair and glasses, squeaked.

"See that you don't," the agent scowled.

Now open, William started working with the machine. All seemed well at first. "I've got the hacking signal down," he called out.

"Good," Heather responded with a nod. "That means we should be getting some help pretty soon."

Suddenly, however, the attitude change. "This is weird," the teen said aloud as he worked.

"What's weird?" Heather asked, growing anxious about that exclamation.

"Just that these aren't controlling the second wave and the accompanying information inflow; that's the one Penny's connected to," he answered. "This one's just directing and monitoring the flow."

"What's going on?" Heather scowled at the captive.

"It-I-uh-" the bespectacled man stuttered.

She was now losing what little patience she had left. "Spit it out!" she snarled.

That seemed to do the trick a bit too well. "That's because she actually is DELPHI!" the technician practically screamed in terror.

"What?" Gadget asked. By now, he and Brain had dealt with all charging foes, and were nearby the system, trying to figure out how to get the girl out of her prison without harming her. "What's going on with Penny?"
"Repeat that again, but slower this time," Heather said to the prisoner.

The man glanced over at Gadget in terror, but repeated again to the best of his abilities. "That's because she is the DElPHI system. All the computers are doing is monitoring her progress and making sure everything is going where it's supposed to. She's powering everything."

"How do we shut it down without shutting her down, then," William asked.

"There's a disconnect switch on the machine she's connected to," the captive answered, never taking his eyes off the inspector. "It's hidden near her right hand. Just don't-!"

"I've got it!" Gadget shouted out. He moves as fast as he could to find and active the disconnect switch. Immediately, Penny came loose from the machine and fell forward, where her uncle caught her. She was now totally unconscious, but breathing slowly and steadily. "It's alright," he said to her in a hushed voice. Much to his concern, she was a good deal thinner now, and this was all he could do to restrain the flush of worry. "I've got you now. I won't allow anyone to hurt you."

"It's too late for that!" the technician cried out. "We're all going to be dead!"

"What do you mean?" Heather asked.

"I think I see what he means," William responded. He was already working with the computers. "There was a DNA scanner on that switch. Things were set up so that if the DElPHI program was ever disconnected by anyone other than someone Freymore chose, the whole place would go up in smoke within ten minutes."

"We can't even try to get out! He didn't want either W.O.M.P. or M.A.D. to find his plans," the assistant sobbed. "If we even try to get DElPHI up to the first floor, the explosion happen instantly! Freymore the only one who can stop the meltdown, and now he's down in that bunker, and we're all going to die!"

"Wait, there's a bunker down the hall he ran?" Gadget asked.

"Uh-huh," the man sobbed. "What good is that going to do now?"

"Here," Gadget said, extending his arms out to hand Penny over to Heather before handcuffing the scientist. "Try to get the kids and the prisoner as far out of here as you can. I've got an idea, just in case you can't get out."

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Down in the bunker, Freymore waited with a small collection of bodyguard for the meltdown to finish. There was no doubt that the good inspector would have attempt to disconnect his niece from the machine. Once he did that, however, he'd have only ten minutes to get out, and considering those with him, there would be no way everyone would escape. Freymore would have to lose all of his tech and most of his personnel, but those were replaceable.

Suddenly, there was a loud clamor outside, and the whole door to the bunker was ripped out of its frame. There stood Gadget himself, looking incredibly ticked off. The guards did their job, but they were really no match. In his state of mind, all the inspector had to do was flick them away as if they were ants.

"You're coming with me," the cyber growled. "Go-go Gadget Handcuffs." Immediately, a pair of handcuffs popped out of Gadget's wrist and snared Freymore's. Now with his prisoner in tow, the detective simply turned and left. "Shut down that countdown, and we'll be good."
"What makes you think I can do that?" Freymore called in a panic. He did know the shut-down code, but he wanted to keep his designs away from anyone but himself, so he tried at calling the inspector's bluff. "Unless the bunker door is repaired, we'll both be killed!"

"Not if you cancel the self-destruct," Gadget replied. "Now, from how I kept count, you have about two and a half minutes to make your decision."

Freymore froze. He didn't want to let his designs get taken. They were too valuable, and too incriminating. Thus, he tried one more attempt. "If you go on, you'll die along with me!" he called out.

"My niece is at stake. There's no other way that I can save her, thanks to you. I am willing to lose my life to protect hers." The level tone used was much more frightening than if he had yelled. "Are you willing to lose your life to protect your designs?"

That finally hit the note. Without hesitating another second, the scientist looked up. "Cancel countdown: code 625 Alpha Delta Charlie!" There was a whir as the self-destruct was officially canceled.

"Now, see," Gadget said, his typical smile returning, "that wasn't so hard. Cooperate like that with the court, and I'm sure you'll end up with a nicer cell."

Outside the cell tower, everything was just about wrapped up. A variety of cops had surrounded the area, and all the villains related to the recent events were rounded up and arrested. Furthermore, much of Metro City had been started up again, so there were proper vehicles and communications lines again.

Much to Gadget's disappointment, the ambulance taking Penny to the hospital had already left by the time he had a moment to catch his breath. However, he didn't have too much to time focus on that.

"Gadget! There you are!" The cyber turned to see Chief Quimby waving him over. Since Agent Heather was standing with him, Gadget supposed the Chief wanted to speak over what had happened, so he went over.

"Good job to the both of you on stopping Freymore," the chief said, placing his hand on both of their shoulders. "He and almost everyone he was working with has been rounded up, and there's no doubt they'll be joining the rest of M.A.D. in the Cistern."

"Almost everyone?" Heather asked. "Who did we miss?"

"Sadly," Quimby answered. "Talon and most of the under eighteen segment of M.A.D. were nowhere to be found. We have patrols out looking for them, and I have recently heard from my grandsons that they have more news on what M.A.D. is up to. You need to take what victories you can, and what leads you can when you lose."

"Sir, if you don't mind me asking, how is Penny? Is she alright?" Gadget asked. "What were those things doing to her?"

There was a moment of awkward silence, before Heather answered. "I'm afraid you are going to have to speak with the doctors for the full update," she said, "but what I can tell you really isn't good. That creep tampered with her body in more ways than one. I'm sure Dr. Bradford can give you more details about most of the tech issues, but there is something else." She put an arm of his shoulder. "You might want to sit down for this."
He nodded and followed, aware he wasn't going to like where this was going, but willing to take the bad news.

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**Elliot Ness Maximum Security Penitentiary Center, ?**

It was another cold dark night at the prison when the buzzer rang. Confused over who it could have been at that time of night, Jack wandered over to the screen. "State your name."

The face of a teen girl appeared on the screen. "Uh, sir," she stammered out. "My friends and I were on a road trip when our van broke down. We'll need some help in getting it fixed."

The guard sighed and shook his head. This was not the first time unfortunates on road trips had gotten stranded by the prison. "Alright, I'll be down there in a moment."

He headed down to the entrance, and could see, sure enough, a gathering of seven teens, two girls and five boys. Wandering out, he called over to the,. "Alright, what can I-"

Before he could finish, one of the boys charged him, catching him by the throat. "Oh, don't worry," the teen said with a malicious grin. "You'll be helping us a lot." The boy raised his free hand, and a long dagger slid out of his wrist. He then used it to stab Jack, killing the guard.

Still holding on to Jack's body, Talon turned the other cybers and the collection of teen M.A.D. "Alright! Who want a party?" A cheer rang out from the crowd.

"Now, Irving, please," Dr. Heidrich said, working inside the prison. "If you will only allow me to administer the medicine, we could block whatever impulses are causing this behavior and allow you to direct your attentions to more productive areas."

"You are wasting your breath, doctor." Claw didn't even bother to turn as he spoke. "I have already explained that I need no medication, and no treatment. There is nothing that I need from you."

"But-" the doctor started, about to continue the argument, when there was a swish to divert his attention. "If you will excuse me for a moment, Irving, I will be right back."

He turned to see who had come in, and saw his former guide, Jack, standing in the doorway. Or, more accurately, his dead body propped up as a dark haired teenager used his thumbprint to unlock the door.

The boy, who was carrying a bag over one shoulder, smirked. "Hiya, doc," he smiled. "Just wanted to let you know, the prison's under new management now. Your services will no longer be needed."

He then dropped Jack's body and lunged at the doctor, grabbing him by the throat.

"Wait. Do not kill him now," Claw ordered, and the boy obeyed, dropping the stunned psychologist.

"Dr. Claw," the boy said hastily, pressing a fist to his temple. "My name is Talon. I bring word from Chow, Waruda, Reyas, and Montan. We have taken over the complex, and M.A.D. is now ready for your return." He scanned a card into the door separating the two side of the cell and handed the bag over to Claw.

Claw opened the bag. Inside lay two highly complex mechanical arms along with a small handheld computer. The villain wasted no time in reclaiming his true arms, before going over the files on the device. When he looked up, he turned to Talon.
"You are my nephew, are you not?" he asked.

"I am, sir." The boy never dropped the salute as he spoke.

"Have you nothing else to say?" Claw asked again.

"You have not asked anything else, sir, and it is not my desire to displease you by speaking out of turn." Talon kept his gaze down as he spoke. What he said was true. He'd mouth off to anyone who did not have the strength to command his respect. If anyone had that strength, it was Dr. Claw.

Hearing this, the older cyber laughed. "A wise decision, Talon. You will live longer that way."

"Please, Irving, don't do this!" Heidrich called out. "I can help you! You can live an honest life again!"

Claw turned to the captive. "I'm surprised at you, doctor," he said in a low voice. "Any good psychologist will tell you that treatments only work when the patient wants them, and as I have told you on many occasions, I do not desire what you have to offer."

"However," he continued, "I did promise you something the first time we met." He walked over and seized the other man by the head and twisted hard. The psychologist fell dead in a second. "I am a man of my word, after all."

Claw then walked out of the cell, followed closely by Talon. The villain observed the area of the Cistern, and he liked what he saw. All the older M.A.D agents had been freed and armed by the younger, and since they vastly outnumbered the guards, they had easily overrun the prison. The whole area belonged to M.A.D.

Standing straight, Claw stepped forward and called out. "Listen to me, M.A.D.!" he called out, and everyone froze. You did not disobey Dr. Claw. "Today, we throw off the shackles of this prison and start a new era of M.A.D supremacy!"

There was a cheer that rang out. Everyone present was on page, which was exactly what Claw wanted to hear.

As he turned, the villain called his nephew. "Talon, come here."

"Yes, sir?" the boy asked.

"I have heard from the lieutenants exactly what Dr. Charles Freymore and Mr. Richard Deboir were planning to do with M.A.D," Claw replied. "I want you to arrange a little meeting with them for me."

"It shall be done sir," the younger cyber responded with a slight smile.

"You enjoy your orders?" Claw asked, noting the smile.

"Those two have been getting way too bold," Talon answered. "They have needed a little…chat for a long time."

"Well, I am pleased to say it will be done." Claw nodded. "Now go. Alert me when all is ready."

"Yes, Dr. Claw," the boy responded with another salute.

Once his nephew had left, Claw turned to his own thought. "You had better be prepared, Gadget," he said, a dark tone in his voice. "You are not the only one capable of an unexpected comeback."
To be continued…
Thursday, March 13

Metro City General Emergency Center

Early morning light filtered through the window, but John Gadget hardly noticed. After all, he’d been awake for the last five hours; a little light wasn't going to change anything about what he was currently doing.

He was sitting in a hospital room where the small family had stayed the night before. Even Brain had been permitted to stay for Penny's comfort and protection, though the dog would be limited to the room. At the moment, the huge canine lay on the other side of the bed, snoozing away.

Truth be told, Gadget had attempted to sleep the night before, but all the information he had been told about the last two days flooded his head. Yesterday had been spent in x-rays, scans, and emergency surgeries to figure out just what had happened to his niece, and the news wasn't good. Everything that his poor Penny had suffered, everything that he had failed to protect her from, came to mind and crushed out all peace inside him.

He glanced over to where she lay sleeping. She had been placed under a lot of medication for the pain, both from the infusion of the DEIPHI system and the injury to her spine.

The injury to her spine had pressed more on his mind than the strange computer. He already couldn't understand the technology that was in his own body; if what Dr. Bradford said was true, they the computer in Penny's head outmatched what he had by years. All he could really do about that was trust what the doctor said was true and cooperate to the best of his abilities.

The spinal injury, however, he had a better grip on. He didn't know what the more technical terminology meant, but he understood more than enough on what it meant for his niece.

"I'm afraid she's never going to walk unassisted again." He could still hear Dr. Matins giving him the bad news.

"Never?" he had repeated. "But, that can't be! Can't something be done, or added?"

"I'm afraid not," the doctor had responded with a frown. "Whoever Freymore got to do the job, they were very precise. There was an incomplete lesion at the level of T-11 and the many of the tracts in relation to walking were completely destroyed in that segment. There is so much damage that there really is no way to mend it or chance of regeneration."

Seeing the grief in Gadget's face, the doctor quickly placed a hand on his shoulder. "There is some good news," she said, trying to sound as comforting as possible. "The damage was incomplete. There are signs of some regeneration in the sensation tracts, so Penelope has a good chance of regaining some sensation, and she will likely still be able to perform most actions for herself. Bathing, dressing, relieving herself; with training, therapy, and special equipment, she will be able to care for herself just as anyone else would. It's just that she will need the assistance of a wheelchair or a brace."

He had then been given paperwork relating the exact amount of damage done and what therapies would be necessary to give her independence again. There were also brochures for several wheelchair companies. Frankly, he didn't want to look at them right now. All this did was remind Gadget of what a failure he was. He had promised Andrea and Daniel on their dying day that he
would protect their daughter, and he allowed this to happen to her. "I'm sorry," he sobbed into his hands. "I'm so sorry, Penny."

"Sorry about what?" Gadget looked up in surprise when he heard Penny's voice. Sure enough, the teen was awake, albeit she appeared to be rather drowsy, and she was looking right at him. "Uncle, are you alright? What's wrong?" she asked.

Realizing that his niece had seen and heard everything, he gave a smile and tried to pass the question off. "Oh, Penny, I didn't expect you to be awake." He forced a smile. "How are you feeling?"

Penny frowned. Her uncle was horrible at covering his emotions and she could tell in an instant when he was hiding something. "Just a little sore," she answered, "but that's normal, all things considered. You, however, look a mess. Are you alright? Did you sleep well?"

Gadget stammered for a moment, desperately trying to think of something to say that would divert the question, but at the same time wasn't a lie. However, nothing could come to mind, so he gave in. "Alright, you got me." He sighed. "This is all my fault. If only I could have done something, I could have stopped this from happening. I failed"

"Uncle Gadget, that ridiculous, and you know it!" Penny declared. "If you hadn't shown up when you did, it would have all been over for Metro City. You didn't fail; far from it! The city, and maybe the world, is safe now because of you."

"But you were still hurt." He looked down at his hands. "I swore never to let anything harm you. Yet, all this still happened. You still got kidnapped, and he was still able to plant that computer-thing in your head, and you're still never going to walk again." He covered his face in his hands again. "I'm a failure as an uncle."

"No, you're not." Penny's voice was firm, though there was still a tone of warmth to it. "There was nothing you could do. Without that encryption, you would have been a slave to Freymore as I briefly was. No one is at fault except for the creatures that actually did the action; there wasn't really anything anyone else could do."

"Besides," she added with a smile, "I'll be perfectly fine. Doctor Bradford and her tech researchers got all the controlling software out of my head, and what is left only I am in control of. There's no danger that anyone will be hacking into DElPHI any time soon, at least not with my encryption in it."

Gadget glanced at the brace wrapped around the girl's torso. "But you'll never walk again."

"Only if I don't wear a brace." A look of sadness passed the girl's face as he said this. She knew all too well what her spinal injury meant, and she was still coming to grips with that reality. Still, she wouldn't let that ruin her life, and she wasn't about to let her uncle have too much grief over it.

"Beside, this was just a fluke." She laughed, giving as much of a shrug as she dared. "I guess I wasn't paying close attention, and they caught me off guard one time. It's not gonna happen again."

He gave a small laugh. "You still remember that?"

"Hard to forget," she responded. She gave him a small smile. "Really, Uncle Gadget, I'll be fine. After all, I'm not the only person in the world to need a wheelchair. Plenty of people use them on a daily bases, and many of them have it a lot worse off than I do."

When he said nothing for a moment, she spoke again. "Uncle, please," she said, holding out her hand. She wanted to hug him, but she had been warned off of moving her torso, so holding his hand
would have to do. "Please don't be so upset. We'll be fine."

He took her hand in both of his and kissed it. "I know," he said, returning her smiled. "I just wish none of this had ever happened."

"I do too," she responded.

That was when she glanced at the clock and took note of the time. "Oh, Uncle Gadget! Aren't you supposed to be a W.O.M.P. HQ in fifteen minutes for the debriefing?"

His head shot up and he followed her gaze. "Wowzers!" he declared. "I totally forgot! I'd better get out of here!" Without hesitating, he sprang up, grabbed his coat and hat with one arm, and attempted to shoot out the door. He was also knocked flat on his back as he collided with the door lintel on his way out.

"Uncle Gadget, are you alright!" Penny cried out in alarm.

Gadget forced himself up, rubbing his forehead, where a bruise was already beginning to form. "I'll be fine," he responded as he got up. "I'll just have to figure out why all the doorways are so short now."

Penny smiled. "Alright, Uncle. Please be safe. I love you."

"I love you, too," he responded, extending his neck so that he could kiss her on the top of her head before hurrying out.

Metro City Police Station

"How much longer are we going to have to wait out here?" Lenny Almos, one of the veteran M.A.D. agents to escape from the Cistern, griped as he waited out in an imitation police van. Both he and his companion, Dick Heffernan, we're wearing police officer disguises with slight holographic tech to keep from being recognized, and were rather impatiently waiting for their mission to be complete.

"Soon, my compadres, soon," Talon said in a casual tone of voice. "We can't rush anything, or else Metro City's finest will get suspicious. Don't worry, though. Dr. Claw's order will be coming out any time now, and then we can be on our way."

"I hope they get out soon," Dick groaned as he looked in the mirror. "I always get antsy when there are cops around."

"Hey, nobody even knows you guys are out yet," Talon laughed. "Malware will update me when W.O.M.P. gets a look at the Cistern's answering machine. Until then, you're in the clear." There came a ruckus from outside, and Talon dodged in the back, adjusting his own disguise. "Looks like they're here."

Out of the police station came a stream of people: reporters, mostly, with some police officers. In tow were two prisoners: Charles Freymore and his assistant, Nicholas Kramer.

Keeping in his holographic disguise, Talon helped the officers load the prisoners into the van. Freymore didn't notice the familiarity, and as soon as the van had driven off, he turned to his assistant. "Remember, keep your mouth shut," he warned. "The less they know, the less they can work with."
"Oh, I wouldn't worry too much about that," Talon laughed, taking his hat off and letting the hologram drop. "Where you're going, everyone knows everything they need to."

"Talon!" the scientist exclaimed in surprise. "This is very inconvenient for a rescue. You should have removed the shackles as soon as the door was shut."

"Ah, but this isn't a rescue, par say," the boy responded, leaning back in an easygoing manner. "You see, there are those who want a word with you, and they've insisted both you and Mr. Kramer attend, as is."

"Wait, that guy's name is Kramer?" Lenny said as he drove. "Hey, Dick, is that old Defecto?"

"No, no, you must be mistaken," Kramer said in a hurry, attempting to duck his head down. "That must be some other Nick you're thinking of."

The protests did him no good however, as Dick glanced in the back and laughed. "Well, I'll be! It is Nick Defecto!"

"Defecto?" Talon smirked. "Why, Kramer, you never told us about that nickname. How did you come to get that?"

Kramer mumbled something under his breath, but once again, one of the veterans spoke up first. "Ol' Nicky there was my roommate back at ol' Metro City University," Lenny explained. "It was a year that our football teams, the Mavericks, were on a winning streak and headed to the playoffs. To boost our chances, coach started handing out some HGH, and some of us really took to it, me included."

"Well, Nick there found out what we were doing and ratted us out to the league," Lenny went on. "Cost us the playoffs. To add insult to injury, coach lost his job and a bunch of us were expelled. Then ol' Defecto decides he can't take the heat and transfers to University of New York."

"What you were doing was wrong," Kramer said, still barely loud enough to hear.

"That doesn't seem to matter now." The bulky agent smirked. "We both ended up working for M.A.D., didn't we?"

"Well, I'm sure he's learned his lesson," Talon said, leaning back in his seat. "Haven't you, Defecto?"

"Please don't call me-" Kramer began, but he was cut off.

"If you haven't, don't worry." The boy smirked at both captives. "We're going to have a talk with someone very special, and he'll make it clear what happen to anyone who's not one-hundred-percent loyal to M.A.D."

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Ah, Gadget, you're here," Quimby called out. He and several others were standing around a table that had multiple photos and papers scattered around. "Good, now we can begin." Here, he motioned to one of the group. "You remember Agent Connelly."

"Of course," he said with a smile, turning to the younger agent. "You were a great help back in the lab."
Heather smiled and waved her hand. "It wasn't anything. You save me and the kids back there."

"We work well as a team, then," Gadget smiled.

"I'm glad you think so," Quimby added, "because starting right now, you two are partners."

"Partners!" Both exclaimed in surprise.

For her part, Heather was somewhat in shock. She hadn't been a member of W.O.M.P. for relatively all that long, only about a year and a half. To be matched up so quickly to someone who was a bit of living legend in the company records came as a surprise.

Gadget, however, had another reason. "You mean I'm getting back in the field!" He practically beamed when he said this.

The chief nodded. "Indeed. The mandatory retirement order has been completely pulled back, in light of the evidence my grandsons and their friends discovered. Take a look at these photos." He motioned to the pictures that were scattered over the table. "These were taken on one of Penny's G-units, the only one to escape capture by M.A.D."

Both Heather and Gadget went over the photos, though it didn't help all that much. "Sir, these are just animals," Heather pointed out. "Admittedly, some of them look like they could be dangerous, if properly trained, but otherwise, they are just normal animals. Most of them look like they belong in a pet shop."

"Is M.A.D. opening an evil pet shop?" Gadget asked.

Quimby shook his head. "I'm afraid not. Each of the creatures you see in this picture is a genetically modified animal known as a Chimera. M.A.D.'s been designing those for years, yet we've never been able to discover too much about these creatures. Indeed, we've only had the one source where we could find out anything."

"Where would that source be?" Gadget asked.

"You don't know?" Quimby asked. He then sighed. "Of course you don't. Haven't you ever wondered why we've been requesting blood samples from Brain ever since your family adopted him?"

"Not really," the cyber answered. A look of shock came into his face. "Are you saying Brain might be infested by Chimera fleas? That would be horrible!"

"No, you nincompoop!" Nozziare, who had been silent up to then, exploded. "Your mutt is a Chimera!"

"As impolite as it was to put it like that," Quimby said, casting a glare in his peer's direction, "it is true. We really didn't know perfectly until a while back, but by then we already were confident he was safe. Now, we can tell by D.N.A. scans that he definitely is a Chimera."

"Wait a minute, why the name?" Heather asked. "I thought Chimera were those creatures with a lion and goat head and a snake for a tail."

"Those were the old legends that gave way to the name," Professor Slickstein said as he, Dabble, and Dr. Bradford joined at the table. "Now it's just a byword for any creature that contains the genes of any other creature."
"But Brain doesn't wear jeans," Gadget pointed out. "How could he have other creature's jeans if he can't wear them?"

It looked like Nozziare was going to blow another gasket, so Brenda intervened. "They mean genetics," she explained, "as in, the blueprints of life. Brain is mostly a hybrid of dog breeds, but genetic scans indicate he also has trace amounts of genetics from several bears, as well as, oddly enough, the genes of the southern grasshopper mouse. That last one would explain why he seems to be somewhat immune to toxins."

"And the first would explain how he was standing up like that during fights, too," Heather added. "I was wondering how he was doing that."

"And considering just how dangerous we know Brain can be when he sets his mind to it," Quimby put in, "M.A.D. getting a whole host of those things can't be a good sign. We'll need every able bodied officer set and ready, which is why you're being pulled out of retirement. If you approve, that is."

"Do I!" Gadget exclaimed. "After all, I'm always on duty!"

"I'm afraid I do have something else to add," Brenda spoke up. "Gadget, this has to do with Penny's condition." Once she was certain she had everyone's attention, she pulled out a small device about one quarter the size of a playing card. "This was the only part of DElPHI that I was able to remove from Penny. The rest of the machine had been directly fused with the diencephalon in the subcortex, and in areas of the occipital lobe of the cortex. Along with connections set in on the basilar artery, Circle of Willis, and the ventricles, these connections mean that we cannot remove anything without directly causing severe brain damage. Frankly, its a miracle she hasn't sustained any brain damage already."

"She's going to be alright, right?" Gadget asked, concern clear in his voice.

The doctor gave a sad smile. "She'll be fine. It's a strange system, but I think I know what Freymore was doing. The sheer amount of information he was stealing was so intense, he needed something already used to handling a lot of information at an extremely rapid pace. For whatever reason, he decided on the human brain and nerves. Thus, he hooked up DElPHI inside Penny to utilize her as a conduit for the theft. It was painful, I'm sorry to say, but seems everything was calibrated so that her body can handle it. We were also able to remove the device that allowed for anyone else to have access to the computer. As of now, Penny is the only person on this planet with access to they system."

"But I am afraid I do have more bad news," the doctor went on. "This device logged all the information that was pulled into or sent out of DElPHI both times it was activated. As you could imagine, it was a lot, but I was able to compile a record of all the information that was stolen directly from W.O.M.P. Mr. Dabble, please hand me the file." She waited for a moment before realizing her assistant had yet to respond. "Myron Dabble!"

In truth, Dabble had spent the last several minutes smiling at Agent Heather and trying to get her attention, and thus was not paying attention when the request was made of him. When he realized he was being spoken to, he practically jumped out of his skin. "Oh, uh, yes ma'am. Here you are." He passed her a file.

Taking it, the doctor flipped it open and spread the papers across the table. "We already knew a lot was stolen, but I was able to narrow the list down to the most damaging files for M.A.D. to get their hands on." She selected a single paper and pushed it forwards. "I think this one is the most relevant."
Both Quimby and Nozziare turned pale when they recognized what was on the paper. "Get me a connection with the Cistern, stat!" the colonel called out.

"What is this?" Gadget asked, looking hard at the paper. "It's just a bunch of numbers and shapes."

"It's the location of the Cistern prison," Heather explained. "If M.A.D. knows where that is, there's a chance Claw could escape."

"I don't think it's just a chance," Quimby responded. Everyone turned to see what he was looking at, and it didn't look good.

The screen was black, with the single image of a demon cat on the background. Beneath it were words written in red: Mortem, Aurum, Dominationis.

A hush of terror filled the room as everyone caught what that meant.

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Deboir Enterprises

To say that Richard Deboir was having a bad day would be the understatement of the year. After the whole DEilPHI debacle, he had discovered that Freymore had attempted to hack into his accounts, as well as that of his competition. It had taken a lot of time and money to backtrack just to make certain that nothing taken was incriminating, and he hated wasting time and money.

Thus, he was not pleased when he came into his office with his bodyguard to find Talon in his secretary's desk, casually drinking out of a fast food cup. "Where's Helen?" he snapped.

"Oh, I gave Helen the day off." The teen chuckled. "It's funny how fast she left when she saw me. Not that it should matter to you. You're needed at the board room."

"I'll go anywhere I darn well please," he scowled at Talon. The boy shrugged. "That's fine, but I don't think the M.A.D. lieutenants would be pleased with you playing hooky."

"Wait, they are in there now?" That was a different matter entirely.

"Yep. Freymore and Kramer are in there, too." The boy took a sip out of his cup. "I'd hurry along if I were you."

Deboir tried to think of a retort, but in lack of one, he stormed off. Or, at least he tried to, before tripping over a large grey tom cat. He shouted an expletive as he fell down.

"Dicky, language!" Talon scolded with mock horror.

Deboir was seething now. He tossed the cat to his body guard. "Go get rid of this vermin," he scowled as he stormed off.

As he entered the boardroom, he found the company assembled just as he had been told. Each of the lieutenants had arrived and was sitting around the table. Freymore and Kramer were there as well, standing against the far wall. Both were still wearing their handcuff, and it was clear they did not want to be there.

However, there was one detail he had not been expecting. Each lieutenant had an animal with them. Montan's was the most normal: a bully-breed dog on a short chain leash. Waruda's was exotic, but at
least natural: a wild Iriomote cat that was sitting on the table. Reyas had a spider monkey in her lap, though the creature's coat pattern and face looked more suited to a panther. Finally, Chow's creature was the most extreme: a thick snake bodied creature with the clawed legs and head of a Komodo Dragon.

"Uh, um, hello!" Deboir declared, trying to seem as comfortable as possible. "I wasn't expecting a personal visit. Just let me get to my seat and we can begin."

"There is no need for you to sit," a growl of a voice responded. "We will not be long." There was then a silence as the heavy leather chair that was at the head of the table spun around. Seated within was Dr. Claw.

"Dr. Claw, sir!" Deboir gulped. "What a pleasure to meet you!"

"I wish I could say the same," Claw responded. "However, I have heard from trusted sources that you have been building yourself up as some sort of replacement for me."

"I-I would never!" Deboir stumbled out, begging to fear for his life. "Where would you ever get such an idea? It was that punk, Talon, wasn't it?"

"My nephew was indeed one of the sources, yes, but there have been others." The overlord's voice never changed as he spoke. "My lieutenants have alerted me to your ambitions as well. There is also the matter of you taking my company."

"B-but I was saving it!" The businessman was now desperate. Claw's reputation had preceded him by a long way, and it was well known what would happen if you displeased him. "George Scolex had run it into the ground, and had I left it to Margarita Scolex-"

"I am not upset about that," Claw said calmly, "but about the fact that your ownership of this company gave you the ideas that you also had ownership of M.A.D. Men have died for lesser assumptions."

"Please, sir!" Deboir cried out. "I can-"

"Stop your sniveling," Claw growled. "You will live, for two reasons. One, I am aware of your bid for the position of mayor, and that you have a strong chance of winning it. It would be very valuable to have the Mayor of Metro City in my pocket. Thus, you do everything I tell you, and you may continue living. Am I clear?"

"Quite, sir," Deboir said, giving a gulp.

"Now, as to the other reason I am letting you live," the overlord went on, "is that I know you were also manipulated by another."

He turned his gaze on Freymore. "He was an idiot who didn't know what he was getting into," he said sharply to the scientist. "You, however, promised to serve me."

"Sire, I never-" the scientist tried to put in, but he was cut off.

"You left me and the majority of M.A.D. to rot in the Cistern for over three years," Claw continued. "When you got the technology to free me, you instead decided to wrest control for yourself. Coming up with a supercomputer, you planned on using it, not to empower M.A.D., but to gain all information for yourself, harming the organization in the process. That disappoints me. You know what happens to disappointments."
"Please, lord, reconsider!" Freymore pleaded. "Give me another chance!

"You have used your chances," came the cold response. "Make sure the doctor is taken to another room."

The two thugs seized Freymore by either arm and dragged him off. Once the deed had been done, Claw turned to his lieutenants. "You may begin."

Each lieutenant signaled their animal and left the room. After what felt like an eternity, the thugs and the lieutenants returned, without the beasts or Freymore. "It has been done," Wardua said with a bow.

Deboir and Kramer stared in horror. Though they had not seen what had happened, it was not too hard to guess.

Claw, however, was still acting quite calm. "Kramer," he said, turning to the assistant, "how much do you know about the DEIPHI project?"

"A little," the technician answered without hesitation. He did not want to risk displeasing Claw. "Not enough to recreate it, only to do some diagnostics. Freymore never wanted anyone else to be able to copy his work, not even me."

"A pity," Claw said with a shrug. "That would have been useful. And of the Cyber projects?"

"I know plenty about those," Kramer responded.

"Enough to continue?" came the next question.

Kramer gulped and nodded. "I was the one in charge of the reverse engineering of John Brown. I know how it all works."

"Good," Claw flashed a hideous smile. "Then you shall replace the late doctor. I trust you will not fail me like he did."

"No sir," Kramer responded, shaking his head.

"Very well." Claw motioned to Dick to release Kramer from the handcuffs. "Wait for my call. When I call you, I expect you to answer. You may now go."

"See you around, Defecto," Dick snickered.

The scientist lowered his head in fear and shame as he left. He'd never wanted this, but now it was too late to back out.

"Uh, if we're all finished here, I'll just be going," Deboir said, trying to inch out the door.

"Before you leave, there is one more detail to tell you of." Claw motioned to the two thugs. "These are Dick Heffernan and Leonard Almos. They will be your new bodyguard."

"That's alright, I already have one," the businessman put in.

"Do you?" Claw asked, and a new figure slunk into the room. It was the grey tom cat from before, and he jumped up on the table in front of the overlord. There was blood on its paws and muzzle. "From what I can tell, your old guard has run into some difficulties that will make it impossible to work for you anymore." The chimera snickered at the remark and began to lick it claws clean.
Deboir could only look in horror, so Dr. Claw continued. "These two will make sure no harm comes to you, and they will also make sure you are doing as you are told. Remember, I want you alive because you are of use to me. If you become more of a liability than an asset, I will have no problem with breaking ties. Do you have anything to say?"

"Only that I will be waiting, sir," Deboir responded with a bow.

"Good," came the response. "Make sure it stays that way. From now on, all decisions come from me. You may leave us now."

Deboir didn't need to be told twice. He rushed from the room, not eager to see or hear anything that might come next.

To be continued…
Monday, April 7, 2087

M.A.D. Research Center #68, Antarctica

"We're almost there." The escapee turned to his brother. "They haven't noticed we're gone yet, so if we can just make it out without getting caught, we should be alright." He peered around the corner before turning back. "Are you ready to go yet, Twelve?"

"Almost," Twelve responded. He leaned with his hands on his knees. "I've almost caught my breath."

This response seemed to somewhat annoy the first person. "How can you need to catch your breath? You don't have a mouth or nose, none the less any lungs."

"I don't know, Eleven, I just do," his brother retorted. "I'm ready now. How do we get out of here?"

"That way." Eleven responded, pointing to a laundry shoot. "That leads to the place the dirtied cloths are all taken. If we can make it over there, then we can get M.A.D. to smuggle us out of here themselves, and Dr. Focus will be none the wiser."

"And then we find Miss Dollar and the Inspector." Twelve smiled. "We'll be home before we know it."

"If we actually get a move on instead of standing around chatting," Eleven said impatiently. "Come on, we've got no time to waste!"

The two of them scrambled out of their hiding place. Their ticket to freedom was mere feet away. They could almost feel the freedom just waiting for them.

That was when all their hopes were shattered. "Hey, look there!" They were interrupted by the call of a M.A.D. guard. "Those robots are out of containment! I'm moving in to capture! All entrances should be on lockdown!"

"Aw, crud," Eleven groaned as the laundry shoot closed up.

"Alright, that's a pair of robots," the guard said, approaching the brothers with a lit up cattle prod. "You're going to come with me back to your containment cell, and we're going to have a nice visit from the doctor."

"Like heck we are," the robot responded. "Go-go Gadget Pulse Canon." Eleven's hand pulled in and revealed a drum-like weapon. This began to vibrate, unleashing several intense pulse blasts, which succeeded in stunning the guard.

Their path temporarily unblocked, the two ran as fast as their feet would take them.

"Okay, I don't think the old plan's going to work anymore," Twelve commented as he grabbed ahold of and tossed away a guard who jumped out at them. "What do we do now?"

"What else?" Eleven responded, unleashing several more pulses. "We run like our lives depend on it!"

The duo continued their flight, in hopes of making it to some safe haven where their pursuers
couldn't catch them. Their hopes were dashed when a small device was tossed between them and went off. The brothers stood stock still for a moment before falling over, temporarily deactivated.

One of the guards looked over the figures of the two robots as he spoke into his walkie-talkie. "That EMP bomb worked, Dr. Focus," the guard said. "We've got them under control now, but there was something weird about these two. They were talking, like they were humans or something."

He listened a bit to the response before speaking again. "Alright, I'll get them to the confinement chamber. They'll be waiting for you to get here."

St. Gemma Galgani Rehabilitation Hospital, Metro City

"It looks like everything is in order," Xander Carlin, the case manager assigned to Penny's case, said as he looked over her papers. At the moment, Penny had finally been transferred from the general hospital to the rehab hospital, and the nurse was explaining what she was going to need to do there to her and her uncle. "It looks like you've come a long way in your recovery."

"It's been a long road," the teen responded. "I can't wait to get out again."

"Well, that's our aim," Carlin responded. He now turned to Gadget. "Is there any questions I can answer for you?"

"Everything ready, right?" Gadget asked. There was a slight tone of anxiety to his voice, since a part of him couldn't help but worry. However, he swallowed it showed his typical confidence. "That's good to hear. I'm glad Metro City's medical professionals are up to doing their duty."

"I'm glad you're pleased. Everything's already been prepared," Carlin answered. "Penny's physical and occupational therapists will be coming in a few moments to introduce themselves, so you can stick around if you'd like. Parents do this all the time, so there's no problem if you want to stay."

With that, he stood up and left to go to his next patient. "If you need any help, Penny, don't be afraid to call for a nurse," he said before leaving.

As he left, he was passed by Agent Heather and Dr. Bradford. "Hey, Kiddo," Heather said. "We'd thought we'd drop in to say hi."

"Glad to see you," Penny smiled. "Lying in a hospital bed's gotten real old. I'm glad to finally be getting some therapy in, so I can start moving around again."

"You'll need to learn how to properly operate your wheelchair, but your occupational therapist will help you with that," Brenda commented with a smile. She then turned to Gadget. "And how are you, John? I haven't see you at W.O.M.P. lately."

"The chief said I wouldn't get any fulltime missions until Penny started her therapies," Gadget responded, "so, I assumed it will a couple of days until I'm officially back on duty."

"That just reminded me," Heather said, and she reached into her purse. "The Chief asked me to give you something." She pulled out a small blue orb about the size of a baseball. "I'm not really sure what it is, but he sure seemed to be happy to give it to me."

"Huh, maybe it's some new tool?" Gadget said, taking the ball and examining it.

"Oh, I recognize that," Brenda said cheerfully. "That's one of Johan Slickstein's inventions. You need to press the button at the top to activate it."
"Oh, like this?" Gadget pressed the top. In response, a slot opened up at the top and projector with a holographic screen appeared with Chief Quimby front and center on it, and to the front there was two panels which acted as a microphone and a speaker. "Wowzers!" the cyber declared. "That's amazing! A baseball that doubles as a TV! That will definitely help all those bored athletes out there."

"Actually, Gadget, this is the new method we will be using to transmit messages," the chief said. "It was a new design by Professor Slickstein, and will be replacing the old notes."

"Just be careful to push the projector in first when closing it; we don't want the speaker and microphone to touch," the redhead scientist called over Quimby's shoulder. "There's a glitch I'm still working out."

"Well, that's convenient," Gadget said cheerfully. "I'm sure that will come in handy when you have a mission.

"Actually, we do have a mission for you and Agent Connelly," Quimby said. "Take a look at this."

A note appeared on the screen.

"Many of the world's recently developed robotics designs have gone missing," Gadget read aloud, bringing the screen as close to his face as possible. "It is suspected that M.A.D. had at least a hand in the robbery. There are some reports of strange robotic activity that have come from the scientific work station in Antarctica. You two will be sent out to the station as soon as possible to investigate the activity. This message will self-delete upon the device being shut off."

The screen disappeared to reveal a massively relieved Quimby. "No more self-destructs," he said in almost a dreamy voice. "What an idea."

"Uh, Chief?" Heather said, and her voice seemed to snap the chief out of it.

"Oh, uh, yes," Quimby said, composing himself. "I'll need you both to come down to HQ to pick up the new Gadgetmobile. Then you will be transferred to your plane to Antarctica."

"That sounds great, Chief," Gadget said, giving a small grin, "but I don't think I can go. Penny's starting her rehab, after all…"

"Uncle Gadget, I'll be fine," his niece said, cutting him off. "I know how much you've been missing your old missions. Besides, you won't have much to do here; between the therapies, the studies of that computer in my head, and the schoolwork I've been getting, I'm going to be totally busy. Don't stay back for me."

"But what if something happens while I'm away and you need help?" Gadget asked. He was really torn, as he wanted to go, but he didn't want to leave his now paralyzed niece without help.

"Uncle, I'm totally safe here," she laughed. "The worst danger I'm in here is from lackluster hospital food." She smiled. "Just please take Brain with you. I know he'll be a really big help, and since he's not allowed here, it'll give him something to do while I'm in here."

"John, you should head out," Brenda said. "If it's any consolation, I'll be staying here, anyway. We're going to be testing how severely DElPHI has affected her day-to-day functioning, now that she has become well enough to move around independently. If you'd like, I can contact you if anything serious comes up."

Gadget gave the two of them a smile. "I guess it's decided then. Heather and I will pick up Brain on the way to HQ, and then we're going to Antarctica. You don't mind bringing Brain, do you?" he
asked his new partner.

"Nah," the agent answered, shaking her head. "He was a big help last time. I'd be glad of the assistance."

"Well, chief," Gadget said, turning to the screen once more, "we'll be there in a moment." With that, he closed up the transmitter, microphone and speaker first.

In HQ, as soon as the two devices touched, there was an intense amount of feedback at such a volume as to physically knock Quimby back from where he was standing. "This is going to be our new thing, isn't it," he groaned as he picked himself up. "At least this will have a lesser amount of burns. Hopefully."

"Well, Agent Heather, we'd best be one our way," Gadget said, casually straightening his hat. "However, before we go, I have one last question: can you actually die from hospital food?"

Heather laughed and shook her head. "I'll explain on the way," she said, taking his arm and guiding him out.

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W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Ah, it's good to be back," Gadget exclaimed cheerfully as he, Heather, and Brain arrived at the main headquarters.

"Glad to have you back," Quimby said as he approached the trio. "We've already gotten a plane lined up to take you to and from the research site. From there, you'll be given the gear you need to continue your investigations."

"Ah, good, so that Gadgetmobile thing was a joke then," Heather commented.

"Actually, no," Quimby replied. "We've finished up the final touches on the finished model of the car." He motioned for them to follow him. "Come on, I'll show you where it is."

Before following, Heather turned to Brain. "It's seriously called the Gadgetmobile?"

Brain shrugged as best a dog can. He didn't name it, and he really didn't care all too much provided they could go from one area to another safely. He made a face that seemed to say it's best not to argue the point. With that, he turned to follow.

"Huh, I guess you're right," the redhead chuckled, before realizing what she just said. "I'm taking advice from a dog. A mutant, non-talking dog," she groaned. "Things are only going to get weirder from here, aren't they?" Not bothering to get an answer from anyone, she hurried to catch up to those who had already left.

"Well, here it is," Quimby said as the group arrived in the garage. "It's not the latest model, but I think it will do."

Sitting in the garage was a white and blue 2085 Toyota Supra. It seemed plain enough from a distance, but a closer look showed that the car wasn't all that it appeared.

"What are these notches for?" Heather asked, examining several lines along the back of the car.

"Oh, that's for when you want to convert to van mode," the cheerful voice of a teenage boy
responded.

Quimby shook his head. "Thank you, Lincoln, but next time you should give a bit of warning before you jump out at people." He then turned to the three behind him. "I presume you remember my grandsons, Elijah and Lincoln."

Gadget, Heather, and Brain hadn't noticed them before, but now that one of them had spoken up, they realized that Eli and Linc had been there the whole time. "Oh, I know you," Gadget exclaimed. "You're Penny's friends. I'm sorry I haven't been able to introduce myself under better circumstances as of yet." A hand popped out of his hat and extended itself to shake.

"Don't worry about it," Eli said, taking on of the Inspector's hands. He was a little put off by the display, but was doing his best not to show it. "Ever since he found out about what we were doing before, Grampa Quimby's been having us do some work here after school. We were just putting the last few touches on the Gadgetmobile."

"You made this car?" Heather examined the outside of the vehicle. "I have a hard time believing that."

"Well, we didn't make it all," Linc responded, "only a small amount of the gadgetry. We were tuning up the extensions for the tires and making sure the fluid pipes went to the right storage containers. I was also checking something of my own." He gave a smirk. "When you're inside, try the switch behind the sun guard. You'll get a surprise."

"You boys did a good job on it." Gadget nodded in approval as he examined the exterior. "It looks just like the old one. I suppose we're ready to go then?"

"Not quite yet." Quimby waved them over to a table. "Winter gear and other supplies are here. Gadget, I know you're all set, but we needed a few other things for Agent Connelly, as well as for Brain since he's coming, too."

The dog wandered over to the table, curious as to what he was going to be given, considering it was the first time he was going to be intentionally sent along on a mission. When he realized they consisted of a coat body suit and a set of booties, he snorted. He would wear disguises when necessity called for it, but he was no fonder of clothing than any other dog.

Heather chuckled when she saw the reaction. "He doesn't seem to think much of the supplies. I, on the other hand, am very pleased with what I have." She set her own body suit aside to pick up the black handgun that had been lying nearby. Smiling, she examined the weapon before putting it back in its holster and clipping the belt on. "A SIG Sauer with .357 SIG caliber bullets. That'll do very well."

"You shouldn't run into too much trouble during the mission, but it's better to be safe than sorry," Quimby commented. "If you have no other questions, then everything's ready to go. Your ride is at the airfield. Just show your badge and they'll take you to where you're supposed to go."

"Thanks for all the help, Chief!" Gadget said. He took and armful of the supplies and began to load them into the Gadgetmobile, along with the brother's help.

Before Heather could join, however, Quimby placed a hand on her shoulder. "You don't have to listen to me, but I would recommend always volunteering to drive." When the agent smiled as if it were a joke, he continued. "I'm dead serious. Whenever you get anywhere near a car, volunteer to drive."
"Wouldn't that be a breach in etiquette, sir?" she couldn't help but ask. "After all, usually the senior agent in a situation drives."

"Hey, are we ready to go?" They turned to see Gadget waving. He and Brain were already in the car, and the cyber had already slid into the driver's seat.

Quimby sighed. "Well, I guess it's too late now. You'll learn very soon what I mean."

Metro City Airfield, fifteen minutes outside the city

Heather had never thought that cars would ever have the capacity break the very laws of physics, but she soon learned otherwise. It seemed that every hill or bump in existence beckoned to Gadget, and at the speed he loved going at, they took to the air every time something was hit. Combined with his tendency to pull hairpin turns and never slow down, this meant that the experience closely resembled a wild roller-coaster ride.

Amazingly, they never hit anything, or really even came close to it. Obstacles were avoided even when the good Inspector wasn't even aware they were there. Somehow, they soon made it to the airfield, alive and in a single piece.

"Lovely day for a drive," Gadget commented. He stepped out of the car and took a deep breath. "It really is a beautiful spring day. It's almost a shame we have to go down to the South Pole."

He then glanced back and noticed that Heather and Brain hadn't gotten out of the Gadgetmobile yet. "Oh, how rude of me," he muttered to himself. "She's waiting for me to open the door." Thus, he wandered around and opened the passenger side door and motioned for his partners to come out.

In reality, Heather had simply been unable to relax the grip she had on her seat. Now that the vehicle was no longer in motion, there was almost a surreal sense of stillness. It took hearing the passenger door open to snap her out of her shock. "Oh, uh, thanks, Gadget." She was now merely praying that she still had the ability to walk without falling over.

Brain was doing a bit better. He had grown up with the Inspector's bad driving, so as soon as he was inside the car, he strapped himself in as tight as was physically possible. Now finished with undoing the straps, he rushed out of the car and practically hugged the pavement.

Hey, he had gotten used to Gadget's driving. He still didn't enjoy it.

"Ah, you two must be Detective Brown and Agent Connelly. Good to see the both of you." They turned to see a light haired man approaching them. "I'm Dave Swintin, and I'll be flying you down and back to the South Pole."

"Great to meet you, Dave," Gadget said. Even though the pilot had already guessed who they were, he still popped his badge out of his hat to show it. "As you know, our mission is of utmost importance, so we had best be on our way as soon as possible."

"Glad to hear it," came the response. "The plane's already been fueled up, and we'll be ready for takeoff as soon as your car is loaded up. Why don't you head into the passenger section and make yourselves comfortable while I make sure everything's tied down."

The trio nodded and followed the instructions. However, they did not notice they were being watched.
"Hey, Montan, we can see them real clear," a bulky M.A.D. thug said into his communicator as he peered from behind a pile of boxes. They're going into the plane, just as we expected."

"Good job, Beltin." The face of Dan Montan was clear on the communicator monitor. "You'd better get on board with them. We can't have them find out about Doc Focus' robotics lab down there. Once they react the Antarctic, make sure their vehicle is not exactly snow-worthy. Then figure out a way to get rid of them."

"Got it, sir," the agent responded with a salute. Another two were sitting nearby, listening to their instructions. "Uh, boss, before you go, who should be contact when we're down there? I mean, which of you guys has the Poles?"

"No one does, officially." A map appeared on the screen, with areas of each continent covered over in one of four different colors. The two poles were the only exceptions. "Not enough is out there to warrant a lieutenant. Just contact me when you are ready." With that, the communicator blinked off.

The trio glanced at the plane just in time to see the cargo hatch opened to allow the Gadgetmobile to be driven inside. Moving as fast as they could without being seen, they hitched a ride inside. Soon, the vehicle would be joining in, and they could work their sabotage.

St. Gemma Galgani Rehabilitation Hospital, Metro City

Penny looked down at her lap as she sat in her permanent wheelchair for the first time. She had been able to choose the style for herself, and much to her relief, there were several styles that were lighter and allowed more maneuverability than the bulky hospital style.

The one she had chosen was a lightweight chair, which looked mostly like a manual chair but had a small motor that would respond to upper body movement. It was a bit on the smaller side, which would make getting around a bit easier.

She had chosen this one because she had no intention of giving up on her old mission. True, she might not be able to go snooping around physically like she used to, but she was far from useless. "As soon as I can get back to my lab," she muttered to herself, "I can get my book back. Then, it's back on duty."

She jumped when she heard a knock on the door. "Penny, are you ready yet?"

That had to be her occupational therapist. The nurse had told Penny she would be the first one coming up, and Dr. Bradford had gone to have a talk with her before they began.

"Oh, yeah, I'm ready!" she called back, leaning in an attempt to turn around so she could meet the newcomer.

The door opened and a dark skinned woman who appeared to be slightly younger than her uncle came in. "Nice to meet you, Penny," the woman said, holding out her hand. "My name is Jeanette Sir, and I will be your occupational therapist."

"Nice to meet you." Penny did her best to move ahead. Thankfully, movement itself in the chair wasn't too hard, but she had yet to get a feel for how far she had to move to get to a certain speed. As a result, her current movement was somewhat slow, jerky, and uncertain. "Sorry if I'm not moving very quickly quite yet. I don't want to break anything by running to something by mistake."

"Don't worry about it," Jeanette responded. "That's what I'm here to help you with. Today, we're
going to work on how you'll need to maneuver around your house. Now, I need to get an idea of what your daily life is like. I am I correct in assuming you like to use computers?"

Penny nodded. "A lot of my activities center on being able to use one."

"Good, good, that's what I thought." The therapist wrote something down on a clipboard she was holding. "I got a word in with Dr. Bradford considering the fact that you'll need some of her assistance as well. We thought it would be best to do her tests right after my sessions, considering computers are a part of your daily life. Does that sound good to you?"

"It sounds great," the girl responded. "Shall we start?"

"Eager and ready to go, I see." Jeanette smiled. "That attitude will help you a lot in your recovery. Come on, we'll head down to my office. We'll practice working around furniture before switching to computer work. Once you've got movement with the wheelchair down, we'll begin practice with your brace and crutches."

"Alright, let's go!" Penny tuned to make her way out of the hospital room.

To be continued…
Tuesday, April 8, 2087

Antarctica Research Station, Guest House

It was about four forty-five AM when Heather made a startling discovery about her new partner. It was undebatable that Gadget Brown…was a morning person.

She had made this discovery when she was startled awake by the sounds of pots and pans clanking and the clattering of broken glass. Jolting up, she looked around, half expecting to see enemy agents all around them, ready to kill them in their sleep.

Instead, she saw Gadget, already up and about in the shelter that had been given to them. Since they had arrived somewhat late in the day, they had decided to get some rest and start up their search for the missing robotics early in the morning. Unfortunately, it appeared that her that her partner's definition of early and hers were two different things.

Noting that she had gotten up and was leaning out of the partition that separated her sleeping area from his, Gadget gave a smile and waved. "Good morning, Agent Heather! Good to see you're up and about, too. I'll have breakfast ready in about ten minutes."

Stretching out, she glanced at the clock in surprise. "What the heck? It's not even five thirty! There's no way the scientists down at the research center are even moving yet."

"I thought it would be best to move out at six o' clock sharp," he responded. "However, a good day always has to start with a healthy breakfast. As I always tell Penny, better to get an early start on the day and have a good breakfast than to skip a meal for all the sleep in the world. It just would be irresponsible to do otherwise."

Heather glanced over at Brain as if to ask for support. Her plea went unanswered, however, as the dog was still fast asleep.

"I hope you like eggs," Gadget cracked several of the aforementioned food in the pan using a hand coming out of his hat. "It appears to be all we've got, aside from some cereal."

"Just some coffee will do for me," Heather got up to set the pot onto the coffee maker. "You want any?"

"Nope, I don't drink the stuff." A hand with a spatula popped out of his hat and handed the tool off to one of his primary arms as he spoke. "It makes me real jittery."

"Suit yourself." She couldn't help but glance over and notice that he seemed to use his hat arms for more things than his real arms. Well, "real" arms, she had to remind herself, but the effect was still odd.

*I wonder how long it'll take me to get used to that,* she couldn't help but think to herself.

"I told you already, you were hallucinating." Doctor Focus frowned at the guard he was speaking to.

M.A.D. Research Center #68, Antarctica
He was currently in a foul mood from being assigned to such an out of the way research center, and stories about talking robots were not doing anything to improve his attitude.

"I tell you, boss, it was no hallucination!" the first guard, a stocky man with dark hair, insisted. "I was just speaking aloud to determine what I was going to do, when the blue one looked right at me and said 'the heck we are!' I'm serious, those things are alive!"

"I saw it too!" This time the speaker was a squat man with red hair. "There's no way we both hallucinated the same thing."

"Alright, alright. I'll go take a look." The scientist was rapidly losing what little patience he had left. "I'm telling you though; we at M.A.D. have been working on self-governing A.I. for decades. There's no way a little girl in a garage could figure out what teams of trained professionals could not." As he spoke, he clicked his pen rapidly, a habit he had done when frustrated since he was a child.

As they walked into the room, the lights in two containment chambers came on. Inside each were the little robots. Each was about three and a half feet tall and modeled after a dark-haired man wearing a button down shirt and tie. Their screen faces were on, showing simple, almost cartoonish features. Both were holding stock still, and did not appear to have moved at all. "See what I am saying!" Focus spun around, anger clear in his voice. The clicking became rapid-fire. "They haven't budged an inch!" he shouted, not noticing as the blue robot's eye twitched.

"But, sir, we saw-" the first guard began.

"You were wrong!" Focus snapped, still clicking away.

By now, it was just too unbearable for the blue robot. He let out a groan of disgust, bringing his hands to the sides of his head in the process. "Gosh, that is so grating!"

There was a moment of silence as the humans turned to look at the robots. "Oh, dear," the orange one mumbles as he and his brother realized they had been caught.

"Perhaps not as wrong as I supposed." The scientist was now fully interested in the twin bots. "They do appear to have some level of self-awareness; enough at least to suffer a level of annoyance. Perhaps some questioning is in order."

"Whatever you do, don't tell them anything of use," the blue robot called over to his orange twin.

"I'll try," the other one responded.

"So, you both can talk?" Focus now turned to the orange robot. He seemed to be the less assured of the twins, as both his facial expressions and hunched over body posture spoke of anxiety. "What is your name?"

The robot remained silent. He didn't want to give anything away, and didn't trust himself.

"Well, you clearly have the senses of sight and hearing." The scientist stood straight and took a cattle prod from one of the guards. With the weapon in tow, he opened a small slot in the containment chamber. "Shall we see if you have a sense of touch?" Moving fast, he rammed the prod through the slot right into the robot's torso. The bot cried out in pain and fell over, clutching his scorched middle.

"Leave him alone!" The blue robot was incensed now. "If you want a fight, why don't you open these up and give us a fighting chance?"
"You are protective of him?" Focus slid the slot in Twelve's chamber closed and turned to his blue brother. "What is your designation?"

The blue bot crossed his arms. "Like I'd tell you."

"You will unless you want your brother to suffer another jolt." The tone Focus spoke in made it clear he wasn't kidding.

The blue robot looked in defiance for a moment, but then glanced at his injured brother. He didn't want to give his proper digits to a M.A.D. agent, but he couldn't let his twin suffer. Finally, he sighed. "Fine. My name is…Digit. Call me Digit."

"Very well. It seems you are at least capable of learning." Focus now turned back to the orange robot. "Now, your name?"

The orange bot looked over at his brother, the newly named Digit. He struggled to think of something that would both sound real and hide his designation number. "Um…uh…Fidget?"

"You say that like it's a question," the scientist said darkly. He turned the prod on again, pointing it menacingly towards the slot.

The orange bot stood straight when he saw this. "Oh, yeah, you can call me Fidget."

"Fidget and Digit." Dr. Focus laughed. "One can easily tell you were named by a teenager. Now, you are going to answer my questions about how you came to life."

"Yeah, good luck with that." Digit laughed scornfully. "We don't know any more about why we're alive than you do."

"Yeah!" Fidget was made more confident by his brother's casual attitude, and was eager to help out. "Even if we did know, we wouldn't tell you anything."

Focus narrowed his eyes at the twin bots, but before he could say anything, a new guard rushed in. "Sir, several agents from the U.S. have come in. They say that Gadget's come to investigate the research center and they want a word with you."

Fidget and Digit glanced over at each other, a wordless message of hope clear between them. If the Inspector had already arrived, then their escape was already half finished. They'd just need to figure some way to contact him.

As if sensing their thoughts, Focus cast a suspicious glance at them. "Very well," he said, responding to the messenger. "Tell them I'll be up to speak with them in a moment. First, we need to arrange new accommodations for one of our new guests."

"What, you mean this isn't the penthouse view." Digit gave a mocking look. "Well, gee, aren't we lucky."

Focus ignored him, turning instead to one of the guards. "I only have need of one of them to study their behavior. The other can be taken and dissected for physical study." He then pointed at the blue twin. "Since he seems to be the mouthier of the two, take that one and restrain him so that I can begin the study as soon as Gadget is dealt with."

"Wait! Dissection!" Fidget squeaked in horror as the guards disconnected and carried off his twin's containment tube. "No! Stop! You can't do this!" The little orange robot began struggling in his tube for any opportunity to escape and help his brother.
Digit wasn't any happier with the plan, but wasn't about to give up without a fight. "Don't worry about me, Fij," he called out. "They won't hold me for long. See if you can't get out, and I'll meet up with you when I can." He tried to sound as confident of his escape as possible, but even he had some level of anxiety about what was going down.

St. Gemma Galgani Rehabilitation Hospital, Metro City

"Alright, so it seems you've just about gotten smooth movements down." Jeanette smiled as she motioned for Penny to join her. The teen had just finished going over the various ways to adapt to the movements of her wheelchair.

Penny did as she was instructed, moving slowly so as not to run into any walls, but with less jerky maneuvering. Looking down at the chair, she grinned. "I've about got it!" she laughed.

"Just about." The therapist smiled and nodded. "Now, just so you know, these aren't the only wheels that attach to your chair. There is also a set of larger, thicker wheels that will make movement easier on different terrains. That way, you'll still be able to move in your chair, even in places like the beach or over grass."

"Sounds like things are going well in there." They both turned to see Dr. Bradford, who had just come in after setting up a small computer station within an empty waiting room. "Are you ready to move onto the next step, Penny?"

"I'll be there in a moment." She turned to the room before waving to Jeanette. "Thanks for your help. See you tomorrow."

"See you then," Jeanette called back before gathering her things and leaving.

The teen leaned around, getting her chair to spin around and head in the direction of the waiting room. To her delight, the chair responded with prompt and smooth movement. Soon, she rolled into the room and found a large computer system set up and a few nurses who were on standby in case something bad happened.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Brenda asked as they entered the room. "If you'd like, we can continue working with X-ray scans."

Penny's response came quick. "Hey, I'm just as eager to figure out just what was planted in my head as everyone else. If this will help, I'm willing to work with you." She rolled up to the panel, and was prepared to start, but hesitated for a moment. "Please be ready to stop it if I start to freak out or anything," she added with a nervous grin.

"We will," Dr. Bradford assured her. "Now, since we have a good idea just of how DElPHI is connected to your system, we'll need to see how active it is and how it effects your physiology. Just place your hands on the scanners, and we'll start everything up to see just exactly how the connection with your neural system is running. Just wait for our signal."

"Got it!" The blonde gave an "A-Okay" sign and rolled over to the computer. She took a deep breath, still nervous that the unpleasant experience from before was going to start again. However, she also wanted to figure out what was done to her, so she brace herself and went on.

Placing both her palms down on the scanners as directed, she leaned back in her wheelchair. It was less than a second before she sensed something in the back of her head alerting her to the fact that the machines started up. Assuming this was the signal, she did what she could to allow the energy flow
She expected it to be like back when she was being used to channel the information, but on a much, much smaller scale. However, the feeling wasn't one of helplessness, as it had been then. It was completely different. Instead of the intense blur that had occurred last time, she could sense everything clearly. She could see the information in front of her in a band like a faintly glowing thread, as all she had to do was reach out and touch it and it was at her command. The information didn't go into her, as it had last time, but instead she could direct the information where she wanted it to go. It was all rather exhilarating, and she was surprised by how alright she was with it.

Remembering that this was a test, she worked to call up several charts giving the lists of neural activity. "I've got everything started up, Dr. Bradford," she called out, keeping her eyes on the screen. "How'd you get this to listen to my instructions just by thought?"

Standing behind the computer screens, Brenda looked on in shock. "Penny, are you doing all this?"

"Yeah, isn't that what it was meant to do?" Penny lifted her hands, but the computer continued on. "I mean, I can pretty much control it just by looking at it. Neat trick."

"Oh, my." The doctor shook her head and began examining the numbers. "I thought I had taken out most of the computers when you first arrived, but the integration was more complete than I initially assumed. It look like there was more to this than just the controlling panel."

The teen was becoming more and more unnerved by the response. "Uh, Dr. Bradford, ma'am, are you alright? Am I alright?"

"What?" Brenda was then shaken out of her thoughts by the question. "Oh, yes. I think you'll be fine, but I have to ask, how did you do that? Set everything up I mean." She motioned to the monitors.

"Oh, that?" Penny shrugged. "I just directed the flow of information so that I knew what I wanted but at the same time wasn't overloaded by the information that I didn't need. Once I had what I wanted, I just directed to do what I wanted it to do and it did it. That's what you wanted to test? To make sure that I could do that without it hurting, right?"

Brenda stared at the screen in shock. "No." He voice was almost a whisper. "This was just supposed to measure the neural integration level. I was going to direct the flow of information from my laptop. I hadn't even logged into the system yet."

Realizing what had just gone down, Penny felt as if all eyes were on her. She let the thread go and gave a weak chuckle, made weaker by the slight twinge in her stomach. "Well, at least we have an idea of how integrated DEIPHI is in me."

Antarctica Research Station, Main Research Lab

Once the three of them were up and ready to begin the investigation, they headed out to the Main Research Lab to question the scientists there about what they had witnessed. Heather and Brain had both been bundled up into their body suits, and it was there, heading out in the deep snow, that Heather noticed that Gadget didn't have one for himself.

"Where's your layers?" she asked, looking at him with an odd glance, as they walked over to their destination.
"Oh, my layers?" He shrugged. "I suppose I am a human, and like any other human there are parts of me others don't know about. However, I try to be as up front about myself as I can be."

"No," she responded, shaking her head. "I mean why aren't you wearing anything other than that trench coat? You look like a Popsicle."

"Oh that." He smiled. "Why didn't you just ask?" Before she could point out that she had, he went on. "I'm not exactly sure, but I think Dr. Bradford said it was something like my gadgets can tell what the outside temperature is and adjust so I don't get too hot or cold." He shrugged at the explanation. "I don't know much more than that, but I do know it means I don't really get very hot or cold anymore. I think it came with the upgrades."

"Interesting to know." Heather nodded, still finding her coworker's processing odd. She turned away, sharply reminding herself she'd need to get used to such oddities.

As they reached the research center, they were greeted by one of the scientist, a rather tall and fat man named Dr. Raymond Michlovich. "Ah, Inspector Gadget! Welcome, welcome!" The man cheerfully shook Gadget's hand before ushering him into the building. "Ah, you must be his partner, Agent Connelly. Come, come in! I cannot tell you how relieved we are to see you."

"We heard you have been having some sightings that might have to do with the robotics that have gone missing." As Gadget spoke, an arm popped out of his hat holding a small recording device. "Can you give us any details about exactly what you saw?"

Listening to the conversation, Heather took out a small tablet to write down or sketch out useful information. If she could put some pieces together now, it might save them some trouble later.

Michlovich nodded. "Indeed, indeed. I saw it with my own eyes. I was out recalibrating several of the devices that were supposed to be following the penguin migration- that's what we're studying by the way- when this massive behemoth rolled out!"

"A behemoth, huh?" Gadget stroked his chin in thought. "I've never heard of a rolling whale. This seems to have M.A.D. written all over it."

"I don't think it was a whale, Gadget Boy," Heather laughed. "Doctor, do you think you could describe exactly what it was you saw?"

It was here that a sharp faced man with thinning hair entered the room. "Are you talking about you're hallucination again?" he commented, making a face at his larger coworker.

"It wasn't a hallucination, Lenard," Michlovich snorted. "I know what I saw out there was a real as you are."

"Right, and I'm the queen of England." The newcomer rolled his eyes before turning to the agents. "I'm Doctor Edmond Lenard. I really hope that Ray over there didn't drag the two of you down here just to listen to his ramblings about mechanical monstrosities."

As the two scientists' argument left the human agents struggling to figure out just what was going on, Brain took the opportunity to explore the compound. This wasn't sort of place the dog would have chosen to live for himself; not enough smells, and those present were too sharply metallic.

That did give the benefit of making any smells that were out of place stand out like a sore thumb. It didn't take too long for him to catch an all too familiar and unwelcome scent to come to him. Following it, Brain soon saw his target: a rat-sized surveillance bug. It observed the humans from an area in the corner where it was obscured by some equipment, no doubt feeding whoever had sent it
Moving as quietly as he could, Brain crept up on the mechanical spy. Thankfully, it seemed focused on recording the humans' conversation and was thus easy to get close enough to spring upon.

Unfortunately, its choice of hiding place did not make it easy to complete the spring. As the dog charged in to catch the spy, by necessity he ended up knocking over box after box. On top of that, the mechanical bug did not go down without a fight and proved to be strong enough to make it a tough fight on top of it. Dragging a dismayed Brain behind it, the drone ran around in an attempt to shake its captor.

The humans were shaken out of the squabbles by the sound of crashing boxes. "You clumsy mutt!" Dr. Lenard snapped. "You're destroying delicate equipment!"

"Please, you need to get him to stop," Dr. Michlovich pleaded.

"Brain, calm down boy!" Gadget leaned over in an attempt to get the dog to stop running around. However, his glove got caught on the dog’s collar instead and he was pulled into the struggle. Between the man, dog, and drone, it appeared that no box would come out of this unbroken.

Thankfully, the struggle was cut short when the drone attempted to shake them off by making a sudden stop. Instead of achieving this goal, it flipped the two over so that Gadget landed hard on the drone, crushing it beneath him. With the troublesome bot destroyed, the unwanted struggle came to an end.

"Now, Brain, you know better than to start running around like that." Gadget pulled himself up as he scolded the dog. "Now look at this mess you made, and all because you were suspicious of a piece of equipment."

"Actually, I think he's on to something." Heather bent down and picked up what was left of the flattened spy bot. "Doctors, is this a part of your tech?"

Dr. Michlovich shook his head when he saw it. "I've never seen that before in my life."

"It's not mine," Dr. Lenard said in agreement.

"Well, then, let's have a closer look at our visitor here." Heather picked up a screwdriver that was lying nearby and pried a panel off of the bottom of the drone. As soon as the panel was lifted off, a small recording camera was revealed, albeit its lenses crushed beyond use. Underneath the camera was a single image: that of a demonic cat.

"Well done, Brain," Heather said, congratulating the dog. "It looks like you found the proof of M.A.D.'s connection."

"Really?" Gadget asked, leaning in to have a closer look himself. "Well, I have to apologize, then. It looks like it was M.A.D."

"This means whatever it was you saw out there, doctor," the redhead said, turning to Michlovich, "wasn't a hallucination. We'd better head out and see what we can find out its whereabouts. Where did you see it, and where was it going?"

"I was about two and a half miles northwest of here, and it was facing in a northern direction." The doctor produced a map and marked on it the exact location. "Would you like me to accompany you to the location?"
"Thank you, but no thank you." Gadget swept up the map and deposited it in a pocket on the inside of his coat. "If M.A.D. is involved, it would be best to involve as few citizens as possible. We appreciate the offer, but we can take things from here." He headed to the entrance of the compound. "Come on, Agent Heather, Brain. We'll get to test out the new winter weather gear on the Gadgetmobile!" With that, the trio headed out to continue their exploration.

Once they left, Dr. Michlovich stared in bewilderment. "Did he name is vehicle after himself?"

"He could call his car Santa's sleigh, for all I care." Dr. Lenard glowered at the pile of rubble left from the brief struggle. "At least it's taking them away from here."

Outside, the trio went over to where the Gadgetmobile sat waiting. The car had already been started so as to get it warmed up, so all the investigators had to do was enter.

"That was a very informative discussion," Gadget said in a cheerful tone of voice. "I'm glad we decided to start there. Now, Go-go Gadget Winter-Weather Driving Gear." In response to his call, a set of caterpillar treads appeared around the tires and widened out, making the vehicle more open to movement on the snow.

"I'm not sure." Heather bit her lip as she entered the coordinates for their destination into the autopilot. "We already knew it was M.A.D., but we still don't know exactly where we are going and what we are looking for. It was only the fact that Brain found that spy bug that we even knew our hunch was right."

"Don't worry about it too much, Heather." Gadget smiled at his partner. "When you've been in this business for as long as I have, you learn pretty quickly that these gut instincts can be trusted. I'm one hundred percent positive that everything will go our way from here."

"I sure hope your right, Gadget Boy," Heather sighed.

As they left, no one noticed the faint ticking that was coming from under the front of the car.

To be continued…
"So you are quite certain that no one could have followed you here?" Dr. Focus was determined to get all the information he could about the current situation. He had no desire to have his work interrupted by any W.O.M.P. agents, none the less the infamous Inspector Gadget.

"Completely!" The grunt sent in to give the information gave bold thumbs up. "We tagged along with bolt-for-brains and his team. They stayed at the research center for the night. They'll have headed out by now, but we left them a little surprise in that car."

His companion laughed. "Yeah! Even if they survive the explosion, they'll end up stranded out in the middle of a winter wasteland! There's no way they'll make it out of this alive!"

"We even left a little bug in the research center so we know exactly where they are going and what they are looking for." The third mook turned to the computers and set it up to show the camera feed. "See?"

Focus stared at the computer before turning back to the mook. "And what exactly am I supposed to be looking at again?"

All three of the grunts looked up in surprise to see that the screen was only showing static. "That can't be right," the most technologically adept of the three groaned. "It was working last night! What happened?"

"Just show the last feed the video has," Focus grumbled, seriously questioning the quality of men M.A.D. was drawing in.

"Ah ha! Here it is!" The mook set things up so that a clear image came on the screen. It was Gadget and Heather speaking with several scientists when Brain's face came in and took up a portion of the screen. There was a struggle, ending when Gadget himself fell on the camera, switching to the static that was now coming in.

"That happened about forty five minutes ago." The grunt looked down on the screen. "Do you want us to tell someone?"

"No, no, I can handle this." The scientist waved, as if dismissing the question. "As was said before, everything out here is a frozen wasteland. Even if Gadget's insane luck is enough to keep him alive from your traps, there's no way he or his companions would survive the snow. Besides, I have other things to worry about." Getting up, he turned to leave the room.

"But considering you're a M.A.D. scientist-" the first of the grunts began. He was cut off as Focus spun around and smacked him hard in the face with a clip board.

"I am not a mad scientist!" the doctor practically shrieked, his face the picture of pure rage. "I am not crazy! I want no one to be questioning my sanity! Am I clear!?"

The man who had been hit was too stunned by the blow to respond, but the other two acted immediately. "Right, sir! We understand!" they called out, pulling the salute so fast they left a mark. They knew enough of the doctor's infamous temper.
"Good." Focus stomped out of the room, looking down at his work to find something to distract himself with.

"Man, did you mess up," the techie grunt laughed. "Forgot that the doc has a thing about being called mad, huh?"

"I didn't call him mad, I said he was a member of M.A.D., which he is!" The luckless man frowned. "Am I bleeding?"

"No, and be thankful you aren't." His non-computer adept companion shook his head. "Remember, to get up in to the higher levels, you've gotta be ruthless and have a few screws loose. Claw's techies are no exception. If you get on a sore note with a higher up, that lump you have will be the least of your worries."

"Come on," the third agent said, getting up to leave. "Let's head down and get some breakfast. We aren't needed here anymore." The other two nodded and followed him out.

Out in the Antarctic Wilderness

"My, the tech boys back at HQ really did a masterpiece with the Gadgetmobile, don't you think?" Gadget asked, turning to Heather. "It doesn't even feel like I'm driving on snow."

"It is pretty smooth." Heather glanced out her window as she spoke. "I just wish there was more to see. All there is on all sides is white, as far as they eye can see."

"True, true. I guess that will make searching for anything by sight rather difficult." The inspector nodded at the comment. "But that's not going to stop us. A lot of near blinding white can't stop us from finding clues, and if push comes to shove, we still have Brain, after all. A little snow's not about to stop you, is it boy?"

The dog let off a woof of affirmative, thought the dog was less confident than he tried to sound. Snow wasn't his favorite terrine, especially since he'd be wearing that coat, but he had worked through worse.

Gadget grinned, taking the bark as an affirmation. "As long as everything works as it's supposed to, everything's going to be just fine."

That was when the explosion happened. In an instant, there was a blast in the front tire wells of the vehicle. The shock was enough to send the front of the car sky-high, flipping the whole thing over.

Thankfully, no one was harmed, though all were startled. "Wowzers!" The Inspector adjusted his hat, pressing it to his head so it wouldn't fall off. "I don't remember being told anything about snow geysers. Those things can really pack a punch!"

Heather shook her head and reached for the door. "I don't think that was a geyser. We'd better get out and see what damages the car took." However, as she reached for the door, she found to her dismay that it wouldn't budge. "I can't get it open!" she exclaimed.

Gadget turned to try his door and found that it, too, was stuck shut. "Well, this really is a pickle." He touched his chin. "We'd better call into HQ to see if we can't get any help about this." Reaching over, he touched a panel, causing it to rise and reveal a screen. Their call was soon answered, revealing the main control room as W.O.M.P. HQ.
"W.O.M.P. HQ he-" the chief began, but he cut himself off when he noticed the agents' rather odd position. "Gadget, are you upside down?"

"Indeed we are, Chief." Gadget shrugged. "We hit a snow geyser and it flipped us over. We tried to get the doors open, but they're kind of stuck."

"Snow geyser?" Quimby turned to Heather with an inquisitive look.

"More likely an explosive device," the agent explained. "We were wondering if there was any other way to try to get out of the car, considering the doors and windows are compromised."

Hearing this explanation, the chief nodded. "I hear you. Luckily, Dr. Bradford happens to be here right now. I'll see if she installed anything for such an occasion."

"Wait a minute? She's there? But she's supposed to be with Penny." Gadget's expression changed completely to one of worry. "What's going on? Is Penny alright?"

"Penny's fine, but they've discovered some…odd unintended side effects of that computer in her. They came here to figure out the extent of the issue. " The Chief turned. "I'll be back in a moment and we'll see what can be done to get you out."

"Wait, Chief! What odd unintended side effects?" The inspector's questions went unheard, since the chief had already headed off.

They only had to wait a moment, since soon a new face appeared at the screen. However, it was neither Bradford nor Quimby, but Penny.

"Uncle Gadget, I head of the explosion!" she said as she wheeled herself to the computer. "Are you guys alright? Where's Brain? He wasn't hurt, was he?"

"No, we're all fine." Her uncle moved his head so the dog could be seen. "We're just having a hard time getting out. Now what is this I hear about issues with your head?"

It was here that the adults caught up to the teen. "It's nothing to worry too much about right now," Dr. Bradford answered. "We're taking care of her, and she doesn't appear to be in any immediate danger. Right now we need to focus on getting the Gadgetmobile back on its wheels."

Gadget glanced once more at his niece with a look of concern before nodding. "Alright, but when I get back, I want to know everything."

"You will, but you don't need to worry too much." Penny smiled, trying to calm her concerned relative. "I'm perfectly fine, and what I can do is really cool."

"Now," Dr. Bradford said, taking over the instructions, "can either of you see a yellow panel? Once you find it, flip it open and you'll see a black switch."

"I've got it." Heather reached out, doing as instructed. Turning the switch activated the back wheels of the vehicle, which extended out and pushed the car back into an upright position.

Now freed from their unfortunate prison, the trio was now capable of getting out and looking around. "We've got it!" Gadget called to the screen, though those he was speaking to could not see him. "It looks like that geyser did a number on the Gadgetmobile, though. The front wheels are gone and there's a hole going right through the hood."

"We've got a tracking signal on the car." Quimby turned to another computer and sent off a signal.
"We've got the area localized and we're sending a rescue jet over to your position. Just stay safe until we reach you." With that, the screen went blank.

"That will still take a while." Heather frowned. "We'll need to find some sort of shelter until they get here."

Gadget tapped his chin as he thought. "Go-go Gadget Legs!" His legs then extended out, giving him a higher vantage point of their surrounding areas. "Ah, good news!" he called down to his companions. Lowering himself, he smiled as he explained his excitement. "There's some sort of scientific research center that way." He motioned in the direction he had been facing. "If we get over there, I'm sure the scientists won't mind if we get shelter for a while."

Heather and Brain exchanged a concerned look before simply deciding to go along with the plan. "Alright, but since the car's busted, how are we going to get there?"

"Simple!" Gadget reached out, picking Brain up and somehow holding the large dog under one arm. "Climb on my back."

The agent did as she was bidden. Now bearing two passengers, Gadget turned to the direction they intended to go. "Go-go Gadget Rocket Skis!" In a heartbeat, a pair of skis extended from the inspector's shoes, and a stream of jet fire shot out, sending hurtling in the direction they intended to go.

M.A.D. Research Center #68, Antarctica

At the moment, Digit was struggling hard against the bindings holding him back. He wasn't looking forward to the plans his captor held in store for him, and was desperate to get away before anything unpleasant could happen to him.

Focus smirked when he saw the struggle. "Why do you keep fighting? There's no hope for you escaping this place. It would be easier for you just to give up and resign yourself to your fate."

Digit scowled at the admonishment. "Yeah, you try that when you're being held by a sicko who enjoys the idea of taking out your spleen."

The mad scientist shook his head. "That analogy is incompatible. You are a machine. Whatever discomfort you may experience from dismantling is inconsequential, considering you can simply be rebuilt."

"Yeah, and having bones splintered is inconsequential when you keep in mind that they'll knit back together." The blue robot frowned. "Just spare me the 'you're not real, so this shouldn't bother you' shtick. We all know you mad scientist types couldn't care less whether or not the things you dissect are real."

At that moment, a change overcame Focus. Spinning around, he snarled at his captive. "I am not a mad scientist!" His voice was practically a shriek. "I am a brilliant robotics technician, not a mad scientist!"

Seeing that he had touched a nerve, Digit grinned. He might be able to use this to his favor, and if he couldn't he was still about to die. He didn't have anything to lose.

"Oh, yeah," he said as he rolled his eyes. His voice was dripping with sarcasm. "Because everyone knows that wanting to hack new people to pieces is a perfectly sane response when you meet them.
Oh, I'm sorry. I meant a *brilliantly* sane response. Because every society honors its mad doctors.*

This response was rewarded with Focus' face turning a deep scarlet, and he would have attempted to smash the robot's face in then and there if he wasn't interrupted up a guard.

"Uh, sir." The luckless guard went over to tap Focus on the shoulder.

The doctor responded by spinning around on the unfortunate man, and it was a miracle he didn't brain him. "What!?"

"We caught Gadget and his partners on video, and they're headed this way!" The grunt backed up as far as he could when he realized that Focus was in one of his more unstable moods.

"Those fools failed to exterminate Gadget?" Focus scowled, forcing himself to calm down. "I suppose it makes sense. Let them arrive, but when they reach the door, let me handle it. I'll see what we can do to get rid of our unwanted guests.

"As for you," he said, spinning around to face Digit. "Don't think I'm finished with you. I'll still have time to deal with you once I deal with the other vermin."

"See, I told you we'd be here in no time." As they pulled into the small entrance area, Gadget slowed down and retracted his rocket skis and set his passengers down. "In record time too, I'll bet! Of course, I don't know what the current record for rocket skiing through the Antarctic is. Oh well."

As they moved further in, both Heather and Brain started to get a funny feeling about their surroundings. Brain especially became anxious, since he could smell that the area was practically crawling with enemy.

Moving ahead, he nudged the inspector's side and whimpered. Noting the motion, Gadget smiled and patted the dog's head. "Don't worry. As soon as we're inside you can take off that winter gear."

"I don't think he likes this place, and frankly I don't either." Heather felt her gun, which she was pleased to find was still securely in its holster. "It's giving me the creeps."

"Oh, come now!" Gadget's voice had a chiding tone to it. "Don't tell me you are frightened of a place just because it has odd lighting. A lot of museums have odd lighting. Are you afraid of museums?"

The younger agent gave her partner a look. "That's not exactly the same. When there are museums that have the possibility of containing enemy agents who want to kill me…"

"I wouldn't worry too much," he responded, throwing a comforting arm around her shoulders. "Of course, a good agent must always be on their toes; danger could come from anywhere. But that doesn't mean that you need to believe an enemy is lurking behind every crack. Most people and places are safe and friendly; you just need to keep an eye out for people and places who do mean harm."

"Well, this looks pretty suspicous to me." Heather glanced around the shadows.

"Which is exactly why I'm not worried." Gadget flashed a grin. "After all, why would the bad guys want to hide out in a dark, spooky looking area? It would make them easy to figure out. No, M.A.D. agents will either do one of two things: look as unrelated and innocent as possible, or get right in your face to try to kill you. That's why I never worry about places that look grim and shadowy;
they're far too easy." He then laughed. "It's like that one book character said: 'The closer you are to danger, the farther you are from harm.' I don't remember who said it, but they must have been very smart."

"Yeah, but, uh…" the redhead started, but then trailed off. "Actually, that kind of makes sense."

"Of course it does!" The inspector moved head, coming up to what looked like a fortified door. "Trust me, Heather, when you've been in this business as long as I have, you'll understand."

Turning to the door, he knocked on it as Heather and Brain joined him in front of it. "Hello? Is anyone in here? Our car broke down and we'll need shelter for a while." There was silence for a minute, followed by a loud buzz.

"See?" Gadget turned to his companions. "These are nice people who are going to help us ou-"

Before he could finish his sentence, the trap door they were standing on opened up, sending them falling down a chute. As they fell, they were split off into three separate pathways, making certain that at their eventual landing, they would be on their own.

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W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Penny, are you ready to continue?" Dr. Bradford asked once they screen had gone blank.

The teen glanced up for a moment. She was still worried about her uncle and his team, but was assured that they were going to get help. She'd just have to trust that Brain and Heather would watch out for Gadget in the meanwhile. "I suppose so. What would you like me to do next?"

"I'd like to take a look at how DElPHI is affecting you when you use it." Brenda turned to Penny once she had gotten the equipment started up. "I'm still not sure what is powering this processor, and I want to make sure whatever-it-is isn't harming you in the long run."

She motioned to a control panel of a much smaller computer. "This is hooked into a small processing unit. It's connected to the main W.O.M.P. system, but not to the internet. That way, the more sophisticated technology will be able to monitor what exactly you are doing while I keep track of your vitals. Just go up to the panel and communicate with it like you did at the hospital, and we should be able to keep track of how you are doing."

"So just do what I did last time, got it." The teen rolled over to the system and laid her hands on the panel. She focused her attention on the computer and, soon, she was inside.

Once again, she focused and the dim thread appeared once more. As soon as she took a hold of it, the feeling from before came over her. She began controlling and directing the computers, and they responded just as they should have, but it was clear the monitor was for the others' benefit. As far as she was concerned, she was her own monitor.

"I'm in, Dr. Bradford." Penny grinned, pleased to find she could still communicate with the outside world while she operated the system. "I've got everything at my control. How am I doing?"

"Very well, I'm pleased to say." Brenda smiled with relief when she saw what the monitor was reading. "You have had a rise in your metabolism rate, but it doesn't appear to be all that drastic."

"So, you mean I'm not going to be able to burn all those calories by browsing the internet?" The teen chuckled. "We darn. There goes my dieting plan."
It was at this moment that Slickstein came in. "Dr. Bradford, I got the specs you- What the?" He looked on in confusion at the scene in front of him. "Uh, doctor, is she using DElPHI to directly command the computer system?"

"Indeed she is." The doctor turned, taking the files from her assistant. "Thank you, Mr. Slickstein. You can go back to what you are doing."

"B-but doc!" The young man was clearly startled by what he saw. "She's controlling it with her mind, and giving it commands unrelated to info gathering! I thought DElPHI was just the gathering unit!"

"I thought so, too, but it appears to have a much more complex system than I had first assumed."
Brenda frowned and began thumbing through the papers in the file. "That's why I asked you to bring these. I want to figure out just what Freymore's game was with this unit. It would have been better if we could have interrogated him ourselves, but with his sudden disappearance, I'll just have to go over all his notes with a fine toothed comb."

"Dr. Bradford?" Penny's voice sounded less confident than it had previously been. "I think you might want to see these."

Both of the technicians looked up and realized what the teen was saying. On the screen, there were strange documents, full to the brim with information. Each and every one of these strange document were marked with three letters: M.A.D.

"What? I didn't put those there!" Brenda exclaimed. "Penny, you'd better get off before those things get into your head."

The girl did as she was told, but she was slightly hesitant. "Doctor, it's a pretty nasty feeling to have things go into your head, and one you can't miss. Those files weren't going to get into me, but they might have come out of me. It's just a guess, but maybe there were some files left over from Freymore's info grab?"

"There's no way...they couldn't have..." Brenda was unnerved by the possibility, but it seemed more and more that the possibility Penny suggested had been the correct one.

Sensing that something wrong had happened, Penny rolled back from the computer. There was another twinge in her stomach, but she was too concerned with what was going on with the files. "What's going on? What are those?"

"It appears there something very important documents in here." Dr. Bradford scanned through the files, shock appearing on her face. "Mr. Slickstein, I need you to go get W.O.M.P. personnel. Penny, you stay here. I'll call the hospital and have your therapists come here to continue."

The redhead man nodded. "Who do you want me to get?"

"Chief Quimby, and any of his superiors who are available." Brenda's tone had grown dead serious. "They are going to need to see this."

When she was finally on the ground, Agent Heather pushed herself up into a standing position and attempted to get good look at her surroundings. Unfortunately for her, the whole area was in pitch black darkness without any appearance of a light. Unnerved by the location, she decided to see if either of her team was there. "Hey, Gadget Boy? Brain? You guys out here?"
Neither cyber nor dog responded to her question, but her call did not go unanswered. Once the words came out of her mouth, a screen lit up in the room, revealing a three foot tall orange robot with a simplistic looking face. The robot glanced at her and looked frightened.

"Go-go Gadget Sonic Pulse Gun!" There was silence with nothing happening. The robot looked down at his arm in annoyance. When nothing continued to happen, he raised his arm again and turned to her. "Alright, stay back. I'm…uh…armed!" he said. It was clear he was trying to sound more confident than he actually was. It was kind of pathetic, really.

"Yes, I can see that." Heather laughed but tried to hide it. "It's alright, though. I don't want to hurt-wait a minute." That was when the realization of what she was talking to hit her. "Did you just use a pun?"

"Uh, I guess I did." The robot looked down at his arm. "I didn't want to lie, but I also didn't want to get torn apart."

"Did you just respond to me?" The young agent was amazed. Of course, she had seen robots before. They were rather commonplace small manual tasks, but she had never seen a robot capable of making puns or truly responding to questions.

"Yeah, I can answer questions." The robot smiled for a moment, before a look of fear came to his face. "You're not going to cut me open now, are you?"

"What? No!" This robot's responses were starting to confuse her. She sat down before continuing. "It's just… I've never seen a robot capable of giving answers like you before."

"Ah, that's good then." The robot's smile returned, and it really reminded the young agent of something. "My designation is- oh wait, I wasn't supposed to give that to anyone but the Inspector. You can call me Fidget, then. May I ask your name?"

"It's Heather Connelly." Heather gave the robot a quizzical look. "You can only tell the Inspector? As in Inspector Gadget?"

Fidget nodded. "Indeed. My brother, Digit, and I were charged by our maker, Miss Penelope Dollar, with assisting the Inspector. Unfortunately, we've been detained here, and don't really have a way of contacting anyone, either our maker or her uncle. The master of this facility has imprisoned us here, and I'm afraid he's going to kill Digit." Fear and sadness came to the robot's eyes in a way that would have seemed to be impossible, considering they were formed from pixels. "I'm trapped in here, and there's nothing I can do to save either of us."

"That might not be the case." Heather straightened up, glancing around the room as she did. "Do you have any idea where the door is, Fidget?"

"Yeah, it's right over here." The robot turned, motioning with one arm to a control panel. Without the glow of Fidget's face, it had been invisible, but now that he had turned to it, it could be seen. It was a simple pin-pad code.

"Do you think you could rewire that thing to let us out of here?" the agent asked, examining the device.

Fidget nodded. "Easy. Unfortunately, it was rigged so that if I try to get near it, an electrical pulse from that device will fry my circuits." He motioned to a blue box that was giving off a low hum. "That's also what's keeping me from using any of my gadgets."

"That's it, huh? Well, it's not affecting any of my tools." Heather withdrew her gun. "Stand back,
Fij. I don't know if this is gonna work, but it's worth a try." Aiming at the box, she fired off several rounds into the device. It sparked for a moment before dying.

"You shut it down!" Fidget beamed, both figuratively and literally. "How did you know it was going to do that?"

"I had a hunch it was a problem that could be solved with some lead." The agent casually put the gun back in its holster. "Now, can you get us out of here?"

"Gladly!" The robot set to work on the lock, inserting several wires from his chest into the device. In a moment, two doors slid open, and the light of the hallway streamed in. With that, the two rushed out to seek their missing companions.

"Hey, Brain? You alright?" As Brain came too, he heard a voice speaking to him. Shaking his head, he looked around to figure out where he was and find the source of the voice.

He soon realized that he was locked in a crate-like cage in some sort of robotics lab. There were mechanical pieces strewn everywhere and robots in various state of disrepair were laying on tables and counters. However, there weren't any people present, none the less any people who would have knowing his name.

"Hey! Over here!" The voice was more irritated this time. "I'm over here!"

Brain turned to look where the voice was calling and realized it was one of the robots. Upon closer inspection, he realized that it was one of Penny's robots; the G-11 unit, to be specific. He was strapped to a table will all four limbs outstretched.

What was more startling was that the robot was talking of his own accord. True, Brain hadn't been around when Penny had built the G-units, but he was pretty sure she hadn't given them the ability to talk. Tilting his head, the dog gave the robot a quizzical look.

"Yeah, I know your name." The robot had clearly taken Brain's confusion to be in relation to that knowledge. "I can't explain a lot now, but I think we can help each other right now."

Jerking his head to the right, the robot motioned to a control panel. There it was cluttered over with parts, wrappers, and a few drinks left over by past guards, but it could still be distinguished. "That thing over there is keeping me from activating any of my gadgets. If you can figure out a way to shut that thing down, I think I can get the both of us out of here."

Hearing the suggestion, Brain frowned and gave a look. It was clear enough to get the meaning from. I'm locked up here, too. What do you expect me to do?

"I don't know; throw something!" The robot made an irritated buzzing sound, which sounded like the equivalent of a snort. "All I know is there's nothing I can do until that's shut down."

The dog sighed, but as he looked down, he spotted something that might be able to help. Nearby, a cord that was connected to a power stapler lay just within reach. If he could reach out with his paw and snag it, he might get a shot at the control panel. It was a long shot, but it was better than nothing.

Reaching out, he grabbed at the chord. He succeeded in reaching it, but the dog soon found to his dismay that the stapler itself had snagged on the counter.

Not quite willing to give up yet, the dog yanked harder. After a few good, hard pulls, he succeeded
in yanking the tool off the counter.

As soon as it hit the ground, the stapler went off. The staple it shot out went straight into the air, where it hit a light bulb. The bulb shattered on contact and sent off sparks, which settled onto several of the wrappers lying on the controller. Once they had settled, a fire sprang up, damaging the entire tech around it. In a moment, the sprinkler system kicked in, putting out the fire, but shorting out what was left of the controller. All this happened in less than a minute.

"Huh." The blue robot looked in surprise as the electrically control restraints released him. "That worked better than I could have expected. Good job, Brain."

The dog shrugged modestly before motioning to the lock.

Seeing the gesture, Eleven nodded. "Right. I got you." Hopping down, he rushed over to the cage and unlocked it. "Come on," he said, motioning for Brain to follow him. "We're going to get out of here, but there are some people we need to pick up first. I presume the Inspector came with you. Do you think you can track him?"

Brain nodded. Turning his nose to the ground, the dog started sniffing. After a moment, he finally caught a scent.

"You've found something? Lead on." The blue robot grinned. "I'll have you covered. Go-go Gadget Stun Gun."

"Wowzers," Gadget muttered as he rubbed his head. "That certainly wasn't what I was expecting. You'd think people would be smart enough not to put trap doors in front of their front doors. Someone could get hurt."

The pulled himself up into a standing position and dusted himself off. "We had better be getting a move on," he said aloud. "Heather, Brain, are you ready to go?" He paused for a moment waiting for a response. When none came, he glanced around. "Heather? Brain?"

He found to his disappointment that neither of his partners had tumbled in the same direction that he had. He was all alone in a large, dome like room.

Along all the walls, a variety of different vehicles were parked. They all appeared to be high tech, and a good portion of them had small demon cat emblems on them.

"It seems that slide must have been meant to take different people to different places." Gadget frowned. "Now that makes that slide make even less sense. These cars look really expensive. If I had been a thief, which of course I'm not, I would have had no trouble at all taking some of these. I had better find the owner of this facility and warn him of the danger his possessions are in." He then set out, determined to fulfill this self-assigned mission.

Gadget had no way of knowing it, but at that moment he was not completely alone. Unbeknownst to him, there were cameras filming his every move, and this film was being observed at that very moment by Dr. Focus.

"That's it, inspector," the mad scientist said with a grin. "Just keep going that way. Soon, my men will be able to deal with you permanently."

Unaware of the viewing, Gadget went through the hallways. "Well, for a research facility, this place is pretty empty. Maybe everyone is on break." He shook his head at the idea. "That really is
irresponsible to have everyone on break at once. They should have at least left a couple of people still at their job."

It was then that he heard several voices. "Oh, good. At least I'll be able to ask for some directions." He followed the sound until he came up to a room. Inside, there were five men all sitting around a table. "My good men," Gadget began, entering the room, "I seem to have gotten separated from my companions in a bit of a mix up. You wouldn't mind helping me to figure out where they are, would you?"

Seeing him, the men all got to their feet. One of them pointed to him. "It's Gadget!"

"Oh, so you know me?" Gadget smiled. "That's nice to know. You wouldn't mind helping me to find my companions and a way out."

The one who had spoken grinned. "Oh, we'll help you out..." he said in an ominous voice. "You know what to do, boys!"

To be continued...
"So, Fij, do you have any idea how to get out of this madhouse?" Heather asked as she and her unexpected companion ran through the hallways.

The little white and orange robot shook his head. "I'm afraid not. When Digit and I were brought in, we weren't sapient yet. We can remember only a couple of things from before waking up, but they all have to do with our programming."

"So we're having a guessing game." The redhead sighed. "Figures."

They continued their flight when, all of a sudden, Fidget turned. "Come this way!" He extended his arm back to take her hand and pull her along. "I think I can sense the Inspector's technological frequency signal!"

"His what?" the woman asked.

The robot didn't stop. "I'll explain later. Just come on, I think I know where he is."

"If you're so sure, alright." She frowned but went along with it. If he was wrong, she didn't have a better idea of where to go.

As they dodged around the corner, it soon became clear that he had been right. They could hear several voices speaking, one of them clearly belonging to Gadget. The duo ran into the room where they could hear him. Sure enough, he was there...surrounded by five M.A.D. agents.

"Oh, Agent Connelly, there you are! And you found a new friend." Gadget smiled when he saw them enter the room. "These kind gentlemen have offered to help us find a way out of here. Isn't that nice?"

As he spoke, one of the M.A.D. thugs decided to take advantage of the situation to charge at the inspector, a knife in one hand. Thankfully, Heather and Fidget could see what was happening.

The robot responded first, shooting out his hand so that it caught the thug by the front of his shirt. He then tossed the criminal aside.

Seeing her opportunity, Heather caught Gadget's hand while Fidget did this, pulling him out. The three of them then took off.

"I don't think they want to help us, Gadget Boy," she said as they fled. "Those Cretans work for M.A.D."

"M.A.D.?" Gadget was stunned by that revelation. "That can't be right."

"I'm afraid it is, sir," Fidget added as he ran alongside. "My brother and I were captured and brought here. M.A.D. wants to figure out how Miss Dollar put us together."

"Oh, you know Penny?" Gadget glanced down at the robot. "That's nice. Who are you exactly?"

"My numeral designation is G-12, but I'm also called Fidget." The robot turned for a moment,
launching out a canister of tear gas in an attempt to buy them some time. "Miss Dollar invented me and my brother G-11, or Digit, to assist you, but M.A.D. got to us first. Now, Digit's trapped somewhere down here, the psycho in charge promised to cut him open!"

"That's not very nice." Gadget frowned. "We'd better figure out where he's being held and where Brain is, so we can get out of here."

As the trio ran, they soon rounded a corner…and ended up colliding with several other people who were also going around the obstacle.

"Wowzers." Gadget shook his head as he attempted to steady himself and get a look at who he had collided with. "Brain! There you are! We need to get out of here fast! This is a M.A.D. station!"

"Brilliant deduction, Sherlock," a voice that Gadget didn't recognize snarked.

Gadget turned to look at the speaker. "Oh, you must be Digit, Penny's other robot."

Digit then realized who it was, and he jumped to his feet and saluted. "Oh! You're the Inspector! I am at your service, though my designation is G-11."

"Alright, now that we're all back together, we had better look for a way out of here." Heather peered around a corner. "It looks like there is a stairwell moving up in here. Come on." The five then hurried, hoping to find a way out.

The direction they had taken, however, was well watched, and just the way their captor had been hoping they would go. "Hmm." Dr. Focus frowned as he watched through the security camera. "It seems that the hostages were more resourceful than I expected."

He turned to adjust a knob. "No matter. Intelligent or not, they'd have to be in control of this base to get out of the hallway alive."

As the escapees moved through the stairwell, the corridor became increasingly dark and narrow the farther they went. Soon, they were pretty much moving single file with hardly enough light to see right in front of them.

Gadget frowned. "We'll need some light. Go-go Gadget Lantern!" A hand popped out of his hat, clutching a electric lantern in one hand. "There! Now we'll be able to see around."

Unfortunately, even with the glow of the lantern, what they could see was not very comforting. There was a whole lot of nothing to the front and the walls to either side were barely a shoulder's width apart.

"It doesn't look like we'll be going anywhere if we keep moving this way." Heather frowned at their option. "Maybe we should head back and try again."

"I don't think circling back is going to be a viable option," Fidget commented with a tone of anxiety. He pointed out in the direction they had just come.

Where there had once been an open hallway, there was now an advancing wall. It was coming up behind them, blocking any hope of getting out the narrow hallway by that direction.

"Ahead it is then, I guess," Digit groaned. "Why the heck would anyone build such a lousy hallway?"

Heather peered ahead, trying to see if there was a way out imminent. Instead, what she saw made
everything much worse. "I think that might be the reason." She pointed ahead, and they could now see that there was another wall advancing at them from that side as well.

Gadget frowned. "There's got to be something we can do to stop it. Go-Go Gadget Arms!" He extended out his arm to either side, pressing hard to try to stop the movement of the walls. The twins joined him, pressing hard against the advancing walls, and Heather and Brain did what they could to try to halt their impending doom. However, the attempt was futile, and the walls continued their movement despite the struggle.

"It's not working!" Heather called out. "What can we do?"

"We can't give up!" Gadget called out. By now, the inspector had both feet pushing out behind him and arms ahead, supported only by the fact that the back to back robot twins were directly beneath him, with Brain and Heather were supporting them. However, they couldn't hold this position for much longer.

In the struggle, Fidget briefly lost his footing, and his foot hit a button on Brain's collar. "That was a click! I heard a click!" The orange robot grew excited. "What's happening?"

Brain couldn't answer, but he instantly knew what was happening when he saw the antenna extend from his collar. He could only hope it would work in this miserable place.

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W.O.M.P. HQ

Penny sat alone in the main room at HQ, now more frustrated than ever that her youth meant that she was often left in the dark about things. Dr. Bradford was currently busy filling in as many of the W.O.M.P. higher-ups about the situation. It had been decided that, as a teenager, Penny would not be included in the discussion until her uncle was available as well.

That was when the beeping started up. Penny jumped, glancing around to try to figure out what was going on. "What was that? It seems too quiet to be an alarm." Looking around, she realized that the beeping was coming from a small corner of the room, where a coat hanger was located. "Oh, yeah, that's right," she laughed to herself.

She wheeled around and turned to the coat hanger, where her purse had been hanging. Reaching in, she dug out a small watch, which sure enough was the source of the sound. "I'd forgotten all about this."

She touched the screen, and instantly Brain's face came into the picture. "Brain?" Penny asked, unsure as to why her dog had contacted her. "Is everything alright?"

"Is that Miss Dollar?" an unfamiliar voice near Brain asked. "Can I see her?"

"We don't have time now, Twelve!" another new voice snapped.

"Penny?" This was clearly Gadget. "How did you get this number?"

"I've always had Brain's number," the teen responded in a hasty voice. "What's going on? Are you alright?"

"Alright might be overstating it a bit." Heather's tone conveyed the situation, which was only assisted by Brain turning the camera to reveal the situation.
"Oh, no!" Penny turned white for a moment. "What can I…?" That was when the idea came to her. It was risky, but if she did nothing, her family would die. "Just hold on! I've got an idea."

"Whatever you're doing, you'd better do it fast!" Heather called out. "We're under a bit of pressure at the moment!"

Using DEIPHI, Penny connected onto the internet. "Alright," she called out. "I've noticed you have G-11 and G-12 with you. Can you access G-11's tracking chips? There located on the right side, underneath the wrist."

"I have tracking chips?" Digit checked a small compartment under his wrist. "I guess I have tracking chips."

"We've got them." Heather pushed back harder on the wall. "What now?"

"I've sent an addition into the tracking chips through the signal that connects all my robots," Penny called back. "Uncle Gadget, try to cut through one of the walls and see if there's any circuitry hidden within. If there is, place the chip on it and I'll take it from there."

Gadget frowned. He was still somewhat troubled by the fact that she could contact them from so far away, but he was willing to listen. "Alright. Go-go Gadget Laser!" Focusing the laser on his thumb, he cut through the wall, revealing a meshwork of wiring and circuitry. Taking one of the chips from Digit, he placed it within the cut. "Alright, it's done. Now what?"

"I'm going to hang up now so I can focus on this," the teen answered. "You should hear back from me very soon." With that, she hung up before anyone else could say anything.

Turning back to the main computer, she squinted so as to cause the dim thread be a bit clearer and focused DEIPHI as hard as she could. The attachment she had sent to the tracking chip would allow her to use the stream to slip through the signal into the M.A.D. computer system. "I hope this works," she muttered before taking control.

"Penny, wait!" Gadget called out, but it was too late. The signal had already been broken, and the computer screen slid back into Brain's collar.

"I hope whatever it was she had planned works," Heather said. She was now struggling to hold Digit up, and she could feel that he was losing his grip as well.

"Of course it will work!" Fidget did his best to sound cheerful. "Miss Penny always know what she's doing. We'll be free in no time! Isn't that right, Inspector?"

Gadget bit his lip. True, the Penny he knew seemed to have a good head on her shoulder. Of course, the Penny he knew also had gotten herself experimented on and almost killed because she was trying to help with his cases. "I sure hope so," he responded quietly.

Dr. Focus grinned as he watched the walls slowly come together. The fools were still fighting against it. As if they had any chance. The only reason they were not dead at that very moment was that he found their struggles amusing. However, he had grown tired of their fight, and moved several switches so that the trap would close, killing its victims in the process.

Instead, the walls didn't budge. Indeed, they stopped completely, allowing the intended victims to
relax. "What is going on?" Focus looked down at the control panel and attempted to make the walls close in once more.

This time, not only did the walls fail to close, they began expanding out. Soon, the hallway was open again, and the prisoners were able to move through the passage with relative ease once more.

"What! No!" The M.A.D. scientist was seething. "Someone's in the mainframe!" Turning to a radio, he sent out an alarm. "There's a hacker in the system! Find where they are and shut them down now!"

Turning away from the computer, he stormed out. Someone might have tampered with the system, but they weren't getting Gadget and his team out alive. That was something Focus was determined to make certain of.

"Well," Heather laughed as the band rushed through the now expanding hall. "It seems Penny came through. Sure was a lucky break that she reached us."

"But what did she do?" Gadget asked, glancing around.

"She probably figured out some way to hack into M.A.D.'s server using whatever it was that she downloaded onto Digit's tracking chip," Fidget suggested.

As they ran, they soon came to an area where the sliding door pulled back completely, revealing an empty room with blank white walls. However, as soon as the five had made it in, a glass object like a large, upside down trapezoid rose up from the middle of the floor.

"Stay back," Gadget said, placing himself between his companions and the shape. "We don't know what this is going to do."

Just as he spoke, however, the last thing any of them expected happened: Penny appeared, standing in the middle of the shape. "It's alright, Uncle," the girl assured him. "This is a hologram station. It's used for communication."

Brain was the first to move. He was excited to see his girl, but the lack of a scent was disconcerting to him. He looked up quizzically, scratching at the side of the glass to make sure nothing was wrong.

Brain wasn't the only one who was surprised by the sudden appearance. "Penny?" Gadget asked, coming up to the glass to try to figure out what was going on. "How are you doing this?"

"That's what Dr. Bradford and I discovered about DEIPHI," the teen answered. "Somehow, the computer allows me to get into and take control of any system I can come in contact with, even long distance, as long as I have a physical entry point somewhere. I can see the information stream as threads that I can control and travel through. That's how I can be 'here,' even though I'm actually in W.O.M.P. HQ. Once I'm in a system, I'm able to do whatever I like."

"So I'm guessing that was you who got us out of that bind?" Heather asked.

Penny nodded. "Yep. It was really close, too. Whoever used to be in control was about to speed things up, but I was able to stop them."

Despite the anxiety he felt over her situation, Gadget couldn't help but smile as small feeling of paternal pride came to him. "Thank you for that. Getting crushed would have made finishing this mission rather difficult."
"I do have some good news about that, too," the teen continued. "The reinforcements that W.O.M.P. sent after you have arrived. I've already filled them in on your location, so they should be arriving at the base at any moment. Do you have any idea what was happening in the base."

"We sure do, ma'am," Digit answered with a salute as he and Fidget took their place in front of the hologram station. "They're holding their stolen tech in here, and experimenting with it to utilize it to their own ends. Twelve and I would have ended up with that fate, too, had the Inspector and his team not shown up."

Their sudden appearance seemed to startle Penny. The girl bent down, looking the robot's clear in the face. "G-11? You can talk?"

"We can both talk, Miss Dollar," Fidget chimed in. "Didn't you design us to be able to?"

Penny just looked slack-jawed at the duo and shook her head. She hadn't had time to program their vocal boxes, and when she had started them up, she had decided that they really hadn't needed voices anyway. Their sudden ability to speak, none the less of their own volition, was an astonishing discovery.

"Huh, I guess that's why that M.A.D. scientist was freaked out by us talking, too." Fidget shrugged.

"So, no one really knows what's going on with them," Heather said, a tone of urgency in her voice. "How nice. So, we're safe for now, but considering this is a M.A.D. base, it's not going to stay that way for long. So, Penn, you've got any ideas about where we should go to next?"

"Oh, right." Penny summoned up what appeared to be a map of the center. "We're here," she said, pointing to a room in the center of the map. "There's a pretty straightforward way out of the building if you follow that hall in the northwest direction and head up. There should be reinforcements there once you arrive. You won't have to worry about built in booby-traps; I'll be suppressing those. Just keep in mind, they still might."

Before she could finish what she was saying, huge pulse blast came out of nowhere, shattering the glass trapezoid. The remaining five were able to avoid the brunt of the blast because of the cover provided by the object, but the shrapnel caused by the blast did result in some minor injuries to the organic members of the group.

Not that they had too long to worry about minor cuts. Storming the room from the doorway they had entered, M.A.D. agents had begun flooding in. They were severely hindered by the narrow pathway, and eventually the door was forced shut and locked, but not before a handful of the heavily armed enemy made it through.

"Go-go Gadget Shield!" Gadget called out, summoning up his energy shield. Heather and the twins hurried to pull out their own defenses and Brain was able to charge at and hold back a few of the enemy who were able to make it past Gadget's barrier.

The team wasn't held up for long, though. A few moments after the battle had begun, a new doorway opened up, allowing the five to slip back into a new passageway before shutting and locking behind them.

"Looks like Penny's still got our backs," Gadget said. He brushed a small trail of blood off his cheek. "We're not out of trouble yet, though." He looked up, speaking directly to his niece. "So, where now?"

In response, another doorway opened up and the lights flashed on, revealing a stairway leading
upwards.

Spurred on by the tell-tale sound of an attempt at forced exit by their foe, the quintet hurried up the passageway. When they made it all the way up, they found themselves only several rooms away from the main exit.

Unfortunately, they also found their way into an ambush. In the room just one away from the exit, Dr. Focus stood with a good number of M.A.D. thugs with him.

Gadget pushed his way in front of his team. "My name is Detective John Brown of the World Organization of Mega Powers," he declared in a firm voice. "Everyone here is under arrest for compliance with a criminal organization, theft, and attempted murder. Comply now and things will go easier for you."

"You sound so confident, detective," Focus laughed. "You don't seem to realize that you are the one who is surrounded."

"That's what you think," Heather smirked. "Hey, Charm, show these jerks what you can do!"

As she spoke, the base's defenses started up and turned on the M.A.D. agents. Unfortunately, it seemed Focus was prepared for that. Taking out a small remote with a button, he clicked it.

There was an intense shockwave, and everything electronic went out. The lights, the computers, everything was destabilized and down for the count. Even Gadget and the twins were stunned. While nothing vital was damaged, they were left with only the most basic of functions.

"That was an E.M.P. pulse, Miss Connelly," Focus explained. "True, it leaves us without technological defense, but it cuts you off from your hacker friend. As a bonus, it means only you and the dog have any form of defenses left." He smirked. "So, what will you do now?"

Penny gave a cry as she was thrown out of the computer system. The sudden shut down had practically sent her hurtling out.

Now aware of her own body, she noted that she wasn't feeling all that good. She was practically starving, and her head ached and vision spotted like she'd been exposed to a thousand camera flashes. She groaned and leaned back so that her chair rolled away from the monitor. She'd need a moment to recover.

Which, of course, meant that was the moment that someone came in. "Penny," she could vaguely hear Dr. Bradford say, "we've finished discussing-Penny, what's wrong!"

"Penny, are you sick?" That was Chief Quimby. He must have come in with Dr. Bradford.

Not bothering to answer the questions about herself, Penny shook her head. "No. Uncle Gadget and the others; they're in trouble."

Which, of course, meant that was the moment that someone came in. "Penny," she could vaguely hear Dr. Bradford say, "we've finished discussing-Penny, what's wrong!"

"Penny, are you sick?" That was Chief Quimby. He must have come in with Dr. Bradford.

Not bothering to answer the questions about herself, Penny shook her head. "No. Uncle Gadget and the others; they're in trouble."

"You're not well." Dr. Bradford frowned. Touching a slot on the back of the chair, a pair of handles popped out, and she began wheeling the teen towards the door. "We'd better get you back to St. Gemma's. You've done enough today."

"Please!" The girl was in a panic. "Hurry! Send help!"

"We are," Quimby assured her as they left. "I'll make sure they're alright; you listen to the doctor."
Penny looked back in distress, but eventually nodded. "Alright," she said. "Just hurry, please."

Once they had left, Quimby turned to the council. "Rescue Team One," he called out, "this is HQ. Juarez, what have you found?"

"You're not going to believe this, chief," the man on the other end of the line responded. "It's a totally dead M.A.D. base. There are people in here, but their entire tech base is defunct. You want us to take the place."

"Do it," Quimby responded, "but be careful. It seems some of our own are in there, and they need help."

Juarez nodded. "Got it. Go in and extract, and don't have guns blazing. Ten-four."

Seeing the danger they were in, Heather withdrew her gun and Brain joined by her side, his hackles raised. "We might not be able to do much," she said in a low tone, "but you can be darned sure we're not going down without a fight."

"Brave sentiments, but ultimately foolish." Focus smirked. "Kill them."

In a moment, the M.A.D. agents charged. Moving in response, Heather and Brain attacked. They moved as fast as they could, Brain dealing with the enemies closer and Heather providing cover fire. They moved feverishly, understanding the desperation of the situation.

Things were getting more and more heated when the banging started up. Finally, the door burst open and men flooded in. "Alright! Everyone freeze!" a man at the lead barked. "This is W.O.M.P.! We're taking charge here!"

With the sudden influx of W.O.M.P. agents, there was a brief burst of chaos as the two groups struggled to figure out who to face. In the end, however, the woefully underpowered M.A.D. agents were suppressed and placed under arrest. The day had been won.

Not that Focus wanted to admit it. "No, keep fighting!" He snarled as some of his men backed down. "We can stop them! We can-!" He was cut off as Heather hit him hard from behind.

"You know your rights," the agent said. "Everything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law." She smiled as she cuffed him and pulled him up.
"So keep blabbing. You'll only give us more fodder for in court."

"Alright, now I'm mad," he sneered as he was led away.

In the calm, Heather leaned against a wall inside one of the rescue jets to rest, stroking Brain's head as she did so. Gadget and the twins had been taken here to get their systems working again. Thus, once the duo got medical attention themselves, they could only wait until they got word of their companions.

"You did good out there, boy," she said, scratching the dog behind the ear.

Brain glanced up at her and let out a whine before closing his eyes. He was too tired to talk right now.
"Agent Connelly?" She turned when she heard the private call out to her. "Call on line one from Chief Quimby."

"Got it, thanks." She pushed herself up, placing her coat under the dog's head before making her way over to the computer. Pressing a button on the control panel, she turned to the monitor. "I'm here, Chief. What's up?"

"What happened in there?" Quimby asked. "Are you and Gadget alright?"

"Yeah we're fine. It was a close call, though." She stretched a bit before continuing. "Gadget Boy and Penny's robots are resting. There wasn't a lot of damage done, thank goodness, but they haven't gotten up yet. The doc says Gadget should be awake within the hour."

"Good." Quimby nodded, but a concerned look was still on his face. "You'll be flown back to the states straight away. When you make it here, I want you to come to HQ immediately."

"Immediately?" Heather looked confused. "By the time we get there, it'll be two o'clock in the morning."

The chief frowned. "I know, but I'm afraid this is urgent. Let Gadget know as soon as he's awake. This concerns him more than you."

"Alright. I guess we'll see you then." The monitor then flickered off.

"Huh," she mumbled to herself as she sat back down. "I wonder what it was that was so important it couldn't wait."

M.A.D. Castle, ?

That night, Claw sat awake, as he often did on nights when Gadget got some sort of victory. It had been hours since he had received word that the Antarctica center had been lost and Focus arrested. The villain had yet to calm down from the outburst.

Despite the massive losses this meant for him, it wasn't only the loss of the base that aggravated him. It wasn't even the loss of all the robotics within or one of his top scientists. No. What was angering Claw more than ever was that it was Gadget who had done so. The buffoon who had dared to laugh at Claw had once again caused a set back to the despot.

As he was brooding on how to deal with his foe, the villain almost didn't notice the rather timid knock on the door. "What do you want?" he snarled.

It was one of the newer recruits, one of the teenagers. The kid saluted as hastily as he could, accidentally punching himself as he did so. That always amused Claw when that happened. "Sir," the teen said as quickly as possible. "Talon is returning and has requested to speak to you on the monitor. He brings news."

"It had better be good news," the villain grumbled.

The young grunt's response surprised him. "It is, sir. The mission was a complete success."

Claw's tone softened when he heard that. "Is that so? Perhaps this is what I need."

Grabbing a large armchair that he had previously upturned, he set it back in front of a desk holding a
personal computer. As he settled down, the grey tomcat jumped onto the desk and curled up besides the computer.

Flicking the monitor on, Claw opened up the communications tab. Talon's face appeared in a moment. "I have been told you have good news for me," the older cyber commented.

"I do, Dr. Claw," the teen responded with a salute. "The Montanari Family has been dealt with."

Claw started stroking the cat as he spoke. "Did they take our agreement?"

"Carlo Montanari was firmly against handing his power over to you." The boy shrugged. "Regrettably, I wasn't able to convince him otherwise, so I was forced to make an example of him. Thankfully, his successor was not so stubborn. Malware is currently connecting all their files to the main M.A.D. database."

"Than our control in Italy is complete." Claw gave a dark laugh. "You have done well, my nephew. Return to the base as soon as possible."

"As you command, uncle." The boy gave a salute before the screen flickered off.

"Well," Claw commented to the cat once the discussion had finished. "Focus may have allowed Gadget a victory, but at least not all my men are incompetent fools."

Wednesday, April 9th, 2087

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Do we really have to be here?" Gadget asked as he and his companions were waiting in the main meeting room. "The last time we heard from Penny, she was able to travel through a computer to see us in Antarctica and got thrown out of it when the tech was disconnected. I really need to make sure she's alright."

"Penny's fine," Brenda responded. She was currently running a diagnostic on the twins to make sure everything was alright. "The effect of using DEPHI to the extent she did left her tired, and her increased metabolism gave her an appetite, but she's perfectly fine. You'll be able to see her soon, but what you're going to be told here is more important."

"We're going to be allowed to see Miss Dollar, too, right?" Fidget asked. He and Digit were sitting on the doctor's analyzing table.

Brenda nodded. "You should be able to, provided we find no examples of M.A.D. tampering in your programming." She shrugged. "You should be fine, though. The programming you two have is amazing. I have no idea how Penny set you up to be able to talk and make decisions for yourselves."

"Can we start this, please?" Gadget's tone held uncharacteristic impatience. "If this is very important, we should get started as soon as possible."

"Agreed, detective. They were waiting for me to arrive." Everyone turned to see as General Sir entered, followed by several other W.O.M.P. officers. Chief Quimby and Colonel Nozziar were among them.

"Sorry about the wait," the general said as he took a seat. "I came as soon as I got the memo."
"What is going on here?" Gadget asked again. "What's so important?"

"Doctor, I believe you should begin," Chief Quimby said, motioning to Dr. Bradford.

"Fidget, Digit, would you two and Brain mind leaving for a moment?" When the twins and the dog complied, she went and joined the others at the table. "John, you are aware that we were running some tests earlier on DElPHI, the computer planted in Penny's head. Well, as we were doing the work, we found out that its connection to her granted her some…odd abilities."

"She mentioned that when she contacted us," Heather commented. "Lucky for us she could, too. The five of us would be flattened right now if she hadn't have come through for us."

"True, but it's more than that." Brenda sighed and her mind raced to figure out how to continue. "When we were doing the test, we discovered that she had files in her head, files that she probably had downloaded when Freymore used her as a channel. One of those files was a connection, along with password, to the lowest level of the M.A.D. data base."

"That's a good thing, isn't it?" Gadget asked. "That means we'll always be able to tell what they're going to do next."

"Well, yes and no." Quimby pressed a few buttons that called the screen up. "There's not a lot here. As Dr. Bradford pointed out, this is only what the lowest levels of M.A.D. sees. Thus, while we do have a foothold, we don't know what their higher levels are up to."

"There is some good news," General Sir said, adjusting the screen to call up some files. "Due to these files, we now know exactly how much M.A.D. knows about you, and what they are doing with cybernetics."

Gadget nodded. "That's all very well and good, but I fail to see why it needed to be stated tonight instead of waiting until later."

There was a moment of silence as the others in the room glanced at each other. Finally, Quimby spoke. "Perhaps it's better if you see it for yourself."

He clicked a link on the database, and a list appeared on the screen of the most wanted enemies of M.A.D., along with the bounties Claw had placed on their head. "Well," Gadget commented as he perused the list. "I see that I'm the number one, but we've known that for a long time. The bounty does surprise me, though. I think Claw should be offering more than twenty five dollars and sixty cents if he really wants me dead."

There was a number of sad looks passed around the table, but no one groaned like they might have under other circumstances. "That's $25.6 billion, John, not $25.60," Brenda commented, "but that's not what we wanted you to see. Scroll down to number 17."

"Alright," the cyber responded as he did as he was instructed. "The price for number 17 is $14.5 million and it's…Penelope Dollar." He turned pale as he read the words. He knew M.A.D. knew about Penny due to the work she had done with her team, but he hadn't guessed they had a price on her head.

"Click on it," Quimby said. "You're not going to like what you see, but you need to know."

Once more, Gadget did as he was instructed. "This is everything they have on her," he said aloud, more to himself than to anyone else. "Her age, her birth date, pictures, videos-wait!" He jumped in shock when he saw some of the images. "That can't be right! She so young in these!"
Sure enough, as he clicked on each video, the horrible truth played out right in front of his eyes. Penny at nine struggling to escape from a flooding elevator and only barely avoiding drowning. Penny at eight about to be thrown from a cliff by a M.A.D. agent and only escaping death by pointing out that there were witnesses. Penny at eight tied up and left on a conveyor belt to be cut in half by a laser and only escaping by cutting her ropes with a nearby diamond. Penny at seven strapped down to a machine ready to crush her only to be rescued by Brain last minute.

Gadget watched silently, unable to say anything. He had turned paper white and tears were streaming down his face. He couldn't believe everything that had happened to Penny, his Penny, right under his nose. The many times her life had been in danger because of her escapades following him, and he never even knew. The shock of it all hit him hard and he could barely move.

The others were startled by the revelation, too, but not the extent Gadget was. Once the slideshow was over, Heather reached over and patted his shoulder. "Hey, Gaj, you alright?" she asked, trying to think of something comforting to say.

All Gadget did in response was take off his hat. "If you would excuse me for a moment," he said in a low tone before standing up. He then proceeded to walk over to a garbage can on the other side of the room, lean into it, and begin to vomit.

To be continued…
Thursday, April 10, 2087

St. Gemma Galgani Rehabilitation Hospital, Metro City

"Uncle Gadget, what wrong?"

"Hm? Wrong, why would you say anything's wrong?" Gadget asked, trying to force a smile as he spoke. He had been visiting his niece at the hospital, just the two of them, and had been doing his best to act like everything was normal. However, he was never the best at hiding his emotions. Despite his best efforts, he had been acting somewhat aloof for the whole visit.

Penny frowned, maneuvering her wheelchair so she was directly in front of him. "Uncle, I know you better than that. You always act quiet and distant when something's bothering you." She took his hands and looked him straight in the eye. "Please, I want to help you, but I can't do that when you are hiding things."

Gadget attempted to smile again, but at the mention had hiding things, his composure broke. "Hiding things. I suppose that's the problem at the root of everything."

"What do you mean?" she asked, confused by the way he had put his words.

He sighed as stood up and walk towards the door, running a hand through his hair as he tried to think of what to say next. "I...know what you have been hiding from me. How you've been following me on my missions and helping me. How this was happening even before your solo stint. How this started back when you were seven."

The girl's heart stopped when she heard this. She had thought that she had done a good job of hiding those activities, though a part of her always supposed her uncle would find out eventually. She did her best not to let him know because she knew it would hurt him.

"Uncle," she said after a moment of utter silence, "I'm sorry. I didn't want you to get upset..."

"Don't worry. I'm not mad." He chuckled, but the laugh was dry and lacking in any humor. "This is my fault, I guess. What sort of uncle doesn't notice that his own niece is following him around the world?"

Penny bit her lip. Despite his reassurances, she kind of wished he would get mad and yell at her. The yelling would be preferable to this utter brokenness. "Please, don't blame yourself," she said. "No one knew, except me and Brain. We hid it from everyone, not just you."

"M.A.D. knew." He turned, walked over to the bed, and sat down with his head in his hands. "They had computer records about everything. They have files on you dating back to second grade. I can only thank my lucky stars they focused more on me than on you, but they still knew. They even knew about how good you are at escapes." He looked up, and there were tears in his eyes. "If I had to guess, I'd say that's why Freymore put you in that wheelchair." He slumped over again. "If only I had noticed sooner..."

"Uncle Gadget, please listen to me." Penny joined him at the bedside and maneuvered so she was
sitting next to him. "You didn't make that choice, I did. I'm the one who's at fault for my decisions, not you."

Gadget sighed and leaned back, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. "I suppose," he sighed. "It doesn't make me feel any better about it though. The one thing I don't get is why did you come with me? If you wanted to know what was going on, why didn't you ask? I would have talked everything out with you. Why did you feel the need to risk yourself like that?"

Now it was Penny's turn to sit in silence as she tried to figure out how to put her words. "It's because I didn't want to lose you."

That took him by surprise. "Lose me? Why on earth would you lose me? Penny, I'd never leave you for good."

"Not intentionally," she responded, "but you kept getting hurt. I'd felt fine about the danger back when you had a partner, but things got worse when you started working solo. Most of the time it was small things, but then that day came when you were ambushed. You even lost your arm and nearly died, all because you didn't have anyone to watch your back. I thought having me watch your back in the shadows would be better than nothing, since it meant you weren't all alone."

That further took him off guard. Gadget had always assumed that she took what he said at face value. After all, that's what he did when he was told something. "If that was your problem, why didn't you tell me? I could have attempted to get some time off until a partner could be found."

"Would you have?" she asked, and her voice shook as tears began welling in her eyes. "Or would you have told me that I was worrying too much? That I needed to relax and trust that everything was going to work out, all while you repeatedly have to be put back together until there isn't enough left to put back together?" By now, tears were flowing freely down her face. "I saw Claw murder Mom and Dad. I can still remember it. I didn't want him to take you away, too."

Gadget was about to insist that he would have listened to her, but thought a moment before speaking. Finally, he sighed. "You're right," he said, pulling her closer. "I probably wouldn't have listened to you. I haven't been very good at that, have I?" He chuckled, giving the first genuine smile he had made that day. "But the last thing I wanted was for that monster to overwhelm your life. He had taken your parents, and right in front of you, too. I thought that if I kept you at a distance from what I did, it would make it easier for you to recover. So I did my best to keep you from everything related to M.A.D." He laughed again. "Look at how well that went."

"If it makes you feel any better, Uncle," the teen said, wrapping her arm around his waist, "I think you've done a pretty good job. I do miss my parents, but I think they'd be proud of how you've taken care of me. I love you."

"I love you, too." He turned and hugged her close. When they broke away, he smiled at her. "From now on, I'll try to do my best not to dismiss your concerns. In exchange, you won't be keeping anymore secrets from me. Alright?"

"Alright." She wiped several tears off her cheek. "I suppose I'm going to be punished now, huh?"

Gadget gave a glance over to the now empty wheelchair. "I think what's already happened has been hard enough already. That said, it will be a long time before I allow you to go running off on your own without checking in with me."

"That makes sense," she responded with a sad smile.
"But we don't need to talk about that now." He took her hand. "I'm pretty sure this is the first time in a while it's just been the two of us in quite a while. I've missed you a lot and I'd rather talk about happy things right now."

"I recently got a new science-fiction book." As she spoke, Penny pulled out a small reading-tablet. "I could read it to you, if you'd like."

"I'd like that a lot." Gadget moved so that the two were leaning back in the bed.

Turning on the tablet, Penny opened the book and began to read. "The last drops of the thundershower had hardly ceased falling when the Pedestrian stuffed his map into his pocket…"

Chapter End Notes

Author's note: So, this was originally going to be part of the last chapter, but I felt it would have made that chapter too long. It was still too important to leave out completely, so here it is no. I hope you liked it.-Silver_Warrior_Wolf.

P.S.: The book they are reading is real. Those would be the opening words to "Out of the Silent Planet," by C.S. Lewis. That book and its squeals are overlooked treasures of Science Fiction, in my opinion.
Monday, May 5, 2087

Metro City Subway Station, Metro City

"Are you sure you're ready for this, Penny?" Gadget asked. He and Penny were standing at the subway station, waiting for the train that would take her to her school. She had recently been discharged from the rehab hospital and was eager to jump back into her old schedule, though he was not quite so certain. "After all, the school year's almost over. If you want to get more accustomed to your wheelchair first, and then go back in the fall, I'm sure I could have that arranged."

Penny shook her head, adjusting her uniform as she did so. "I've been practicing with this and my crutches for ages, Uncle. I'll be fine. Besides, Rheeci's going to be on here, too. It's not a big deal."

Gadget gave a nervous smile. "Alright then. You'll be sure to check up with me before lunch, right?"

"That's what the holodeck's for," she responded. "Besides, you'll be able to contact me though the speaker, remember?" She lifted up a pendant she was wearing, which was shaped like a gear.

"And you know not to strain yourself to much?" he continued. "You don't want to cause more problems with your back or pass out because of DElPHI."

Penny smiled, realizing he was more trying to relieve his own anxieties than nag her. "Uncle Gadget, I'll be fine," she laughed. "I've been at Riverside for some time now, and they've got plenty of wheelchair accessible facilities. If I need any help, I can ask for it there and you have my assurance I won't use DElPHI unless its life or death. If I need you, we'll be in touch."

"Alright then, if you're so sure." He leaned down to hug her. "Just please don't take any unnecessary risks."

"I won't," she promised, returning the embrace. "Just you don't let Fidget experiment with the oven again."

"I could've told him that wasn't how you made a casserole," he sighed, remembering an incident not long ago.

Their goodbyes were interrupted by the arrival of the train. "The Yellow Line train is now boarding," an announcer called out.

"Well, that's my train." Penny wheeled around. Before she headed out, she waved. "I'll meet you here this afternoon. Bye!" With that, she headed off.

"I'll see you then," Gadget called out. It seemed odd to him for her to go to school on a train instead of a bus, but he supposed it was a bit different since she was going to a private school.

As he left the station, his mind wandered on the recent events. Thankfully, things had been rather calm ever since they had caught Dr. Focus in Antarctica. He and Heather had a few cases, but none of them proved to be anything major.
"Maybe Claw's taking a bit of a vacation?" Gadget mused to himself. "I could imagine one would want to go on a vacation after you spent three years in prison." He then frowned at his own thought. "I wonder where he'd go for vacation. No respectable resort would give him a reservation, and I've never heard of a M.A.D. resort."

He continued pondering the conundrum of where the M.A.D. overlord took his vacations as he wandered to where he had left the Gadgetmobile. This train of thought might have continued all the way home if it wasn't for the fact that as soon as he sat down, his right hand started ringing.

"What the heck?" he exclaimed, looking around for a moment. It took a little while, but he finally figured out that it was his hand that was ringing. "Oh, it's the Super-Secret Gadget Phone! The chief must have a mission." Adjusting his thumb and pressing his hand to the side of his head, he answered the call. "Gadget here. Is that you, chief?"

"I'm afraid not, Inspector." Fidget's voice was almost apologetic as he answered.

"Oh, Officer Fidget, I wasn't expecting you to call." Gadget was somewhat disappointed, but hid it as he spoke. "I've just dropped Penny off at her train. Is everything going well at home?"

"Well, that's kinda what I was calling about." The apologetic tone in the robot's voice became even clearer. "Since you and Miss Penny left so early, I decided I was going to try to make breakfast."

Knowing the little robot's track record with cooking appliances was worse than his own, Gadget prepared himself for the worst. "And how did everything go?"

"Well…" Fidget began, but he was cut off before he could finish.

"Hey, are you done in there?" Digit's voice, though slightly muffled, was rather easy to hear. "The fire department says it's safe to go back into the house and they've got all the egg scraped off the ceiling, but the toaster's melted beyond further use!"

Gadget supposed he should have been upset, but he couldn't help but find it all kind of funny. "Alright, I get the jist of it. I was meaning to get a look around the city anyways; I might as well get a new toaster while I'm at it. You guys and Brain will be alright without me, right?"

"Got it!" The enthusiasm returned to the little robot's voice. "Digit and I were going to help Dr. Bradford studies and sends out our blueprints anyway, and Brain says he's been looking forward to some time to himself."

"Wait, you can understand what Brain says?" The inspector was surprised by this revelation.

"You can't?" came back the response. "Huh. I thought everyone could. He's pretty laconic and to the point."

"Well, we'd better get ready to go. See you when you and Miss Penny get home!" With that, the little robot hung up.

The call now finished, Gadget examined his options. "I guess breakfast at home is out. I wonder if that bakery I liked is still open." With that, he drove off, determined to find out how much of his city had changed.
At the same time, Dr. Claw sat in front of his monitor. It had been some time since he had a personal hand in the affairs of M.A.D., and he thought it was time to mend that problem. As such, he had decided to reach out to those corporations willing to work with M.A.D.

As he adjusted his screen, an image of a young man with brown hair came on to the screen. When he spoke, he had a London accent to his voice. "This is Siren Cosmetics, how can I-" He cut himself off when he realized who he was talking to. "Oh, uh, welcome, Dr. Claw, sir! We haven't heard from you in such a long time-"

"Spare me the small talk," he said in a voice that was almost a growl. "You know who I want to speak to."

"Oh, course, sir," the secretary said with a bow. "I'll connect you to her right away."

After a moment's wait, the screen changed. This time, a dark haired woman was on screen. She looked to be about Claw's age, though the effect did not diminish her looks. "Ah, Dr. Claw! My favorite customer!" the woman exclaimed. "It's been quite a while."

"It has indeed, Miss Molly," Claw responded. "The Cistern was not my preferred choice for some time off, but I intend to return right to where I was before. As such, I will need your help."

"I suppose you don't mean in the cosmetic department."

The woman smiled. "Very well. What can Charybdis do for you?"

He leaned back in his chair as he spoke. "Regretfully, during my time away a portion of M.A.D.'s weapons stock was squandered. Furthermore, a good portion of what was left has recently been appropriated by W.O.M.P."

"So you wish to replenish your stock." Miss Molly nodded as she listened. "Well, we can certainly help you out with that. While Charybdis still primarily works out of England, we have recently been successful in starting some channels across the pond. If you can get several of your agents to come in contact with some of mine, we can send over the completed catalog of what we have. I do hope what we have to offer doesn't disappoint." She pressed a few buttons of her own, sending over a list of her agents and where to contact them.

"Your organization is one of the few connections I have that has yet to disappoint," he said in response. "I will make sure agents are sent out to collect. Once we have the catalog, I will personally place the orders."

"I can't wait to hear from you," Molly replied flirtatiously. "Until then."

Claw nodded. "Until then." With that, he ended the conversation.

Switching over to another screen, he called up one of his lieutenants. "Montan, come in."

The screen waivered for a moment before the face of the lieutenant came on screen. "I'm here, Claw," Montan said, making the salute as he spoke. "What do you want me to do?"

"I have gotten in contact with Charybdis and they will be sending agents to deliver their catalog to us. I want you to select agents to go out and collect the pieces and bring them to me." Claw sent over the list of destinations as he gave the instructions.

Montan took the list and skimmed it over before he spoke again. "I hear ya, sir. I think I've already got some men in the area. I'll send them out right away."
"Very good. I expect them no later than the end of today. They had better not fail." With that, the screen flickered off.

Metro City Yellow Line Train

Once Penny had gotten on board the train, things had started out pretty smoothly. To her relief, the handicapped section was rather close to where she had gotten on, so all she had to do was wheel over to the section and move into the area designated for wheelchairs.

Now that she was on board and settled in, she decided to go over her homework one more time before arriving at school. After all, even during her time in the hospital, she had been given supplementary work to do so she wouldn't be too far behind in her classes when she got back.

She had pulled out her computer and was going over the assignments when someone approached her and placed a hand on her shoulder. Assuming it was Rheeci, she looked up. "Hey, I wasn't expecting you until-" she started, but cut herself off when she realized it was a woman she had never met before in her life. "Um, hello?"

"Hi there!" the woman said in an ultra-sugary voice. "I just saw you get on the train, and I wanted to say was you are doing is just so inspiring!"

"Um, okay…" This was just weirding Penny out. "Do I know you?"

"Nope!" The woman shook her head. "I just saw you get on the train, and since you are wearing that uniform, I guess you were headed to that private school."

Looking down at the black skirt, white blouse, navy vest, and gold and white tie that made up the Riverside uniform, Penny wondered what the heck this woman was getting at. "Alright, I guess."

"It's just so brave of you to be attending school while you're stuck in that wheelchair!" The woman looked like she was tearing up. "I just couldn't imagine having the courage to do such a thing!"

As she was speaking, the train came to a stop. "Oh, this is where I get out. Good luck, and keep up courage!" With that, she ran out just as Rheeci came on board.

"Hey, Penny!" the other girl called out as she came up. "You ready to be back in school?"

"I've been ready for weeks," the blonde responded. "It's funny how old hospital rooms get."

"So, who was that you were talking to?" Rheeci asked. "One of your therapists?"

Penny shook her head. "I have no idea. She just out of the blue came up to me and told me I'm an inspiration."

"That's funny." Rheeci frowned when she heard this. "I thought your uncle and Doc Bradford were trying to keep your robots on the down low."

"They are. That's the weird thing." The younger teen frowned as she continued. "I think she was inspired by me going to school in a wheelchair."

"Well, if a teenagers going to school impresses her, she must come on this train to get inspired a whole lot." Rheeci touched her chin in thought. "Maybe being so easily inspired makes her good at designing or something. That way, she can always come up with something new and fresh."
Penny shrugged, just wanting to drop the subject. "Who knows? So, did you get any farther in that biology subject?"

"Oh, yes!" The older girl brightened up at the mention of her favorited topic. "I have indeed. I've gotten the flight patterns of the Canadian Goose down pat, and I'm getting there with the Dark-Eyed Junco. That program you recommended helped a whole lot."

"I'm glad to be of assistance," Penny replied, leaning back as they started to compare projects.

22nd Street, Metro City

"There's a target if I've ever seen one," Rat muttered to himself. The twenty-four year old thug was one of M.A.D.'s newer members. At the moment, he had been left to his own devices and did what many M.A.D. agents did in their spare time: hone their skills. At that very moment, he had picked out an older looking man who was chatting absent-mindedly on his cell phone. Seeing this as a great chance to attempt to pick a pocket, he moved in for the score.

Before he could reach his target, though, his communicator went off. This caught the attention of not only the target, but everyone else as well; as such, he was forced to abandon the idea of a theft. "He-he," he chuckled, pointing to his pocket. "Guess I left the volume up to loud. Better go get that."

With that, he slunk off into an alley to find out what he was being called in for.

"Rat here," he said, making a salute the camera. "What do you want, boss?"

On screen was Montan. "Got an assignment for you, boy. This one comes from the very top, too. Claw wants something picked up and delivered to him."

The mook beamed when he heard this. None of the newcomers had been given a mission direct from Claw before, so this sounded very important and official. "I'm the guy for the job! What do you want me to do?"

Montan called up a file, which appeared on the mook's communicator. In the file was a picture of a pretty blonde woman. "This is Charybdis agent Susan Dione. She has the package you are to deliver. Meet up with her, get the device, and bring it to the fencing point. You got that?"

"Yeah, I got it." Rat nodded as he looked over the notes. "Should be easy pie."

"It should be," the senior agent agreed. "Make sure you don't mess it up." With that, the connection was severed, leaving the agent with his instructions.

Looking over it one more time, the young man smiled. "First big job, and it's an easy delivery. Things are looking up for me yet." Shutting off the device, he headed out. "Crystal Waters Mall, here I come."

Bradford Tech, Metro City

That early Monday morning was a unique one for the younger members of the Bradford Team. At that time, Dr. Bradford herself was hard at work going over a system of files she had gained from Penny in relation to the sudden sapience of Fidget and Digit, and would soon be working with the twins themselves to approve what would be sent out to other labs for analysis. This meant, however, that a lot of the members of the team were left with free time on their hands.
"Come on, get 'em, Blaziken!" Slickstein called out as he focused on the controls for the Pokemon battle.

Dabble laughed at his opponent. "Come on, everyone knows Psychic Types have an advantage over Fighting types. You're no match for my Delphox!"

"Maybe, but you're only at level fifty-two, whereas I've reach level eighty-seven." He glanced over his shoulder at the one observer in the room. "Come on, Will, you tell him!"

The teen had been standing at a nearby station, working on repairs to several communicators that had been brought in. "Oh, no," William responded, not even bothering to look up from his work. "I know how competitive you guys get when it comes to video games. I'm staying out of this."

"Suit yourself," the older boy responded. "Yeah! You're stunned!"

"Not for long," Dabble responded.

"Uh, hello?" a distinctly feminine voice said. "Am I interrupting anything?"

All three guys looked up to see Agent Heather standing at the counter separating the lab from the rest of the building, looking over the odd scene. "Oh, no! You're not interrupting anything!" Dabble said quickly, switching off as much the game as he could.

"Hey, slow down!" Slickstein protested. "Shut that off too fast and I'll lose all my data!"

As the two older workers fought over how quickly to shut everything down, William wandered over to the counter where Heather was waiting. "Good morning, Agent Connelly," he greeted. "Is there anything we can do for you today?"

"Yeah, I was hoping to talk to Dr. Bradford," the young woman responded. "What are you doing here, Will? Shouldn't you be in school?"

"I belong to an online K through 12 system," he answered. "As long as I get my assignments in on time, I'm pretty much free to do my work at my own pace. It makes working jobs like this a bit easier."

"As for Dr. Bradford," he continued, "I'm sorry to tell you, but she'll be a bit busy for a while. She recently got the go-ahead to send in information about Penny's robots to other labs with connections to W.O.M.P., so she'll be working with them for a while."

"Ah, I see." Heather shrugged and turned to leave. "Well, what can you do? Sorry to bother you. I'll just be on my way then."

"Wait!" Dabble called up, finally surrendering the console to Slickstein. Stumbling over, he pushed past William and made his way to the counter. "Dr. Bradford might not be able to help right now, but I'm sure whatever it is you want, we can cover."

"You can?" Heather gave an incredulous look. "You looked pretty busy just a moment ago."

"Merely a momentary distraction," the portly scientist responded. "We're perfectly ready and able to help with whatever it is you want."

"Alright, then, if you are free to help." She turned back, retaking her place at the counter. "I was kind of hoping to try to get a little weapons upgrade. Since I've gotten the day off today, I thought this would be a good time to ask."
"Weapons upgrade?" Dabble's smile broadened. "Sure, we can help you out! Whatever you need, we're your guys!"

"Great!" Heather brightened at the confirmation. "I've been feeling a bit outclassed by my teammates, so I was hoping I could get a bit of help on this."

It was at this moment that Slickstein decided to intervene. "Uh, excuse us for a minute," he said, pulling Dabble away with him. "We need to talk."

"I'll be just a moment!" the other scientist called out. "We'll be back soon!"

As soon as they two were a distance off, Slickstein groaned. "'Sure, we can help you out!' 'We're your guys!'" The redhead groaned at his partner's actions. "Myron, you and I have never tested any weapons by ourselves, even the ones we've designed! Anything we've ever done related to military has been under Dr. Bradford's supervision!"

"Well, sure, we've never done it on our own yet, but there's a first time for everything," Dabble protested. "Besides, we've done repairs and modifications on our own enough times to know what we are doing. We'll be fine! Come on, Johan, we've got to take this!"

Slickstein sighed. "You just think she's hot and want to spend time with her."

"Like an inferno, and this is the perfect chance," Dabble responded.

"Fine, fine, we'll do it just this time," his partner eventually surrendered. "But anything gets messed up, and you're taking the blame."

"Full on, all the way!" Dabble grinned. "Besides, we're not students anymore. We know what we're doing!"

With that, he hurried back out. "We're taking the order!" he said to Heather in a chipper voice. "Just tell us what you want, and we'll help you out!"

"Great!" The agent smiled. "I'll be back there in a moment."

Once she had left, William turned to the older tech worker. "I didn't know you guys tested your own weaponry."

"We do now," Slickstein groaned. "Please stay on hand in case we need anything fixed. This can only turn out well."

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Crystal Waters Mall

Gadget had been pleasantly surprised when he arrived at the mall to find the small donut shop he had been fond of was indeed still open. Upon entering, however, he had found that a lot had been changed. The interior had been redone, changed from the old-time bakery he remembered to one of a more contemporary coffee house, and he couldn't recognize any of the workers.

"Good morning, sir!" a chipper looking barista called out as he entered. "Welcome to Jen and Michael's Place. Can I take your order?"

"Uh, sure," he said, still getting used to the new atmosphere. "I'll take a cinnamon roll and a bottle of milk."
The girl at the counter charged everything up. "Alright, that's a cinnamon roll and a bottle of milk. Can I interest you in a Hazelnut Mocha Frappe? It's the flavor of the month!"

"No, thanks," he said, shaking his head. "I don't drink coffee."

The girl smiled and nodded. "Alright then, your total is $4.75. We'll call you when your order is up!"

Having ordered, Gadget went over to one of the nearby tables and sat down, still trying to figure out when all this change had happened. He could hardly recognize the place, though from the name and the smell, it was apparently the same shop.

He was then approached by a cheerful looking elderly woman. "Oh, good morning, Gadget! It's been quite a while!" she greeted.

He looked up in response to the greeting and was pleased to see a familiar face. "Good morning, Mrs. Mahi'ai. Getting the bread of the week?"

"Just like every week," she responded. "I haven't seen you in quite a long time, inspector. Have you been well?"

"I've…had some issues I've had to deal with," he said, not wanting to launch into details but still trying to be honest. "It's been a long time since everything has been normal."

"Oh, and I heard your niece just came back from the hospital," she continued on. "I do hope she's feeling better."

He gave a sad smile. Truth be told, he still felt rather guilty for his charge's injury, despite it not being his fault. "Penny's recovered pretty well. She's adapted quickly to using her wheelchair, though she prefers to use her crutches when she can."

"It's good to hear she's feeling better." Mrs. Mahi'ai smiled. "She's such a nice young lady. She and her friends visited the retirement center quite a bit. We were all so concerned when we heard she had gotten hurt."

Before much more small talk could go on, there was a call from the front desk. "Cinnamon roll and milk, ready for pick up!"

"Looks like that's my order," he said, standing up. "It was nice seeing you again."

"And you too, young man." She smiled and waved as she turned to go. "You take good care Penny."

"I try to," he responded, but felt another twinge of guilt as he spoke.

Once he had picked up his order, he wandered out into the main area of the mall and looked around as he ate. As a slight relief, much of it was the same as how he remembered, but that was counterbalanced by a variety of changes he had not been around for. New stores mingled with old, and a lot of newer signs and attractions had been left around the who building. It was kind of a lot to take in.

But that didn't mean he couldn't take it in. "Things might have changed, but that doesn't mean that it's bad," he said aloud to himself. "After all, a lot of changes are good!" Standing a little taller, he turned to boldly face this new world…and promptly walked into the path of another customer, sending them both head over heels and ramming into other shoppers.
"Watch it, you klutz!" The man Gadget had run into was clearly not in a good mood.

"Oh, I'm sorry, my good fellow," the inspector responded, quick to try to help the other man to his feet. "I guess I wasn't looking where I was going. Here, let me help you."

"I don't need your help, grandpa," the other person, a younger man with a rodent like face, snapped. With that, he pulled away from Gadget's offered assistance and stomped off.

"Gee, I said I was sorry," the dazed officer mumbled. "I wonder if there was something else I was supposed to do?"

He watched the man for a moment, still trying to think if there was another way to apologize, but he was soon distracted by a store that was nearby. "Well, I'll be!" he exclaimed. "A Teddy and Company store! Penny loves these." He wandered over to the entrance and looked in, memories flooding in as he looked around. "I remember when she got her first one," he said with a laugh. "She loved that little bear to pieces."

"Good morning, sir!" Gadget was shaken from his thoughts by the sound of a store worker approaching him. "My name is Angela. Can I help you today?"

"I don't think, so," he said, still looking around. "It's just that these toys hold a lot of memories for me. I used to order my niece one of these for her birthday every year. She's still got them, too."

"Oh, that's sweet!" the woman said. "Has she come into the store yet? We've just opened up, so we're trying to attract in fans of the company to come in."

"No," he said, shaking his head. "We've had some problems as of late, but I'm sure she'd love to see it."

"Well, when she comes in, she'll have to see our newest design." Angela motioned over to a stand where a group of stuffed red foxes were sitting. "It's limited edition, and special to this store for the grand opening. She's sure to love it!"

Gadget was about to thank the saleslady and leave, but he glanced again at the little red fox. Penny would love the little animal, and he didn't think that she had a fox in her collection yet. "And I did miss several of her birthdays…" he couldn't help but think to himself.

"On second thought," he said, going up to Angela, "I think you could help me."

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

Alright, time to give credit where credit is due. While Charybdis belongs to me, its leader, Miss Molly, does not. She was invented for the fan series Go Go Gadgetinis, and I am using her on permission from GadgetMonster. I do like Go Go Gadgetinis myself, but I will say that it is for older audiences. Just a shout out and thank you for letting me use the characters!
"Alright, class," Miss Hastings said as she started up the history class that morning. "Has everyone gone over pages two hundred and sixteen to two hundred and thirty five?" When there was a certain mumbling of assent, she turned to the board and wrote on it. "Good, then you're all caught up for the topic we're going to go over today. That would be political relations to propaganda. Does anyone know what propaganda is?"

Penny raised her hand, and when called upon, answered. "That would be an article of communication to promote an idea."

"Very good, Penny." The teacher smiled and nodded. "It would also be used to denounce an idea, or to promote or denounce a person. This is a tactic used a lot in politics, to the point that a lot of mudslinging can result. Can anyone think of a recent example of propaganda that has popped up in the Wilson/Deboir debate?"

At that moment, Penny wished the ground would open up and swallow her. She knew quite well what was going on in the election, especially a close to home hot-button issue. While she hoped no one else was thinking of what she was, she knew that was a vain hope.

As if to prove the point, a boy at the back of the room raised his hand. "How about the controversy over fact that the World Organization of Mega Powers is utilizing a cyborg officer?"

"Very well done, Michael," Miss Hastings said with a nod. "As you are all probably aware, there has recently come to the public attention that an officer, armed to the degree that Detective John Brown is, could very well be incredibly dangerous. In particular, Richard Deboir has been placing a lot of focus on this issue. On the other hand, some people purport that the recent rise in M.A.D. dangers makes having officers that are armed to such a level is necessary to keep people safe. This would be the angle that Lilian Wilson is coming at things."

"Now, I don't want anyone discussing who is right and who is wrong on the issue," the teacher was quick to add. "A lot of people have very heated feelings on the topic, and I am running a history class, not a debate class. However, I will be showing some political videos from the mayoral candidates discussing the cyber issue and other issues as examples of recent propaganda before we move onto historic examples. You will just watch what is happening, and then I want two of you to come up and explain why the candidate holds their view."

As she turned on the video, Penny started to wish she had taken up her uncle's offer to stay at home. Deboir's was first, and it was borderline painful to watch. As it had recently come to light, Deboir had decided to make a crusade against illegal cybernetic augmentations a platform for his election. Unfortunately, that seemed to mean making personal attack after personal attack against her uncle, even calling the who topic "the Gadget Issue," which was something the poor girl just couldn't stand to watch. Only ten minutes into the first interview, and she already could feel herself not being able to take it anymore.

Moving away from her desk, she approached her teacher. "Miss Hastings," she said in a hushed tone of voice. "I'm not very comfortable with seeing him talk about my uncle like this. May I please wait out in the hall?"
"You might not enjoy politics, but no one is talking about your uncle," her teacher responded. "They are discussing the Gadget Issue, not anything that has to do with your uncle."

"Actually, Inspector Gadget is my uncle," Penny responded. "He's my mother's brother, and I don't like him being talked about like this."

"Now, Penelope! I'm surprised at you!" Miss Hastings frowned at her. "It's one thing to not like politics, but it's another entirely to make up stories to get out of class. You don't even resemble Detective Brown in the slightest, so why do you expect that I'd believe you two are related? Now, go back to your desk before you get detention, and I am going to meet with your guardian in person to discuss your behavior."

Penny went back to her desk, realizing that she wasn't going to be able to get anywhere without getting into trouble. Thankfully, by then the Deboir interview was just about over and they moved on to the next video.

Not that Mayor Wilson's video was any better. She wasn't hostile towards Gadget, as Deboir had been, but she treated him more like a sideshow attraction than a person. There was no mention of the good he had done, or how many lives he had saved, only talk about how much good publicity he brought to the city. Frankly, the objectification only made the teen feel slightly less sick than Deboir's belligerent ranting had.

Thankfully, the class then turned to historical examples of propaganda, which meant the topic of her uncle had faded away for the moment. What had not faded, however, was the sickening feeling in her stomach, which clung to her even as she left the classroom after the period.

Bradford Tech, Metro City

"Alright," Dabble said as he, Slickstein, and William guided Heather out into a testing range, "so we'll need to have an idea of what you are looking for before we begin."

"Alright then," she responded. "My expertise is in ranged weapons, especially with sharpshooting. I'm pretty comfortable using most types of guns, and I have a beginner's knowledge with throwing knives and arrows."

"Ah, perfect! I've got just the thing!" Dabble rushed back to a cluttered design station. There were multiple pieces of tech in various states of finish scattered over it. He selected on, which closely resembled a handgun version of a pellet gun, as well as a container full of brightly colored capsules.

"Take a look at this!"

Heather picked up the gun and examined it. "Nice, it looks like it's in pretty good shape. It doesn't look that much different from an ordinary gun, though."

"Ah, it might not look different from an ordinary gun, but try it with one of the capsules," the scientist responded, pointing to the box he a brought. "Each has been specifically developed to trigger a reaction when fired."

"Really?" She picked up one of the yellow capsules. "What does this one do?"

"That's a flash bomb," Dabble answered. "Fire it at any target, and it will let out a blinding flash of light. Why don't you try it out?"

"Thanks, Wiz Kid," she said as she loaded the gun. "I think I'll do that."
As she entered out onto the testing field, Dabble went back to where Slickstein and William were watching. "Ya hear that? She called me 'Wiz Kid.' She's totally into me."

"If you haven't noticed, she seems to have a nickname for everyone," Slickstein responded with a slight eye-roll.

Dabble frowned. "Oh, really? What does she call you, then?"

"Slick," Slickstein answered.

"Also," William added, "she calls me 'Fix-it,' Detective Brown 'Gadget Boy,' Penny 'Charm,' Brain 'Wonder Dog,' Colonel Nozziare 'Ol' Nosehair,' Dr. Bradford 'Dr. B.,' together Penny's robots are 'Tin Men' and separately-"

"Okay, okay, I get it," the older scientist cut him off. "This one's special, though. I can just tell."

As they had been talking, Heather had taken no notice. She was more concerned at the moment with testing out the gun. It had a good feel in her hands and was pretty easily set up. Raising the weapon, she aimed a target about a hundred yards away and fired.

The pellet hit its mark and shattered, allowing the precisely measured chemicals to mix. This produced a bright flash of light with a surprisingly little amount of heat. Had one been close to the flash, they would have certainly been left temporarily blinded.

"Not bad. Not bad at all." She twirled the weapon around one finger as she returned to the table. "It handles well, and there isn't a terrible amount of kickback. Not to mention that flash pellet will definitely be a help in missions. So, what do the other paintballs do?"

Dabble approached the box and laid a single pellet of each color as he explained. "Along with the yellow flash pellets, the red ones produce a burst of heat, the blue ones react with moisture to produce a trapping substance, the white ones will release a strong but quickly evaporating acid, the green ones produce an electrical shock, and the black ones are tracking devices."

"Well, I have to say these are all pretty impressive." The redhead picked up one of the blue pellets and examined it. "These must have taken a while to develop. Are you sure Dr. B.'s okay with me using these?"

"These are my designs, and I say it's alright, so I'm sure it's alright." He smiled. "So, is there anything else you see that you like?"

"No, this looks great." She set the gun and turned to go. "You've been a big help, thanks. I'd better get out of you guys' way."

"Oh, wait!" Dabble called out. "Don't go yet! You need to...uh...see the magnetic gauntlets that Slickstein here developed! They've gotten to the point where they are hand activated and can be used to interrupt the movement of a bullet. He'd be so proud to show you how they work."

"I would?" the other scientist asked with a disapproving frown.

Heather, however, missed out on the frustrated tone. "Really, Slick? That sound really impressive. I'd love to see what you've got."

"Really?" The surprised Slickstein somewhat, since this was the first time someone outside of his field had taken an interest in his work. He blushed a little, complimented by her enthusiasm. "Well, they're not done yet, but I suppose a demo would be alright."
"Alright! Lead the way," she responded, following him to his own station.

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Crystal Waters Mall

After his little run-in with that clumsy detective, Rat was incredibly eager to get to his destination without anyone noticing him. Thankfully, the area he was heading to was very near, hidden by a small door outside of a nearby doll shop. He was able to break away rather easily and make his way through the door without much notice.

Inside, the area was empty and poorly lit, but not totally abandoned. There was a table set up towards the back, and an attractive blonde woman was sitting at it.

"You would Susan Dione?" Rat asked as he joined her at the table. He pulled his jacket open a bit, revealing the demonic cat pin.

"Ah, you were the man M.A.D. sent." The woman gave a smile. "I was hoping this wasn't just a test. Charybdis has had a sad shortage of customers ever since M.A.D. lost its original power."

"Well, we're back and on the rise, and no number of brain-dead cops are going to stop us this time." He smirked as he sat down. "So, what do you got for me?"

She returned his smile. "Ah, you're very eager, I see. Here's what I was sent to deliver." She pulled a bag from the neighboring teddy bear store out from under the table. From that, she pulled out a small stuffed bear without much decorations except for a ribbon around it's neck. "You'll want to get this to Dr. Claw as soon as possible."

"A teddy bear?" The thug examined the toy with a bit of confusion. "Isn't he a little old for toys?"

"That bear might look innocent, but it's hiding some big secrets." Dione ran her finger over the bear's ear as she spoke. "Inside the head is a projector chip that will list and explain exactly one-eighth of Charybdis' catalog."

"Ah, I see now." Rat nodded as he shoved the bear back into the bag. "Something that no one will really question, but distinct enough that we'll know exactly where it is."

"Got it." She gave a nod before slipping her purse out. "I have to head back to my own base, and I'm sure the Doctor will be eager to receive his delivery. Take it to this drop off point as soon as possible." She handed him a card with the location of a drop box on it.

"I'll get it to him right away." He snatched up the bag and pocketed the card as he rose from his seat himself. "So, now that we've got business out of the way, how about we arrange a time for a bit of pleasure?"

Dione gave a smirk in response. "I usually prefer to keep business relations professional," she answered, "but in this case, I might be willing to make an exception." She tossed a small card to him, which he caught out of the air. "Just wait a week or so before you call. It will make the M.A.D./Charybdis connection harder to track down." With that, she turned and stalked away into the shadows.

As Rat left, he couldn't help but make a small gesture of victory. Things were just going his way today, and he was certain that nothing and no-one could ruin the day he was having.
Crystal Waters Mall

As Gadget left the shop, his shopping bag in one hand, he was startled by a high beeping that started up. This was followed by a projector popping out of his hat, and the image of Penny was projected in front of him. "Hey, Uncle Gadget," she greeted, though her voice lacked its usual cheer. "Just calling in."

"Oh, Penny! Hi!" He was quick to shove the small bag behind his back, lest the surprise be ruined. It didn't take long for him to notice his charge's demeanor. "Is everything alright? Are you doing alright?"

"Yeah, I guess," she sighed. "It's just taking a little while to get used to getting around campus on my wheelchair. It's rarely easy, and people keep treating me differently. Was it like this after you were... uh..."

"After I was changed?" He smiled, catching on to what she was trying to ask. "A little, I suppose. My difference wasn't as obvious as a wheelchair at first, but once people figured it out, there was some different treatment. I wouldn't worry about that, though. You know what you can and can't do, so I wouldn't let what other people think bother you."

She gave a small smile in response. "Thanks, Uncle Gadget. That helps a lot."

"It'll be alright," he said. "Just give it a little while. Now, I've got to hang up. The officers had an incident in the kitchen, and it looks like we'll need a new toaster."

"Before you go, there is one more thing," Penny added. "I'll need you to pick me up from the school directly, instead of meeting me at the train station."

Gadget was confused by the request. "That's easy enough, but I thought you said you'd prefer to come back with your friends. Is everything alright?"

"Yeah, it's fine," she answered, brushing her bangs back as she spoke. "I just told my history teacher, Miss Hastings, that you were my uncle, and she kind of got a bit upset and asked to meet you."

"Ah," he responded with a knowing nod. "I suppose she was just startled to find out one of her students had a connection like that. I'd be happy to meet her, and whoever else would like to have a word with me."

At that moment, a bell went off at the school, signaling that the next period class was about to start. "I've got to go, Uncle," Penny said. "I'll call you before my last class, and I'll see you this afternoon. Bye!" With that, she hung up and the screen vanished.

"Well, so her teachers are interested in meeting me?" he said to himself in a quiet voice. "I was going to wait for the PTA meetings, but I don't see why we can't speed things up a bit." With that, he turned on his heels to go.

Once again, this sent him right into the path of another visitor. They were sent sprawling over the ground once again in a tangled mess with both their bags going everywhere.

"Oh, oh dear," Gadget stammered out as he struggled to right himself. "I'm sorry about that." He extended his neck to get a look at who it was he had collided with, and was surprised to find that it was the same man as from before. "It's you again. Sorry about running into you again. I promise, I'm not trying to injure you or anything."

"What! You again!" the man snapped. He snatched up one of the abandoned bags. "Just get lost,
why don't you?"

"Huh, well, that wasn't very polite." Gadget shrugged off the other man's bad manners and turned to pick his own bag up. As he was doing so, he saw a small flash of red on the ground a short distance off. "Oh, Penny's fox fell out. That won't do." He snatched the fox back up using one of the arms in his hat, which he then handed the bag off to. The arm retreated, with the bag, back into his hat.

Once everything was cleaned up, he turned in the direction of a department store. "I've got just enough time to pick up that toaster and have lunch before I go to pick Penny up." With that, he hurried off in the direction of the store.

Riverside Preparatory High School

"Hey, Penny! Over here!" Penny had just hung up after he call with her uncle, and she could see Eli, Linc, and Rheeci sitting at one of the outdoor lunch tables waiting for her. It wasn't too hard to pick out, since it was one of the few tables with wheelchair accessibility.

"Hey, guys," she said as she went over to join them. "Thanks for saving me a spot," she added with a small smile.

As they ate, they mostly discussed recent events revolving around school, but unfortunately, some topics were unavoidable. "Man, is it just me, or are these class assignments getting way more personal?" Linc asked. "I mean, just today, in the machine shop, Mr. Andrews kept trying to get me to compare the vehicle we were repairing to the Gadgetmobile. It's not like I made the thing, just did a few additions, but from the way he was talking about it, you'd think I was the Gadgetmobile."

"Didn't you guys have to sign some sort of confidentiality agreement when you started working for your grandpa?" Rheeci asked.

Eli nodded in response. "Yep. We're not supposed to talk about anything we do on that car, except to W.O.M.P. personnel. Doesn't mean people listen or take hint."

"That stinks." Rheeci frowned and ran a fork through her rice. "I guess it's rough for all of us. My aunt's wildlife sanctuary isn't a government-y or anything, so working there does help a bit with my projects, but then there's that whole thing involving the research into chimera."

"You're aunt's place is doing studying into chimera?" Penny asked before taking a bite of her sandwich.

Her friend gave a smile. "Yep. My Aunt Chloe's going to be in charge of figuring out how the chimera mutation effects the animal involved, and whether it's possible to rehabilitate a captured chimera or if they all have to be put to sleep. Excepting Brain, of course," she was quick to add. "Thankfully, nobody's calling for him to be put to sleep."

"Let me guess," Linc said in a dry tone of voice. "Someone or other is upset about the connections and is calling to have the whole place shut down."

"Try almost every extreme animal rights group in Metro City," Rheeci groaned. "They've been harassing the sanctuary on account of the research center for years, but the chimera issue's given then a platform to push against."

"Why would they be against a wildlife sanctuary?" Eli asked. "Don't you guys protect endangered animal? I'd think a group calling for animal rights would want to support that."
"You forget, bro," Linc sighed. "A lot of these people aren't exactly sane."

"There are a lot of good groups, but it's the psychos that have really gotten stirred up over the chimera issue." Rheeci played with the end of her braid. "They've been having protests just about every day, and some of them have gotten pretty violent. I think your uncle and Agent Heather had to intervene one of days, Penny."

The younger girl nodded in response. "I remember. He also got ambushed by several pro-Deboir reporters who tried to frame it like he was responsible for that mess." She sighed. "From the way people have been responding, you'd think we were responsible for everything M.A.D.'s been up to, instead of the psychotics who actually did the deeds." She groaned before leaning against the table. "Heaven only knows how people would respond if they actually knew what we were doing for the last two and a half years."

"Yeah, but thankfully, that's all under wraps," Linc smiled. "W.O.M.P.'s got all that info tied up tighter than a canoe to a car top. There's no way that's getting out to the public." He raised his hotdog to his mouth, only for a blot of ketchup to fall off and on to his shirt. "Dang," he said with a groan. "Of course, I forget the napkins."

"Here, I'll get them," Penny responded. She leaned back, rolling away from the table.

"That's okay, you don't have to," Linc tried to argue, but Penny shook her head.

"I want to," she responded. "I've been aching for a chance to be able to get up for a change." Taking a hold of her armrests, she pulled the cover off of them, revealing a pair of forearm cuffs. She then reached behind the chair, unclipping the rest of the crutches from the back of the chair. "I can't get around very fast with these," she explained as she put the equipment together, "but it feels a bit more normal to use them than to use the chair 24/7."

Once she had the crutches assembled, she eased herself up and in to them. Reaching down, she adjusted several clips on her braces, neatly hidden under her pants, so that her knees would be held straight, and began a slow, swinging motion that allowed her to make her way over to the island with the napkins.

It took a few minutes to get there, but she made it was soon able to grab a handful of them napkins. Penny grabbed a few of them and tucked them into her skirt pocket, and was about to turn back to her table, when she heard a high, completely unpleasant voice.

"I knew it," a blond girl said from a table not too far away. "She was faking. I knew she faking!"

Penny groaned, but did her best not to give the other girl any attention. She was really not in the mood for a confrontation of any sort.

"She's been using that wheelchair all day, just to get attention." There was a bout of laughter as the girl's friends nodded in agreement. "Watch until I tell everyone she's been doing!"

Several choice words came to mind, but Penny decided against them. "I am using my crutches right now," she muttered under her breath. She knew she couldn't be heard, but it felt better to vocalize it. "I can walk a little bit using them, but I can't do it all the time. I'd tire out very quickly and I'd be late all the time. So, no, using crutches is not 'faking'." With that, she turned and headed back to her table, doing her best to ignore the other girls' rambling about how much trouble she was going to be in.

"Is her highness trying to find another excuse to get you in trouble?" Linc asked as Penny returned to
"It was my crutches this time," she responded. "Honestly, it's really kind of pathetic. I have no idea what problem she has with me."

"Hey, look at it this way," Eli added. "At least she doesn't have problems with you the same way Talon does."

Penny snorted in response to this. "I almost wish she did. At least I can punch Talon in the stomach and not get in trouble for it."

"I wouldn't worry about her," Rheeci assured. "She might be a regular terror, but it could be worse."

"Yeah, I know," Penny replied. "It's still frustrating, though. She's not all that much of a problem, but put her on top of everything else that's already happened, and you've got a nice stew of misery."

After that, they were able to change the conversation to much more pleasant topics and finish their lunch in peace.

To be continued…
Monday, May 5, 2087

Just outside the Crystal Waters Mall

Having finally gotten the package and almost finished with his mission, Rat exited the mall and dodged into a small alleyway. "Now to let the boss know I got the bear," he muttered to himself.

As he was rummaging around in his pocket for the communicator, however, the thought came to him that he had better get a look at the bear first. Abandoning the search for the moment, he reached into the bag to retrieve the item he was to deliver.

When he reached in, however, there was something wrong. He could feel nothing inside. "What the…" he murmured, digging around in the bag to find the bear. However, there was not toy inside the bag. All that was held within was a receipt for a red fox plush.

"No, no, no, no, no!" Rat exclaimed, looking all around everywhere. He couldn't have lost it! "Oh, they're going to have my skin for this!" he groaned.

That was when the memory hit him. He had dropped the bag when he had a run-in with that klutz detective. "It's got to be back there," the M.A.D. grunt muttered. "It's just got to!"

He rushed back into the mall in desperate hopes that he would locate the bear. However, upon arriving at the place where he’d had his run in with the cop, nothing was there. There wasn't even a scrap of paper on the ground.

Rat gritted his teeth in dismay as he tried to figure out what had happened. As he was searching, he saw a flash of grey pass him. Instinctively, he dodged into hiding and looked after the flash.

It was Gadget, who had recently emerged from a nearby department store. "I got lucky that this was on sale," the cyber detective said to himself. "And a six-slot one too! There no way I would have afforded this if it wasn't on sale." With that, a hand popped out of his hat, grabbed the bag the detective was carrying, and pulled it back inside.

That was when it clicked for Rat. "Why that little…” he growled, muttering a string of profanities under his breath. "He stole my bag!"

That was when another awful thought hit the M.A.D. grunt. "That means he knows, and he's going to be taking it to W.O.M.P.! Oh, Claw will have my hide if W.O.M.P. gets that chip!"

Rat stared after the inspector for a short while. "Then I can't let W.O.M.P. get a hold of it. I just need to figure out some way to get that hat." He narrowed his eyes and began to follow the unwitting detective. "I'll figure out some way, if it kills me."

Bradford Tech, Metro City

"So, how do I active these?" Heather asked, glancing down at the gauntlets. They were incredibly
lightweight and were formed from incredibly thin wires, giving them a feel almost more like cloth than metal. She was standing in a bunker designed for the testing of certain weapons, with a protective bulletproof wall between her and the viewers.

"They're set to activate when you clutch your hands into fists," Slickstein answered. "That's also the way to shut them off. You can also change the specific poles of the magnets by forcing them to come close to each other."

She nodded. "Alright, a fist is on/off, clap to change directions. Got it." She tightened her hands into fists and instantly felt a slight thrum.

A distance away sat a table that was holding a small amount of metallic objects: a blunted nail, a piece of chain, a small cup, and a few paperclips. Wandering over to a tape line about three feet away from the table, she raised her right hand up. In response, the objects all raised up, rushing at her. The cup hit her hand first, with the other items slamming into that.

Turning that had to a side, she raised her left hand so that it was parallel to the right. This caused the items to get caught between the pulls of the two magnets and get suspended in midair. Seeing the results, Heather smiled. "These turned out really good, Slick," she called out. "These would come in handy out in the field."

"You really think so?" The redheaded scientist blushed at the compliment. "They're just a prototype. I'm still working on them."

"Oh, yeah," the agent responded with a nod. "These would defiantly help. I'm not really sure what could be done to get these to work better." She mad a motion like clapping her hands together, causing the poles to switch. Adjusting her hands slightly, she sent the objects flying back to the table.

Unfortunately, she underestimated the force which they were sent away, and the objects flew hard past the table and slammed into the far wall. The cup flattened with the impact as it hit the wall, and the nail and chain bit ended up embedded into the wall. "Well, except maybe some way to control the intensity," she was quick to add as she shut the gauntlets down.

"So much for your big invention," Dabble muttered in a voice too quiet for Heather to hear. He was now regretting using Slickstein's invention as an excuse to keep the pretty agent there.

"I'll see if I can't add in a way to effect intensity," Slickstein said, doing his best to ignore his partner's clear jealousy. "Once they're finished, they'll be covered in a so as to make them less conspicuous."

Heather nodded, setting the gloves down on the table. "Everything looked great," she said as she exited the training room both of you. Thanks, both of you."

As she left, there was a chime on her phone. She pulled it out and took a look at the text. "Oh, I'd better be heading out," she said.

"Some sort of W.O.M.P. business?" William asked.

She shook her head. "Nah. I was supposed to meet my boyfriend for dinner tonight, but his work called in last minute to say he had to come in tonight, so I'm going to meet him for lunch instead."

At the mention of "boyfriend," there was a complete change in the room. Dabble looked downcast, and Slickstein, while not as clear, still was somewhat disappointed. She was taken.

There wasn't much time for that atmosphere to settle, as the scene was soon interrupted. "Agent
Connelly!" Fidget called out as he, his brother, and Dr. Bradford entered. The two robots were now wearing a trench coat and hat each, not unlike the one that Gadget usually wore. "I wasn't expecting to see you here today. Is there news from W.O.M.P."

"Nice to see you, Sunny," Heather greeted. "You too, Rainy. Nah, I was just coming in to see if there wasn't any way to get my own arsenal expanded. Wiz Kid and Slick were nice enough to show me some new models."

"I see you two got a bit of an upgrade as well," she added, pointing out the coats.

"First of all, what have I told you about calling me 'Rainy'," Digit said brusquely, skipping over any pleasantries. "Second, we were going over our blueprints with Dr. Bradford before she sent them out to be studied and she took notice that we were rather weak on defensive gadgetry, though we had plenty in offensive. These were meant to amend that situation."

"Well, I think they look good." She turned and headed towards the door, looking over her shoulder as she went. "Well, Tin Men, I'm heading out to a restaurant, but your house is on the way. You want me to drop you off?"

Fidget smiled at the offer. "That'd be great. We kind of got funny looks on the bus all the way here."

"You'd think they'd never seen someone pay their bus fare with cash before," Digit said with a frown.

"We'll have to get a card once we can figure out a way to keep our electronics from wiping it," his brother commented as they followed Heather out. "By, Dr. Bradford. Call us when you get the news from the other researchers."

"Goodbye," Brenda called out. "I'll be sure to."

Once the three agents had left, she turned those who remained behind. She wasn't finished with them quite yet. "So," she said, a tone of reprimanding in her voice. "You were conducting unsupervised testing of equipment without authorization, were you?"

The three boys sighed, realizing where this was going. They were never going to hear the end of this.

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S. Broadway, Metro City

Having recently left, the mall, Gadget drove around a bit, trying to decide where to go for lunch. It was going to be a bit of a drive to get to Riverside Prep, so I couldn't be a particularly busy restaurant. Besides, he was hoping to try something new.

He soon settled on a Mexican restaurant he couldn't recall having gone to before, El Sueño Imposible. "It certainly looks well kept," he said to himself as he pulled up, "and none too busy, too. I hope they don't mind me dropping in after the lunch rush."

As he entered the restaurant, he didn't notice as someone watched from within a nearby car. "So," Rat muttered to himself as he followed his target with his eyes, "he's stopping here, huh? This must be some sort of covert stopping place for W.O.M.P. agents. I'd better not make myself conspicuous." With that, he slid out of his car and followed the inspector in.

Inside, the restaurant had been pretty much empty. There were a few customers left from the lunch
As he entered, Gadget was approached by an older woman with a name-tag reading Bianca. "Good afternoon, sir," the woman greeted with a smile. "Welcome to El Sueño Imposible. If you would please follow me to your table your waitress will be with you in a minute."

"Thank you, madam," he responded. "I would appreciate that." He was then lead to a booth not too far from the door.

It was then that Rat made his way into the restaurant. Since Gadget wasn't too far from the door, the thug could see right where he was. It would be child's play to sneak up and snatch the hat away.

At least, it would have been, had Bianca not noticed him trying to sneak into the dining area. "Sir," the lady said in a scolding tone, "please wait behind the line to be seated. We only have two waiters in right now, so it will be just a moment." Rat scowled, but realizing that any attempt to disobey the matron would blow his cover slunk back to the waiting area.

It was at that point that Gadget was greeted by his waitress. "Good afternoon, my name is Zita, and I'll be serving you today," she said as she handed him a menu.

"Thank you," he said with a nod. "I've never been here before. May I have a moment to look things over?"

"Certainly," Zita responded. "Just call when you know what you want."

As he sat waiting, Rat scowled. This was taking forever, and he had to get that bear to the drop box. There had to be some faster way to get that hat.

It was at that moment that Bianca came back. "Alright, we have a table ready now. Please follow me."

The thug's frustration melted away when he realized he was being seated just behind Gadget's booth. Oh, things were finally going his way! He was able to slide into the seat directly behind the inspector, and as soon as the hostess walked away, he turned to the task at hand.

Fortunately for the M.A.D. agent, Gadget was too absorbed in his menu to notice anything around him. Added on top, none of the staff was still around, which meant there weren't any witnesses, either. Everything was just falling right into place.

Moving slowly and silently, he reached over and gripped the brim of the fedora and began lifting it. He had a bit more trouble than he expected, since it turned out to be quite a bit heavier than it looked. How the heck does this guy keep this thing on? the grunt couldn't help but think to himself. It's like wearing a barbell on your head.

"Hmm, maybe," Gadget muttered out loud at that moment. He leaned ahead, and the sudden movement pulled the fedora out of Rat's grip.

The thug scowled, but was forced to turn back when the waiter came by and handed him a menu. He snatched it away without a word and pretended to look over it while he waited for another opportunity to snatch the hat away.

Unfortunately for him, as soon as his waiter left, Zita returned. "So, have you decided on what you want?" she asked, pulling out her note pad as she approached.

"Yes, ma'am, I believe I am," the inspector responded. Gadget proceeded to give his order, which
seemed to Rat to take forever. After what felt like forever, he finished, he handed over his menu.

Once the waitress had finally left, Rat saw his opportunity to move in. Gadget still somewhat distracted, so the thug was able to inch the fedora off without too much of a problem. After a minute of hard work, he finally had the hat.

It was a little too heavy to shove under his coat, so instead the thug decided to try to move out of the restaurant as fast as he could. His timing, however, did not work out at all, since it was at that moment that Zita came back with a drink in her hand.

"Sir," she said, turning to Gadget. "I think your hat's been stolen."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand restaurant slang," he responded with a confused look. He looked himself over. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No, I mean he stole your hat." She pointed out Rat, who now decided to speed up and get out of the restaurant. In the process, he knocked into the other waiter, causing him to drop a tray of dishes, before hurrying out of door as fast as he could.

It took the inspector a moment to process what he was being told, but he caught on soon enough. "Hey! You hat thief!" He darted up to take the chase. "Come back here!"

Rat swore as he ran, cursing that busybody waitress. He was so close to making it out, and she just had to ruin everything.

He hurried ahead desperate to keep out of Gadget's reach. He now had Dr. Claw's device, and all he'd have to do was get that hat to the drop box and he was home free!

Unfortunately for him, the inspector had other ideas. "Go-go Gadget Boxing Glove!" he shouted out, loud enough that the microphone in the hat could pick up his voice. The hat, hearing its master's call, responded, launched a red boxing glove, which struck Rat in the chin.

The hat, its contents, and the thief were sent sprawling. Gadget was still a distance off, so Rat decided just to grab a bag and run. He's need to get this to the drop box as soon as possible, and he didn't intend to waste any more time dealing with the inspector than he had to.

When Gadget arrived on the spot, he was able to gather up his belongings. To his frustration, the thief had gotten away with one of the bags, and though he searched everywhere for them, they had apparently disappeared. With some amount of frustration, he went back to the restaurant.

"Oh, you came back," the hostess greeted him when he came back. "And you got your hat back, too."

"Yes, but I'm afraid I won't be able to stay for lunch," he added with a sad tone of voice. "Is there any way I can get my order to go?"

"I'll have it prepared right away," Zita responded with a nod. "I hope you're not injured."

"No, but I've got somewhere to be," he said with a sigh, "and he got away with my new toaster. I'll have to buy another one on the way." As his food was brought out, he paid for the meal and was certain to leave a generous tip for all the trouble he had unintentionally brought. "I'll also pay for anything he broke," he said, writing down his name and number on a sheet of paper.

"Oh, you don't need to do that," Bianca assured him. "It's alright."
"No, I insist," he responded, handing her the sheet of paper. "I wasn't able to catch him, or even figure out who he was, but it wouldn't be fair for you to lose money because of what he did."

He handed her the sheet of paper and picked up his food. "Thank you very much for your service. Sorry I can't stay like someone normally would, but I have an important date to keep. Good day to you both." With that, he turned and hurried out the door.

Or, at least, he attempted to, and instead hit his head against the door lintel. After pausing stunned for a moment, he shook it off before heading out to the Gadgetmobile.

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Riverside Preparatory High School

Penny sat in an uncomfortable silence in her classroom as she waited with her teacher for her uncle to arrive. She had done her best to try to explain the Miss Hastings just what the circumstances were, but it appeared that was a hopeless task. Miss Hastings had apparently convinced herself that everything Penny said was a lie, which meant that they could only sit and wait for the inevitable, a task made all the more uncomfortable by the fact that Gadget was late.

Eventually, however, he arrived. Coming into the room, he smiled brightly. "Hi, Penny," he said as he came over, hugging her and kissing her forehead. "I'm sorry I'm late. I had a run in at lunch that slowed me down a bit."

"That's alright, Uncle Gadget," Penny said with a laugh, returning the embrace. "This my teacher, Miss Hastings. Miss Hastings, this is my uncle, John 'Gadget' Brown."

"Nice to meet you, ma'am," Gadget said, turning to the teacher. A hand popped out of his hat and offered itself for a handshake. "I heard you wanted to speak to me?"

Miss Hastings could only sit slack-jawed. Never in her wildest imaginings could she have guessed that Penny's claims of relations had been true. "Uh, yeah, that's right," she eventually said, somewhat recovering and accepting the handshake. "I, um, wanted to speak to you about Penny. You see, her mentioning that she was your niece came as something of a surprise."

Gadget nodded understandingly. "Yes, I know we don't look that much alike. I didn't really look much like her mother, either. That's because we were adopted. Here, I have some pictures. Go-go Gadget Photo Album!"

In response to the call, a projector popped out of his hat, and various pictures going all the way back to Penny's parents' wedding began flashing on the screen. The inspector loved having the chance to speak about his family, and he could have gone on about the pictures forever, not in the least hindered due to the fact that his audience was still in a somewhat stunned silence.

He was cut off, however, after about then minutes by Penny. "Uncle," she said, touching his arm, "shouldn't we be heading back home soon? After all, you don't have the day off tomorrow."

"Oh, yes, Penny, I do believe you're right." Gadget withdrew the projector and turned back to the teacher. "Well, I am sorry to be cutting the discussion short, but we must be getting back home. I was very nice meeting you today, Miss Hastings." He pulled his hat down politely before turning to leave.

"See you tomorrow," Penny called back as she followed her uncle. She had to muffle a laugh at how stunned her teacher was, though.
Once they were out of the school, she went up to the car and turned a small switch on the passenger side. In response, the chair folded over and withdrew, revealing two slots that allowed her to maneuver her wheelchair into the spot. Once she was able to buckle herself in, she turned to Gadget. "So, did you enjoy your day off today?"

"It was rather productive," Gadget responded as he got into the driver's seat, "though there were some frustrating parts. Some punk attempted to steal my hat while I was having lunch. Apparently, he wanted our new toaster, because that's what he ran off with. It was a very nice toaster, but I can't see why he would have gone to the trouble of stealing my hat to get it."

That sounded more suspicious to Penny than her uncle might have caught on to, but she decided there probably had to be something else to it. "What kind of toaster did you buy?"

He grinned at the question. "Oh, it's a real beauty! Thankfully, I was able to go back to the store and buy another one afterwards. That's what held me up. Here, let me show you." He called out the arms that had been holding the shopping bags.

Unfortunately, the hat decided to launch out all the shopping bags at once, sending the toaster bag into Gadget's lap and the stuffed animal one into Penny's. "Drat it," Gadget mumbled as he attempted to get his arms back into the hat. "I'll have to ask Brenda to look into my hat later. It did that earlier, too."

Penny smiled and did her best to assist him. "That's alright, uncle. It's probably something simple, like a tight spring." It was at this moment that she noticed what was in her own lap. "Now, what's this? A Teddy and Company bag?"

Gadget had completely forgotten he had that from before, and gave an awkward smile when he realized he had been found out. "It was supposed to be a surprise for later, but you can look in now, if you'd like."

"Thank you," she responded. She looked in, and a look of delight came in her eye. "Oh! It's Ricky!" She pulled out the little red fox and hugged it. "How did you know I needed Ricky for my collection?"

"Oh, uh, lucky guess?" Gadget responded. He knew Penny had been collecting the dolls for years, but he really had never known that individual dolls had names. "That was the one the sales worker recommended. You've really been needing that one?"

She nodded. "I was able to save up for his partner, Olivia, last year, but I wasn't sure how long it was going to be before I could get Ricky. Thank you so much!" She then glanced back into the bag. "But you didn't need to get Gerard, too. I already have him."

"What?" That really confused Gadget. "I only bought the fox."

"Well then, what's this?" Penny pulled a small, brown bear out of the bag and studied it. "Well, now that you mention it, there is something off about this one."

"There is?" It looked like a normal toy to the inspector. His niece nodded. "Yeah, take a look at this."

"This is definitely Gerard, but he's supposed to have a straw hat, not a ribbon. This was likely put on by someone else." Undoing the bow, she examined the lining around the bear's neck. "And the stitching is all wrong, too. It's like someone took the head off and redid the stitching, and then put the ribbon on to hide it." That's when a sudden realization hit her. "Uncle Gadget, can you cut the
stitching around the neck?"

"Sure," Gadget replied, calling up a small pair of scissors from wrist. "What's going on?"

"You mentioned that someone tried to take your hat, and then ran off with one of the bags when you caught him, right?" she asked, taking the now decapitated bear from him.

"Yes," he responded with a nod. "I'm afraid I'm not following you."

"I don't think the thief was after the toaster." Penny began rifling through the head of the bear. "Ah-ha! I'm pretty sure he was after this." She pulled a slim black disk the size of a wafer out of the toy. It was plain, with a single button on it where the symbol was printed: a pair of eyes looming menacingly out of a whirlpool.

"Whatever this is, I'm pretty sure this is what the thief was after," the teen said. "I'm pretty sure this is how you activate it." She pressed the button in the center, and a bright screen was projected out of the device. On it, the words "Welcome, Dr. Claw" were printed in bold lettering.

"What! Dr. Claw wants that?!" The shock was clear on Gadget's face. "If that's the case, that can't be anything good."

"Gotta agree with you there," Penny said, deactivating the device and slipping it into her pocket. "We'd better get this to W.O.M.P. as soon as possible."

Gadget nodded. "Alright. We'll head to HQ right now."

"I'll phone Brain, the twins, and Agent Connelly so they can meet us there," the teen added. "I'll bet they'll want to know what this is, too." Thus, they hurried out of the school parking lot as fast as they could, hitting two curbs and only barely not running a stop sign in the process.

As they left, however, Penny chuckled. "Uncle Gadget," she said, leaning back in her seat, "what do you think Claw's going to do when he realizes what he really has?"

"If I know Claw," he responded, "I suspect it's not going to be good for the goof who lost it."

M.A.D. Castle, ?

"It's a toaster!?!" Claw shouted out in a fit of rage. Grabbing the unfortunate appliance by its wire, he slammed it into the side of the wall, causing it to shatter upon impact. "Why did they send me a toaster instead of the eighth piece?"

Onscreen, Montan was doing his best for damage control against the infamously short tempered dictator. "We were able to send over seven of the devices," he pointed out, "and we do know which one of the agents messed up. This is his first strike, so he will be taught what happens when you fail."

"And where did the eighth piece end up?" Claw asked with a snarl.

"Uh, well, sir," his underling said, clearly understanding that the answer was not going to be liked. "It looks like Inspector Gadget claimed it."

"What!? Gadget!?" The rage was clear in the dictator's voice. This was followed by a string of near incomprehensible ramblings and profanities.
"Sir, do you have anything else-" Montan began, but was swiftly cut off.

"No!" Claw snarled. "Just deal with the failure!" With that, he ended the transmission, before turning to destroy whatever else was replaceable and within reach.

After about a half-hour of this "therapy," there came a chime at his computer. Having burned off enough steam to speak coherently, Claw turned to the computer to look at who the message was. When he saw who it was, he immediately answered. "Miss Molly. I thought I'd be hearing from you soon."

"I heard the bad news," the woman replied. "It appears that W.O.M.P. now has a connection between our organizations. Everything on that chip will have to be moved, and for safety sake, we will not be able to make any transactions with anyone until the heat dies down."

Claw nodded. "I thought that as much would be the case. Now, is that all you had to tell me? I am not in the mood for small talk."

"Neither am I," Molly responded, "but since you are going to be receiving some pressure from W.O.M.P. due to our connection, I thought you might want a bit of warning."

This intrigued Claw. "Warning? About what?"

Molly's face blinked away from the screen, replaced by images of a younger woman with mousey brown hair. "This is W.O.M.P. agent Inspector Prince. She has been assigned to just about any and all cases that organization gets involving us. Since they now have a link between Charybdis and M.A.D., it is likely that your agents will have at least a few run-ins with her."

As Claw looked over the information, he found nothing that truly perked his interest, aside from one detail. "So, you will have no problems eliminating this agent, even with her connections?" he asked.

"She is only as connected to me as she is to you," Molly responded. "She has been a thorn in the side of Charybdis for quite a while now, and I would shed no tears should something...unfortunate happen to her."

"Now, I had better leave," the woman replied. "I will be sure to contact you as soon as it is safe to begin conducting business again." With that, she signed out and left.

As the call ended, Claw turned to the seven devices still on the table. He was so close, and now they were worthless! It could only be one man's fault.

"I'll get you, Gadget!" the tyrant shouted in a rage. He slammed his fist down, destroying the delicate technology. "Next time, you won't escape."

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

Some secrets have been revealed all around. What will be the outcome of all of this? We'll just have to wait and see.

Also, like I mentioned before, Miss Molly is a character from the fan series Go Go Gadgetinis. The character of Inspector Prince is as well, and I am using both characters
with the permission of GadgetMonster.
"Alright, boys, careful with that cargo!" The call of the supervisor was not hard to hear, considering that the museum was dead silent at the moment. It was late at night, and the renovations that had been going on were almost finished. The last few artifacts were being loaded into the museum, and things were almost ready for the grand reopening on Friday.

"Where do you want this to go?" one of the workers asked, motioning to one of the large boxes that had been taken in.

"That?" The supervisor overlooked the box to figure out what it contained. "That looks like it's more C.O.N.T.R.O.L. junk."

"C.O.N.T.R.O.L.?" The work man looked down at the box and opened it up to get a look inside. "This stuff isn't junk. This is amazing! I mean, look at this!" He pulled out what looked like an ordinary shoe, which had been one of the items packed in. "This one of the shoe-phones they used until 1985! I can't believe Washington's letting us have all this stuff."

"They didn't want it cluttering up the Smithsonian," the supervisor replied with a shrug. "Considering we really don't have many reliable records about C.O.N.T.R.O.L. before it was absorbed into W.O.M.P., we really can't tell how much they actually helped."

"Yeah," the other worker laughed. "For all we know, they were a greeting card company."

The first snorted with indignation. "So, you're telling me that everything done by Max Smart was a hoax?"

"Oh, I'm sure something along the lines of those stories really happened," the second worker responded, "but they were probably done by ordinary cops and maybe the odd FBI agent and everybody lumped them together under the name of a fictional agent who was declared to be Agent 86. It's just way too far-fetched to be one guy."

"No way, he was real," his companion retorted. "If it's so far-fetched, how come a lot of those stories seem to be real similar to the ones of Inspector Gadget? Or are you telling me you don't believe in the Inspector, either?"

"First of all, we have pictures of Inspector Gadget," the second snapped, "something we don't have of the supposed Maxwell Smart. Secondly, while I know he exists, I don't think Gadget's responsible for all the 'successes' that W.O.M.P. claims he has."

"Oh, you're just parroting that hot air Deboir's been spitting out," the first said with a snort. "Everyone knows he's full of bologna."

"Alright, you were hired to move artifacts, not discuss politics," the supervisor said, cutting into the argument. "Mr. Gailson's going to want the new holographic system tested before Friday, and the techies can't do that unless everything's been moved into place. Talk about the election in the truck, if you want, but as long as you're here, you should be getting everything in place."

"Yes, sir," both men said, and they shut the box up, moving to another room. This was one of the
newer rooms of the museum, which was filled with artifacts from the history of the local W.O.M.P. section. Since the American segment had been known as C.O.N.T.R.O.L. before merging in with other counterparts to form the organization as it was today, there was an area sectioned off for what historical items could be found of the organization.

Unfortunately, a fire started in what was the main C.O.N.T.R.O.L. HQ meant that what artifacts they had were few and far between. Thus, the few items they had, such as the shoe, a few articles of clothing, and an odd looking umbrella, were priceless, and were going to be very valuable to the museum.

Once they were finished putting the artifacts in their designated corner of the museum and were packing up to leave, something changed. The lights began to dim, and the holographic image of a woman dressed in a dress-suit from the 1970's appeared.

"Hey, what's going on?" The second workman asked, staring closely at the hologram.

The woman flashed a bright smile. "Get out of this area right now, or pay the consequences," she said in a voice that was way too bright and chipper for the message.

"Alright, who's the wise guy?" the workman asked, looking for whoever was controlling the hologram. "Who's setting up this prank?"

There didn't appear to be anyone around. At the very least, no one came to claim responsibility. Instead the woman spoke again. "I will repeat myself only once," she said, still keeping the chipper voice. "Get out of here and don't come back. This is your final warning."

"Alright, Bozo, the joke is up," the first workman snapped. He stormed into a side room where the controls for the hologram equipment was kept. He expected it see the person playing the prank to be inside.

No one was in there.

"I warned you," the woman said, and in a moment, she had shifted into a horrifying banshee. The two workers could only tumble over each other and they attempted to get out of the museum and away from the creature.

As they hurried out, phantom forms appeared in other exhibits, all looking like twisted, horrifying representations of the eras the exhibits were from. "Get out!" all of them snarled. This time, the workers didn't need to be told twice.

Friday, May 30, 2087

Gadget Household

"Oh, yeah!" Fidget called out in excitement. At that moment, he and his brother were waiting for Gadget to be ready to head into HQ, and were taking the opportunity to try out one of Penny's video games in the meanwhile. "Another one busted! Who ya gonna call?"

"Come on," Digit groaned, having difficulty catching up to his brother's score. "How the heck did you get so good at this?"

"I just play it at night when you keep insisting on patrolling." Fidget fist pumped again as he finished a level. "Yeah! Another successful case!"
Brain just rolled his eyes and turned back to his book upon hearing the twins' conversation. He had never seen the appeal of video games, but when someone liked them, they could get competitive.

It was then that Gadget himself came into the room. "Alright, Officers, Brain, it is now about two thirty, and the Chief is expecting us to be at HQ for a meeting at three. Are you all ready to go?"

"We're ready to go when you are, Inspector," Fidget responded, putting down his remote control so that he could pull on his coat.

Digit nodded in agreement. "Since we don't need to do human things like eat or bathe, we're ready 24/7."

"Glad to hear it!" Gadget grinned. He considered the duo to be trainees, and had a primary concern with training them to be better law enforcers. "With an attitude like that, you'll get very far in no time."

Brain snorted a bit at the praise, a tinge of jealousy seeping up. A part of him couldn't help but feel like the little robots were here to replace him. He knew the feeling was unfounded. After all, he was Penny's best friend, and she would never replace him with a set of robots. However, considering they could do things he couldn't, like talk or have opposable thumbs, it wasn't always easy to shake that feeling.

He was soon distracted from the thought by a slight tapping at the window. Going over to where the sound was, the dog was able to push up the window. Outside, a little blue ball had been rolling at the window, trying to get in.

The dog wasted no time in seizing the ball in his teeth and carrying it over to Gadget. "Oh, Brain, what do you have there?" he asked. When the ball was handed over, a bright look came into Gadget's face. "Oh, we must have a mission!"

Pressing the small button at the top, the screen and speakers popped out, just as they had last time. Once again, the Chief's face could be seen on the screen. "Ah, good morning, Chief Quimby! How's everything going on today?"

"We're fine at HQ," Quimby answered, "but we've recently gotten some bad news from the city. Are you aware of what's been going on with the history museum?"

"Oh, yes, I think I heard about that," the inspector replied with a nod. "That billionaire, Rodger Gailson, commissioned the museum to be remodeled so that tour guides can use holograms of themselves to give better demonstrations of the exhibits. That was nice of him." He rubbed his chin, racking his mind for extra information. "Oh, and they're opening up a permanent exhibit on C.O.N.T.R.O.L. with the artifacts that were sent over by Washington. I was going to take Penny and her friends to see that this weekend, considering the interest they've had with W.O.M.P."

"Well, we've gotten some bad news from the people renovating the exhibits," the chief went on. "According to some of the workers, the museum is haunted."

When he heard this, Gadget burst into laughter. "Come on, chief? Haunted? That can't be serious! Everyone knows there's no such thing as ghosts."

"Well, yes, but not everyone is as easily convinced." Quimby brought some information up onto the screen and continued talking as he showed it to Gadget. "No one's been hurt, as of yet, but starting last Wednesday, the workers claim there have weird happenings going on, including monstrous phantoms appearing with no one at the controls."
"Since no one's been hurt," the chief went on, "Gailson wants to keep the schedule for the grand opening tonight, but there's going to be an extra inspection today at 3:00. He's going to be there himself, and he'd like it if your team showed up to help."

"I'd be glad to help, Chief!" Gadget responded. "It's a shame Penny has school today, though. I'm sure she would have loved to help."

"Perhaps," the chief responded with a shrug. "You had better get going. You'll be wanted at the museum soon. Agent Connelly is already alerted and on her way; you'll meet her there."

"Got it!" the inspector exclaimed. "I'll contact you once the mission is through." With that, he shut down the transmission ball, once again closing the microphone and speakers first, causing the explosive feedback back at HQ.

Unaware of the chaos he accidentally caused, he turned back to his companions. "Officers, Brain, we had best be on our way. We're needed at an inspection at the museum." With that, the four of them headed out.

Abandoned Microwhelm Computers Warehouse, Metro City

At that very moment, in one of the abandoned sectors of Metro City, a gathering of teens had come together. They were all gathered around a computer screen, watching as one of them worked with the controls of a computer. Once he was finished, look up at the others.

"I've got everything all set up, Talon," Malware said as he disconnected from the computer monitor. "Almost everyone thinks that old museum is haunted!"

"Wait, why is Dr. Claw having us stage a 'haunting'?'" Joltwave asked. "Sure, the museum's kind of lame, but if we wanted to ruin it, why don't we just preform an old fashioned robbery? I mean, there's a lot of valuable stuff in there."

Talon shook his head and laughed. "Ah, you're not thinking about the long run. If we just robbed the museum, then we'd only be causing them an amount of trouble for right now, but it would be trouble they'd get out of rather quickly. This, however, isn't aimed at the museum. It's aimed at Gailson. He's devoted millions to developing the hologram program from the museum. Once his big hologram program goes up in smoke, Gailson Incorporated will be ruined!"

"Forcing him to sell out to Deboir Enterprises, which puts more money in M.A.D.'s pocket," Malware continued. He got up and grabbed a soda from a nearby fridge. "Furthermore, with the problems going on, the Inspector and his band of goody-two shoes are being brought in as well for an investigation. If it so happens that the event that ruins Gailson is an unfortunate accident befalling W.O.M.P.'s favorite son, all the better for us."

"I guess that makes sense," Wildfire said, scratching his head as he spoke, "but if only Malware's going to be working on the project, why are all of us here?"

"That's the beauty part," Talon replied. "We've got another mission, and I think it's one you're going to like. Drillbit, remember how you said you wanted to have a little bit of real action, opposed to just the meetings we've been attending?"

"Oh, yeah!" The hulking teen cheered, changing his hands into drills with the excitement of anticipation. "We're going in to bust some heads!"
"Well, close," the head replied with a shrug. "We've actually got some specific targets." The boy
pulled out a map marked over with red. "Dr. Claw believes it's time to start rebuilding some bridges
that were damaged when he was taken to the Cistern. He's already started some work with
Charybdis, who is just as eager to get back to business as usual. However, there are some areas
where the new management isn't as eager to let M.A.D. take back the reigns."

"So you're going to be sending us into to make sure the 'new' new management knows who's boss,
right?" Joltwave asked, giving a smirk.

"Oh, you know me so well," Talon replied with a laugh. "In specific, we're going to be setting up
our connections with the people we left in the Metro City University. Now, you're not going to be
going in there alone." He spread out to pictures, one of a middle aged woman and another of an
elderly man. "These would be Dr. Thelma Botkin of the Anthropology department, Professor Drake
Vernon of the Biology Department, and Dr. Elvin Spectrum of the Robotics and Cybernetics
department. We have it in good faith that these three people are still loyal to M.A.D. They'll get you
whatever you need."

"Now, not everyone is going to be a cooperative as them, so you'll need to apply an amount of
pressure to make sure the other departments who used to be in our pay knows what's good for them."
He gave a dark smirk. "I'm sure between the five of you you'll figure something out."

"The five of us?" After-Shock asked. "Aren't you coming with us?"

"Nah, this would be a fun mission, but a simple one." The head grinned as he pulled out a knife.
"I've got a tougher mission," he said simply as he played with the knife blade. "I'm going to make
sure that a certain blonde monkey wrench doesn't come between Malware and the good inspector.
She's really the only contingency that could ruin this plan."

"Now, everyone get to your duties," he ordered, and the others nodded. "This is going to be a fun
day."

Metro City Subway Station, Metro City

"Ohh! This is going to be such a fun day!" Rheeci squealed. She, Penny, and Kayla had previously
decided to meet up and have a bit of a girls' day, since it was the last day of school.

"You're telling me," Kayla responded with a grin. "I've already set up the appointments at the salon.
They'll be ready for us as soon as we get there." She then turned to Penny. "You'll really like the
highlights they put in here. They've got this new formula that doesn't fade over time, so the colors
stay bright weeks after the treatment."

"I've been meaning to try something new for a while now," the blonde responded. "Ever since that
last 'haircut' I've kind of missed being able to play with my hair." She touched the end of her now
just barely longer than pixie-cut hair. "I just hope it doesn't make me look like I have paintbrushes on
my head when I can finally do pigtails again."

"Still going for the pigtails, huh?" Rheeci asked with a smile.

Penny shrugged. "What can I say? They're my style."

"They've been your style for as long as I've known you," Kayla responded, shaking her head. "So, at
least three years."
"Longer," Penny replied with a smile.

"So," Rheeci commented, changing the subject, "do you think we'll be able to see the Gadgetinis when we're done today?"

"I'm not sure," Penny replied with a shrug. "Ever since they were assigned to be Uncle Gadget's assistants, he's been pretty strict on a training schedule." She laughed. "Not that it bothers them. They seem to like the work, especially Digit."

"Oh, look," she said, glancing at the door. "Looks like we've reached our stop. Once we're at the station, I'll have to call my uncle. After that, I'll be ready to go." With that, the trio headed to the exit to get off of the train.

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Metro City Museum of History, Metro City

"And here we are, team," Gadget exclaimed as he pulled into the parking lot. "The Metro City Museum Campus, and in specific the Museum of History. Thus is one of the best places in the whole city to go if you want to learn about the rich wonders of our world. Now, come along. They'll be expecting us about now."

Before they had gone very far, a familiar beeping started up, and a projector slid itself out of Gadget's hat. It turned itself on, and soon Penny's face came into view. "Oh, Penny," Gadget said, pleased to see his niece but somewhat startled by her unexpected call. "I forgot you were going to call in."

"Sorry for shocking you, Uncle," she responded. "I just wanted to let you know, Kayla, Rheeci and I have made it to the station and will be heading to the mall."

At this point, the other two girls leaned into the screen. "Good afternoon, Detective Brown," Rheeci called.

"Hey, I.G.!

"Good afternoon, girls," Gadget responded with a nod. "Now, Penny, we're on an important mission right now, and it's rather urgent that we be on our way."

"I understand," she said with a nod. "We'll, I just wanted to let you know what I was doing. See you at home!" With that, the screen shut down and projector slid itself back into the hat.

"At least Penny's friends didn't see us this time," Digit said, crossing his arms as the group headed over to the museum.

His twin gave him a look. "You don't like Kayla or Rheeci? They seem pretty nice to me."

"They might be nice," the blue robot responded with a huff, "but if we're called the Gadgetinis one more time, I swear I'm going to bust a gasket. It's bad enough that you and I've already been saddled with the names 'Fidget' and 'Digit.' The last thing we need is another name that makes us sound like the Inspector's back-up singers."

"Really?" Fidget shrugged. "I kinda like it. It's like we have a last name."

"Robots don't have last names," Digit retorted.

Before anything more could be said, a familiar voice called them over. "Hey, there you guys are!"
Heather called out. She was standing at the museum entrance with a man in a suit, and she motioned for them to join her. "Gadget," she said, motioning towards the man, "this is Rodger Gailson, the man who funded this renovation."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Gailson," the inspector replied, a hand popping out of his hat in order to shake. "My name is Inspector Gadget, and these are my assistants, Fidget and Digit Gadgetini and my dog, Brain. You already know Agent Heather." Behind him, Fidget had to keep a clearly annoyed Digit from banging his head into a nearby lamppost.

"Nice to meet you, Gadget," the businessman replied with a warm smile, taking the hand and giving it a hardy shake. "Please, call me Rodger."

"Alright then, Rodger," Gadget said with a nod. "The chief said you were having some problems with the museum exhibits. What exactly are we looking at?"

"I'm guessing faulty technology," a newcomer said, striding up to the group. It was another businessman, though one that didn't look nearly as friendly as Gailson. There was a blonde woman next to him, and the two of them approached the little group."Of course, what would you expect when it was designed using Gailcorp tech?"

"Richard Deboir," Gailson said in a voice that made it clear he was not happy to see the other man. "May I ask what you are doing here?"

"I've decided to attend the investigation," Deboir answered, never losing his smarmy grin. "You could say I'm acting as devil's advocate."

"Ah, Mr. Deboir," Gadget said, moving forward and once again offering his hat arm. "We haven't met yet, but I've heard that you're running in the mayoral election. I'm Inspector Gadget, and this is my team, Brain and the Gadgetinis, and this is my partner, Agent Heather Connelly."

"Charmed, I'm sure," Deboir responded, completely ignoring the outstretched hand. He motioned to the blonde. "This is my friend, Miss Lana Lamour. She's an actress, has a bit of an interest in technological development in use for special effects, so she was hoping to get a look at the holographic technologies."

"That's nice," Heather commented in a sharp tone, "but who said you were welcome to attend. After all, this is a private investigation, and neither of you are have been given permission to attend."

"On the contrary, my good agent," Deboir responded, pulling a slip of paper out of his jacket pocket. "This letter from the museum curator says that I have more than enough permission to attend. They agreed that Gailson himself might be a bit biased in the scrutiny of his technology, and there needed to be a bit of balancing off."

"Like you're going to be fair and unbiased," the redhead retorted. "Your political videos have been proof of that."

At this point, Lana walked over and took Gadget's arm. "Oh, we're not going to let a little thing like politics ruin a nice day like this, are we?" she asked, batting her eyes at him. "I'm sure we can all go in and enjoy a peaceful afternoon looking over all those fascinating little gears and wires, can't we, Inspector?"

Gadget turned beet red at her advances. "W-well, I guess if you have permission, I'd say it's okay," he stuttered out.

The woman's strategy hadn't gone unnoticed by the others, either. Heather shot a look that would
have fried Lana's head if he had lasers and Brain's hackles had raised and he had started giving a
low, rumbling growl. Something about this woman rubbed them the wrong way, and the way she
had gotten all chummy with Gadget all of a sudden hadn't helped.

Only the twins had completely missed out on what was going on. "So, now that we're all caught up,"
Fidget called out, "shall we go in and begin the inspection?"

"Yes, lets," Gailson replied, suddenly eager to just prove there was nothing wrong with his systems.
"Here, I'll lead the way."

They moved into the museum to begin, but as they entered, they came to a problem. The door guide
allowed the humans and the robots in fine, but when Brain came to the door, he was stopped. "No
dogs," the guard said firmly, blocking the path into the building.

"It's alright," Gadget said, trying to get it so the dog could enter. "He's with me."

"I'm sorry sir, but the rules are clear," the guard insisted in a rather huffy tone of voice. "No dogs
allowed, with the exception of completely trained service dogs. Unless he's a service dog and he
supposed to be helping one of you, he's not coming in the building."

Brain chuffed in annoyance but backed off. It was clear he wasn't going to be able to get in, and
nothing said there was going to be able to change the guard's mind in the slightest. A part of the dog
wished they were back in the old days, when he would have been wearing a disguise from the first
moment.

"Hey, Brain, wait," Gadget said, not wanting to give up quite yet. "I'm sure we can make some
agreement." He cast a pleading glance over at the guard. "Can't we?"

The guard frowned. "I didn't make the rules; I only enforce them. No dogs."

"That's alright, Inspector." Fidget said. The robot then exited, joining up with Brain. "The two of us
can keep an eye on the perimeter outside the museum. You know, keep an eye on everything from
outside."

Digit glanced at his brother in confusion for a moment, and then sighed. "I'll come, too," he said,
following after.

Gadget didn't seem one hundred percent happy with the solution, but couldn't see any other way
around it. "Alright, then. Call in if you need anything."

"Will do!" the orange robot responded with a cheerful wave. With that, the humans and Digit went
further into the museum.

"Well, looks like it's just the three of us," Fidget commented. "We'd better get to looking, shouldn't
we?"

"You do know there are specific protocol when surveying a perimeter," Digit commented. A roll of
tape measure popped out of his hat, and he began measuring out the area around the museum as he
rambled on about specific rules, most of which only he had memorized.

Brain let out a low grumbling sound and started moving, keeping his nose low to the ground to see if
he couldn't catch any scents. As he did so, he gave a bit of a groan, wishing his companions would
keep quiet for a moment. Since that didn't look like that was going to happen any time soon, he tried
to distract himself with the work. It was undoubtedly going to be a long day.
Once they were inside the museum, the investigation began in earnest. "So, Rodger," Heather commented as they walked through the exhibits, "this place looks pretty big. Where would you like us to begin?"

"The trouble all started in the new exhibit on C.O.N.T.R.O.L.," Gailson explained. "That seems like as good a place as any to begin."

"Indeed," Gadget said with a nod. "It makes sense, of course. Since it's obvious there aren't any ghosts, since they don't exist, then there's probably foul play involved, and it makes sense that anyone tampering with the equipment would begin with that exhibit. After all, I doubt whoever's doing this is a friend to W.O.M.P."

Thus, the group wandered over into the exhibit room, which was located not too far away from the entrance. The room was by now fully stocked with all the artifacts sent from Washington.

"This place looks really old fashioned," Heather commented as she looked around the room.

"That was on purpose," Gailson said with a nod. "While it never closed down, C.O.N.T.R.O.L. was in its heyday in the 1960's and 1970's, when it was spending much of its time in conflict with K.A.O.S. Thus, it was decided that it would be best to give the whole exhibit the feel as if you were stepping back in time to those decades."

"It certainly has worked," Gadget commented, wandering over to the shelf containing the smaller items delivered from Washington. "These look so real, Max Smart could have used them himself."

"Now, don't say you believe in that old folk legend," Deboir commented with a snort.

"I'm pretty sure he wasn't a folk legend," the inspector commented.

"Then why, pray tell, don't we have any photographic evidence of the aforementioned agent?" the politician asked with a snort.

"Simple, my good man," Gadget responded with a nod. "He was entirely devoted to his duty. I certainly know that if I was an undercover agent, I would avoid having my picture taken at all cost and whenever possible."

"And of course all successful law enforcement agents think like you," Deboir responded with a sneer.

"It is a little difficult to believe," Heather commented, "though not one hundred percent impossible. I guess it's just one of those things we'll never know entirely about."

"Uh, I don't mean to interrupt," Lana said, cutting into the conversation, "but I think we now had a bit of proof about that ghost problem."

"Now, Ms. Lamour, please don't be silly," Gadget commented. "There is no such thing as ghosts."

"Alright," the blonde said with a roll of her eyes. "Then what is she?"

She pointed to a corner where the semitransparent of a woman in a 1970's business suit had appeared. She looked at the group and smiled. "You were warned about coming here," she said in an overly cheerful voice.
To be continued…
Assignment 7.2: Haunting Atmosphere

Friday, May 30, 2087

Crystal Waters Mall, Metro City

"When you agreed to try a new color," Kayla commented as she leaned back in the salon chair, "I never guessed that was the one you were going to go with. It's not really going to stand out too much."

Penny shrugged. "It might not be very outstanding, but it will be noticeable." She took a strand of hair that had not been wrapped in foil. "I'm blonde, but it's kind of a yellower blonde. I think this'll make a nice contrast."

"Kind of like light coming through the clouds," Rheeci said with a nod. "I think that'll look good."

"Thanks," the blonde responded with a smile. "You're pink will look good, too."

"It took me a while to decide whether I wanted the pink or the blue," the older girl said. "They both look so pretty."

"Come on, we all knew you were going with pink," Kayla said with a laugh. "You might think about it, but you always choose pink."

"Not always," Rheeci tried to protest.

"Those shoes?" Kayla pointed out. "And the purse from last week. And that jacket, the very one you're wearing right now."

"She's kinda has a point," Penny said with a giggle. "You do seem to like pink."

"So what if I do?" Rheeci flashed a grin. "It's a good color, so why not wear the color I like the best a lot?"

"True, true," Penny rescinded with a shrug.

As the girls chatted on, one of the older ladies nearby called over to the hair dresser and asked for the television in the corner to be turned up. On it, the afternoon news was playing, and as the volume was increased, what was being said could not be ignored.

"...and we're looking at bright skies and beautiful weather all weekend," the meteorologist on the screen finished up. "Looks like it'll be a good time to get some outdoor activity in. Back to you, Tom and Katie."

Tom Mayson, the channel seven news anchor, sat at a desk. His dark red hair had been combed back, and he was wearing a professional suit. The dark-haired woman next to him, Katie Hallman, was dressed in a similar fashion.

"Oh, I know I'll be getting out," Katie said with a laugh. "Now, onto the news. Just yesterday, aspiring mayor Richard Deboir gave an interview the other day, detailing just what he planned to do about the recent rise in cyborg crime, or the 'Gadget Issue,' as he called it. Our own Marissa Devon was on hand to get the interview."

The screen flashed to a woman with an olive skin tone who was sitting in a room with Deboir. "So,"
the woman said, turning between a notebook and her subject, "you said if you were elected, you planned on focusing on a way of slowing down the crime performed by cybernetic enhanced criminals, or cybers. How do you plan to do that?"

"For one thing," Deboir began, "I will start with an absolute zero policy for all undocumented cybernetic enhancements. Anyone caught with so much as a robot arm, and no paperwork to go with it, will be arrested. No exceptions."

The reporter raised an eyebrow at this statement. "Interesting. And how will this efficient ban on Cybernetics in Metro City effect its most well-known law enforcer, Inspector Gadget?"

"He will be no exception." Deboir was very quick to give his answer. "As soon as the policies are in place, he will be liable to the search for documentation, just as any other citizen would be. W.O.M.P. or not, he should be held accountable to the law just like anyone else."

"And what of the rumors of unwilling cybers?" the woman continued. "After all, Gadget claims to be one himself, and there might be others who were given cybernetic enhancements under less than consensual circumstances."

"If that was the case, then there will be sympathies given and paperwork will be printed up, after a test is run on the cybernetics themselves and proof of a lack of consent is given." The politician gave a laugh. "However, I find the idea of such 'non-consensual cybernetic enhancement' to be rather unlikely. In amount of money and effort needed to get them in place, as well as the seen benefits they give, make it hard for me to believe that anyone has either the time or money to force these on unwilling individuals."

Hearing this, Penny turned and did her best to ignore the television. She was angered by what she heard, but she did her best to hide how she felt.

She wasn't very good at it. "Hey, don't listen to that creep, Penn," Kyla said, trying to be comforting. "Yeah," Rheeci added with a nod. "Just because some big-shot politician runs his mouth on events he doesn't know about doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you or your uncle."

"Thanks guys," Penny gave a wry laugh. "I know it's just a bunch of hot air, but it's kind of frustrating to hear people like Deboir blow their mouths off about my life. Wilson's not any better; she treats everything like it's all one big comedy. If she had her way, Uncle Gadget and I would be circus attractions, just around to make her money and get her attention." She looked down for a moment, feeling her rush of anger mix with a charge from the wiring in her head. Swallowing to restrain any discharge from DElPHI, she looked up again.

"Yeah, it's really stupid." Rheeci placed a hand on the younger girl's shoulder. "It's just the way of the world, I guess."

"I just wish there was a way to let people know what is really going on," Penny said with a sigh. "Some way to get out what's really happening."

"Maybe there is." A bright and somewhat mischievous grin came to Kayla's face. "You know what, gals? I think I have an idea."

"I know that look," Penny said, a smile creeping over her own face. "What are you thinking of?"

"Well, in computer skills class, we learned a little bit about running a blog," her friend responded. "I learned about how to get it all set up, update it, and get it connected to followers. I wasn't going to do anything with that, but this gives me an idea. Since all the mainstream news sites are either biased to
Deboir or Wilson, why not set up a blog of our own to give a clearer picture on what's going on."

"You'd do that?" Penny asked. "It sounds great, but it also sounds like it's kind of a big project."

Kayla waved a hand. "Nah, it'll be fine. Besides, I have a friend from school who'd be more than willing to help out."

By then, it was time to finish off the appointment, but the decision had been made. The girls continued chatting as their hair was finished up, and by the time they left, they had the plans for the blog starting to come in.

Unfortunately, they didn't look back at the TV screen in time to see the breaking news.

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**Metro City Museum of History, Metro City**

"Now, madam," Gadget said, wandering over to the figure, "W.O.M.P. has been receiving some complaints about a so-called haunting that we have been called in to investigate. Now, if you have had anything to do with these pranks, you must stop immediately, or else I and my partner will be forced to arrest you."

The woman giggled, as if he had stated a particularly funny joke, instead of outlining just what needed to be done. "You were given warning, so now you will pay." Her grin widened and spread across her face to an unnatural amount, to the point that it almost looked more like a cut slit than a mouth. "You will pay with your lives." She raised her hand, and a series of laser guns appeared out of the walls and opened fire.

The five were forced to retreat further into the museum to escape the fire. "Laser weaponry?" Heather's tone conveyed a serious amount of shock and horror. "What the heck is laser guns doing in a museum?!"

"To protect the artifacts," Gailson explained as they rushed down a flight of stairs. "All of the museum exhibits are very valuable, so the finest security systems were put in place." He was forced to duck down as a laser blast hit over his head. "However, they're only supposed to stun an intruders. Whoever's taken over must have tampered with the security settings."

"Gee, I wonder how that happened," Deboir commented with a sneer. They were by now far enough away to have escaped the 70's girl, so they could pause for a break. "I mean, when it's your tech that's being used, nothing ever could go wrong," he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"We don't have time to be ragging on each other like that," Heather snapped. "If we're going to survive, we've all got to be on the same page." Deboir snorted and turned away, followed closely by Lana.

She then turned to Gadget. "Do you think you could contact the chief and see if he can send in any backup?"

"Let me try," he responded, pulling his hand in formation for his phone.

Once they had slipped away, out of earshot from the others, Deboir turned to the blonde woman. "What's going on?" he hissed. "Claw never said that robo-brat in his employ would be trying to kill us, too!"

"Relax." The woman's face hardened. "Claw's orders were clear. You do what you were told to do,
and Malware will do as he was ordered."

"But nothing was ever mentioned about real, _lethal_ force," Deboir snapped.

Lana gave a snorting laugh at the comment. "Gadget is involved. Of course there's real, "lethal" force. Do you really think Claw would miss out on such a golden opportunity? Relax, only he's in the crossfire, and maybe that partner of his."

"I swear, Lamour," the man growled, getting a low tone. "If there are any more of these close calls, I swear, you're going to have to-"

It was at this moment that Lana's expression changed a lot. Her eyes opened wide, and her face twisted into a scowl. "I'll have to what?" she hissed. "You forget your place. If you don't remember, I was sent to be the one to give _you_ orders, not the other way around. Or do you not remember Heffernan and Almos waiting back at the base? What Claw has ordered them to do if I don't give them the order not to?"

Realizing he had overstepped a boundary, Deboir backed down. It was clear who the one with power here really was. "Alright, I'm sorry," he mumbled in a low voice. "I just don't understand why I have to be in here while all these weapons are being unleashed on a neigh-indestructible cyborg."

"To put suspicion off of you," the woman answered. "Remember, once Gailson is disgraced, you're the one who's game to benefit. That also means it would put you in the spotlight for having apparently caused the disaster that ended in the loss of at least one W.O.M.P. agent. However, if you were almost a victim, then you have a reason for why there's no way you could be behind it."

"I still don't like being put in the danger zone to do so," he grumbled.

Here, she smiled and flicked some of her hair over her shoulder. "You don't have to like it," she said with a snide smile, "but keep one thing in mind. You've been useful to M.A.D., but you're still skating on thin ice. You'll end up in much more danger from displeasing Claw than from any number of W.O.M.P. agents."

With that conversation out of the way, the two strode back over to where the others were. Gadget was still working with his phone, but it didn't look like he was making much progress. "Something's blocking the signal," he said aloud as he put the phone away. "I can't get any calls through."

"How horrible!" Lana exclaimed, slipping right back into her ditzy flirt persona. She hugged Gadget and looked up pleadingly at him. "Certainly there's something you can do to get us out of here, can't you?"

Turning red again, Gadget straightened up. "W-well, certainly, ma'am. There's several things that I could try, but we'll need to find a place where we might have a bit more movement. Maybe the roof?"

"That would work," Gailson commented. "There's a huge skylight in the aviation wing of the museum. If we can make it there, then you can probably make it out there."

"So where is the aviation wing?" Heather asked.

"That's the problem," the businessman said. Selecting a map from a nearby container, he spread it out on the ground. "It's all the way at the other end of the museum. To get there, we'll have to pass more than a few holographic exhibits."

"Which will no doubt put us in viewing distance of the poltergeist," Deboir huffed. "Just
wonderful."

"So we need to get out of here and work our way there, and try not to hurt along the way. Great." Heather took the opportunity to push between Gadget and Lana, pulling the inspector away with her. "Come on. We'd better take the lead to find a safe way out of here."

"Right." Gadget nodded, trying to clear his head. "You and I will go to make sure the hallway's clear." He turned to the rest of the group. "You hold tight here. We'll call you when it's safe."

There was no argument from the other three, so Gadget and Heather hurried off to try to find a safe way to get to the aviation wing. Unbeknownst to them, their entire conversation had been watched.

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Outside the Museum

At that time, Brain and the Gadgetinis were still wandering around the perimeter of the building, making sure nothing was going wrong from the outside. It seemed alright, and there really wasn't much for the trio to do.

As usual for him, Digit kept to the patrol, but Fidget and Brain chose that moment to take a break from the aimless wandering. "So," the robot said, trying to start up a conversation despite his companion's lack of ability to speak, "everything's going pretty great, huh? I mean, it's disappointing we couldn't help the Inspector inside, but at least we can help out here?"

Brain huffed and laid his head down to take a bit of a nap. He was not in the mood to talk, none the less to one of the Gadgetinis.

"Is everything alright?" Fidget asked. He had noticed that the dog wasn't exactly enthusiastic to be around him or his brother, and he had hoped he'd be able to bridge the gap and make friends. "You know, if you're disappointed about that guard's attitude, I'm sure there's something we could try to get to keep this from happening again."

At that moment, Brain caught a very unwelcome scent. Sitting up, he turned his nose to the scent and began trailing it.

Fidget was quick to notice the dog's movement and follow. "Hey, did you smell something? What is it?"

The dog turned and made a motion for silence before turning back to the trail. Seeing the response, Fidget nodded and silenced himself before following along the trail.

Digit had just rounded the corner of the building in time to see the two run off. Hurrying, he ran after them. "Hey, we're supposed to be-!"

"Shhh!" Fidget said. He motioned for his twin to come closer, and when the blue bot had done so, spoke in a hushed whisper. "Brain's caught a scent, and whatever it is, he doesn't like it. We're trailing it now, but we've got to be quiet."

"Oh, I see," Digit commented with a knowing smile. "It's a stealth mission. Well, say no more. Not one word will be uttered."

To their credit, once the twins knew what was going on, they remained silent for the rest of the tracking trip. They followed Brian as close as they could and said nothing, waiting for the tracker to give them some signal as to what it was they were following.
As they got further along, the target of their pursuit came into sight. It was a boy, who at the moment was around a good fifty feet off, dressed completely in black and with a hoody pulled over his head. He really didn't look all that suspicious, but something about his scent made Brain's fur stand on end.

Noticing the dog's reaction, Digit turned towards the boy, though they were careful to keep their distance. "That's him, huh? Go-go Gadget Binoculars." A set of binoculars popped out of his hat and lowered down, allowing him a closer look. "Good catch there," he said in a hushed whisper, smirking once he got a look at his target. "Looks like we've found Talon Scolex."

"Claw's creepy assassin nephew?" Fidget called up his own binoculars and craned his neck to get a good look. "But we haven't heard anything about him or his partners in weeks. What could he be up to?"

Digit recalled his binoculars. "I don't know, but it can't be any good." Touching the side of his face, he attempted contact Gadget and Heather. "G-11 to Inspector Gadget and Agent Heather Connelly. Please come in." He waited a moment, but the only answer he received as static. "Uh, please come in," the blue robot repeated, unsure of what to do. "We've kind of got an emergency here."

Seeing the Gadgetini's trouble, Brain adjusted his own collar, attempting to come in contact. His attempt failed, too, as all the collar picked up was static.

"That's strange," Digit grumbled. "This should be working."

"They're probably just busy," Fidget guessed. "Come on, we've got to hurry. He's getting away."

Sure enough, when they looked up, Talon had already started to slip away, heading across a street and almost dissolving into a crowd.

Brain let out a *wuff* and hurried to follow the assassin. This was too dangerous a criminal to allow to just slip away without any idea of what he was going to do, so the dog couldn't allow the trail to get cold.

Seeing his actions, Fidget nodded. "Brain's got the right idea. Come on, let's go!"

Digit could only glance at how his two companions were rushing off, and he frowned. "This is against protocol," he sighed, but didn't put up any more resistance and hurried after them.

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**Crystal Waters Mall, Metro City**

"You were right, this was a good idea," Penny said. She and the other girls were currently seated in the mall food court, still going over the plans for the blog. "This layout looks great. Are you sure you'll have time to set this up?"

"Plenty," Kayla said with a nod. "You forget, we all got W.O.M.P. sessions now, but I'm not working with animals or tools, like you guys. This will give me a way to help with the skills I have."

"This will help more than you could know," the blonde responded with a smile.

Rheeci then looked up, craning her neck to look into an electronics store. "Uh, Penny, you might want to take a look at this," the older girl said, a tone of anxiety in her voice.

"What is it?" Penny glanced over her shoulder to see what she was being told, and she turned sheet white when she saw it. In an instant, she spun her chair around and hurried into the electronic store.
Inside, there was a display of televisions, which all had a single news channel showing on them. On each screen were the bold words "The End of Inspector Gadget?" Under the words, a news anchor was speaking, though no sound could be heard from the displays, though that problem was easily mended by pressing a button on a control board in front of one of the televisions.

"were shocked when an unrequested livestream feed began playing on their devices," the anchor woman said once Penny had activated the stereo system. "The livestream, entitled "The Fall of Inspector Gadget," appears to be a live feed from inside the museum. On it, the famous W.O.M.P. detective John Brown, his partner Agent Heather Connelly, and three other people are apparently trapped within the museum."

Here, the screen changed, showing the footage. Gadget and Heather were attempting to move through the museum, but their attempts were hindered by various robotic appendages that emerged from the walls, or from the small maintenance robots that swarmed from their travel tunnels. "This is the scene right now," the anchor went on, "after the W.O.M.P. employees and their companions were able to escape from the initial attack, supposedly perpetrated by a ghost. We go now to W.O.M.P. chief Quimby and police chief Watterson as they attempt to make it into the museum."

The screen then turned to the two men, who were attempting to figure out a way to get in a rescue party, which was a difficult feat, thanks to the interference of the security systems. Penny, however, didn't have time to just sit and watch the TV, so she hurried out of the store.

Once out, she hurried into the direction of the bathrooms, dodged into the family stall, and locked the door for privacy. Once she was inside, she touched her watch to call up a signal. "Penny to Brain. Come in, Brain."

After a moment, the dog's face came clear on the little watch screen. He let out a quiet woof to let her know she had his attention.

"Brain, what's going on?" the girl asked, anxiety in her voice. "I saw what's happening at the museum, and the trouble Uncle Gadget and Heather are in. What's happening to you guys?"

At that moment, the screen split into thirds, and Fidget and Digit's faces appeared onscreen as well. "I'm sorry to say we don't really know," the orange robot said in an apologetic tone. "When we got to the museum, the guard wouldn't allow Brain in, so Digit and I went with him to do perimeter securing. Then we…ran into a bit of trouble of our own, and we were unable to come into contact with the Inspector."

Biting her lip, Penny tried to think of something that would help. "Well, something's happening at the museum, and I'm pretty sure I can help, but there's no way I'll make it to the building on my own. Where are you guys right now? I might need your help."

"I'm afraid that's going to be a bit of a problem," Digit responded. "Remember that trouble we told you about? It's Talon, and he's up to something."

"Talon, huh?" Penny said. "There's a disaster happening to Uncle Gadget at the museum, and Talon's skulking around at the same time. That can't be a coincidence." She closed her eyes in thought for a moment before looking up again. "Alright, you three keep following Talon. Don't lose him, whatever you do. I'll figure out a way to help Uncle Gadget and Heather with their 'ghost.'"

The three saluted. "We'll call you when we have more information."

"Got it. See you then." The girl deactivated her watch and hurried out of the bathroom once the conversation had finished.
Outside, Rheeci and Kayla were still waiting for her. "Did you catch what's happening at the museum?" Rheeci asked as they approached her.

Penny nodded, hurrying to the exit as she spoke. "Yeah, some creep thinks he's going to kill my uncle, but he's got something else coming."

"So you've got something for ghost-busting?" Kayla asked as she and Rheeci ran to keep up with the blonde.

"That's no ghost, whatever he calls himself," Penny responded. "Whatever's going on in there, it's technological in nature, not spiritual."

"Can you really be certain of that?" Rheeci asked. "After all, there's a lot of events that science just can't explain."

"True, but this isn't one of them." The younger girl paused for a moment and motioned for her friends to come closer. "I've seen this happen before. In fact, I've done exactly what this 'poltergeist' is doing right now."

"Really?" Kayla looked down skeptically. "Where were we when this happened?"

"It was back when I was still in rehab," Penny answered. "Until now, only the people at W.O.M.P. knew about that. I'll explain more later."

The other two girls nodded, their shopping trip instantly forgotten. Some things were just too important to skip out on, and none of them were about to do nothing.

Metro City Museum of History, Metro City

"Alright then, follow close," Gadget called. He and Heather had worked to the point that the hallways were now pretty much clear, and they could work their way through building to the back. Gailson, Deboir, and Lana were now trailing behind the agent, just in case there were still dangers that had to be faced.

"I don't think we're too far from the aviation exhibit," Heather commented. "If we can't stay close and move fast, then we increase our chances of getting out of here in one piece."

"Good," Deboir snapped. "The sooner we get out of this glitch filled death trap, the better."

"That's the spirit!" Gadget exclaimed, missing out on the politician's tone of bitterness. "Now, you don't have a thing to worry about."

"So, Rodger," Heather said, turning to the museum's benefactor, "what exhibits are between us and the exit?"

"Not many," the businessman responded. "The biggest problem will probably be the hall of robotics, but all the technology in that exhibit are ancient. However, you'll still need to keep a watch out for the security system."

"Ah, out in the open and ready for more?" The group looked up to see a new hologram phantasm, who looked like a 1950's style mad scientist. "I've got just the thing for you then!"

Not bothering to wait to see what their new challenge was going to be, the two agents charged
forwards. It didn't take long to find out, as a huge, many tentacle-armed robot with a large club in one such arm stormed out of the exhibit and swung a thick tentacle at the duo.

"Get to hiding!" Heather called out as she ducked the blow and shot twice at the machine. The bullets only dented the machine, and she couldn't help but wish that her new gear was ready.

As they rushed to hiding, Gailson couldn't help but glance back at the machine. "There's something wrong here," he muttered as he watched the duo battle the behemoth.

"You mean everything was alright before," Deboir practically hissed.

"Can you just forget rivalry for now and listen?" Gailson responded with a huff. "That's 2048 Narline security droid. You can tell by the distinctive striping on the side. However, it's too large, and there are pieces of other tech incorporated in, especially on the torso region, and the arms are too long. Furthermore, that club-thing never existed in this design or the design for anything I've ever seen before. The exhibit never looked like this."

"So someone fudged the history for an interesting exhibit?" Lana asked in a tone of horror. "How terrible!"

"It's worse than that, I'm afraid," Gailson responded. "It means that whoever's gotten in is affecting the technology and making it more dangerous."

More dangerous was correct, as Gadget and Heather were now fighting with every ounce of strength. The robot shot out its arms and attempted to ensnare Gadget in its grasp, but he was able to dodge out of reach just in time. He grabbed ahold of one of the tentacles and pulled back, attempting to yank the appendage off. Unfortunately, it had time to respond, wrapping smaller tendrils around his wrists and dragging him to one side. He was able call up wire cutters to free himself, but only just in time to avoid a blow from a heavy, club-like defense.

Heather wasn't having much better luck. Not having her partner's strength or durability, she was doing her best to stay out of the creature's reach, and instead look for a place where her gunfire might be of more assistance. Like before, she ran into the problem that machine was so thickly armored that her bullets hardly left a mark on the robot. Not to mention that the thing was just as determined to catch her as it was to catch him, which meant she had to avoid being crushed by one of the giant tentacles as well.

Her luck in dodging soon ran its course. As she fought to avoid being hit by the monster's thicker appendages, several smaller wires shout out and entwined around her ankles. She was unable to keep her balance bound like that and she tumbled to the ground. In response, the monstrous creature spun itself around and aimed it huge club directly at her.

See what was coming for his partner, Gadget shot his arms out and entwined them around the weapon, pulling back to keep it from squashing his partner. The two struggled in the fight, but soon it was too much. Despite his best attempt, the beast was able to wrench its weapon away from him and slam it right into the ground where the female agent had been lying.

Thankfully, he had already bought her enough time to untangle herself from the wires and slide away, so that she had already gotten a distance off by the time the huge weapon had come crashing down. Darting to one side, she was able to get another shot in, this time hitting a glass lense on the front of the droid, shattering it immediately.

With the lense shattered, the creature was partly disabled. Now unable to detect its prey, it thrashed around wildly in an attempt to catch anything and everything.
As the two of them struggled with the behemoth, Heather was able to work her way over to where Gadget was, and the two of them were soon standing back to back. "I've got an idea that might put gear head out of commission," she called out, "but I'm going to need your help."

"I'll go for it," he responded, catching one of the thicker tentacles and snapping it off before it could smack into them. "What do you want me to do?"

"There's a weak spot towards the top of that thing," she responded. "It's the glass lense. I've already cracked it and it seems to have some sort of connection into the inner workings. If we can get it off, and then gum up the works somehow, we might be able to take this thing down."

It took the inspector a moment to find the area she was referring to, but when he did, a grin spread over his face. "I see it!" he exclaimed, not noticing several wires extending from the robot and reaching out for him. "Go-go Gadget-"

Before he could finish the words, the wires struck out, wrapping around his throat. They tightened, but were not strong enough to actually strangle him. Instead, they pulled him to the huge robot, who wasted no time in cocooning the Inspector in a thick layer of tentacles.

Heather responded immediately when she saw her partner incapacitated. Thankfully, the sudden move the robot had taken against him meant that it had left the glass lense that Heather had noticed completely undefended, and she was able to spring up and make the attack. Using her gun to smash away the glass, she was rewarded by the sight of hundreds of tangled wires.

"I hope this actually does something," she muttered, taking a handful of the wires and tugging hard and then jumping down from her perch. She had success, and the pull not only unplugged or tore the wires she was holding onto, but also caused several that were in contact with them to be pulled loose as well. The robot then gave a few jerking steps before falling over backwards.

As soon as the behemoth was still, Heather rushed over and began attempting to clear away the tentacles. "Come on!" she called out to the other three, who were now coming out of hiding. "He's still stuck in here! We've got to get him out!"

Gailson rushed over immediately to help the agent free her partner, and Lana came after him a bit slower, but Deboir crossed his arms. "I say good riddance," he snorted. "It's because of the likes of him we have problems like this now."

"He just saved your life, you miserable jerk!" Heather snapped at him. "If he hadn't helped to fight that thing, it would have been you who'd be in that thing's clutches!"

"Don't waste your breath," Lana responded. "Richie's a smart politician, but once he's gotten an idea in his head, he's often too thick to let it go."

"I think I've found him!" Gailson called out. Sure enough, there was a hand with a yellow glove poking out from within the coils of tentacles, which Gailson took ahold of and pulled.

Unfortunately, as he pulled, it soon became clear that this wasn't the Inspector's arm, but an arm that came from his hat. As soon as the appendage was pulled, the whole thing came loose, and all they had was the grey fedora.

That did, however, reveal a small passage to where the actual Gadget was ensnared, and the three of them working together were able to clear enough of the bindings away to pull him free from the unwanted embrace. "Gadget, are you alright?" Heather asked, propping her partner up against the wall.
In response, Gadget gave a dazed grin. "You didn't happen to catch the license of that train, did you?" He laughed when he saw the concerned looks on those around him. "Really, I'm fine. It just took me by surprise, that's all."

"Glad to hear it," Gailson responded, handing Gadget back his hat.

Before anyone could say anything, the mad scientist from earlier appeared. "So you got out of one trap alright, but how long can you're luck keep up against these?" He began cackling, and as he laughed, the sound of scurrying became clearer.

As he heard it, Gailson got up as fast as he could, pulling Lana and Deboir back as he did so. "We've got to get away from here, fast!"

"What's going on?" Gadget asked as the group began moving.

"Whoever this specter is," the businessman replied, "he's tampering and adjusting the machinery within the museum. If that is what I think it is, he's taken over the maintenance drones."

"Maintenance drones?" Lana waved a hand dismissively. "I'm sure if the Inspector could handle that big old lug, he can take a couple of smaller maintenance drones. Can't you?" She emphasized the last part by looking back at Gadget with a coy smile.

Before the Inspector could say anything, however, Gailson spoke instead. "Maybe one or two, but there are hundreds of them in the building. It's better that we get as far away from the area as possible rather than risk a major confrontation."

"That's quite right," Gadget said, shaking off the embarrassment from being flirted with. "You three attempt to get ahead. Heather and I will be right behind you. We'll keep them off you as long as you can."

The three nodded and took off. As they followed at a slower pace, Heather turned and smiled at Gadget. "So, you ready to handle these things?"

"Absolutely," he responded with a bright smile. "Go-go Gadget Laser!"

To be continued…
Assignment 7.3: Phantasm Trails

Friday, May 30, 2087

Metro City Train Station

As Brain and the Gadgetinis followed behind Talon, it soon looked like their path might be a fool's errand. Despite the fact that the cyber was a known assassin, it didn't seem like he was doing anything criminal, or even just mean at the moment. Indeed, it might have just been an ordinary walk. The only thing even mildly suspicious was the fact that his destination was the train station.

The lack of any results was starting to wear a bit on the trio, but they had their orders, and they were determined to follow through on them. "So," Fidget said in a hushed whisper, unable to bear the uneventful quiet for much longer, "what do you think he's up to?"

In response, Brain gave an annoyed wuff as a sign that the robot should keep silent. Unfortunately for him, his sign had apparently gone unnoticed.

"I'm not sure," Digit responded, though his voice was even lower than his brothers, "but whatever it is, it can't be good. He's one of M.A.D.'s top assassins, after all."

Brain rolled his eyes and went back to the chase, turning his attention back on Talon. He was fortunate he did so, because at that moment, he finally spotted something.

Not three yards off, Talon had pulled back and ducked into a nearby hallway. Turning to the side for a moment, he touched several dials on his arm, activating some sort of gun in his arm. Going to face away from his followers one more time, he pulled the gun up and aimed it at a target who had just appeared: a blonde girl in a wheelchair who was boarding a train.

Recognizing the danger Penny was in, Brain let out a sharp bark to alert the Gadgetinis to what was happening before charging ahead. Lunging at Talon, he bit down hard on the gun arm and pulled, causing the assassin's aim to go off. The projectile was still fired, but it's target was already safely aboard her train and now out of reach.

In response to the attack, Talon swung his arm, tossing Brain to one side. The dog was quick to spring back to his feet, snarling and bearing his teeth, ready for a fight. He was now joined by the Gadgetinis, who had been more than alerted to what was going on.

When he faced his opponents, Talon smirked. "Well, well, it seems Penny's puppy thinks he's going to play the hero, and with only the assistance of some tinker toys as well." He laughed. "How pathetic. Now, I don't really have time to play right now, since I've got an appointment with your mommy. Why don't you run along?"

"You have the right to remain silent," Digit said, ignoring the cyborg teen's mocking. "Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law."

"Really, you're placing me under arrest." The boy just broke down into laughter at this. "Look here, Robocop, if your mistress was never able to take me in, what makes you think you've got any better chance."

"Well," Fidget said, "for one thing, it's three on one."
"Alright, you've got me outnumbered, short stuff." Talon shrugged. "How about a drink to celebrate you're obvious victory." His hand flipped back for a moment, and a long, bronze object slid out. "Here, enjoy." With that, he tossed it, and it smashed down in the pavement in front of the trio. The assassin then gave a mocking salute before hurrying off.

Digit responded first when he recognized what the object was. "Go-go Gadget Shield!" he called out, and a miniature energy dome spread from his hat and shielded himself and his companions from the liquid that splashed out. "That's a highly corrosive acid!" he called out, spreading out the shield to cover over areas burned away by the acid. "Fidget, you're going to need to neutralize that stuff before it eats away the station's foundation."

His twin nodded. "Go-go Gadget Acid Neutralization hose!" Stepping out of the protection of the shield, but not close enough to the acid for it to harm him, he pointed a finger at the soupy mess of acid and dissolved materials. The tip of his finger opened up, and a stream of liquid shot into the mess. There was a loud hiss as the two chemicals mixed, and once the reaction was done, there was a puddle of water with several chunks of carbon floating in it.

"That should keep the acid from hurting anyone," the orange robot commented as he began cleaning up the mess. "Still, it be best to dispose of this in a safer area."

"We'd better hurry. He said he's going after Penny, and we can't let him get close to her," Digit responded with a nod. He then turned to Brain. "Do you think you can get a scent on where he's going?"

Brain sighed and shook his head. He could get Talon's scent rather easily, but the way he saw it, he had an even simpler way to figure it out. Motioning for the Gadgetinis to follow him, he wandered over to a large wall map showing all the various trains and their destinations.

"That's right!" Fidget exclaimed when he caught on. "Miss Penny got on one of these trains, which means she's bound to be heading somewhere."

"Exactly," Digit said. "In particular, that was the yellow line, which means she should be getting out around...here!" He ran a finger down the train line on the map until it came to a station. "That'll probably be where Talon wants to intercept her."

"Then we need to make it there first!" The orange robot gave a bright grin. "Come on, guys, Miss Penny's counting on us!"

"So we have no time to lose," Digit commented. "We'll have to use the skateboards." When Brain gave a quizzical look in response to the comment, the blue robot gave a smirk. "You'll see."

The twins moved fast, picking the dog up so he wouldn't be lost by the speed. As soon as they were ready, the called out at once. "Go-go Gadget Skateboard!" In response, two skateboards formed from the bottoms of their feet, and there was a jet attached to the backs of each.

"Just hang on tight!" Fidget called up with a grin. "We'll be there in no time!" With that, they shot off at an unprecedented speed.
"Yeah, this is way freaky," Kayla said in agreement.

Penny bit her lip and thought of a way to answer. "Alright, but what I'm going to tell you has got to stay between us, alright?" When both gave the affirmative, she lowered her voice and motioned for them to come closer. "I can use DElPHI on my own."

"What! Doesn't that hurt you?" Rheeci asked concern clear in her voice.

The blonde shook her head. "I don't use it the same way Freymore did. What I do does cause an increase in metabolism, but as long as I eat to make up for it, it won't hurt me."

"Wait, wait," Kayla said, raising her hands. "You don't use it the same way that sick freak did, that's good to hear, but how do you use it?"

"It's kind of hard to explain, but I'll try," Penny said with a shrug. "You see, when I focus on a piece of technology, I can sometimes see these little threads coming out of it. I can see them better when it's dark or I'm squinting, but they'll always be somewhere. When I touch these threads, it gives me complete control of the system. I am actually inside the workings, and it does whatever I want."

"Whoa, so you have some sort of overall remote control?" Rheeci asked in surprise. "How'd you find out about that?"

"Dr. Bradford and I were running some tests on DElPHI when we found out, but it doesn't stop there. If what I'm in has an internet connection, I can use that to telepathically slip into anything with a connection."

"So basically, if you could hack it with a regular computer, you can hack it telepathically now?" Kayla asked.

Penny nodded in response. "And much faster and easier, too. My guess is that since Freymore wanted to use me to hack into just about any private database on earth, he worked to find a way to make it so that no protection file could stop it."

"So you could hypothetically get into and control a M.A.D. base?" Rheeci asked. "That sounds way too much like science-fiction."

"But it's true," the blonde said. "Now only could I take a M.A.D. base, I have. You remember the Antarctica mission Uncle Gadget took a while back? Well, I was able to help out. Digit used one of his tracking chips to make an internet link into the base's technological systems, and I was able to take over from W.O.M.P. HQ. It was like I was possessing the machinery within the base, and I had total control until they cut the power to kick me out."

"This all leads me back to what's happening at the museum." Penny's blue-green eyes flashed as her mind raced. "I'm certain that the museum is possessed, but not by a ghost or demon. Now, I'll need to use a specific program I based off of DElPHI's detection systems to figure out if my hunch is right, but if it is, then I'll be able to help my Uncle and the others without calling the Ghostbusters."

"So we've got an internet hacker who's going all poltergeist to take over the museum and take out your uncle," Kayla commented. "Well, it makes as much sense as anything else that's happened recently. So, what's your course of action? Find the hacker?"

Penny shook her head. "Not quite yet. When I was in the bathroom, I was on a call with Brain and the Gadgetinis. They weren't able to get into the museum, but they were able to spot Talon snooping around the area. They didn't have any idea what he was doing, but if my hunch is right, then our hacker is probably Malware, and Talon was doing some scouting. Now, I've gotten Brain and the
twins tailing Talon, but there's the other cybers to worry about, and there's the fact that no one's going to be able to get in the museum until Malware's kicked out of the hardware."

"No prob there!" Rheeci said with a smile. "We've taken on those robo goons before, and we can take them on now."

"Not without Linc and Eli, we can't." The blonde sighed. "The three of us would be outnumbered fast, and that's not even counting the trouble we'd get into for physically fighting even if we won."

"We can't just sit back and watch," her older friend commented. "There's got to be something we can do."

Penny nodded. "There is and I'm going to need your help. Rheeci, I'll need you to go pick up the boys and whatever W.O.M.P. agents will come and try to track Malware's signal using this." She handed over her watch. "If you can find him, then perhaps we can bring him in as well."

The dark haired girl grinned. "Got it! Just leave it to me."

"Kayla, I'm going to need you to come with me," the blonde continued. "I've got an idea of what I can do to help, but I doubt W.O.M.P.'s going to let me get close enough to do it. I'll need you to distract Chief Quimby and other others while I move in."

"I'm on it," her friend said, flashing a smile. "So, what are you planning?"

Penny smiled and reached into her backpack. "I'm going to be performing an exorcism," she said, slipping a blue book out of the bag and pulling it into her lap.

Metro City Museum of History, Metro City

Insider the museum, chaos reigned. The five people were only just able to move faster than the maintenance drones, which proved to be incredibly fast and unexpectedly strong. Furthermore, whoever had tampered with the machinery had also added a strange mouth, full of razor sharp serrated teeth. The robotic monstrosities chased after the group, eager to bite and tear.

Thankfully, Gadget and Heather were more than a match for the little monstrosities. Between Gadget's strength and array of defenses and Heather's skill as a sharpshooter, they were able to keep the little monsters at bay.

Unfortunately, as soon as one or two were knocked back by the defenders, six more sprang up, and there didn't appear to be any end to the wave after wave of attackers. "How far are we from the aviation exhibit?" Heather called out, letting loose another shot on one of the little beasts.

"Not far," Gailson called back. "I can see the door to the exhibit now!"

"Good, you three go run back there," Gadget shouted, using his hammer to knock back a huge number of the little robots. "We'll be right behind you!"

"Oh, do please hurry!" Lana shouted out as the three noncombatants raced to the destination.

Gadget blushed a little, but flashed a smile. "Don't worry, ma'am, we'll make it just fine."

As the three ran, Heather and Gadget continued to face the onslaught of the little robots. Just above them, a new ghost appeared, this time in the shape of an old west prospector since they were just
outside of the wild-west exhibit. "You might be getting close to your goal," he said with a smirk, "but do you really think that's gonna help you?"

"Will you just go away!?" Heather snapped. She took aim at the hologram generator and fired, smashing the device and causing the prospector to vanish.

Not that that helped much, as a new hologram manifested in the form of a pirate. "Did you really think that was going to hurt me, lass?" the pirate asked with a laugh. "You'd have to be on my plane to hurt me, and that's not happening. I, on the other hand, am more than capable of hurting you."

The two had by now been successful at whittling away the small robots, and there seemed to be a lull in the current attack. However, as soon as the pirate said this, new trouble emerged in the form of cannons mounted on several motorized shelves. They were initially harmless recreations meant to fire foam balls, but it was clear that the poltergeist had adjusted these, too.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," the red headed agent groaned when she saw them come wheeling out.

Gadget was a bit more confident than his partner. "Get into the aviation exhibit," he called out to her. "I'll cover you. Go-go Gadget Shield!"

"Are you sure you don't-" she began, but was cut off as one of the cannons fired, and the plasma burst smashed hard into the shield.

"Yes, I'm sure!" he called back. "I'll follow once it's safe, but I can't hold them back forever!"

Heather didn't argue this time, instead turning to make her way into the goal. There was several other thuds as the plasma bolts slammed into the shield, but in time, they were both able to make it into the room relatively unharmed.

Once everyone was inside, Gadget reached up and removed the shield generator from his hat and pressed it against the crack in the door. "Go-go Gadget Duct Tape," he called out. A roll of the aforementioned adhesive popped out of his hat, which he then used to affix the generator to the door. "There," he commented once the work was finished. "That should buy us a bit of time."

"Alright, the window's up there," Gailson said, motioning for the others to follow him. They were in a large domed room with several floors and a huge skylight overhead. He pointed up to the skylight. "There aren't any dangerous defense systems up on the roof, so we should be safe once we make it up there."

"Great, but just one question," Deboir said in a huff. "It's almost two stories up. How do you expect us to reach it?"

"Like this," Gadget said as he approached the group. He held out his hand to Lana. "I hope you don't mind going first, ma'am."

"I most certainly don't," she responded, wrapping her arms around his neck and letting him pick her up.

The inspector blushed again, but turned back to his work. "Go-go Gadget Legs!" At his call, his legs extended out, bringing the two of them up to the skylight. Once they reached the window, he called out again. "Go-go Gadget Glass Cutter!" Three arms then popped out of his hat, two to stabilize the glass and one to cut. Once a fair sized opening was made, he then went through and deposited Lana on the roof. "Be back in a moment, ma'am," he said, respectfully tugging his hat before lowering down again.
He made two more such trips, depositing Gailson and Deboir first. As he came down the third time to get Heather, the pounding at the door began to become more and more intense. "Sounds like they got through the shield," the agent commented.

"All the more reason to get out of here," he responded, helping her to get on his back. He extended his legs to reach the opening and deposited her on the roof with the others.

As Gadget was pulling himself through the opening, however, several long robotic tentacles finally made it through the door. They shot out, entwining themselves around his legs and began pulling him back in.

In response, he attempted to grip onto the windowsill, but the tendrils' grip on him was too tight. "Something's got me!" he called out when he realized what was going on. "It's pulling me back!" He was tugged sharply back and was forced to extend his arms to be able to keep his grip.

Heather responded first, rushing to him. "What can I do?" she asked.

"My hand!" the inspector called back. "Turn the dial! Clockwise!" As he spoke, a small cover opened up on the back of his hand, revealing a small dial underneath it.

Heather wordlessly did as she was told, turning the dial in a clockwise manner. This began reeling in the Inspector's arms, pulling him back towards the opening. His grip was holding, and after a few moments of this, it seemed like he was going to make it out.

That was when the sill bent and snapped in his hands. In a moment, the tendrils had their opening and he was pulled far back into the museum.

"No!" Heather called out, and she was almost ready to leap in after him. She might have, too, had Deboir and Gailson not pulled her back. "No!" the agent called out, struggling against them. "I've got to go after him!"

"And fall three stories?" Deboir asked in a mocking tone. "Yeah, a lot of good you'd do him then."

"I'm afraid he's got a point," Gaison said. "The best we can do to help him is get to W.O.M.P. and hope they have a way of getting through to him.

Seeing the wisdom of what she was told, the agent stopped fight. She peered down the opening, but Gadget had been pulled too far back by then. "Hold on, Gadget Boy," she said under her breath. "Help is on the way."

Metro City Train Station

Due to the speed with which they were traveling, the trio of Brain and the Gadgetinis were able to make it to the train's scheduled stopping point as soon as the train was. They began to slow down when the vehicle came into view, and pulled to a stop not too far from the boarding area. They made it just in time, too, since nearly as soon as they twins had retracted their skateboards, they caught the trace of their target.

Once again, Brain caught the sign first. Disoriented though he was over his sudden travel, his sense of smell was clear enough, and nearly as soon as was on his own four paws he caught the scent. There, about ten feet off, Talon had his perch and was preparing to attack Penny and her friends as they got off the train.
This time, however, the young assassin was too high up to reach his enemy, but something had to happen fast if they were going to help. Thus, he turned to the twins and gave a sharp bark, hoping they'd know what he meant.

"What? What's going on?" Digit asked. It was clear he was lost from what was happening, and this response was not hopeful to the dog.

Fidget, on the other hand, did not have the same reaction as his brother. Instead, he took off running in the direction of the teen. Leaping high, he was able to make it up to the perch and grab ahold of Talon's weapon, able to aim it in the wrong direction right as the blonde and her friends disappeared from view.

While he succeeded in buying Penny the time she needed to escape, Fidget's maneuver also put him right within reach of his enemy. Upon realizing what happened, Talon grabbed the robot by his throat. When that didn't incapacitate the little bot by that much, the assassin grabbed his arm and wrenched it back, causing his victim to cry out in pain.

Hearing his brother's cry, Digit sprang into action, followed by Brain. "Hey! Stop now!" the blue robot shouted out as loud as his voice could go. "Let him go right now!" He sprinted up, and was prepared to charge Talon as Fidget had done a moment ago.

Unfortunately, the M.A.D. cyber was ready for him. Spinning around to face the oncoming robot, the assassin tossed Fidget at his twin, causing the injured arm to come off in the process. "You know, you wind-up toys are becoming an annoyance," he snarled, attempting to slap Brain back with the stolen limb.

In response, the dog grabbed the dismembered limb and snatched it away, before tossing it aside and rushing at Talon again. He was knocked back by a blow with the staff, but the Chimera dog was not dissuaded that easily. He jumped back onto his feet, and with hackles raised, prepared to charge again.

While he was dealing with Talon, Digit helped Fidget back to a safe place. "You stay back here," he instructed his injured twin. "Brain and I can handle Talon." He then rushed off to go help the do in facing their enemy.

Despite his injured state, however, Fidget was none too happy with the idea of being forced to stay out of the battle because of his wound. He glanced around, searching for something that he could use to help, and that was when he caught sight of his now discarded arm. Inside the end that had been connected to his shoulder, he spied a small object that he recognized in a moment. A magnet. Glancing into his shoulder, he found a magnet nestled in there, too. A crazy idea hit him, and under most circumstances he would have shaken it off and waited for Miss Penny to repair him. Now, though, he needed to do something, anything, to help.

From the moment he had left his brother's side,Digit had thrown himself into action against the enemy cyber. Utilizing a stun cannon, he attempted to cause his enemy's systems to freeze up, which would give him and Brain the opportunity they needed.

At the same time, the dog was rushing in, attempting to use his teeth as a weapon at any opening. If there wasn't a chance at getting in a bite, then he switched tactics, getting up on his hind paws and throwing his weight around, hoping to knock the enemy off balance.

Unfortunately, while their attempts were valiant, their strategies did not work out as well as they might have liked. Digit's stun cannon didn't have an effect on Talon due to the cyber's shields. Furthermore, Brain's more physical attacks did only minimal damage, and were returned in full.
"Did you really think that was going to work?" the assassin asked, grabbing Digit by arm and swinging him around so that he knocked Brain back. "Do you think that your mistress hasn't used those fighting styles before? You are all pathetic." Standing over the stunned duo, he extended out several wires from his arms, which wrapped themselves around the dog and robot's necks. "Under other circumstances, I might have let you live, but now you've ticked me off. I'm reducing you all to scrap!"

He prepared to run a charge through the two of them that would have killed them in a moment. However, before he could send out the killing strike, he was stopped by two curved knives, which had been tossed out and severed the cables. Thus, the dog and robot were released.

In a moment, Fidget rushed between Talon and his intended victim. He now had his arm reattached, and there were two more knives in either hand. "I'm not going to let you hurt them," he said in a low voice.

Responding to the challenge, Talon withdrew a staff from his back, which extended out and began to glow with energy. "You're going to regret that, tin can," he said in a low voice. "You're all going to regret that." With that, he charged at the three, ready to kill.

Metro City Museum of History, Metro City

Outside the museum, chaos reigned supreme. When the mysterious streaming had started, crowds began to gather outside the museum, and the combined forces of the local police and W.O.M.P. were barely enough to hold back the masses that gathered in panic and curiosity.

The reporters had come first and they were certainly the most persistent of the group. At that moment, Quimby had been swamped by a veritable hoard of microphones and cameras while their holders shouted questions out at him. "No, we don't know exactly what is going on," he called out, trying to keep the approaching army of people back. "All we know is what was shown on the feed, and you all know that just as well as we do. Now, you all need to get back!"

"Chief Quimby!" He was so focused on what was going on that he on instinct ignored when someone called out his name. However, the caller was determined to be heard. "Chief Quimby! I need to talk to you!"

He turned and recognized the speaker. "Kayla? What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be with Penny and Rheeci?"

"When we heard what was going on with Penny's uncle, we had to get more info," the girl responded. "Do you know what's going on in there? All we heard was that Inspector G. and Agent Heather were trapped in there."

"I'm afraid that's all we know ourselves," the chief responded, a tone of regret in his voice. "There are three others in there: Rodger Gailson, who designed and funded this place, Richard Deboir, and a small-time actress named Lana Lamour. We have no idea what happened in there, and there's no way for us to get in."

"That's no good," Kayla responded, frowning. "Penn's not going to like that."

"You're going to need to get back with the others," Quimby said. "When you see her, tell Penny to stay away from here." The chief shook his head. "She's a smart girl, but she tends to get herself into trouble."
As they two of them spoke, no one noticed the black-haired girl in a wheelchair who was making her way around a corner of the building. She wheeled her way out of sight, to a far corner of the building where no one would see her.

Once she was there, the girl raised a hand to her ear and spoke, "Go-go Gadget Alias, code word: off." As soon as she said these words, the disguise was dropped. Penny then worked her way to a gathering of wires in back and squinted, focusing hard to find the glowing blue thread.

It didn't take too long to find it. The internet cable insert. Of course, most internet connections were wireless, but most public buildings had a place for such an insertion, in the offhand chance that something happened to the wireless and a wire needed to be set up. Right now, it was exactly what Penny needed.

Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes entered the stream. She wouldn't have too much time to use her abilities before she had to leave, but her uncle needed her. She wouldn't take long.

To be continued…
Within the museum, everything had turned to a blur for Gadget. He couldn't really remember anything that happened from the moment the windowsill had snapped in his hand. He could feel long robotic arms seizing him, snatching him back and stretching him out. When he could finally make sense of what was going on, he was trapped against the back wall of a storage room. The arms had pulled all of his limbs to their limits and were holding him pinned down.

"Well, well, it seems you've finally fallen for the trap." A new figure appeared, this time in the shape of a strange grey blur that almost looked like living static. "Now I'll get to have my fun."

Gadget struggled against his bindings, but he was held fast and couldn't break loose. "You have to stop this!" he called out. "If you keep this up, you'll end up hurting people. No one's been hurt yet, and if you stop now, things don't need to go farther than this."

The shape laughed at this. "Why do you goody-goodies always say things like that? You don't seem to get it." He moved closer, getting so close to his prisoner than the inspector might have felt his breath if he wasn't a hologram. "I want to hurt people. To be specific, my enemies. Right now, that means you."

"Good luck with that," the inspector responded. "Lots of people have tried that and you won't be any more successful than they were."

"But I have one thing they didn't." The figure waved what passed for a hand and three arms came out and tore open the front of Gadget's coat and shirt. "I know things about you, inspector. For instance, the main control panel to your gadgetry is right about here." Four thin cables shot out, striking Gadget in the chest at four areas where there were overlapping plates. "Now, I won't be able to open those panels up. They're biologically programed, with only a few trusted individuals being able access them. That said, there's still something I can do."

Gadget was going to say something again, but before he could say anything, several jolts went through him. They weren't painful themselves, but they were horrible to feel. His head swam and his body went numb before allowing a soreness to come over him. This happened two more time before the specter spoke again.

"Do you feel that, old-timer?" he said with a malicious grin. "That's the feeling of a glitch being planted. Even I'm not sure what's happening inside you, but everything's getting mixed up. It won't be too long before those pitiful devices keeping your heart going, or the ones making breathing possible, are mixed up. You'll die soon." The specter raised his hand, prepared to unleash another jolt.

However, before he could do it, another presence could be felt within the room. "Get the heck away from him, you creep!" a female voice practically shrieked. Along with the voice, about half the machinery in the room stirred. An amount of the tendrils binding Gadget released him and turned to attack the other ones. Furthermore, for once, the specter himself was effected. He was tossed back, as if he had been hit by a hard blow.

The newly turned tendrils soon ripped away the ones that were holding the inspector hostage and the
turned to the torture instruments, which were disposed of as well. Now freed, he slumped to the floor, once more allowed to retract his arms and legs to their proper length.

As he regained his bearings, a new glow started as a hologram appeared. He jumped back, expecting that the specter had returned, but the figure that had appeared in front of him was not the blurred figure of his tormentor, but the completely clear one of a young girl.

"Uncle Gadget?" Penny asked. She wanted to reach out to him, but restrained the instinct, considering she wouldn't be able to offer much in the way of physical support. "Can you see me?"

"Penny," Gadget said, just as stunned by his niece's presence as he had been by his sudden rescue. "You stopped him."

Relief flooded the girl and she almost jumped ahead to hug him. "Oh, thank goodness. I was afraid I was going to be too late."

There were so many conflicting feelings that Gadget was having at that moment that he could hardly think straight. "What are you doing here?" he asked, coming up with something he could say.

"I saw you were in trouble, and I couldn't leave you here," Penny responded. She turned to one of the long robotic arms and directed it to help him to his feet. "Once I got in, I was able to get some control away from Malware."

The inspector took the assistance from the arm. "So, this wasn't a ghost, but some program, huh?" He chuckled. "I knew it couldn't be a ghost. There's no such thing as ghosts."

"I'm afraid it wasn't a program either," Penny said. "He's-"

At that moment, he figure flickered away, replaced by the image of static, before Penny took control and reappeared. "This is mine!" the figure cried out, though he was forced to solidify, and the shape of a teenage boy became clearer and clearer. "I'm not letting you take over, Gadget-brat!"

"As if you could," Penny responded as her figure pushed away that of the boy. "Uncle, he's trying to take the hologram projector! You've got to-" She was once again cut off as Malware took over the projector.

"Nice try, but this is my game!" Malware snarled. He could now be seen as himself: a rather skinny teenage boy in a black shirt and pants with a green jacket. "Claw's ordered him dead, and there's nothing you can do to-"

This time, he was cut off as Penny took control. "Actually, there is something I can do!" She fought to hold the M.A.D. cyber back as she turned to her uncle. "He's in here through the museum's wireless internet connection," she said, physically struggling to keep her opponent back. "I can hold him off for a while, but you'll need to sever the connection to get him out."

Hearing this, Gadget nodded. "Alright, where do I need to go to do that?"

Before she could answer, Penny cried out, and her figure flickered with that of her enemy as they struggled over the projector. For a few minutes, Malware was successful, and once he was in control, turned to the inspector. Without a word, he sent a stream of mechanics after Gadget.

"Go-go Gadget Laser!" the inspector called out, preparing to defend himself. However, instead of the laser, his hammer popped out of his hat. While it could batter back some of his attackers, it couldn't protect him indefinitely that way.
Seeing this, Malware laughed. "You see, this is what the glitches have already done!" the teen taunted. "You can't control your gadgets, but I can control mine."

"Uncle Gadget, come this way!" Penny's voice came from a distance off, but Gadget could hear it clear enough. To add to the direction, several long robot tendrils shot out from behind and pushed the ones attacking him away. It didn't take any further beckoning to get him to follow the tendrils back where they had come.

Seeing this, Malware scowled. "You won't get away!" he snarled, and the hologram vanished as he followed his quarry through the museum's technology.

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Metro City Train Station

Fidget had to move fast to avoid be struck by the now energized staff. The weapon crashed into the pavement where he had been standing only a moment earlier. Without hesitating, the little robot let two more of the knives fly, forcing his enemy to respond quickly to avoid the counter attack.

While Fidget kept Talon buys, that bought Digit and Brain enough time to recover from their own near death experience. "You alright?" the blue robot asked as he went over to help the dog to his feet.

Brain nodded as he got back up to his feet, though he was still a bit shaky. That had been a close call and he was still in surprise by the orange robot's sudden recovery.

They didn't have too much time to process what had just happened, however. Despite the best of intention and the advantage of surprise, Fidget was still not nearly as strong as Talon was. He had been holding his own just fine with the throwing knives, but things turned against him when the battle turned hand to hand. The assassin had been able to avoid the knives just enough to get close to his quarry, and Fidget now found himself blocking the staff with the knives.

Unfortunately, he had forgotten the energy pulsing through the weapon. As soon as knife and staff came in contact, electricity flowed through the conductive metal into the robot. He gave out a cry as the flow went through him and then slumped down, temporarily weakened by the shock.

Talon then raised the weapon to finish Fidget off, but was stopped as Digit rushed up. "Go-go Gadget Energy Siphon!" the blue robot shouted out as he sprang up. A silver coating came out and covered his hand, and he grasped ahold of the staff. The covering allowed him to pull the charge out of the weapon.

However, he was unable to do any more than that. As soon as their enemy realized what had happened, he gave the staff a hard jerk, tossing the blue robot away. Digit crashed a distance off, but was back on his feet in a moment.

In the meanwhile, Brain had now gotten his opening. With the weapon depowered, he could now spring ahead and seize the staff in his jaws. Utilizing his size and weight to his favor, the dog Chimera was able to jerk the staff out of the M.A.D. cyber's hands. He then tightened his jaws and pressed hard on the weapon with his paws, snapping the staff in two like a twig.

Now that their opponent was unarmed, the three of them were able to converge together. "There, you're unarmed now," Fidget said, pulling a pair of handcuffs out of his jacket. "Come with us peacefully, and it doesn't have to go any farther." Digit and Brain stood near, ready to back the orange 'bot up if their opponent refused to go easily.
Hearing this, Talon laughed. "Do you really believe I only have one weapon? Then you have no idea what a cyber is." Two long, sword-like blades extended from his wrists, and the dark smile on the boy's face made it clear he was looking forward to what was to come.

However, before he could move, a voice could be heard shouting out of order. "Talon, return to the base now. Your aspect of this mission has failed, and I have another task for you."

Talon glanced at the three around him, and it was clear he wanted to continue the fight, but he wasn't about to disobey the order. "Yes, Dr. Claw." He then smirked at the trio. "Well, it seems I have to cut and run. Say hi to your mommy for me."

The three tried to move in to stop him, but the moment they made their move, they were pushed aside by a motorcycle that rushed in. The assassin jumped onto the vehicle while they were scattered and was soon out of sight.

The three attempted to hurry off after their enemy, but before they could go, a loud ringing started up. "I'm getting a message from Agent Connely," Fidget said. "Should we answer?"

"If she's able to contact us, it's probably important," Digit responded. "We'd better pick up."

Fidget nodded, and in a moment his face flickered off and was replaced by that of Heather. "Agent Heather Connely to Brain and the Gadgetinis! Come in! It's an emergency."

"We're here, Heather," Digit answered.

"What's wrong?" Fidget asked, catching the tone of urgency in the agent's voice.

"Gadget and I have been having some trouble with the museum," she answered.

Digit nodded "We heard about that. Considering your talking to us, I assume you made it out alive. Do you need some help with that 'ghost' hologram?"

"Yes, but there's-wait, how do you know about the holograms?" Heather asked.

"You're whole misadventure was livestreamed right to the internet, and Miss Penny updated us," Fidget answered. "We haven't been able to keep track though, as we had some problems of our own."

"I hope you're not too busy right now," the redhead went on. "We were able to get the others out, and I escaped too, but that creep grabbed Gadget at the last minute and he's still trapped in there. I'd go after him myself, but it doesn't look like I'd be able to get back in by myself and survive the drop."

"Got it! We're on our way!" Digit called out.

"We'd better get going," Fidget said as the transmission ended. "If the Inspector needs help, than there's no time to lose."

As they were about to take off, they realized there was one problem they had. "We're going to have to fly," Fidget said, turning to Brain, "but I don't think we'll be able to carry you with the copters."

The dog sat down and thought for a moment before the solution came to him. Raising a paw, he pressed a button on his collar. A screen popped out in a moment, and the meaning of what he was saying became clear.

"Alright then," Digit said with a nod. "You go alert Miss Penny, and we'll catch up with the
Inspector." With that, the two robots called out their copters to fly to the museum roof while Brain rushed off, following the tracking signal to find out where Penny was. None of them had any time to lose.

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**Metro City Museum of History, Metro City**

Gadget raced through the hallway, dodging those defenses that attempted to grab ahold of him and stop him. "Why the heck does a museum have so many robotic traps?!" he asked aloud, kicking away another maintenance bot that had found its way out."

Suddenly, Penny materialized by his side and directed a few of the defenses to act in her uncle's favor. "It originally didn't," she explained. She motioned for him to follow her, but continued explaining as she went. "Malware's ability is to take over machinery and adapt it to his own ends. He's been working on the museum for days, which is why it seems like he's got everything under control."

At that moment, they came out into the main hall. "There!" the girl cried out, pointing out the C.O.N.T.R.O.L. exhibit. "The main control box is hidden in there! You need to shut down the wireless signal; that'll break his control. I'll hold him off you while you work."

Gadget nodded and rushed ahead into the exhibit. While he ran, Penny turned and faced her opponent. Since she had the same connection to the computers in the building, she didn't need a hologram to tell where he was. Unfortunately, that meant he didn't need one to know where she was. Thus, the two grappled for control of the building.

Inside the recently set up exhibit, Gadget searched for something that might look like a control center. "Come on, where are you?" he muttered with an amount of annoyance. "You've got to be around here somewhere."

At that moment, the lights flashed off as a side effect of the struggle between the teens. As the inspector had not been prepared for such an obstacle, he ended up tripping and knocking over several of the display stands.

"Go-go Gadget Flashlight," Gadget called out. Thankfully, his cybernetics worked this time, and a small flashlight appeared out of his middle finger. Shining the beam around the room, he tried to get his bearings on where he was.

The stands he had knocked over had been a few small ones that had been holding only what appeared to be everyday objects. A few pens, a shoe, and an umbrella lay scattered in the chaos.

He picked up the umbrella to act as a cane when he moved through the darkness. As he bent down, however, his flashlight shown on an area he had not looked at yet. There, a door stood ajar. "That must be it!" he declared, and he rushed into the room.

Inside, there was a ton of machinery. Computers, modems, screens, and all sorts of other tech flashed and flickered, their lights ridiculously easy to see in the pitch blackness.

Gadget prepared to move in to cut the wireless connection when he realized something rather major. "Penny!" he called out. "Penny, can you hear me?"

"I can hear you," the girl's voice responded, though she was still out of sight, "but I've kinda got my hands full. He's putting up a big fight."
"Alright, but I need to know which one of these to shut down," her uncle responded.

"Oh, that's right! Sorry," she called back. "Just look for a small box with the words 'Wi-Fi Modem' written on it."

"Got it," he replied. It didn't take too long for him to find the box. "I've found it. Now what!"

"You need to-" Penny began, but as her voice became garbled and hard to understand.

"Penny?" Gadget asked, looking up in concern. "Penny, are you alright?"

"I'm in control now, Grampa!" Malware's voice now echoed through the building.

"You! You'd better get out!" Gadget said with a dark tone. "I'm going to destroy that modem!"

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," the M.A.D. cyber responded. "I mean, not if you care about your pretty little Penny, at least."

"What have you done with her?!" The inspector's voice had raised to a shout when he heard his niece brought up.

"Me? Oh, I haven't done anything to her," Malware answered. "I'm just taking a turn with the speaker. But hasn't it dawned on you? I need a way to get in here, but she'd need one, too. If you cut off the wireless, do you really think she's not going to be affected? After all, what happened the last time DElPHI was forcefully shut down?"

Hearing this, Gadget paused. It hadn't hit him that Penny might be using the same connection that their enemy was. He wanted to stop the rogue cyber, but at the same time he remembered what had happened to his niece when the M.A.D. research center had been shut down. How she had been almost violently tossed out and left feeling awful. He didn't want to do that to her.

As he paused, Malware attempted to go on. "You see, you've got to-" Before he could go on, however, his signal began breaking in and out, and soon he was gone.

At that point, Penny's voice came back. "Don't listen to him, Uncle Gadget!" she shouted out. "Just cut the wireless now! He's getting harder to hold back!"

"But what about you?" he asked, fear and concern in his voice. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't! I'll be fine!" she called back. "Just, please, destroy that modem!"

Gadget gritted his teeth and braced himself for the task at hand. It was clear he had no other choice, and he'd have to risk it and hope she was right. Raising up the umbrella he still held in one hand, he brought the metal tip down hard on the machine, smashing right through it. The device sparked for a few minutes before going dark. It was destroyed and the wireless signal had been cut off.

For a moment, there was nothing but silent stillness, but that was soon cut. The lights flickered back on and the wayward devices that had pursued him into the exhibit began to withdraw and conceal themselves once more.

Furthermore, the hologram came on again, and Penny's image came into view. "There," the girl said with a sigh of exhaustion and relief. "He's gone now, and systems are back on, so I can put these away."

"Penny! You're alright!" Gadget rushed to her and attempted to hug her. He had forgotten that she
was a hologram, and as a result, he went tumbling through the image and into another display stand.

"Uncle!" Penny cried. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," he said, pushing himself up from where he had fallen, "but how are you still here? Didn't I cut the wireless?"

She smiled, relieved that he was uninjured. "Yes, you did, and that's why now I'm in complete control of the building. I wasn't kicked out because I wasn't using a wireless connection. Instead, I used the wire jack outside."

After taking a moment to process all that he heard, Gadget sighed and shook his head. "Well," he said, giving a slight laugh, "it appears you've saved my life for the third time."

"You've saved mine on more than one account, too, Uncle," she responded. "It's just what family does. We have each other's backs."

Once again, a paternal pride in his niece came over the inspector. "You've got that right."

At that moment, a voice called out to them. "Hey, Gadget Boy! Where are you? Are you alright?"

"Back here, Agent Connelly!" he shouted back. "Penny and I are back by the C.O.N.T.R.O.L. exhibit!"

In a moment, Heather hurried over to join him. Behind her, Fidget and Digit were also close at hand. "I came back in to help you as soon as the Tin Men arrived," she said joining them. "So, where'd our ghost get to?"

"I am glad to say for certain now that what we were dealing with was no ghost," Gadget stated. "Penny here arrived and proved that what was happening was that a M.A.D. agent had hacked the museum and taken over. Thanks to her, we were able to break the connection and set everything back to normal." He attempted to place a hand on Penny's shoulder, forgetting once more that she was a hologram.

Hearing this, Heather grinned. "Is that so? Well, Charm, it seems you're making a bit of a name for yourself. Maybe we should bring you in on the team full time."

"Thank you!" Penny smiled and was about to respond, but the Gagdetinis presence reminded her of other matters. "Oh, Fidget, Digit, there you are. What happened with Talon?"

"Talon?" Gadget asked, confused over the question. "Officers, what does Talon have to do with anything."

"After we left the museum," Digit explained, "Fidget, Brain, and I started to stake out the grounds and spotted Talon Scolex skulking around the territory. We tried to contact you and Agent Connelly, but since the connection was inaccessible, we took pursuit. We were able to get into contact with Miss Penny, and after that were forced to confront the M.A.D. agent ourselves."

"We hit just in the nick of time, too," Fidget added. "He was going after Miss Penny, probably to keep her from helping you. Unfortunately, he got away."

"Don't worry about it too much," Penny said. "I have yet to figure out a way to pin him down myself. So, where is Brain?"

"He said he was going find you," Fidget responded. "I'm surprised he's not here now."
"Oh, he's probably with me then." The girl shrugged. "I'll disconnect and find him. We'll join you after that." With that, Penny's hologram flickered away and there was no sign that she had ever been there in the first place.

Outside, as Penny disconnected, the familiar feeling of hunger and exhaustion filled her. "Well, I guess I gave DElPHI quite the workout," she muttered to herself. Shaking her head, she tried to clear thoughts and look around for Brain.

That was when she heard the shout. "She's awake!" a man called from behind her, and immediately a clamor of questions and comments were shouted out.

"Penny Gadget! What exactly were you doing in there?"

"Penny! Have you ever helped your uncle like that before?"

"Miss Gadget, can we have a statement about the opponent you were facing?"

"Yo! Penny Gadget! How did you get into that hologram thingy anyway?"

A feeling of dread filled Penny as she heard all the calls, and though she had no desire to, she spun around to get a look at just what she was facing. Standing behind her was a horde of reporters and journalists, all staring at her and shoving microphones and cameras in her face.

Something froze up inside the poor girl. She might be able to face M.A.D. agents without any difficulty, but all these people were another matter entirely. Every eye on her filled her with dread, and every camera lens represented at least another twenty eyes, if not more. She tried to say something, but camera-fright had already filled her and turned any explanation she might have given into choked stammering.

Things were cut short, however, by one loud and familiar cry. "Go-go Gadget Siren!" A second later, the crowd parted as Gadget came forward, practically flying through as people dodged to get out of his way. "I said 'siren,' not 'skates!'" he cried out in dismay. His clarification did him no good, however, and he was still sent headfirst into the wall.

Concern for her uncle's wellbeing pushed a camera-fright out of Penny's head. "Uncle Gadget, are you alright?" she asked as she went to help him get up.

"Nothing worse than a bruise," he assured, though he accepted her help up. "It seems those glitches that M.A.D. agent hit me with where more severe than I thought they'd be."

"We'll have to get you a checkup soon," she responded, straightening the front of his coat and fixing several of the buttons.

Once he had regain his bearings, she could now get a good look around. To her relief, Gadget's interruption had also given the rest of the team time to get in and regroup. At that moment, Heather and the Gadgetinis were answering questions and urging the reporters back. Brain was there as well, only now able to make it to his girl's side.

"Why are they all…?" Penny began, but the answer hit her before she could finish her question. "Oh no. The livestream. This was on the internet, wasn't it?"

"The internet?" Gadget asked, confused by the statement.

"I'll explain in a moment," she said, taking his hand. "Right now, we need to see Chief Quimby. There'll be a lot he needs to know."
Once he had been kicked out of the museum, Malware angrily took off the headset and tossed it down. "You think that will stop me?" he snarled. "Once I get there, I'll-!"

"I wouldn't finish that sentence if I were you," a voice behind him said. The rogue turned around to find Rheeci, Linc, and Eli standing behind him. All three were armed and had their weapons pointed right at him. What's more, a good squad of W.O.M.P. agents were with them, all focusing entirely on him.

"I'd say we could do this the easy way or the hard way," Linc said with a smirk, "but lets face it. No matter what you pick, it's going to be the easy way for us. I guess the boring way or the fun way would be more accurate. Either way, it's your choice now."

Realizing that he was outnumbered, Malware scowled but raised his hands. There was no way out of it now.

M.A.D. Castle, ?

Talon kept his eyes down as he faced Claw and gave his report. "The results of today have been severely mixed. We have failed to eliminate Gadget, and due to the intervention of the living robots and the Chimera meant that Penelope Dollar was allowed to give her assistance. What's more, the intervention of W.O.M.P. meant that Malware was captured, and is currently in custody."

Claw was silent through this, but he didn't need to say anything for his opinion to be clear. He was not happy about all this.

"I am pleased to say," the teen went on after this, "that the mission was not a total failure. Even though Gadget still lives, Malware was still able to implant the glitch in him. It will not be easy for Bradford to erase that from his systems, which means he will have a handicap in future confrontations."

"That does mitigate it some," Claw agreed. "We will have to wait a while before making any attempts, just in case, but the glitch should make it more difficult for him to access the tools of his trade."

"Now, we might have lost Malware, but what of your other followers?" the warlord went on. "How have they done in the mission assigned to them."

"That mission went off without a hitch," the boy responded, allowing a slight tone of confidence to come into his voice. "They were able to contact both Dr. Spectrum and Professor Vernon, and they are ready to receive their orders. Furthermore, it appeared that Vernon was able to bring word of another agent. Ms. Botkin is still active and in the field, and as such was not at the college. She is, however, awaiting your call."

"Excellent," Claw said with a hideous grin. "I'll have to make sure she gets into contact with Deboir; she's much better with these subtleties than he is."

"Now, Talon," he continued, turning back to the boy. "I have another mission for you."

The boy made the salute. "I am listening."

"I have recently learned that two labs have received some important plans from Bradford Tech. They
would be in London and Lisbon. Now, the London location is too close to a W.O.M.P. facility for comfort, but the one near Lisbon is secluded enough that a heist will be possible. I want you to take you team and retrieve these plans. Once you have them, send them to Dr. Spectrum for analysis."

"I will do as you command," the boy said with a boy before turning on his heels to leave. Once he was gone, Claw turned to the window. "So, Gadget, you will live to see another day, though not unharmed. Do not get comfortable, for one of these days, you will fall. This is inevitable."

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"I can't thank you all enough for what you've done!" Gailson exclaimed. They had all been gathered together within HQ to escape from the massive horde of reporters who had been attracted to the scene. The video of the events had gone viral in a matter of hours, and all were clamoring to hear something or other from the newly dubbed "Team Gadget."

"It's all in a day's work, my friend," Gadget said, casually twirling the umbrella in one hand. He had quite forgotten he had it until recently, and thus was still keeping an eye on it before it could be taken back to the museum.

"What I don't get is what M.A.D. wanted with the museum," Heather commented. She leaned against the control panel as she thought. "Sure, it ultimately was a trap, but why the museum. There are thousands of places where he probably would have been able to have a similar effect, but with more chances of success."

Gailson shrugged. "Cannot say for certain, but if I was going to venture a guess, I'd have to say it was probably the new hologram system and automation that was set up. It's currently one of a kind, but there are plans to use it in everything from hospitals to military bases. Had this Malware boy made it look like the systems didn't work or were susceptible to malfunction, then all those plans would have been for naught."

"Which would have been such a loss," Deboir said with a scowl. He was unhappy about having to join the others at HQ and was doing his best to make his opinion known, but the others paid him no heed.

"Well, you won't need to worry about them hacking in again," Penny said as she finished up some work on her computer book. She popped a chip out of book and handed it to Gailson. "Just download this program into the museum's computer banks and you'll be protected from almost any spyware. Of all the known programs we have now, only DElPHI can get around it, and I can personally assure you that system will not be used to attack you."

"This is twice now you've helped to save my technology," the businessman said, shaking her hand as he spoke. "I can't just accept this without any form of payment."

"Don't worry about it," the teen assured him. "Just make sure it's downloaded quickly, before someone else attempts to get in."

"Oh, but we have so much to thank you all for," Lana said. She sidled up to Gadget and batted her eyes at him. "Especially you, Inspector. You were so brave out there."

Gadget once again turned bright red, but he did his best to attempt to keep his cool. "It was nothing, ma'am," he said, returning her smile. "Just doing my best." He attempted to lean on the old umbrella.
Unfortunately, he overestimated the strength of the tool and it snapped, sending him head over heels.

"Uncle!" Penny cried out, and she rushed over to him as Heather and Brenda helped him back to his feet. "You need to be more careful! Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, I'm fine," he assured as he steadied himself. "Just a little surprised, that's all." As he tried to regain his bearings, he smiled at his niece, but his expression changed when he noticed something he hadn't seen before. "Penny, are you alright?"

"I'm fine. A bit hungry, but fine," she answered. "Why do you ask?"

"A portion of your hair is white!" he responded, gently picking up a strand of the odd color.

"Oh, that." Penny chuckled. "That's just dye. My friends and all got some highlights. It's a bit more on the subtle side, considering I'm a blonde, but I thought it would look nice."

Gadget gave a smile of relief. "Oh, it does," he assured. "I was just worried someone scared you really bad."

"Hey guys, you might want to see this," Fidget called out. No one had really taken too much notice of the little robots for the time being, so not much attention had been given when they began to look through the shattered remains of the umbrella.

At that moment, both of them were holding up a few reels of film that had popped out of the tool when it was broken. "This crazy," Digit murmured. "Who'd have guessed they'd have had this tech back then."

"What is it?" Brenda asked, taking a few of the reels.

"Video tapes," Digit said. "They've got the sound recordings attached to them too."

"But I thought C.O.N.T.R.O.L. never made any videos or took any pictures," Quimby said, confused by the revelation. "What on earth could these be?"

"There's only one way to find out," Brenda commented. She began working at the controls of one of the big computer monitors. "Thankfully, we've been working on a video system with just about every know form of tape, so hopefully this will work. There! Got it in!" She adjusted a few more dials and stepped back. "Now, let's see what's one these tapes."

In a moment, the picture came up, and on it was a woman and a man in semi-formal attire. The woman didn't look all that unusual. She looked to be in her thirties and was tall with had dark brown hair and eyes. She was dressed in a dusty pink skirt-suit and held small purse in one hand. No one really took much notice of her, however, as all eyes drifted to the man standing next to her. He was a little older than the woman, and was also dressed in a suit, though his was black. He was a little bit shorter than her, but this also was missed in favor of his face.

He had a long face, predominated by a rather large nose, and his black hair had been combed back in a professional manner. It was a face they had all seen before, though not with this man.

"My word!" Quimby exclaimed. "Gadget, don't you recognize him?"

"Now that you mention it, he does look kind of familiar," the inspector muttered, touching his chin in thought.
At that moment, a voice spoke on the screen. "Max, the camera's rolling," the voice said, though the speaker couldn't be seen.

"Oh, it is? Sorry about that, Chief," the man in the suit said, and his voice was just as familiar as his face. He then turned back to the camera. "Welcome, new C.O.N.T.R.O.L. recruits. My name is Agent 86, Maxwell Smart. This is my wife, Agent 99 Smart."

"How do you do?" the woman, Agent 99, said with a smile.

"In this series of videos we will talk to you about what will be expected of you in your upcoming missions," Max continued. He went on about what the tapes were going to be for, but only Gadget was really paying attention. Everyone else was too startled by what had just been found.

There was no doubt. Maxwell Smart really did exist and he could have been John Gadget's identical twin.

To be continued…
Assignment 8.1: The Family Business

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wednesday, June 4, 2087

Gadget Household, Metro City

"So, have you thought about it yet?" Penny asked early that morning. As one of the first days of summer, it was one of the first times that the whole clan had been able to gather together at breakfast.

Gadget glanced up from the paper he had been perusing. "Thought about it? Have I thought about what?"

"You know what I mean," she responded with a smile. Grabbing a plate of toast and scrambled eggs (that she had prepared for herself), she wheeled up to the table. "Chief Quimby suggested it last Monday, and you told him you'd give your answer today. So, have you made up your mind yet?"

"Oh, yes. That." The man sighed. "You know how I feel about this, Penny. If I had my way, you would just have a normal teen's life. I don't think it's good that you ended up in the whole fight against M.A.D. so young."

Hearing this, the girl looked down. "I understand," she said, and there was disappointment clear in her voice. However, he wasn't quite finished.

"That said," he went on, "it appears that I don't have complete say over what's going on. I know Claw and his ilk, and they're not going to just let you go because I wish they would. They're still going to come after you; that Talon boy has already proven that. So, though I might not prefer it, I've decided to accept the Chief's proposal. You will begin training as a Junior Agent today."

Hearing this, Penny brightened up. "Really? Thank you, Uncle Gadget!" She went around the table to hug him. "You're the best."

Gadget gave a small smile before returning the hug. "Now," he said when she released him, "there are some conditions. Since you will be working with Agent Connelly and myself, you must do as you are told. As a Junior Agent of W.O.M.P., it is imperative that you listen to your superior officers. Also, when school rolls around again, you'll have to keep your grades up."

"Of course," she responded. She went back to her seat and settled down to her breakfast. "I wouldn't think of doing otherwise."

At that moment, there was a knock at the door. Before either of the humans could move, Fidget shot up. He and his brother had been sitting nearby going over some notes from previous cases, and he was already looking for an excuse to skip out on the rather dull organizing task. "You guys eat," he called out. "I can handle this."

"Just be careful that it's not more…" Penny started, but her warning had come too late.

As soon as the orange robot had opened the door, a familiar and none too welcome voice spoke up. "Jessie Harbain from Teen Scene," a chipper woman said, briefly patting Fidget on his head "This is my photographer, Edward Claimsy." She leaned in until she was able to see the table from the door. "You must be Penny Gadget! May we come in?"
Inwardly, Penny wanted to scream. Outwardly, however, she was able to restrain the frustration. She detached her crutches from her chair. "Please wait just a moment. I'll come to you."

As she was preparing to come over, Gadget got up and wandered to the door. He was not as anxious over media interviews as his niece was, but in the last few days, he had seen the effect it they were having on her. Thus, he wanted to make certain of their intention towards her before she dealt with them.

"John Brown," he said, introducing himself. "Most people call me Gadget. I'm Penny's guardian."

"Yes, Inspector Gadget. I've heard of you, too." The reporter's smile became rather forced. "Know, we'll just want about a moment of Penny's time to ask her a few questions. Metro City's just dying to have a juicy expose on the teen heroine."

"I'm sorry to tell you this, but Metro City's going to have to wait" he said, standing firmly in her path. "We don't have time for an interview. We are on a time schedule and will need leave pretty soon. Breakfast isn't a good time to approach us, anyway, so if you would be on your way, I'd greatly appreciate it."

"I'd want to hear that from the lady herself," Harbain insisted, standing firmly where she was.

"I'm only going to tell you what my uncle's already said," Penny commented, coming to stand next to Gadget. "We're in a bit of a rush, and I'd like to finish my breakfast before we have to go. Maybe if you try again later and at a more opportune time, you'll have better luck."

Harbain didn't seem very pleased with this response, but couldn't see any other way around it. "Well, fine. Here's my card." She handed Penny a small business card. "Call me when you have more time." She then turned on her heels and headed back to her van.

Once the door was shut, Gadget turned towards Penny. "I don't want you to have anything to do with that magazine," he said firmly, not even bothering to dance around the issue.

"Don't worry, Uncle Gadget," the girl responded with a laugh. She picked up a banana and began to peel it. "I don't intend to have any juicy exposes at all, none the less from a magazine with a reputation like that."

"A reputation like what?" Digit asked. He had just finished with the papers and had come in, the box of files in tow.

"Teen Scene has gotten a reputation over time of being a gossip rag, and one with an interest more in scandal than opinions," Penny explained. "It's nothing too scandalous, but it's considered a gateway into harder stuff."

"There's no way in heck Penny's going to appear in such a publication," Gadget said, a bit of a huff in his voice. He picked his newspaper up and attempted to turn back to it as he ate. "It's bad enough the regular media's been sticking its nose in our business as of late."

As they spoke, another tapping started up, this time at the window. "What's that?" Digit asked, turning to the sound.

"It's probably just that reporter, trying to get another try at an interview," Penny responded before taking a sip of her chocolate milk. "Just ignore them; they'll go away eventually."

Despite what she said, the tapping persisted after a few minutes. Eventually, it became too much, and Gadget went over to the window to get a look at what was going on. He found no one there, and
when he opened the window, he found a blue ball attempting to make its way in.

"It looks like the chief's trying to contact us," the cyber said, picking up the small orb and clicking it open. "Morning, Chief," he said as the screen came up. Do you have a mission for us today?"

"Yes, I do," Quimby said with a nod. He was standing next to a dark haired woman in a suit. "Before we can go into that, though, I have to ask, have you made up your mind about Penny?"

Gadget sighed, a little disappointed that topic had come up again so soon. "I have," he responded. "I've decided that it is probably for the best that she join Agent Connelly and me as a Junior Agent. That way, at the very least, she can be trained to defend herself, and she will be in contact with us."

"Good to hear that," the chief responded with a nod. "I ask because we've already got a mission for your team. It looks like it's not too dangerous, so it'll be a good one for Penny to cut her teeth on."

Quimby then motioned to a woman standing next to us. "This is Ms. Myra Falden. She is the chief engineer in charge of nuclear engineering for Albincorp International."

"How do you do?" the woman said, giving a smile.

"Nice to meet you," Gadget replied.

"Now, Ms. Falden supervises a team of nuclear engineers who had recently found a new way of producing energy that will have fewer negative side effects than the methods currently used. I won't go into too much detail, but they'll need to test this method for several days and in several stations across the country, and the Metro City power plant is one of the places chosen for this testing."

"Now, long story short," the chief went on, "we're not the only ones interested in this technique. We have reason to believe the M.A.D. might be attempting to get their hands on this method as well, and as such, we have decided to assign W.O.M.P. agents to protect the various members of the teams while these experiments are being conducted."

"Oh, I see," Gadget said. "You want us to protect Ms. Falden through the experimentation." He flashed her a smile. "Do not worry, ma'am! I and my team are the best at what we do. There's no chance that M.A.D. will get anywhere near you."

"Actually, Inspector, that's not what's going on," Ms. Falden answered. "I'm just here to make sure you are all correctly briefed before moving on. You will actually be guarding one of my team members, Alan Connelly. He will be supervising the tests here in Metro City. He's not here at the moment, but he'll be waiting for you at HQ when you arrive."

"Alan Connelly, huh?" Gadget asked. "That's quite the coincidence. My partner's name is Heather Connelly. I'll bet she'll get a real kick over that."

"Well, chief, ma'am," the cyber said, finishing up the debriefing, "there's nothing you have to worry about. Mr. Connelly is just as safe as you are!" He then closed the orb, once again starting with the mic and stereo.

Quimby was only just able to get Falden down before the intense burst of sound came over the speakers. "That's what I'm worried about," he muttered under his breath.

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City
Around fifteen minutes later, the team made it to HQ. The Gadgetinis and Brain had already moved inside the building, but the two humans had hung back for a moment to finish up some of the paperwork to get Penny instated as a Junior Agent. They had begun getting out of the Gadgetmobile when Heather arrived on her motorcycle.

"Ah, good morning, Heather," Gadget called out. "It seems we had pretty good timing."

"Morning, partner," Heather replied as she clipped her helmet onto her bike. "Penny, good to see you here, too. I guess that means you talked your uncle into letting you join us."

"Yep," the teen responded with a smile. "I'll be getting my badge after we meet up with the engineer we're protecting."

"That's right," Heather responded with a nod. "I got word about that mission earlier this morning. The chief was kind of in a hurry, though, so I didn't get the guy's name."

"That's alright," Gadget responded with a smile. "The chief did mention it to us this morning. You're really going to get a kick out of this. The man we are protecting is named Alan Connelly."

When she heard this, Heather paused. "Wait, his name is Alan Connelly."

The cyber gave a nod. "Yep. Isn't that a funny coincidence?"

When Heather didn't answer, Penny caught on that there was something still being said. "Is it a coincidence," she asked, "or do you know him?"

The older girl sighed. "I should hope I know him," she said, pausing outside of the main door. "He's my cousin, and we practically grew up together."

"Well, that's good then, isn't it?" Penny asked. "After all, if you grew up together, then you know each other pretty well."

"Oh, I know him very well," Heather sighed. "It's just that…well…he's kind of a fan of you, Gadget Boy. A big-time fan."

"Oh, there's no problem with that," Gadget said as he reached out to open the door for the two girls. "I've always got time for a fan."

"No, I mean a huge fan," the redhead went on. "Like president of your fan club for five years straight huge. It…might get a little weird."

"Whatever it is, I'm sure we can handle it," Penny responded as she made her way into the building. "After all, how bad can he be?"

As they went into the building, they could spot the rest of their team pretty quickly. The Gadgetinis and Brain were standing in the back, talking with Chief Quimby and another, younger man. He appeared to be around the same age as Heather, if not a little bit younger, and also had red hair.

That, however, was where the resemblance stopped. He was also shorter than Heather, and had glasses and rather prominent front teeth. If it wasn't for the professional looking lab coat he was wearing, he would have looked like he just walked out of some goofy preteen sitcom.

"Hey, cuz," Heather called out as the trio approached. "Funny seeing you here."

"Good morning, Heather," the man called back. He looked over and was going to continue, but his
expression changed when he saw who she was with. "That-! That-! How-?! Who-!? Your!?!" he stammered out, unable to find a way to articulate his thoughts.

The agent sighed and gave a nod. "Yes, Alan, this is who you think it is. Meet my partner, John Brown. This is also his niece, Penny Dollar, who is the Junior Agent assigned to us. I see you've already met the Gadgetinis and Brain. They also help us, though I'm not sure if their positions hold a title yet."

Not even bothering to continue to speak to Heather, the man rushed over and began shaking Gadget's hand. "You're Inspector Gadget! Oh, it's such an honor to meet you, sir. My name is Alan Connelly, and I'm your biggest fan!"

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Alan," Gadget respond with a smile. "So, I hear we are going to act as your defense while this testing is going on, is that right?"

"Oh, yes, it is, oh excellent Inspector," Alan replied, still giving a big, fan-boy grin. "Is it weird if I called you that? I mean, I thought there might be some special way to address you, but I came up with that when I was eleven."

"Just 'Gadget' is fine, thanks," The cyber responded. "Now, if you can just wait for a moment, Alan, Penny and I have a bit of paperwork we're going to need to fill out. Don't worry, this won't take long."

"Oh, take your time." The engineer was still clearly in a state of euphoria. "We'll be right over here!"

As uncle and niece walked over to finish turning in the paperwork, Alan walked over to stand next to Heather. "Oh, boy, this is so great!" he said with a squee. "We get to spend at least a whole week with Inspector Gadget! Well, I get only a week. I guess you get to hang out with him all the time, since he's your partner. You're so lucky, Heather."

"Things certainly have gotten more exciting," she said with a shrug. "So, last I heard from you, you were working for a plant just outside of the city. Where'd all this experimental division stuff come from?"

"Oh, that? It's nothing." Alan gave a shrug before continuing. "Just a few ideas I'd posted on my blog. It wasn't the entire work, of course. That was developed later after the entire team formed. However, they liked what I had and asked if I'd help."

"Seems things turned out pretty okay for you after all," Heather commented. "So, do your folks know anything about this yet?"

Her cousin shook his head. "Nah, most of this is pretty top secret. I can't even discuss most of this stuff with you, and you're on the security detail. Besides," he said with a shrug. "if I called and talked about my job, all I'd hear was questions on why I didn't join the military like you, Andy, Jean, and Bruno did."

"I wouldn't worry too much about that," the agent said, playfully punching her cousin's shoulder. "It's been five years; by now they've probably come to grips with the fact that you're the only Connelly cousin who didn't have a military career."

"True," Alan responded, "but there are sometimes I wonder if they were right. After all, you joined the Army, and look at you! Now you're working at W.O.M.P., and as Inspector Gadget's partner! Maybe if I had taken a military career that could have been me." He gave another of those fanboy grins. "Just imagine, all the adventures we'd have gone on. Maybe I'd even have that flight cape I
designed when I was six. It'd be great to have a flight advantage on the enemy."

Heather struggled to restrain a laugh at the thought of her cousin running around in a brightly colored cape. "Sure, whatever you say," she said, doing her best to smother the laugh.

The conversation was then cut short by Gadget and Penny, who had finished up there work. "Alright, it seems everything is set and we're ready to go. So, Alan, where are you staying?"

"The Broad Street Callway Hotel," he answered. "Are we going to get to drive in the Gadgetmobile? Can I ride up front?"

"Indeed we'll take the Gadgetmobile, but Penny needs to ride the in front," Gadget explained as they left. "It's the only place we can get her wheelchair in."

"That's alright," the engineer said with a nod. "It's just awesome that I'll get to ride at all. Just wait until the folks in my fan forum hear about this!"

As they left, Heather hung back a bit, embarrassed by her cousin's display. Seeing her posture, Fidget approached her. "Agent Heather, are you alright?"

"Just fine there, Sunny," she sighed. "Just standing here wishing the ground would swallow me whole."

"I don't know why you'd want that," the little robot commented, "but I'm afraid this isn't likely to happen. The nearest fault line is far, far away from here, and earthquakes don't hit this area."

"Don't worry," Digit groaned as he passed the two of them. "I know exactly what you mean."

Telman's Pub, Metro City

"So, what do you say? Do we have a deal?" A tall man with dark hair smirked as he held out several sheets of paper to his companion.

The other man, a younger man with blond hair, looked over the sheets. "So, you say that M.A.D. can make sure that he disappears?"

"Oh, I can do much better than that, my friend," the first man said with a smile. "I'm one of M.A.D. contractors myself, so I can give you one-hundred-percent guarantee that Mr. Perfect vanishes off the face of the planet, leaving you to sweep the love of your life off her feet. All you need to do in return is promise that if the time ever comes for you to do M.A.D. a favor that you'll play along. Alright?"

"It sounds good, but what if it doesn't work?" The man looked rather concerned. "I mean, it would be great for Baskins to just disappear, but what if he doesn't? I don't want the cops or W.O.M.P. breathing down my neck. And what about that favor Claw wants?"

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that favor at all," the M.A.D. agent assured. "Claw makes thousands of these deals. There's no way he'd ever cash them all. Odds are, you'll never have to hear from us ever again, if you don't want to. As for Baskins surviving his little run in with M.A.D., well," he said, turning to pat a covered cage that sat next to the table, "I don't think that's going to be a problem. Snarling and squealing came out of the cage as he patted it. "My boys here will deal with your little problem, or my name isn't Rick Boulden. So, have we come to an agreement?"

Before the man could answer, a ringing started up from Boulden's pocket. It was a shrill ring that just
sounded like an obnoxious ringtone to most people, but the M.A.D. agent knew exactly what it meant.

"I have to take this," he said, slipping away from the table. "You have a look over the papers and I'll come back to you, alright? Alright." He then grabbed the jacket and slunk off to the pub's restroom.

As soon as he was in private, he turned the communicator on. "Boulden here," he said giving the salute as the image of Montan came onscreen. "Does Claw have a job for me?"

"Ya got it," the M.A.D. lieutenant responded. "Have ya heard anything about that new development in the world of nuclear engineering?"

"Ugh, that kind of math and science gives me a headache," the agent said with a groan. "I left that stuff all behind me when I joined M.A.D. to do what I'm really good at."

"I see that," Montan replied, giving a chuckle as he spoke. "Well, you don't need to know exactly what's goin' on there to do your mission." A picture of a bespectacled, red-headed man came on screen. "This is an engineer named Alan Connelly. He will be your target."

"He looks like a real dweeb," Boulden said with a smirk. "The boss wants him rubbed out? That'll be easy enough. I'll just show my boys a ripped picture and they'll finish him off in no time."

"No, you are not to kill him," the superior agent ordered. "Believe it or not, Claw believes Connelly could be of some value. You are to capture him and bring him to us alive and in one piece."

The thug gave a shrug at that information. "That'll make things take a bit more time, but eh, alright. We'll bring him in alive. It won't be as much fun, but I've got other jobs for that."

"Oh, don't worry," Montan reassured. "It's not going to be an actionless mission. W.O.M.P.'s already gotten an idea about the fact that we want this guy brought in and have arranged for a protection squad. You know that so-called Team Gadget?"

"So I'll finally get to face off with the famed Inspector Gadget for myself." Boulden smirked. "He seems like a goof, but his redhead partner's kinda hot. Maybe I'll leave her after we deal with the others."

"Don't get cocky," Montan warned. "Despite his appearance, Inspector Gadget can be very dangerous. Do not allow his unassuming appearance deceive you. You are to make sure he and everyone on his team are dead, including the gals."


"Just keep that in mind," his superior said. "Claw doesn't like insubordination, and should you disobey him, the consequences will be severe."

"You don't have to worry about me double-crossing Claw," the agent replied. "I remember what happened to the last guy who did that."

"Which is why such examples are made," Montan said with a nod. "Now, go and bring him to M.A.D." With that, the transmission ended and the lieutenant disappeared.

Slipping the communicator back into his pocket, Boulden snuck back into the main pub area. "Well, Jimmy, I'm afraid I'm goin to have to cut this meeting short," he said, going over to the covered cage and sliding it onto a nearby cart. "You hold onto that paperwork and contact me once you've made
up your mind. Right now, me and the boys have got another job to do." He chuckled as then squealing and snarling started up in the cage once more.

Callway Hotel, Metro City

"So, are you guys robotic clones of the Inspector, or are you from the future in a time when robots have replaced the human race, but they are still building you guys in the image of the heroes of the past," Alan asked as they pulled in. "Personally, I think the first one, but the forum I'm on is pretty split on the issue. An official statement from you would be great in settling the issue."

The Gadgetinis could only glance at the engineer and then at each other, just stunned by the fact that they were being asked that question. Eventually, Fidget decided to try to answer. Emphasis on try. "Uh, neither. Miss Penny just built us to be able to help the Inspector, and we came to be able to make decisions without the help of a program. We're not sure why it happened, but we just know it did."

"Seriously, robot clones from the future?" Digit added. "What sort of weird reality do you think we live in?"

"Well, we are currently in a car with two cybers and a genetically altered bear/dog hybrid."

"Wait a minute," Penny said, turning around in her chair, "no one's ever announced that Brain is a chimera. Where'd you find that out?"

Hearing her, Alan grinned. "I made an educated guess. He looks a lot like a dog, but he's too big and heavy to be a proper dog. What's more, his hind feet are somewhat shorter and wider than the hind feet of a pure dog, and his fore feet are a bit flat and wide. Adding in the fact that he has a tendency to stand on his full foot when on his hind legs, as opposed to just on the balls of his feet like a normal dog, all the signs seem to point to him being at least part bear. Since it is likely that M.A.D.'s broken the rules of nature in similar cases, it wasn't too hard to put two and two together." Seeing the looks of concern on the others' faces, he quickly continued. "Oh, don't worry; you guys are the first people I've ever told this to. No one else knows."

"How do you know about Chimera at all?" Digit asked. "That stuff is top secret."

"Well, I haven't seen anything concrete, like documentation," the engineer said with a shrug, "but rumors about those sorts of creatures have been circulating through 42n8 for quite a while."

"What's Fortunate?" Gadget asked. "And how the heck is it getting a secrets like that?"

"Oh, it's just an online chat group," Alan replied. "We just give guesses, and sometimes they are right. Like now, I guess. Don't worry, though. If this stuff is supposed to be secret, I'll pretend you that I don't know. It'll be our little secret!"

At that point, they were at the hotel and began filing out of the car to get to the building. Upon getting out of the Gadgetmobile, Penny went over to Heather, who was setting up her motorcycle in the next parking space. "Heather, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, Charm," the older girl replied. "What are you wondering?"

"It's about Alan," the blonde replied. "He's never seen any W.O.M.P. files, has he?"

When she heard this, the agent placed her face in her hands and sighed. "Let me guess. He said
something he read on 42n8, combined with observations no normal person would make, and came to correctly guess something that was top secret?"

"It was Brain's nature as a Chimera," Penny answered. "He's done this sort of thing before?"

"Since we were kids," Heather said with a nod. "My Aunt Margery could never let him even see about Christmas or birthday presents or he'd guess them right just on their approximate weight and sound. He's always had a good memory, but only really for things he's interested in. Adding in the fact that he's got a good portion of the internet mapped out and is prone to joining those conspiracy theory sights, there are a lot of secrets he tends to learn on guess alone." She gave sigh and shook her head. "I'd better send a message to the chief to let him know about this once we're not in public."

"Probably not a bad idea," Penny said as she and the older woman headed towards the main building. "Until then, I don't think it'll be too much of a problem as long as we can stay away from the press."

"Are you guys coming in?" The two girls looked up to see Gadget waving to them. He and the others had made it up to the hotel building and were waiting for the duo to catch up to them.

"We'll be there in a moment, Uncle!" Penny called as they began to move in. As the group hurried into the building, they did not notice the hushed whispers that started out or the camera phones that were being turned on and pointed in their direction. Thus, they had no idea of the pictures and videos being uploaded to the internet at that very moment.

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

Time to make mentions again! I have to owe Alan's first name to systemcat, who selected it in her IG AU for the character, who only had a nickname in canon. Her version of that character is named Alan Engenis, and I'm afraid to say that Alan Engenis is a lot cooler than Alan Connelly is. Both Alans, however, are less aggravating than their canon counterpart.
Wednesday, June 4, 2087

Callway Hotel, Metro City

"Alright, Penny," Gadget said as he and his niece strode through the hallway of the hotel, "one of the most important things you need to remember when you are providing protection is to stay ever vigilant. You need to have an idea of what is going on everywhere, and at all times, whenever possible."

"That's why we split up to cover more ground, right?" Penny responded. She already knew a good deal of what he was telling her, but she humored him, hoping he'd have more confidence in her abilities if he thought he taught them to her. "The Gadgetinis can keep an eye on the upper levels while Heather and Brain guard Alan directly in his room, and you and I will keep a patrol on the lower levels and outside. That way, if no matter how M.A.D. tries to come at us, someone's going to notice."

"Correct!" Gadget affectionately patted her shoulder. "You catch on fast. I'm sure you'll make a fine inspector in no time."

"Hey, look! There they are! It's Inspector Gadget and Miss Gadget! They're here in the hotel!" Uncle and niece turned when they heard someone calling out. At that exact moment, a group of people rushed over. Questions practically poured out of the various reporters as they rushed over to the duo.

"Inspector, are you on some sort of job, or is this for leisure?"

"Penny Gadget, are you actually working with you uncle, or was that a one-time thing?"

"Where is your team, Inspector?"

"What sort of work are the two of you getting up to?"

"We all know you're a cyber, Miss Gadget, but are you as mechanical as your uncle is?"

"Penny, how is the Gadget Problem going to affect you?"

This being one circumstance where she was more uncomfortable, Penny leaned back, uncertain of what to do. She was considering backing out into the hallway before too many people could mob her, but she didn't want to look like she was running away.

Thankfully, her pause in judgment was not of too great importance. Catching on to what was happening, Gadget stepped in. "Now, now, I know you are all excited to see us," he said, raising his hands to signal that the newcomers should step back. "I appreciate the enthusiasm and support, but I'm going to have to ask you all to go about your business. We are on important W.O.M.P. business, so we don't have any time for an interview."

A few of the more belligerent reporters didn't want to listen and attempted to get in closer to get answers to their questions, but most of the crowd seemed to get the picture and left. Eventually, even the outliers finally were convinced that they weren't going to get any big scoop by sticking around and left, lest they face trespassing charges. Soon, they were left alone in the lobby with the few actual hotel guests who had been there previously.
"That's another thing you're going to have to get used to," Gadget said to Penny, guiding her to one side. "The press seems to be unable to ignore us. No matter what steps you take, someone is going to find out where you are. You just have to be able to let them know that you can't talk while on a mission and politely ask them to step back."

"I'm gonna have to work on that one, Uncle Gadget," Penny said, taking her uncle's hand. "I don't know what it is, but for some reason, reporters scare me more than M.A.D. agents do."

"Your mother used to say that, too," Gadget commented with a laugh. "She'd say at least she could fight off a M.A.D. agent who was bothering her." He gave a shrug. "I'll admit, I never really understood what she meant. After all, most reporters aren't trying to kill you. Of course, there was that one guy who had a pistol hidden in what looked like a camera that one time, so you can never be too careful."

"We were both just lucky to have you around, then," she responded, smiling up at him.

Gadget smiled, before turning back to the lesson at hand. "Now, on to scoping out the territory. Of course, it is not always practical or possible, but when you can, it is a good idea to know the exact dimensions of the territory. It will give you a better idea of where you could be taken unawares." He held out his hand. "Go-go Gadget Tape Measure."

Instead of the tape measure, however, his siren popped out of his hat and began blaring at top volume. "Oh, right, now you choose to come out," he huffed with some annoyance. As he realized that others were glaring at him, he recalled the siren back. "I said 'Go-go Gadget Tape Measure.'"

This time, an arm popped out of his hat and handed him a bottle of water. "No, this isn't what I wanted, either," the inspector groaned.

Seeing his distress, Penny touched his arm. "Are you alright?" she asked. "Still having problems with glitches?"

Her uncle sighed. "It's not all the time, and never serious, but these annoyances keep popping up." He paused to call the arm with the bottle back into his hat. "Nothing Dr. Bradford's tried has been able to get rid of them for long. It's really more a frustration than a major problem, but they still won't go away."

"I'll be alright," the girl said, trying to do her best to comfort him. "We'll eventually figure out a way to fix them. Here, I think I have something that will help." She pulled a charm off of her bracelet and scanned it with her watch, causing the little device to beep. When she heard this, she held the watch up to her mouth. "Go-go Gadget Area and Perimeter Scan."

In response, a small device emerged from one end of the watch. It shot out a red beam of light, which then swept over the whole room. After performing a few scans, the scanner retreated into the watch and offered up the information on the screen. "Alright, it looks like the room is about three hundred and fifty square feet and there are currently eight people inside, counting you and me," Penny read aloud. "Will that work, Uncle?"

"Well, yes, that will do in most circumstances," the Inspector said, doing his best to regain his composure. "Now that you know your terrain, you need to do your best to keep an eye out for any and all suspicious characters."

As he continued lecturing her on the proper way to identify a potential enemy, a man approached the two agents. He had a large box with him, which he set to one side as he reached them. "I've got a delivery here," the man said, tapping Gadget on the shoulder. "You Inspector Gadget?"
"Oh, I didn't see you there for a moment," Gadget responded, spinning around to face the delivery man. "Yes, I am him."

"Good," the delivery man said. "I've got a package for an Alan Connelly, but them said to take the package to you and let you take it to him."

"I see," Gadget responded with a nod. "They must have realized that I'd be on the security detail and prepared in advance. Well, just leave it there, my good man, and I'll take care of it."

The man gave a smile and nodded. "You got it." With that, he set the box down and turned to leave.

"Well, we certainly were lucky that whoever sent that knew to come to us," Gadget said with a smile. "Imagine, if they had just gone to his room, Heather might have mistaken him for a M.A.D. agent. That certainly would have been embarrassing."

"It seems a little bit too convenient for me," Penny commented, looking the box over. "Uncle, could we get a look at what's inside this before we bring it up? Something about this all is making me suspicious."

"Now, Penny," her uncle responded with a slight tone of reprimand, "you know better than to be rifling through someone else's mail. That would be mail fraud."

"In this case, I think we can make an exception, considering we are on protection duty," she responded. She looked up at him pleadingly. "Please? It would make me feel better about this whole situation."

Gadget sighed after a moment. "Alright, just this time. Go-go Gadget Crowbar." The tool slid out from a compartment in his side, and he used it to pry the lid open a little bit. "But I don't want you to tell me there are creatures in there."

Penny peered into the box and immediately leaned as back so as to get away from the crate. "Uncle! There are creatures in there!"

"I told you not to tell me that!" Gadget scolded. He then peered in and got a good look at the contents himself. "Wowzers! Those are ugly!" He slammed the lid back down as the creatures within attempted to escape. As he smacked the nails with the crowbar, he turned to his niece. "Penny, get to cover and contact the others. We're going to need help. Everyone else, clear out now!"

Thankfully, most of the employees and bystanders who witnessed this took the instructions and fled. Their luck ran dry here, though, since as soon as the civilians had left, the Chimera escaped.

There were two of the little beasts. Both were a little smaller than a middle school child, and they had a body type and arms that appeared to be from a chimpanzee. Their heads, however, were like those of rats, and their fangs spoke of some sort of predatory creature. They were completely identical, with the only identifiers they had were tags that were on their ears. One was blue and one was orange.

As soon as they were free, the little chimp/rat things let out squeals and charged at the two humans. Gadget sprang at them in response, grabbing the blue one before it could reach Penny. The orange one, which had charged at him, had reached him without much difficulty, and he had to extend his neck up to keep the beast from biting his face.

Meanwhile, Penny had obeyed her uncle's order and had gotten behind the main desk for cover. Once she was shielded from the fight going on in the main lobby, she turned to her watch. "Penny to Heather, Brain, and the Gadgetinis. Hurry, please! We've got an emergency!"
In a moment, the faces of the four remaining teammates came on screen. "We're here, Charm," Heather said. "What's going on?"

"M.A.D.'s made their move," Penny responded. "They've sent in two Chimera. Uncle Gadget's keeping them back, but he's going to need back up, and soon!"

"We're on our way!" Digit called out. "We'll be down in just a moment."

Having gotten her message through, Penny shut down the communication and selected one of her charms. Scanning it, she peered over the edge of the desk to get an idea of how her uncle's battle was faring.

Things were getting rough. Though the beasts were much smaller than the cyborg, they were completely mad and ridiculously strong. He had been knocked to the floor, with the orange-tagged beast still attempting to make its way to his face, and the blue-tagged one was attempting to gnaw at his throat. All limbs the inspector could spare were devoted to keeping the little monsters off of him.

Moving fast, Penny aimed her watch and used its laser to blast the blue-tagged one off of him. The shot hit home, knocking the creature off and allowing him to turn his attention to throwing the orange-tagged one back.

This didn't end the fight, though. When it was hit by the laser, the creature gave a shriek and turned its attention to the girl. Snarling, it charged at her sprang up, landing heavily on the desk right in front of her.

Seeing this action, Gadget attempted to turn and help his niece, but the orange-tagged Chimera had other ideas. It launched itself at him from behind and bit down on his shoulder. Unfortunately, the place it bit was one of the few places that was still flesh and blood, and thus it dealt a deep wound. Gadget was able to shake the creature off of his back, but the injury had already been done.

Penny, meanwhile was doing her best against the blue-tagged monster. She unleashed laser after laser in an attempt to blast the creature back. The beast, however, had already gotten used to that specific attack and seemed undeterred by the pain it dealt. It let out a shriek and prepared to charge at her, but was tossed back as another streak of blue appeared. The girl wasn't quite sure what happened at first, but soon could see that she had been saved by Digit, who was now wrestling the creature back.

"We got here as fast as we could," Fidget said as he pulled Penny back, away from the battle. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," the girl responded, "but I'm not sure about Uncle Gadget."

The little orange robot peered up to get a clear view of the battle, and gave a thumbs up. "He's hurt, but Brain's gotten here, which means Heather can't be far behind. I think he's going to be alright."

Sure enough, as Digit had driven the blue-tagged monster back, Brain had arrived and done the same with the orange-tagged one. The battle seemed pretty even, but the two defenders were eventually able to drive the creatures back to the entrance of the building.

The creatures were far from deterred and were preparing to make another charge at the defenders. Before they could, however, there was the sound of a gunshot and suddenly there was a burst of electricity at the two creatures.

Two more shots of the electricity bolts were sufficient to drive the creatures back. They dodged out of the main entrance, and before the defenders could take up the chase, the two beasts had fled into a
waiting van, which then drove away.

"So, it looks like M.A.D. was expecting us," Heather said. She had her specialty gun in one hand, and there were three more of the green pellets loaded in it just in case.

"You're telling me," Penny said, moving out from behind her hiding place to join the rest of the group.

It was then that she noticed Gadget's injury. "Uncle, you're bleeding!"

At that moment, Gadget had picked up piece of curtain that had been shredded by the creatures and was attempting to stanch the bleeding. "Yeah, one of those little brutes bit me. You don't need to worry though. It's only a scratch. Once I can get a bit of antibiotic and a bandage, I'll be fine."

Despite his protests, both girls had now come to his side. "Here, let me get a look," Heather said, helping him to get his coat off. Once his shirt had been pulled down so his shoulder could be seen, the redhead winced and began tying a cloth to the injury. "This is pretty bad, Gadget Boy. You're torn up something awful; you might even need stitches. We'd better get you to a hospital."

"I can't," the inspector responded. "We're still on a mission, remember?"

"Oh, don't bleed out on my account! If you need to see a doctor, go!" The team turned to see Alan, who was standing in the hallway just behind the lobby.

"What? I told you to stay in the room!" Heather said in a scolding tone.

She then shook her head and began guiding Gadget to the exit. "Come on, we don't have time to argue." She turned her gaze on the inspector. "You are going to the hospital, and you," she said, turning to Alan, "I guess you're coming with us until we can figure out just what's going on."

"But I don't need-" Gadget began to argue, but he groaned as pain shot through his shoulder.

Hearing this, Penny came up and took his hand. "Please, Uncle Gadget. Heather and I will be coming, too, and Alan with us. We'll be able to continue the mission once you've seen a doctor. Would you please just cooperate, for me?"

The inspector looked like he was about to argue, but he sighed and shook his head instead. "Alright then, but if you're coming, who's going to deal about this lobby?"

"Hey, you three can handle that, can't you?" Heather asked, turning to the Gadgetinis and Brain. Before they could answer, the humans had hurried out the door. "Thanks, guys! We'll call you once we've got injury settled!"

Now alone in the lobby, Digit crossed his arms. "Well, isn't that just typical. Leave the robots and the dog with cleanup duty."

Fidget shrugged in response. "Oh, well. We're not allowed in the hospital anyway. Come on, we'd best get to work."

Seeing his brother's chipper attitude, Digit turned to Brain. "Don't tell me you're good with this."

The dog gave a shrug and a look that seemed to say I've gotten used to it. He then turned to the floor attempting to see if he couldn't sniff out any hints as to where their attackers got to.

It was at that point that the manager came back. "My lobby!" he shouted in horror when he saw the
"Hoo, boy, this is going to be fun," the blue robot mumbled under his breath as he turned to deal with the hysterical manager.

Several blocks away, the van that the creatures had escaped in pulled sharply into an alley and turned into one of M.A.D.'s hiding holes. "Alright, for a first try, things didn't work out," Bouldon muttered under his breath once the van had been parked. "They looked in the box, just as planned, but somehow were able to call in the reinforcements before they could be finished off." He frowned in thought. "I'll never finish them off as long as those six are all together. I've got to find a way to get them split up. Once they are separated into groups they'll be easier to take out."

He then turned back to the two Chimera, who were waiting in the back with some amount of impatience. "Huh, I'll bet you two are still hungry, considering your prey got away. I'll get you something."

The thug got out and began unpacking two sides of beef for the beasts. It wouldn't keep them as happy as fresh kill would have, but there was always something set aside to keep the Chimera pacified.

As Boulden tossed the beef into the back of the van, he then noticed something about the orange-tagged beast. It was quieter than the blue-tagged one, and seemed to be busy licking its lips and fangs. "Huh, what are you doing there?" When it saw the meat, the creature turned, like its twin, to the food, but it had left a scrap of something behind, which the M.A.D. agent could get ahold of.

When he picked it up and saw what is was, the thug laughed. "So," he said, pocketing the scrap of grey, blood-stained cloth, "that little exercise wasn't a total failure after all. We'll see how well that dunce fairs now that a Chimera has a taste for his blood."

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Metro City Suburb

"Please, sit down, Uncle," Penny said, doing her best to guide Gadget to an armchair. "The doctor said you need to rest your shoulder if it is to heal properly."

"Penny, I'm fine to make dinner," her uncle responded, shaking his head. "I just have a couple of stitches. I'll be alright if I fix something up."

The group, Heather and Alan included, were then gathered at the Gadget Clan household. It was decided that, after the last attack, it was probably best to regroup at the house until they could contact W.O.M.P. to figure out what to do next. As such, they were now hiding out at the house while Heather tried to get a call in with the chief.

At the mention of Gadget cooking, a look of concern came to the girl's face. "Well, sure, Uncle Gadget, but we have guests over tonight. We can't start cooking right now. It wouldn't be quite right to leave them waiting while we prepared it. And on top of it, we might be leaving soon, and that might require us to leave with oven on or with the dished undone. Wouldn't it be better if we ordered something instead?"

Hearing her advice, the inspector paused for a moment and thought. "You know, I think you are right. It is kind of rude to leave Heather and Alan alone as we were preparing dinner. I know just the place, and they do takeout, too. We might need to pick it up, though. That might be a problem."

"Pick what up?" Heather asked, coming over to join where the two were talking.
"Oh, just our dinner," Gadget responded. "It's a bit late to start cooking now, but I'm not sure we should be inviting a delivery man to our door. Not when a M.A.D. agent could hijack the poor fellow as a way to get close to us."

Heather stayed silent for a moment, marveling once more at how Gadget seemed to mingle common sense with the most ridiculous of ideas, before shaking her head and going on. "Never mind about that," she said, turning back to what she intended to speak about. "I just got into contact with the chief. When he heard about what had happened today, he agreed that it would probably be best to set up some new safety measures."

"He's not taking us off the case, is he?" Penny asked with some concern.

The agent shook her head. "No. I'm pretty sure he was going to, but considering Alan spent a good portion of his part of the conversation talking about how great it was to have the Gadget team protecting him, that decision died pretty quickly. Instead, we're going to head out tomorrow morning to some sort of safe house W.O.M.P.'s been setting up just outside the city. The security measures are still being put into play, but it should still be a safe place to lay low for a while."

"Very good," Gadget said with a grin. "It's decided then. We'll stay here tonight, and then tomorrow morning we head out to the safe house. Furthermore, since we're staying here tonight, that means that I can make dinner. It'll be easier that way."

"Oh, don't worry about that, Uncle Gadget," Penny said, attempting to move between her uncle and the oven. "I'll make dinner. You go rest your shoulder."

Hearing his, Gadget chuckled and patted his niece on the head. "That's sweet of you to offer, Penny, but I'll handle it. My shoulder's fine, it really is. Beside, you never learned how to make my specialty recipe. I'll just need to get everything together and dinner will be ready in no time."

Hearing that, Penny gave an awkward smile nodded. It was clear that he wasn't going to back down about this. "That's great, Uncle," she said, backing slowly out of the room. "You do that. I'll just, uh, come out here and do, uh, something. Heather, why don't you help me come do something?"

"Uh, alright." The older girl was a little confused by the younger's behavior but followed her lead.

When they were out of earshot of the kitchen, she turned to Penny. "Is everything alright? You seemed a bit off put back there."

The blonde sighed and shook her head. "I love my uncle, I really do, but I can't recommend his cooking. I had to figure out basic recipes at eight just so we didn't have to live off his cooking and take out forever. He really likes his specialty, though, so I have yet to figure out how to convince him not to make it."

"Hey, at least he's trying," Heather said with a shrug. "Besides, how bad can his specialty be?"

"The primary two ingredient are red cabbage and blueberries mixed into a tofu base," Penny replied in a deadpan tone.

Hearing that, the redhead turned a shade paler. "How about I go pick up some mashed potatoes as a side?" she said, reaching for the keys to her motorcycle.

Penny nodded before heading out to the living room to check on Alan. "Better pick up two containers."
Thursday, June 5, 2087

Road to Safe House, outside of Metro City

"What sort of place are we looking for?" Penny asked. They were currently driving on one of the highways leading out of the city. Everyone had gone in the Gadgetmobile, which had been switched onto a camouflage mode to keep it from being recognized.

"The chief didn't specify, but he did mention that we were supposed to keep an eye out for some sort of blue flag," Heather responded. Thanks to quick timing, she had been able to convince Gadget to let her drive, so at the very least their drive would be comparatively peaceful.

"This is great!" Alan exclaimed. He was practically beaming with excitement. "This is just like those games we used to play with the neighbor kids. You remember those, right?"

"How could I forget?" his cousin responded with a slight eye roll. "For some reason, Kim and I were always the ones who got kidnapped by M.A.D."

"Well, someone needed to get caught for Gadget to rescue," Alan responded. "After all, who would he rescue? Though, I guess there wasn't a lot of kidnapping that happened in the actual missions. Not of the damsel in distress kind, anyway."

Both Gadget and Penny turned a slight shade of red and Brain let out a snort of annoyance at the comment. Thankfully, they were spared having to respond to the awkwardly specific statement.

"Heather, do you think that might be the flag we're looking for?" Fidget asked, leaning against the car window. He was pointing at a shack that was standing in an open field, about a mile and a half off of the road. The flag on it was just barely visible, but it was present.

"That would be my guess," the red head responded. "Sharp eyes there, Sunny." She turned off of the road to head out towards the shack.

They made it there in a few moments, but as they got closer to their destination, things began to look a bit bleak. It was certain that they were meant to head in that direction, but the closer they got to the little hut, the clearer it became that the destination was tiny. By the time they got to it, they could see exactly what sort of building it was.

It was a tiny shack, barely big enough to be called a shed. The blue flag attached to the top of it was nearly as big as the roof was, and the wood of the structure looked like it would be knocked over by a particularly strong wind.

"That's where we're meant to hide out?" Digit asked with an amount of annoyance. "We'd have a hard enough time in there if we all stood. How are we going to get Miss Penny's wheelchair in there?"

"You don't need to worry about that," Penny responded. "I'll take my crutches."

"Are you sure that's such a good idea?" Gadget asked, turning to his niece as he spoke. "What if you get caught in there? Or you fall?"

The teen laughed when she heard his concern. "Uncle, if I am capable of falling in that tiny space, it will be by some fluke of physics."

"I know, but it's going to be difficult for you to get through the field on your crutches," he said. "I don't want you to get hurt."
"I'll be fine," she assured, patting his arm. "Sure, it'll be kind of tough, but Brain will help me figure out a good path to use. Won't you boy?"

The dog let out a wuff of assurance, and Penny turned back. "See? I'll be A-Okay."

Gadget was still worried, but he shrugged in resignation. "Alright, if you're so certain. Just be careful."

"I will," she said with a smile.

As they got out, they looked around the small hut. "So," Heather sighed, "I guess we all have to figure out a way to get in there."

"Maybe it's bigger on the inside?" Fidget hazarded to guess, earning a glare from Digit.

"There's only one way to find out, and that's would be going in," Gadget said. He approached the hut, which was only about a half an inch taller than he was. "I'll go first."

He opened the door and ducked under the doorway to get in. "Well, it's going to be a tight squeeze," he called out, "but I think we can-yahhh!"

When they heard his shout, the others rushed to the doorway to see what had happened. Upon making it to the door, they looked in and realized that Gadget was nowhere to be seen. Instead, a panel was sliding in on the floor.

"Oh, I think I get it!" Penny exclaimed. "I'll go next." She made her way into the hut and sat down as quickly as she could with her crutches in her lap. As soon as she was sitting, the panel slid into the ground. The others could watch her lower down for a moment before another panel slid into place.

"It's some sort of elevator," Fidget said. "We should have guessed there'd be something like that in place."

"Alright, Alan, you go next," Heather said, motioning for her cousin to pass her by. "Tin Men, you go after him. Brain and I will follow after that."

It took a little while to get everyone down to the proper hideout one at a time, but after a few minutes, all seven of them had made it. Once they dismounted the elevator, they found themselves in a much more modern looking building. It was a huge metallic hallway leading out into a much larger room. Inside, there were several technicians hard at work.

As they entered into the room, one of them looked up and recognized them. "Hey! You made it!" William called out. He set down the handheld computer he was working with to make his way over to meet the group.

When the teen boy popped up, Alan's eyes practically bugged out of his head. He pushed ahead and attempted to bar the boy's passage. "I know you from those news reports! What are you doing in here, Scolex?" he called out in a hostile tone of voice. "Spying for your uncle?"

Seeing the hostility, William backed down for a moment. "I-I'm one of Dr. Bradford's technicians," he tried to stammer out.

"A likely story," Alan growled. He was about to continue, but found himself shoved firmly aside by Penny.

"He does work for Dr. Bradford," the blonde responded in a harsh tone of voice. "What's more,
Will's my friend. I don't appreciate him being treated like this."

"B-but he's a Scolex," the stunned engineer pointed out. "Talon's his brother."

"What's that got to do with the price of eggs in China?" Penny snapped back.

"Believe it or not, he's an ally," Heather said, stepping up to offer explanation. "Talon might have sided with Claw, but the rest of the family's on the right side. Will here even helped to save Penny's life once."

Alan looked confused by the revelation. "Really?"

Before much more could be said, the discussion was cut short by a new arrival. "Ah, see you all made it." The group looked up to see Dr. Bradford approaching them. "I do hope it wasn't too much trouble finding the place."

"No trouble at all!" Gadget exclaimed with a bright smile. "Dr. Bradford, this is Alan Connelly. He's one of the engineers who's going to be working on that nuclear project."

"I read about that," the doctor responded with a smile. "That work is a bit outside of my field, but from what I hear, though should help a lot with reducing the amount of the harmful side effects of nuclear power. Am I right in that assessment, Mr. Connelly?"

At this point, Alan was practically beaming. "Yes, that's right!" he said, nodding enthusiastically. "Might I say, it's a great honor that you've read about my work. I'm a huge fan of you technologies."

As she caught on to where this was going and knowing that the Gadget Program was a bit of a sore spot for the doctor, Penny stepped up. "Everything looks really high tech in here," she said, cutting into the conversation. "Is everything set up, and how does it all work?"

"I'm afraid it's not all set up yet," Brenda responded. "Regrettably, we weren't able to get most of the intruder prevention systems up and running yet. I afraid that's why we couldn't give you much information regarding his place's location. We're sort of depending on this being a relatively unknown area to act as a safety at the moment."

"Speaking of that," she said, turning to William, "have you gotten those bugs out of the alarms yet?"

"Not yet," the boy responded. "I think I've figured out what's causing this issue, though. I was going to test my theory in a moment."

"Good," the doctor said with a smile. "Once you take care of that, at the very least we can get the alarms online."

"I'll go do that now," he said with a nod before turning to go.

"I'll come with you," Penny said, moving to follow after him. "Come on, Brain. We'll make sure everything is up and running."

"Good idea, Penny," Gadget said with an approving nod.

"Fidget and I will take reconnaissance in the eastern corridor," Digit said. "That's where the main surveillance connection is, right doctor?"

"That's correct," Brenda said with a nod. "You'll be able to monitor everything there, both in the physical and cyberspace fronts."
"Heather and I will stay here to protect you directly," the inspector said, placing an arm around Alan's shoulders. "Don't worry, though. You've got nothing to worry about. There's no way M.A.D. will find us here."

Outskirts of Metro City

"Well, boys, time to get to work," Boulden said, opening the latch on the Chimeras' cage. Sensing their access to freedom, the two monstrosities took off running. Their master gave a grin before returning to the car to follow them.

As he started driving, he received a call. "Boulden, we've just gotten word that you've unleashed the Chimera," Montan said as he appeared on screen. "I assume that means you're close to completing the mission."

"I'll have that dweeb soon," the thug responded. "I don't know where they're hiding out now, but one of my boys bit one of the Gadget crew. I don't need to tell you about what happens when a Chimera's tasted blood."

Montan nodded in response. "Just make sure the target isn't killed, too."

"He won't be," Boulden responded. "By the end of the day, we'll have the target and be down at least one Gadget."

To be continued…
The Safehouse

The main database for the computer systems were held in one of the deepest chambers of the safe house. It was housed in a well-lit room with various computer modems lining around the walls. Unfortunates, none of the monitors had been hooked up yet, making it necessary for anyone who wanted to work with the information to do so with smaller, portable computers until the proper equipment was sent in.

At that moment, Penny and William were sitting against one of the larger of the modems, staring at a laptop the boy was working with. Brain had taken a seat near the entrance of the room, keeping an eye both on the teens as well as the hallway, just in case.

"Here's my problem," William said as he worked on the system. "There are several different alarms programmed to go off when there is a different emergency. The first is for fire, the second is an intruder, and the third alerts that we are needed elsewhere." He then touched a button on the computer, triggering three alarms on the computer. A shrill and continuous tone went off on the computer's speakers, followed by a lower pitched warbling tone, and finally by a pulsed set of low tones.

"That sounds fine," Penny commented, looked at the screen in search of a problem.

"It sounds fine here, on my laptop," the boy responded, "but here's what all three alarms sound like in the main system." He pressed a few more keys, transferring the programs into the main database before setting them off. This time, instead of any of the distinct tone from before, a set of static was all that played over the building's speakers.

"I've figured out a few tweaks that might be able to get them in properly," William continued. "Hopefully this will do the trick and everything will work properly in a moment." He added the adjustments to the files before attempting to upload them into the main database. "Here goes nothing."

He pressed the button again, triggering the alarms again. This time, there was the correct pattern of responses, with a pattern of continuous, warble, and pulsed. Unfortunately, the static didn't go away, and the tones were only just audible.

"There must still be some bugs in the system," the boy groaned. He adjusted his glasses before leaning into the screen again. "This program just hates me."

"Here, I'll help," Penny said. She reached into her backpack and pulled out her computer book. "Mind if I link up?"

"Be my guest," he responded, motioning to the USB port. "Maybe between the two of us, we can figure out why this isn't working."

"Of course," she added with a laugh, "that is assuming the program doesn't hate me, too."

As the teens worked, Brain glanced back over to the hallway. Frankly, he had a bad feeling about this place. The dog was willing to go wherever his girl had decided to go, but he was none too fond of being underground. It meant that you were enclosed in a small space, and should the moment
come that you found yourself being hunted, you were bottled up. He much preferred to be up and in
an area where both fight and flight would be relatively easy, and this safe house was a place where
that would be difficult at best.

Still, the humans weren't all that concerned, so he'd try not to get too freaked out either. Instead, he
tried to rest for a while, laying his head on his front paws and try to ignore that funny feeling in his
spine.

It had been about fifteen minutes by the time the kids were ready to test out the warning alarm again.
This time, as they downloaded the program into the system, the three tones went off perfectly, just as
they were meant to.

"Got it!" William said, smiling at the success. "I'd better go tell Dr. Bradford."

"So everything's up and running now," Penny asked as she attempted to get back on her feet.

The boy shook his head as he helped her up. "Not yet. We don't have the physical defenses up and
running yet, but since we now have the alarm, we'll be able to tell when someone tries to make their
way in."

"But what are the odds of that?" she asked with a laugh in her voice.

Nearly as soon as she had spoken, Brain's head shot up and he sniffed the air. Something was
wrong, and he could just smell it. A growl began to form in the Chimera's throat.

"Brain? What wrong?" Penny asked, making her way to the dog's side. She rested a hand on the top
of his head. "What can you smell?"

Before anything else could be said, the alarm went off without any warning. It was the middle,
warbling tone. Hearing it, Penny turned to face William. "Don't tell me that's not another test."

"That's not another test," he said with a sigh. "We'd better get back to the others."

"I told you not to tell me," she said under her breath, but she nodded at his advice.

Brain moved ahead of them, guarding the two from the hideous smell he could sense coming closer
to them. Thus, the three hurried to the entrance of the safe house, hoping they weren't too late.

A few moments ago

"Well, Fidget, it appears that everything is in order here," Digit said as he finished up his
investigations of the surveillance cameras. "Every inch of the facilities is under careful scrutiny.
There's no way anyone will able to make it in or out of here without us knowing."

"Of course we're all set," his twin said with a nod. "Dr. Bradford set everything up. You know as
well as I do that she doesn't mess around when it comes to safety preparations."

"True, true," the blue robot said with a nod. "Still, you can never be too careful. One slip up could
give M.A.D. the opportunity they need to take us out. We need to be hyper vigilant! Never let any
area that could be weak go unnoticed, lest we reveal an Achilles heel. Especially under
circumstances like this where we are the first line of defense, since the automated defenses aren't
online yet."
"That is true," Fidget responded. "I wonder if Miss Penny and her friend there have gotten the alarms online yet. That would be a big help."

"The alarms will probably come up soon," Digit replied. He motioned to a computer screen that showed the two teens hard at work together. "I can't speak for that Will kid's ability, but with Miss Penny at work, there's no way it'll fail."

The orange robot motioned to another screen towards the middle of the collection. "It looks like the Inspector and Agent Connelly have everything set up on their end as well. Look, they've gotten their own defenses set up, too."

"Which just leaves us," Digit said with a nod. "That's why we're over here, keeping track of everything that come in, both in person and online."

Fidget nodded respectfully, well aware that his brother was going to start a long talk about duty and responsibility, and that the information would likely be about things already discussed on multiple occasions. He had long learned that it was best just to smile and nod, and eventually the blue robot would wind up his conversation.

Halfway through the typical speech, however, something different happened. "Uh, Digit?" Fidget said, not quite sure how to cut in.

His brother, however, initially took no notice of him. "And once we reach that goal…" Digit went on, completely missing out on the call.

This meant that Fidget had to raise his voice higher than what he typically liked. "Darn it, turn around!" he said in a firm, though still quiet voice. "We've got an intruder!"

"What do you mean an-?" the blue robot asked, but as he spun around, he saw what was being referred to. On one of the monitors that was watching the entrance, there were two creatures roaming around the entryway. It was clearly the creatures from before, and they were followed by an armed man.

"We've got to get word to the others!" Digit exclaimed, springing to get to the door.

As the two rushed to the exit, a loud warbling tone started up and began to echo through the chambers. "It looks like Miss Penny and her friend got the alarm up," Fidget commented as they ran.

"It seems that we're all set," Gadget said once he, Heather, and Alan had been guided to one of the back rooms. It was one of the smaller rooms, but it also was more protected, compared to the other rooms in the safe house. "Do you think it will take Penny long to join us here?"

"Probably not," Dr. Bradford said as she went over a few of the defenses. "All that's wrong with the alarms is that it's having sound issues. That should only take a few minutes for the kids to sort out."

"So, what's all this?" Heather asked, joining the Doctor at the control panel.

"I'm glad you asked," Brenda said with a smile. She motioned to the keys in front of her. "We've got a couple of the defenses up for some of the rooms, such as this one. It's nothing major, only a few barriers that can be used in the case of an emergency. Everything is controlled through this panel, so I'll show you how to work the shields."
She went over the controls, pointing out how each of the devices could be used in the case of an emergency. It was mostly defensive systems, such as nets or shields, but several Taser-like stunners were also positioned around the room.

"Of course," Dr. Bradford said as she finished up, "it's unlikely that we'll have any need for these defenses today. I don't think whoever came after you the other day will figure out you're here."

"I almost wish they would figure it out," Alan said, leaning back in an armchair and pulling out his laptop. "Then they'd learn what happens when you challenge the great Inspector Gadget and his team!"

"Keep in mind," Gadget commented, "discretion is the better part of valor. We'd prefer to avoid a fight if we can help it."

"True," the engineer responded with a shrug. "I still have quite a bit to post online, too. I feel really bad about yelling at that Will kid. Oh, well. He won't have any problems with 42n8 from here on."

"Oh, don't tell me you're getting mixed up with that prank-group," Brenda said with a sigh.

"I'm guessing you're not a fan," Heather commented.

"The last time Bradford Tech released the new defense update for smart phones," the doctor explained, "42n8 leaked that the update would include allowing you to get rid of suspicious content by boiling your phone. It took us months and thousands of damaged smartphone claims to get the confusion cleared up."

Alan snickered at the story, but tried to muffle it. He kept his head down, doing his best to avoid Dr. Bradford's disapproving glare.

Before anything else could be said on the topic, however, an alarm went out and echoed through the safe house. "Is something going on?" Gadget asked, springing to his feet. Several of his gadget hands popped out of his hat by reflex as he prepared himself for a confrontation.

"I don't think so," Brenda responded. "That probably means that kids just got the alarm systems online."

"Still," Heather said, getting up from where she had been sitting, "it's probably best if you and I check the situation out."

"Right," the inspector responded with a nod. "We'll be back in a few moments," he said, turning to the rest of the small group. The two of them then rushed out as fast as they could.

As they made it out to the main corridor right before the entrance, they ran right into the Gadgetinis. "Inspector! Agent Connelly! Thank goodness we ran into you," Fidget said. He and Digit were both armed, and it was clear that they had been spooked by something. "There's an intruder about to get into the building."

"He's right," his blue twin added. "We saw the creeps on the monitors. They're about to get in right now."

"Seems like we made it out in time, then," Heather said. She pulled out her gun and loaded several of the pellets into it. "You two better head to the back. We left Alan and Dr. Bradford back there. You stand guard there, just in case Gadget and I can't deal with them out here."

"We're on it!" the twins both responded before rushing off to fill their post.
"Alright, let's see just what it is we're dealing with," Heather said. She slid on a pair of red and white gloves before prepping her gun.

"Go-go Gadget Stun-gun," Gadget called out. Much to his frustration, his hammer came out instead. "I guess that works too."

As they were prepping, the few technicians still around rushed off, having no desire to get caught up in a battlefield. Theirs was a wise choice, since as soon as the elevator made its way down, the two Chimera sprang out of it.

The orange tagged one lunged immediately at Gadget, who could only respond by swinging at it with his mallet. He struck it hard in the chest, which sent it flying into the wall on one side of the room. Unfortunately, this didn't keep it down, and it was soon back up, charging at him with tooth and claw.

At the same time, the blue tagged one charged at Heather. In response, she fired off several of the electrical pellets at the beast. It was fast, though, and dodged so as to miss the brunt of the pellets. It was still caught in the range of the charge, but the fact that it was not struck head-on made the charge weaker, and the beast was able to carry on its attack.

It had almost reached her when she spun chamber around to another pellet color and fired. This time, a red pellet came out and struck the attacker hard in the chest. The creature let out a cry of pain and shock at a burst of intense heat came out, searing off and amount of fur.

This gave the agent the opportunity she needed. Spinning the chamber around again, she fired off four of the blue pellets at the creature, which expanded out as soon as they shattered. The beast let out several cries of rage and began tearing at the sticky substance to free itself. Heather, meanwhile, turned her attention to helping Gadget rid himself of his attacker, which now had a firm grip on his right arm.

In the chaos, Boulden emerged from the elevator himself. He intended to use the panic of the moment to make it past the two agents to get to his target unnoticed. He had almost made it through the doorway when he was spotted.

"There's our intruder!" Penny cried out as she, Brain, and William came upon the scene. "Go, Brain! Stop him!"

Seeing the dog Chimera start a charge, Boulden thought fast. He spotted the blue-tagged Chimera, which had torn itself free from the trapping substance. Without hesitation, he let out a high pitched whistle and motioned to the girl.

Hearing the non-verbal order, the beast turned and lunged at Penny, knocking both her and William over in the process. The girl was only just able to call up a shield to keep the monstrosity from biting into her.

Regaining his senses in time to see what was happening to the girl, William grabbed a fair sized remote controller that was lying nearby and chucked it at the monster. The throw was good and struck the creature in the head. All it did, however, was anger the beast, which let out a shriek and tore off a portion of the nearby counter. It then threw this at the teen, who was only able to just dodge out of the way before he was crushed.

It then turned its attention back to Penny and was going to resume the attempt to rip her head off when it was interrupted again. This time it was Brain, who had spun around to help his girl. He grabbed the monster by the neck and tossed it back, sending it far away from the two teenagers.
The monster was bleeding from the attack, but it was not finished. Bearing its fangs, it let out a snarl and charged at the dog, who responded in turn.

I the meanwhile, Boulden had used the panic of the battle to slip though the hallway relatively undetected. There was only a few of the technicians around, and none of them seemed willing to challenge the armed intruder.

As such, he was able to make it to the back room unhindered. In the room, Dr. Bradford and Alan Connelly were still hiding out, waiting for news of the battle outside. Spotting his target, the M.A.D. grunt grinned. "You, four-eyes," said, raising his gun up at Alan. "You're coming with me. Dr. Claw has plans for you."

Usually that was enough to get his target to do whatever he wanted to. Thus, Boulden was angered and stunned when the redhead man made now move other than to smile. "Oh, yeah? If Claw really wants me, then you're not going to be allowed to kill me. How are you going to make me come?"

"Like this," the grunt sneered. He moved his gun so that it was now pointing at Brenda. "You'll come with me or she'll die."

"You are welcome to try," the doctor said, her own tone completely calm and level.

Anger flooded the M.A.D. agent again and he opened fired, shooting off two bullets at the doctor. To his surprise, however, they didn't come near her. Instead, they deflected off of some sort of shield and ricocheted back, forcing him to dodge out of the way of his own shots.

"He's down! Take him now!" Boulden didn't have time to process the command before the Gadgetinis rushed out of their hiding place. Fidget rushed ahead and attempted to place handcuff on the stunned M.A.D. agent while Digit tried to help by holding the perp down.

The agent was not about to give up quite so soon. Responding to Fidget, he grabbed ahold of the orange robot's arm and swung him into his brother. They were both knocked aside by this maneuver, which allowed the grunt the opportunity to charge ahead and grab his gun. "I'm not being taken in by any real W.O.M.P. stoolie, none the less two worthless mechs," he sneered before opening fire.

In the entrance room, the fight was still burning on. Heather and Gadget were still struggling in their fight against the orange-tagged beast, which seemed determined to eat them. Indeed, it seemed to ignore every other form of attack in favor of attempting to take bites out of the both of them.

This strategy, thankfully, meant that the creature could only turn its attention to one of them at a time. When it attempted to bury its teeth into Gadget's throat that gave Heather the opportunity to get in a blow to its head with a pipe she had picked up. At the same time, when it turned its attention to her, then Gadget had an opening to make a shot with his laser or hammer, depending on which he could get out in time.

Unfortunately, nothing they threw at the beast seemed to take it down for long. Every blow, burn, shot, or shock fired off at the beast didn't do anything more than stun it. It seemed like there wasn't any way to keep their attacker down.

The beast seemed to know this, and its attacks were bold, without any thought of defense. It was one of these attacks that gave the defenders the very opportunity they needed. The beast had thrown itself at Heather, since she was the nearer of the two W.O.M.P. agents, and when it had gripped her, it let out a shriek before attacking.
The redhead, however, was not about to die so easily. She had her gun already set up and in one hand. Raising it up, she fired off three blue pellets into the creature's mouth. There was no way she could have missed at such close range.

It only took those three shots to knock the creature back. The beast tore at the rapidly expanding mass in its mouth, but the compound was impossible to get rid of. After a minute or so, the monster fell dead, choked on sticky substance.

At the same time, Brain's fight with the blue-tagged beast was going much the same. The dog was a good deal bigger and stronger than the monster and he was able to deal a good amount of damage whenever he was able to get his teeth into his opponent. Unfortunately, the malicious Chimera was faster and more agile than Brain was, and after a moment of getting tossed around, it would make its way onto his back and inflict damage from there.

While this fight was going one, William was able to work his way over to Penny. In the attack of the beast, one of her crutches had been damaged, leaving her in a vulnerable position. "Come on," the boy said, doing his best to get her on her feet and support her. "We've got to get to better shelter."

"Just wait a moment," Penny replied, accepting the help but reaching for one of her charms at the same time. "I think I can help him. I've just got to get a good shot."

William nodded. "Alright, but you'll need to move fast."

The blonde gave a smile as a small laser emerged from her watch. "I'll only need a minute." Leaning on her friend for support, she aimed the watch laser at the beast and waited to get a clear shot. Once the creature was in her sights, she was able let off a bright red blast.

The laser blast was not enough to kill the monster, but it did knock it off of Brain's back and throw it down. It was stunned by the blast and unable to move, which gave the dog the opening he needed. Springing upon the monster, he snatched it up in his jaws and shook hard. That attack did the trick. The beast was dead with a broken neck before it hit the ground again.

Now that both the current threats were dealt with, the victors had a moment of breathing room to attempt to take in what had happened. Unfortunately, before anyone could speak or move, gunshots rang off from the back end of the safe house.

Without hesitation, Gadget and Heather took off in the direction of the gunshots, followed closely by Brain. William and Penny trailed behind as well, hoping that they wouldn't be too late to stop whatever it was that was going on.

Thankfully, as it turned out, their urgency was unneeded. As they arrived in the room, they came upon the somewhat comical scene of a rather large M.A.D. agent struggling against the much smaller Gadgetinis, who had him backed into a corner. He was firing off rounds at the little robots, but he might have been using spitballs for as useful as the bullets were.

"I'll be taking that," Heather said, balling up a fist to activate one of the magnetic gloves. The sudden magnetic pulse tore the weapon out of the grunt's hand, leaving him thoroughly disarmed.

"Good job keeping the perp detained, Officers," Gadget said with a nod of approval. "I'll take things from here." He then turned to Boulden, slapping a set of handcuff on him and reading him his rights.

About forty-five minutes later, a patrol from W.O.M.P. arrived to haul Boulden off to jail. At the same time, Rheeci's aunt, Felicity Quang, had also arrived to take the Chimeras' bodies away for study. "I can still hardly believe these things are real," Dr. Quang said as she looked down at the
"Oh, trust me, they are real enough," Heather laughed. "When you have one of those things trying to bite your head off, it seems to be the realest thing in the world, at the moment."

The doctor laughed at the comment. "That's not what I meant, but I can understand the sentiment. Thankfully, no one was permanently injured today, and hopefully what we can find in the autopsy will help us to prevent any more dangerous attacks."

"I wish you luck," the redhead responded, brushing several strands of hair out of her face. "If it can keep close calls like that from happening again, then I'm all for it."

"Alright, Fidget, I'm almost done," Penny said. She was examining the little robot's interior workings to make sure that the bullets had not caused any urgent damage that needed immediate treatment. "It looks like you're in the clear for now. I'll need to do a more thorough examination later tonight, but for the moment, you two will be alright."

"At least we know those defense shields in our coats were up to standards," Digit commented. He had his examination first and had been standing nearby during his brother's exam. "Is there anything you would like us to now?"

"Check in with Chief Quimby and see if he needs help with anything," the girl answered. "I want to see how Uncle Gadget and Brain are doing." The two robots gave a nod and ran off to do as they were instructed.

Using the undamaged crutch to get to her feet, she leaned heavily on a nearby railing to work her way over to where the man and dog were sitting. Since they had been the only ones to really suffer any severe injuries, they had been brought over to rest once the medics had done their work. At that moment, Alan was standing nearby, exclaiming what an honor it was to have been defended by the older cyber.

"Hey," Penny called out as she arrived. "Mind if I have a moment with them?"

"Certainly not," Alan responded, moving over to make room for her. After a moment, however, it became clear he did not intend to leave.

"I meant alone," she added.

"Oh! Oh, yes, I suppose you'd want a word alone," the engineer stammered out. "I'd better go find your friend and apologize to him about earlier."

When they had been left alone, Penny settled down between Gadget and Brain. "Are you feeling alright?" she asked to both in general.

In response, Brain let out an audible groan and laid his head in her lap. His injuries weren't life threatening, but there was a good number of stitches on the dog's back and shoulders.

"That would summarize my feelings, too," Gadget commented as he wrapped one arm around his niece's shoulders. "No other bite wounds, but there's a good amount of damage to the surface layers of the mechanics. I'll be aching for a little while, not to mention the fact that the old stitches needed to be redone." He let out a laugh. "I guess it could be worse. That thing might have actually gotten to my face."

Penny scratched Brain behind the ear. "We're able to stop those things, and catch their master," she commented. "That's all that matters in the end."
"At least this will probably make things a bit easier for the rest of the mission," Gadget commented. "I know Claw. He typically abandons failure missions pretty quickly to focus on other tactic. Alan should be safe for a while now that the agent assigned to kidnap him is behind bars."

"That M.A.D. agent better be glad we caught him instead of Claw," his niece replied as she leaned against his shoulder. "I can't imagine M.A.D. has too forgiving a policy for failures."

Metro City Prison, Metro City

With the loss of the Cistern, a small segment in the Metro City Prison had been converted to holding prisoners who belonged to M.A.D. until a new site had been constructed. This segment had housed two prisoners for the last few weeks, and a third was currently in the process of being added.

"So, this is where they tossed you after you lost the Antarctica center," Boulden sneered at his new cellmate, the previously captured Dr. Focus. The guard had wandered out for the moment, and it would be a little while before the new guard came. As such, they had a moment to speak in private. "I'd have thought you'd have come up with some way of escape, considering how smart you are."

"They've grown cautious with us," Focus responded. "Ever since the jailbreak at the Elliot Ness facility, W.O.M.P. is afraid of another break out. They're only keeping us in here because we're relatively normal human beings. You know they captured Arthur Treymin, right?"

"He's that cyber kid, Malware, right?" the grunt asked. "I think I saw him following Talon around."

The scientist nodded. "That's him. They're keeping him in a deeper part of the prison, and other than at scheduled times for meals and exercise, he's kept in an entirely tech-free cell. Even the bathrooms and showers are of a style that would be considered primitive in the 1940's. They're terrified something will happen that either lets us out or lets a captain in."

"They have good reason to be afraid of that," a voice said from behind. They turned to see the new guard come in. He was the one who had spoken, and when he looked up, the prisoners could clearly see that he was Talon Scolex.

"It's about time you got here," Focus snorted. "I've been waiting for a break out for months."

"Oh, I'm not here to break you out," the boy said casually. "You two both disappointed Claw, but he has use for you. Thus, he decided that it would be in his interest to let you cool your feet here until he needs you again."

"Than what are you doing here, runt?" Boulden asked.

"Oh, just delivering a message." The teen gave a shrug before continuing. "Dr. Claw was really ticked at you for losing those Chimera, Boulder. You know how long it's going to take Doc Wildman to cook up some more? You've got to select the strongest of the litter, train them out of eating everyone, make sure they know the command words…"

"Get on with it," the grunt snapped.

"Hold your horses, compadre, I'm getting there," Talon replied. "Thing is, without those beasties, you're pretty much useless to M.A.D, so you can expect a pretty long wait for anyone to come for you."

"Is that all you wanted to say?" Boulden snapped.
"Well, yes and no," the young cyber said. He gave a cat like smile. "That's all Claw wanted me to tell you. However, I have a little message of my own." He then opened the cell and entered before closing it again. "I heard that one of your beasts got pretty close to killing Penny Gadget."

"Yeah, just about bit her throat out," the grunt said with a laugh. "What about it?"

He was taken completely off guard as Talon rushed at him, punching him in the stomach before delivering two hard blows to the face. Once he had done this, he grabbed the thug by the throat and pulled his face closer. "Listen here, rocks-for-brains," the boy sneered in a tone far more hostile than the one used before. "I know what my uncle's policy with Inspector Gadget is. Anyone can kill him and they will be rewarded for it. Well, I'm not the same. Penny Gadget is mine, and mine alone. I'm not going to argue if she'd caught or hurt trying to escape, but she's mine. If anyone tries to break my toy, well, then, I'll just have to break them." He gave a cruel laugh. "You're just lucky that wuss brother of mine was able to distract the creature long enough for the mutt to come in for the kill. If she had been killed, I wouldn't be so merciful. Do I make myself clear?"

Boulden choked out that he understood and was then released. As the grunt fell to the floor, Talon left the cell, locking it behind him again. "Glad we have an understanding," the cyber said, switching right back to his pseudo-friendly tone. "I trust that mistake won't be made again."

Talon then turned to leave, before pausing for a moment. "Hey, Focus," he called back. "If the next guard asks, Boulder over there was clumsy and had a nasty run in with the bunk. Am I clear?" He lifted a hand, allowing a knife to slide out of his wrist in the process.

"Quite clear, sir!" the scientist squeaked. "He also slipped a second time, which is why he has two black eyes."

"Glad to hear it," the teen commented before heading out of the prison.

To be continued…
Assignment 9.1: Important Work

Wednesday, July 9, 2087

El Sueño Imposible, Metro City

"And here we are," Gadget said, holding the door open so Penny could follow him into the restaurant. As he glanced around the surrounding, he frowned a little. "Looks like things are a bit busier tonight than they were the last time I came. Are you sure you don't want to get your chair?"

"I'll be fine, Uncle," Penny responded, moving in on her crutches. "It's not too bad, and there are some chairs I can wait at over there. Besides, with the size of the restaurant, a wheelchair would just get in the way."

The inspector shrugged, but conceded to his niece's logic. "If you're alright with this," he said, letting the door swing shut once she had made her way in. "I'll go get us on the list."

"Alright then," the teen replied, picking up and extra menu from a tray to look at while she waited. "I'll be here."

Just as he had pointed out, there was a bit of a line for the wait list, but thankfully the hostess was very diligent, and the line moved rather quickly. When he made it there, he was surprised to see that Bianca was there again.

Furthermore, it appeared that she remembered him, too. "Inspector," she said in a welcoming voice, "glad to see you back. I do hope you were able to make it to your appointment on time."

"My appointment?" Gadget asked, his mind going back to the earlier day. "Oh, yes, that appointment. Yes, that turned out well." He laughed before continuing. "Hopefully I'll be able to stay for dinner tonight, and not get anything broken."

"So, another table for one?" the elderly woman, turning to the book.

"Two, actually." Gadget turned and pointed to Penny. "I've got my niece with me this time."

"Oh, how nice," Bianca replied, writing the name down in the book. "It seems you're in luck. A table for two should be open in about fifteen minutes, if you don't mind the wait."

"I don't mind," he replied. He then turned to join Penny to wait until their table was ready.

Once everything was set, they were guided to the table to wait until their waiter came over. Thankfully, it didn't take long for him to come over.

"Good evening," he said, handing out the menu. "My name is William, I'll be your server tonight. Can I start you with some drinks?"

Drinks, however, were not on Penny's mind at the moment. "Hey, Will," she said with a smile. "Funny meeting you here."

"Penny?" Will looked up, stunned by the voice. In truth, he had been paying so much attention to getting the menus out he hadn't noticed who the customers were. "Oh, yeah, I work here now."

"Really?" Gadget asked. He gave a small frown. "I thought you worked at Bradford Tech. Brenda didn't fire you, did she?"
"Oh, no, I still work for Dr. Bradford," Will explained. "It's just a family tradition to work here, too. It's kind of what happens when your grandma owns a restaurant."

"Your grandmother owns this place?" Penny asked. "It's very beautiful, and it smells great. You'll have to give her my compliments."

Not wanting to keep William from his work much longer, they put in their drink orders before turning to choosing a dinner. The evening then passed without much excitement.

As they were finishing off the meal, Penny turned to William, who was taking some of their plates away after delivering the check. "You know," she said, "I'm pretty sure this is the first time we've run into each other in a place that wasn't related to W.O.M.P. or Bradford Tech."

"Yeah," he replied, giving a small, awkward laugh. He kept his eyes down as he worked, keeping his attention on the dishes he was clearing. "I don't really get out all that much."

"Well, this Saturday, a bunch of us kids from school are going to Adventure Kingdom," Penny said. "It was going to be a school thing, but not all the slots were filled, so we're allowed to invite friends. You should come along."

Will was about to answer when his grandmother came up to the table. "How's everything going tonight?" she asked in a chipper voice.

"Wonderful as before," Gadget responded in an equally cheery voice. "Especially since we found out one of Penny's friends works here."

"Oh, so this is the Penny you've told me about," Bianca said.

"Abuela, please don't make a big deal out of this," Will pleaded in a whisper, but he went unnoticed.

"I'm so pleased to meet a friend of Guillermo's," the woman said with a bright smile. "He's told us about how you've helped him on your adventures."

"He's helped me on more than one occasion, too," Penny replied. "I was just asking him if he'd like to come on a trip to Adventure Kingdom this Saturday with some of my friends."

"I'd love to," Will said, "but I'm afraid I can't. I think I have a shift here that day…"

"Oh, don't worry about that," his grandmother said before he could continue. "If you want to go, go. I'll get Lorenzo to cover that time. Goodness knows how many of his shifts you've covered since he met Magdalena."

"Really?" the boy asked. He looked a bit unsure, but gave a small smile. "You know what, sure. I'll come."

"Great," Penny said. "We're all meeting at the rec center at eight o’ clock."

"Then it's all settled," Gadget said with an approving nod. He then set to paying the bill and the two of them left for the evening.

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Friday, July 11, 2087

M.A.D. Castle, ?
"I'm booorrrreeedd!" Drillbit groaned. He, along with the rest of the teen cybers, were lounging around the living quarters that had been given to them. They hadn't been given a mission in about a week, and the lack of activity was starting to wear on the group.

"You think your board now?" Joltwave asked. She was currently at a computer, working on info gathering on W.O.M.P. "Try being locked in a cave for a month without as much as a vacuum-tube TV, then talk about boredom."

"Yeah, yeah, we all know how horrible the W.O.M.P. prisons are, and how if we're not careful, we'll end up like Malware," After-Shock retorted, "but let's face it. None of us have had anything to do in ages. We haven't even been told to be on standby!"

"It's not like we really have much to do," Syreen commented. She was sitting at a nearby table, painting her fingernails. "You know Dr. Claw is this close to setting up connections with Charybdis again, and he doesn't want anything to draw W.O.M.P.'s attention in the direction of his communications."

"Yeah, but you'd think there'd be something for us to do," Wildfire countered. "After all, the eggheads in the science department are working on that robot-thingy. We might not be able to help with the communications, but we could run a distraction or something."

Talon had been reclining on a nearby couch, reading a copy of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Hearing his companion's words, he dog-eared his page. "You know what, mi amigo," he said aloud. "I think your right."

Wildfire beamed. "Of course I'm right! Uh, right about what?"

"Running a distraction," the dark-haired boy responded. "After all, with nothing to do, W.O.M.P. could very well turn their attention to M.A.D.'s communications, once again causing Charybdis to cut ties. However, what if they had something else to look at? Something far more pressing?"

"I see where's you're going with this," Joltwave said with a grin. "Cause those stoolies to have to deal with us, keeping all eyes away from Claw's invitations."

"Bingo," Talon flashed a smile. "We'll have something to do, and my uncle can contact his lady-friend without being hampered by the goody-two shoes." He then frowned. "Unfortunately, I don't think we will be able to do it personally."

"Why not?" Drillbit asked. "No one else in the world can mix things up like we can!"

"And that's the problem." The head leaned against a post, thinking up a solution to the problem. "We're too well known, and we're well known as M.A.D. Even if we don't show our faces, once Penny Gadget and her stooges catch a whiff of what's going on, she'll know it's us. Considering she's got that fancy-smancy Junior Agent badge now, she'll go right directly to W.O.M.P. and all eyes will be on M.A.D. again."

"That means we're right back on square one again!" Wildfire declared, knocking over a desk to emphasize his frustration. "I swear, if we have to stay cooped up in this crummy old castle for another day, I'm gonna blow!"

"Hey, hey, cool your jets," Talon replied. He casually set the table back upright. "Who said we're staying here?"

"You did say we couldn't get in on the action," Syreen pointed out.
Talon shrugged. "True, but I never said we couldn't have a hand in on it. Pretty Penny knows our style, but it's not like we were the only ones causing problems for Metro City in the last three years?"

There was a moment of silences as the others processed what he said. Joltwave gave a grin as the solution came to her. "Oh, I see where you're going with this," she said. "Very clever…"

"I don't," Drillbit said with a grunt of frustration.

"Don't worry about it." Talon flashed a grin. "We're just going to go sow of few seeds of discord to watch them bloom. First, however, we're going to have to visit a few of our old stomping grounds."

Saturday, July 12, 2087
Randy's Bar and Grill, Metro City

Late night and early morning is usually not a good time for businesses to be open, but occasionally the specific clientele of an establishment would dictate when good work times are. For Randy's Bar and Grill, these odd hours worked for their specific niche group.

Thugs and gang members of all kinds crowded into the establishments. None of them were high enough to have been recruited for a group like M.A.D. Instead, these were members from other groups who had to focus on less ambitious areas of crime. Petty thieves were the most common, though your odd arsonist or hitman occasioned the place. Heck, ever since Randy had added in that wifi server, several identity thieves and extremist hacktivists set up shop at times. However, since it was preferable not to get noticed in the daytime, the night hours were when the pub was usually full.

It was one such night, at around one in the morning. Ignatius "Iguana" Masters had claimed the bar for the night. Of all the non-M.A.D. related gangs of the area, his was the most successful, though they were new enough that they had little experience with anything like M.A.D. They had just come back from an especially successful raid of a rival's warehouse. Thus, he and his group had decided to celebrate. What none of them had been expecting was for the festivities to be cut short by another, far more serious rival.

"Well, Iggy Boy, imagine seeing you here," a teen boy said, sliding in the booth next to the mobster. Masters looked over the newcomer. It was a kid, no older than eighteen, though he looked more seventeen. "Get out of here, brat," he said with a mocking sneer, unamused by the kid's casual demeanor. "Why don't you go run along to some arcade."

"You don't seem to understand who I am," the boy asked, his friendly tone never wavering. Not waiting for Masters to respond, the boy turned and waved down the waitress. "Hey, sweetie, get me a Cuba Libre." The woman looked shocked by the request, but hurried to the back none the less.

"Now, getting back to business-" the kid started, but Masters cut him off.

"We aint got no business," the thug snarled. "Now, get yourself out of here before I have my boys take you out."

Normally, that threat would have gotten the kid to get the picture and hightail it, but it didn't seem to work this time. "Oh, are you really going there?" the kid asked.

Not bothering to respond, Masters motioned to Bruno and Talmer, two of his enforcers, to come to
the table. "Show this is punk who's boss around here."

The two men were huge and well-muscled, and the teen looked downright puny by comparison. However, the development didn't ruffle him in the slightest. "I should give you a bit of warning as to who I am," the boy said. "My name is Talon. Talon Scolex. Maybe you've heard of me."

Masters laughed when he heard this. "Yeah, I know about you. You the old guy Claw's nephew. Well, I've got news for you, kid. No fifteen-year-old punk who got his position because of his uncle's gonna intimidate me!" He motioned to the goons. "Take him out."

The two thugs came closer, but Talon only grinned. "You wanna dance? A ponemos chancla."

One of the men tried to grab the boy and pick him up, but found to his shock that the kid was heavier than he looked. In response, Talon grabbed the goon by the shirt and the belt, knee'd him in the gut, and tossed him across the bar.

The second man charged Talon while he was finishing with the first, knocking the teen onto the ground. The boy was ready for him, too, and he reached up, firing a sonic pulse blaster directly in the thug's chest. The shot sent the man flying away in the opposite direction of his cohort.

Once both were knocked back, the boy looked up. "Drillbit, Joltwave, why don't you make sure those two stay down."

Before the stunned men could move, the other teens revealed themselves. Drillbit moved faster, grabbing the first and giving him a hard blow across the head, knocking him out. Joltwave then went up to the second man, placing her hands on either side of his head and giving him a hard shock, which knocked him out cold.

The two goons now dealt with, Talon returned to his seat. By now, the waitress had returned and handed him a glass.

Taking a sip, he made a face at the content. "I wanted a Cuba Libre. This is Coke."

"Cuba Libre has rum in it," the waitress responded.

"And the sky is blue," the teen responded with a scowl. "Just get me the drink I asked for before I get it myself."

Looking at the carnage the kid caused, the woman hurried off to fulfil the order.

"Now, where were we," Talon said, turning back to Masters. "Oh, yeah, that's right. Business."

"Uh, of course," Masters said, realizing the position he was in. "What I meant to say was that I didn't know Claw would have any use for us. After all, we're small potatoes compared to you guys."

"True," the boy said with a shrug. "Still, that doesn't mean you can't be of any use to M.A.D. at all. In fact, I have an offer for you."

"An offer?" the man asked. "What sort of offer?"

"Just a simple little gig," Talon replied as the waitress came back. He took the drink from her, took a sip, and then went on. "You know about Adventure Kingdom?"
"That little amusement park?" Masters asked. "Sure I do."

"Indeed." The cyber leaned back, taking another sip before continuing. "We want you to cause a scene. Take over the park, mix things up a bit. We'll even supply the tools for you to use so the police aren't an issue. Just make sure it gets public attention. In exchange, M.A.D. will allow your group stakes in our profits, along with help with any competition."

The mobster pondered the offer. "It's tempting," he said eventually, "but there's two things that rubs me wrong about the whole affair."

"Which is?" Talon asked.

"Why do you guys want an amusement park hassle?" came the response. "There's not really much money to be made in a job like this, and there's no hostage or treasure to be gotten either."

The teen laughed. "Perceptive, I see. Well, rest assured, this helps M.A.D. in more ways than you can guess. The exact details don't need to be explained, but the important thing is that you make sure all eyes are on you. Now, what's the other issue?"

"The Mech." As soon as the words had come from Masters' mouth, everyone around fell silent. They all knew who was being spoken of. "This is his city, after all. Once he gets word something's going down that the police can't handle, he'll come in, and I want no trouble with him."

"Oh, if it's just Gadget you're concerned about, don't worry," Talon said with a shrug. "I'll be working on something myself that makes sure Gadget won't be able to set foot anywhere in that park. Just as long as he's not inside when you make your takeover, everything should be just fine."

"Now," Talon said, spreading out a few papers, "just do exactly as you are told and everything will work out just fine..."

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"I'm glad to hear you are enthusiastic about our work," Gadget said, completely missing the tone of sarcasm in the robot's voice, "but I'm sorry to say this is probably one of the less enjoyable parts of our job. It might be boring, but it is very, very important that we always make sure that the paperwork is filed to the correct place at the correct time. Otherwise, you end up with mishaps like that time when I hadn't closed the case file on those M.A.D. terrorists." The cyber shuddered. "I was cleaning ravioli out of the main lobby for weeks!"

Hearing this, the two Gadgetinis looked confused. "Do we want to know?" Digit asked, turning to Penny.

The girl laughed and shook her head. "If you're curious, ask Sharon, the help desk operator. She's got quite the story to tell."

At that moment, she glanced out the window and saw a van approach. "Well, my ride is here," she said. "I see you guys later." She quickly patted Brain on the head, and kissed her uncle and the twins on the cheek.

"See you, Miss Penny," Digit called out.

"Have fun," Fidget said.

"And try to be careful," Gadget added.

"I will," she called back. "I'll contact you once we reach the park," she assured, holding up her pendant.

By the time she had made it out, the van had pulled up to the driveway and the door was opened. Inside, Rheeci and Kayla were already in the front, and a red-headed girl Penny had never met before was in the seat behind them.

Seeing her come out, Rheeci walked around to help her get in. "Glad you could make it, Penn," she said as she and the redhead worked to lift Penny into the van. "I was a bit worried your uncle would have some sort of work for you over at W.O.M.P."

"Nah, they're just doing paperwork today," Penny replied, working her way into the van and buckling in. "I couldn't help even if I wanted to. You have to be eighteen or older to handle those files."

"Gotta wonder why they're letting the 'Tinis in on the action, then," Kayla commented. "Aren't they, what, five months old?"

"About, but they took a cognizance test, which set them mentally at about twenty-five to thirty years old," the blonde responded. "General Sir decided that counted as close enough, so they get to help out with filing paperwork. Lucky them."

"By the way," Kayla said, changing the subject, "this is Bridgette Gellanchen." She turned around and motioned to the redhead who was sitting next to Penny. "She's that friend of mine from school who said she'd help me out with the blog."

"Nice to meet you," Penny said, turning to Bridgette. "I appreciate the help."

"No prob," Bridgette responded. "I've been working in the AV department at school forever, and there's only so much attention you can get reporting on softball games and pep rallies. It would be an honor to work with Team Gadget."
"No work today, though," Rheeci said. She had loaded up Penny's wheelchair in the back of the van and now slid her way into the driver's seat. "Once we meet up with Linc and Eli, it'll just be some exciting rides and cool shows."

"Oh, there's one other thing," Penny added. "I did invite a friend to come along. He's meeting us at the rec center."

"That's right, you told us about him," Kayla said. "His name's Will Cortes, right? I don't think we've met him before."

"He works for Dr. Bradford," Penny responded. "That's how I've met him. He's cool, you'll like him."

"Hey, I'm not complaining," Kayla responded. "We've been needing a few more guys around. Don't get me wrong, Linc and Eli are great, but there can be times, especially with Linc…"

"You said his name is Will Cortes?" Bridget asked. She made a face, as if contemplating the name.

"Yeah," Penny replied. "Do you know him?"

"Not exactly," the redhead responded. "I can't remember anyone by that name in specific, but it does ring a bell." After a moment, she waved her hand. "Ah, it'll come to me later."

"Now," Rheeci called out as she made her way into traffic, "what's our plan of action for today?" For the rest of the car ride, the girls discussed their plans for the day's outing, unaware of the turn the day was going to take.

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Now, officers," Gadget stated as he and the Gadgetinis went through the main W.O.M.P. building to an elevator in the back, "we will be spending most of the day in a section of the building we don't usually go to: the office spaces. Once there, you need to be very careful. Since this is where most of the paperwork is done, we won't be the only ones at work here, and people can get very testy if their offices are damaged."

"If the offices are damaged?" Digit asked. "If you guys just do paper and computer work here, how much damage can be caused?"

"You would be surprised what's happened within these walls," the detective replied. He entered the elevator and pressed the button for the twenty-second floor. "You might need to look up the code of contraband items. It's available on the website."

As they rode to their destination, Fidget did just that. "Wow," the orange bot said as he perused the list, "this is kinda thorough. No gel pens, glitter, video game cartridges, living wild turkeys, ravioli, living or dead water buffalo, even Tic-Tacs!"

"It took the Colonel two weeks to recover from the Tic-Tac event," Gadget said. "I just thought everyone would like to try the cherry cola flavor. I didn't know he kept his paperclips in that drawer."

The twins glanced at each other, wondering if they should question any further, but were cut off from any opportunity as the elevator pulled to stop. "Ah, we're here," the Inspector said, stepping out into the main hall. "My office is just down that hall, next to the break room. Why don't you two head
down there and get settled in? I'll just pick up the forms we need and meet you there."

Once the twins had gone off to do as they were told, Gadget turned and headed to a desk at the direct opposite end of the floor. There, a woman was sitting at a computer that she seemed to be completely invested in.

"Good morning, Cheryl!" Gadget called out in his useful, cheery tone.

Hearing his greeting, the receptionist practically jumped out of her skin. "Oh! Brown, it's you," she said, clearly not very pleased to see him. "Is it that time already?"

"I'll just need five copies the typical form packets for the Quimby unit," he said, completely missing the displeasure in her voice. "If it's possible, I'd like a couple of extras, too. Maybe three or so? It's the Gadgetinis first time learning about paperwork, so I'd like to be ready for errors when they crop up."

"Fine," Cheryl responded in a huffy tone. She picked up a phone and talked into it. "I need several of the Quimby unit form packets, eight if you have that many." She then hung up and turned back to Gadget. "Just go wait over there, Brown, and try not to touch anything."

"Got it!" he responded, and turned on his heels to go to the waiting chairs as he was directed.

Thankfully, he didn't have to wait their too long, as he was soon approached by a young man. "Oh, Inspector Gadget, hi!" the man called out. He had a Manilla folder in one hand. "I wasn't expecting you to be in today."

"Good morning, Jimmy," Gadget greeted. "It's been a bit slow lately, so I thought it would be a good time to file the paperwork for the last couple of missions."

"Well, I've got the files you wanted right here," the man said, handing over the folder. "Hopefully things will stay uneventful for a while."

Once he had handed over the files, Jimmy turned to leave. Gadget turned to go to his office himself before pausing and turning back. "Oh! I forgot to give you a tip."

At the mention, both Jimmy and Cheryl turned pale. "Oh, no need for that," Jimmy said, raising his hands. "It's my job; there's no need for a tip."

"Nonsense," the inspector replied. "It would be rude for me to not tip you. Go-go Gadget Wallet."

Instead of the wallet, however, his hat took a moment to stutter for a moment, before sending the boxing glove out instead. It struck one of the sprinklers, knocking it askew and setting it off. In response, all the other sprinklers in the floor lobby went off as well, to the dismay of those sitting in the room.

"Well, that's not right," Gadget murmured, hardly noticing the sprinkles going off around him. "Go-go Gadget Wallet."

This time the umbrella went off, shielding him from the unexpected shower. "Well, that is helpful, but not what I asked for. Go-go Gadget Wallet."

Finally, the hat responded, handing over a small leather wallet. Taking a dollar out, he handed it to Jimmy. "Here you are. Have a nice day."

Having finished that job up, he looked up at the sprinklers. "Now I'll just have to fix these faulty
"No! Don't!" Cheryl called out. She soon caught herself and tried to make herself sound calmer. "No need for that. I'll just call the handyman."

"Are you sure?" the inspector asked. "Because I'm sure it will just be a quick fix."

"Which is why we should call Jason in instead," the receptionist responded with a nervous laugh. "It is his job after all. You just go fill out what you need to file."

Gadget gave a shrug. "Alright then. I'll see you later." He then turned and hurried off to his office.

Once he was gone, Cheryl turned to her phone. "Hello? Can you send Jason up to the twenty-second floor to repair the sprinkler system?" After a moment's pause, she sighed. "Yes, it is John Brown's day in the office. How'd you guess?"

To be continued…
Saturday, July 12, 2087

Jacob Taylor Recreation Center, Metro City

There was an air of excitement in the group of teens that had gathered around the bus parked outside the center. Around them, the several adults appointed as chaperones were checking and rechecking their lists every six minutes as kids who attended Riverside Prep kept bringing in their friends who did not, meaning the list of names kept growing every few minutes.

It was into this environment that the girls pulled up. Once they had gotten a parking spot decently close to where the bus was, they worked to get everyone out and ready to join the group. As they came up to the bus, they were approached by a woman. "Ah, Miss Dollar," she called out. "I saw your name on the list. Glad to see you and Miss Tran could make it. The Washington boys are holding a spot in line for you."

"Glad to come, Coach Roberts," Penny replied, feeling a little odd that she was being singled out. "Just so you know, we are bringing three friends with us. This is Kayla Conners and Bridgette Gellanchen. There will also be another boy named Will Cortes, who'll meet us here."

The coach wrote down the two girls' names on her list and scanned over the paper. "Looks like Mr. Cortes is already here and signed in," she said after a moment. "Can't say I'd recognize him, though, so I guess you'll have to find him yourself."

"Thank you," Rheeci said, giving a wave. "We'll be sure to."

Once they had made sure they were marked as present, the girls moved over to the bus. Sure enough, waiting towards the front of the line to the bus was the Washington brothers. "Hey, gals!" Linc called out. "Over here!"

The four girls moved to go join their companions. "Well, this is a first," Rheeci laughed as she scooted into the line. "I don't think you've ever beaten me to something school related, Eli."

"This one doesn't involve any essay writing," Eli replied, giving a smile. "You'd be surprised how fast I can get going when there's no homework involved."

Linc turned to speak to Bridgette. "Why hello there," he said, casting what he was sure was an alluring smile. "I don't believe we've met. My name's Lincoln, but you can call me Linc. I do hope we get to know each other better."

"Oh, don't worry about that," Bridgette laughed, catching the boy's flirtatious tone. "Kayla's told me all about you."

"She has?" The boy's tone became suddenly less confident and he turned to cast a glare over at Kayla, who only laughed in response. Turning back to the redhead, he attempted to compose his attitude. "I mean, of course she has. This isn't the type of personality that one just ignores."

"Oh, of course not, Mr. Hot Wheels," Bridgette responded, using a faux-flirtation tone of her own.
Hearing this, Linc blushed and turned to Kayla. "Seriously!? You told her about that?!!"

"Hey, they're only so many times a guy gets covered in glitter glue and Hot Wheels cars while running up to someone's house," the offender replied.

While her friends were discussing what was and was not appropriate to discuss over the past, Penny scanned through the gathered kids to see where William might be hiding so that she could call him over. She eventually did find him, though it turned out to be in a less than pleasant circumstance.

The boy was at the other end of the parking lot, but not in line. Instead, four other boys had cornered him and knocked him down against the flag pole that stood at the entryway to the parking lot. It was clear he needed help.

"Oh, crumbs," Penny mumbled under her breath as she hurried over to the scene. A part of her wanted to break out some of the more offensive capabilities of her watch, but realizing the problems with that plan, came up with another one. "Hey, Eli! Kayla!" she called out. "I think I'm going to need a bit of help on this."

Hearing her call, the bigger boy looked to where she was looking. "Oh, boy," he groaned as he and Kayla went to follow the blonde. "It's Eddie."

"Funny," Kayla muttered. "We haven't had any fight related problems with him before."

Sure enough, it was Eddie Hollens, the Riverside Prep big man on campus, who was the ringleader in the issue. He was the one who had cornered the now trapped Will, and three of his thuggish friends were standing on all sides, keeping any form of escape an impossibility.

"...if you think you're going to fool anyone here," the larger of the two boys was saying, "you've got-"

Without pausing for a minute, Penny pushed herself between Will and Eddie. "What's your problem?" she asked with a scowl.

Eddie stepped back for a moment, somewhat startled by the interruption. "Penny? Oh, I get it." A look of realization came on the jock's face, and he nodded knowingly. "I get it. You don't have to worry about it, babe. I was just telling this loser to get lost. I don't know why he came here in the first place."

"He came here because I invited him!" Penny scowled.

At this point, a look of even stronger confusion came over Eddie. "You invited him? Penny, don't you know who he is?"

Penny gave a huff and determined to ignore the comment. Turning to Will, she reached out to help him up. "You alright?"

Taking her hand, the boy nodded. "A bit bruised, but nothing I haven't lived through already."

"Penny, aren't you listening to me?" Eddie said, attempting to pull the girl aside. "I know what he is! I went to school with him, before he set this fake identity up, and considering who your uncle is, I'd think you'd know, too. Why would you, of all people, want anything to do with him?"

"I'm not-" Will started, but he was cut off as he was forced to dodge a blow.

"Why you lying little-" the jock sneered as he missed. He looked like he was about to hit the smaller
boy, but his arm was caught.

"There's no need for that," Eli said. By that point, he and Kayla had caught up and were ready to provide any physical support, should it be needed.

"Penny invited him to come," Kayla said, coming in to back up her friends. "Since Will doesn't even go to this school, I can't see why you'd even think you'd know enough about him to have a problem with him."

"Oh, I know him," Eddie huffed. "He and his psycho of a brother went to the same grade school as me, and they were nothing but trouble. It wouldn't surprise me if he's still I cahoots with Talon, just acting as the friendly face. You might have fooled them, but you haven't fooled me." With that, he turned to a huff to get in line at the bus.

Now that they were alone, Will shook. "Sorry about that," he said with a sigh. "I didn't think he'd still remember me."

"Don't worry about it, man," Eli said. He held a hand out in greeting. "My name's Elijah Washington, but you can call me Eli."

"I'm Kayla Connors," Kayla added. "Nice to meet you, Will. Penny's told us quite a bit about you."

"Not everything, I hope," Will said with an awkward smile.

Penny shook her head in response. "It doesn't matter," she assured him. "At least, I don't care."

"She's told us you're cool, which means you're good by us," Kayla said, placing an arm around Will's shoulders. "Now, come on. We've got a few more of us waiting for us back in line, and they're not about to hold everything up just so the four of us can catch up." The four then turned, rejoining Rheeci, Linc, and Bridgette back in the line.

Once in line, Bridgette and Will caught each others' glances. Recognition, and not of a pleasant variety, came to both, and there was an uncomfortable moment of tension. At that moment, however, the bus loaded, and any opportunity for a mention of the mutual discomfort was lost. All they could do was follow in line and hope things wouldn't turn out too bad.

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

Gadget's office was located at the far end of the floor, behind a door marked Detective John Brown. It was one of the few rooms that was completely separated from the rest of the floor, which meant it was also the only room that was not currently having an unexpected shower.

"Alright, I have all the paperwork we're going to need," the inspector said as he entered the room. He gave the umbrella a quick shake to get the water off it before recalling it back into his hat. "You'll find some pens in the top drawer. If you two could get some out, we can begin out work."

The two Gadgetinis could only look on in amazement as their superior came in. "Uh, Inspector?" Fidget said, deciding to bring up the elephant in the room. "Why is it raining in the building?"

"Oh, that?" Gadget glanced outside the door at the still-showering hallway. "There was a small... uh... accident with the sprinkler system. I offered to fix it, but they said not to worry. You shouldn't worry either." He shut the door before moving over to his desk. "All the papers were in a folder, so they'll still be dry."

Moving into his seat, he spread out the papers. "Most of these are pretty routine," he said, handing
out a small stack to Fidget and then to Digit. "They'll cover the protests back in mid-May, as well as traffic incident in June and that one incident with the llamas. There will need to be a more detailed report on the incident with the cases that ended in the arrests of Arthur Treyman and Richard Boulden, so I'll handle those."

Thus, the work began with filling out form after form. Gadget's work mostly involved his computer, so he spent much of his time in typing out the specific case logs. Occasionally, one of the twins would need help with their forms, in which case he would look up and give the explanation on what was needed, before turning back to his work on the computer.

Digit was much more adept to this form of work that his brother or the Inspector were, so thus he finished his pile of paperwork by the time ten minutes had passed. He glanced over to where Fidget was hard at work and noticed that his brother's paper was in two piles; one that had most of the sheets, and one where only one page was left. "I see you're almost done, too," he said, proud of his own achievement.

"What?" Fidget looked up, startled by the comment. "Oh, this? Oh, no. This is still my first page."

"Really?" The blue bot leaned in to get a look at his brother's work. Sure enough, Fidget was less than halfway done with the first sheet. Turning from the larger pile of unfinished work, Digit reached over. "Here, I'll take care of this."

Fidget moved to allow his twin to take it, but both were cut off by Gadget. "Now, now, Digit," the detective scolded, "Fidget needs to learn how to get the paperwork done, too. If you take over everything by yourself, then he'll never learn what he's supposed to do."

Digit sighed, slumping back in the seat by the side. Fidget gave a small, apologetic smile before turning back to his own work. He could sense his twin's frustration but couldn't think of any way to try to help.

In his boredom, Digit glanced around the office. It was pretty sparsely decorated, matching the inspector's simple tastes. A few pictures were hung on the walls, and a Newton's Cradle and another picture were stationed by the computer. There was nothing else in the room to attract interest.

With little else to do, Digit shifted his focus to the picture frames scattered around the room. They were mostly digital, with only the frame on the desk holding a paper photo in it. The others flashed through a variety of scenes. Most of them featured Gadget with his partners on various missions, inter-spaced with pictures from Penny's childhood. Nothing of any real interest to the robot.

Instead, he reached to get a look at the physical photo on the desk. In it, a much younger (and still totally human) Gadget stood next to a blonde woman in a police uniform. He had his arm around the woman's shoulder, and the two of them beamed at the camera.

"Who's this?" Digit asked, holding up the photo. "An ex-girlfriend?"

"Oh, that?" The inspector looked up to see what was being referred to. "No, that was my sister, Andrea. She was Penny's mother."

The robot jumped, realizing his mistake. "Oh, uh, sorry about that."

"Don't worry," Gadget replied in a chipper voice. "Most people made that mistake the first time they met us. I know we don't look all that much alike."

"You don't look like who?" a voice asked at the door. The trio looked up and realized that someone had come to the door and was looking in. It was a tall man with dark hair who was wearing a (now
"Oh, hello, Elliot," Gadget greeted. "Fidget, Digit, this is Elliot Smith, Vice Director of the C.I.A. Elliot, this is Fidget Gadgetini and Digit Gadgetini."

Hearing the designation of the organization he worked for, the two robots looked alert. "The C.I.A.?" Fidget asked. "Then you much be on some sort of important assignment."

"Don't get too excited," Elliot responded. "C.I.A. in this case stands for Cryptic Intelligence Agency, not Central Intelligence Agency. I work for W.O.M.P., and not at a very high level, either."

Hearing this, the twins relaxed. As Fidget turned back to his work, Digit turned to the newcomer. "Cryptic Intelligence Agency? I've never heard of it. What do you guys exactly do?"

"We're the behind-the-scenes guys, so to speak," the man responded. "We find out when a mission is due and pass along the info to whoever's going to deliver it. I personally see to it that Quimby receive any missions that Inspector Gadget has been assigned to. We also make sure that any non-Bradford related tech is in working order, disguises are made, smaller info is passed along, and all paperwork is filed correctly."

"Huh," Digit said with a smirk. "So, you're the bean pushers?"

"Indeed, they are," Gadget said with a nod. "It's an important job, too. We wouldn't be able to handle the amount of cases we're given without their help." He then turned to look at Elliot. "It was nice of you to drop in, but I don't have much time to chat today. We're working on some important paperwork, so we'd better get back to it. Say 'hi' to the gang for us."

"Oh, before I go, I was supposed to tell you that you'll need to bring the papers down to the C.I.A. floor yourself today," Elliot said.

"That's quite alright," Gadget responded. "We'll be sure to do so. Is something wrong with the normal transport system?"

"Apparently, someone left the lid off the transporter, and it got soaked by the sprinklers," the other man replied. "I don't know whose fault that was, but all the same, you might want to prepare yourself for a chewing out from the Colonel about it."

"Sure thing," the inspector said, giving a thumbs-up. "I'll be done with this in about an hour. Please be sure to remind Dana not to lock the doors on us."

Once Elliot had left, both Gadget and Fidget turned back to the work at hand. Digit, however, sat in silence, looking for something to amuse himself with as he waited. "Well," he said eventually, not able to stand the silence any longer, "at least we'll have a walk once everything's done. How much longer do you thing you'll have?"

"I've just finished the first page!" his twin replied, proudly holding up the paper.

In response, Digit groaned and leaned into the chair cushion. "I wish Miss Penny had given us the ability to sleep."

Adventure Kingdom, thirty minutes outside of Metro City

"Alright, kids," Mr. Reginalds, one of the teachers who had come along as a chaperone said, as the bus pulled into the park's parking lot. They were standing outside the park, which was covered with a huge glass dome. "You all know the rule. Once your hand has been stamped, you'll be free to go
wherever you like within the park dome. Once you leave, however, you can't come back in without a new ticket, so don't leave unless it's a complete emergency. Stay in groups and keep ahold of one of the pagers in case there is an emergency." He then rambled off a list of thirty other instructions, all in case of an emergency, though few people were listening by the time he had finished.

Once all the instructions were through, the kids unloaded, each grabbing one of the small pagers as the left. Penny was the only one who didn't have to file into the line at the front of the bus, since her chair made it necessary to use the lift at the back.

Thankfully, this also meant that the six others going with her had an easier time breaking off from the main crowd to join her at the back. "Oh, I have been looking forward to this!" Kayla said. "I heard they've got the whole place remodeled!"

"I think that's just the Pirate's Plaza," Rheeci responded, pulling the park map out of her bag. "After that fiasco with fountains last November, they had to redo the area."

"It'll be interesting to see what the place looks like," Penny said, rolling ahead of the group. "I don't think I've been there since I was ten years old. Do they still have the crocodile show?"

"I think they shut that down, after some guy fell into it chasing after a kid who snuck under the tent," Eli replied.

"Wasn't that your uncle?" Kayla asked.

Penny gave a nod. "Yes, I remember that. I wasn't there myself, but the video went viral. Uncle Gadget can get a bit…preoccupied when he's on a case, and considering there was dynamite in the park, it was a pretty important case."

"Well," Will said, "at least there won't be any explosives this time."

"No, but with our luck," Rheeci laughed, "it'll be M.A.D.'s take your kid to the invasion day."

"Really?" Bridgette asked. "Do you think M.A.D. will attack?"

"No, not really," Penny responded. "It's just that Talon and his goons had a habit of springing out of nowhere and interrupting anything and everything, at least since we first met up. We do prepare for a possible attack, but it's not likely to happen in a crowded place like this, especially since M.A.D.'s been laying low as of late."

As they came to the gate, they got in lines to get their hands stamped for entry. Kayla found herself standing directly behind Bridgette, which gave her a moment to ask a question that had been gnawing at her.

"Hey, Bri?" she asked, tapping the other girl's shoulder.

"Yeah?" the redhead responded, looking over her shoulder.

She took a deep breath, still feeling like she might be crossing a line. "You've been pretty quiet ever since we got on the bus. Is everything okay?"

"Oh, that," Bridgette said with a smile. "Oh, yeah, everything's fine."

"Are you sure?" Kayla asked, still not convinced. "You've been staring at Will a lot, and you don't seem very happy to see him."
"It's nothing," the other girl replied. "I think I know him from somewhere, but it doesn't matter. Everything's fine, really. Let's just enjoy the day."

"Alright then," the brunette acquiesced. She was still not entirely convinced that everything was alright in the group, but she was willing to let the matter lie.

In a moment, everyone had gathered together at the fountain that was the main landmark at the front of the park. "So," Penny said, calling up a holographic map with her watch, "what shall we do now?"

"First things first," Eli said, leaning in and moving the map around by directing the picture. "We should probably set where we want to go first, so we can try to get through without line hassle. Things tends to go smoother when there's an plan."

"Plan-schman," Linc said, waving a hand with a careless air. "I say we just head out. We've got a whole day to enjoy and all the time in the world to enjoy it! No work, no school, no M.A.D., just us and a whole park full of rollercoasters!"

"Oh, not too many roller coasters," Rheeci said in a small voice. "And not the big ones. They scare me."

"We'll have a spread of all the rides that are available," Eli assured her before turning back to his brother, "and we'll want a plan. This is both a weekend and in the middle of the summer. If we just rush into things without any sort of idea of when we want to do it, then we'll be stuck into lines for fifty to seventy-five percent of the day."

"I know a website the takes the statistics of public places and predicts how long the wait for those places will be," Will piped in. "Should I look to see if they've got Adventure Kingdom listed?"

"That sounds great, man," Eli responded. "Penny, can you mark this map to mention the best times for each area?"

"I'll also get the alarms for the bigger rides set," the blonde responded, fiddling with the controls to get to the settings. "So what should we do? Five minutes before load time? Ten?"

"Better go with twenty," Bridgette said. "When this place is packed like this, working your way around can be nuttier than peanut butter. We'll need to set in time to get around."

As the kids talked about their plans, they were completely oblivious to all around them. All they had on their mind was their future activities. They had little idea about what was actually in store for them.

M.A.D. Service Bunker, forty-five minutes outside of Metro City

"Alright, everyone, gather round," Talon called out. He and his band were hiding out in one of M.A.D.'s more furnished bunkers, ready to observe and direct the day's fun.

"So, we're all wired up to the place, right?" Joltwave asked, staring at one of the blank monitors that lined the room.

"Like a Christmas tree," Talon responded. "Checked all the lines myself. There's not one corner of that park that we won't be able to see, or through that Masters doof, control. We might not be there in person, but it'll be a blast all that same." He gave a smirk at the thought. "When I say 'blast,' I mean blast."
"So, how are we going to make sure there's no interruption of the Gadget variety?" Wildfire asked, setting up several of the monitors to play. As they flashed on, areas related to the park's swimming section appeared. He gave a smile as he focused the camera around the area. "After all, we don't want our fun ruined by any goody-two-shoes."

"We've got that all laid out," the boss responded. "You remember the Lucidi-Soli bomb we snatched from that weapons depot?"

"Sure I remember the Lucy-Sully bomb. That's a great bomb, the Lucy-Sully," the blond boy said, giving a nervous laugh. After a moment, he continued. "But maybe some of the others don't so it might still be a good idea to give everyone a refresher."

Talon sighed, but shook his head before giving the explanation. "The Lucidi-Soli bomb is a specific weapon designed for infiltration of and implantation in enemy bases. It is, for the most part, and ordinary series of bombs, except for the fact that it is fitted to hold a full liter and a half of lucidity soluti solution. You know what happens when that chemical goes up in flames."

The two girls and Wildfire nodded knowingly and smirked, but both Drillbit and After-Shock exchanged glances that said they were lost. Seeing these looks, Talon swore under his breath in Spanish before explaining. "Lucidity Soluti is Latin for 'implosion burst,'" he stated. "When the solution is set on fire, like, say, in an explosion, it causes an intense chemical reaction that results not only in instantaneous combustion of all the oxygen around it, but also causes a brief increase in gravity. Anything around the Lucidi-Soli bomb would be suffocated, immolated, and crushed all at once."

Hearing this, the two remaining boys nodded, and looks of excitement caught in their eyes. "Oh, I get it now!" Drillbit said. "We're going to use it on the Gadget Crew! That way, they can't interrupt!"

"As fun as that might be," Talon replied, "that's just not possible. The bomb itself takes a while to get the solution on fire, so it is unlikely that we'd actually be able to get Gadget anywhere near it and not risk his little princess disarming it while he holds the goons off. But, if we can keep them away from the park in the first place, we'd be on a much stronger track."

"The bomb," he went on, "has been planted in a corner of the park where construction was started but never finished. Not many people go there for structural reasons, so it was easy enough to set up. Now, all Masters has to do is mention that he had the bomb planted, and that he'll set it up if he gets even a whiff of W.O.M.P. interference. There's no way they'd risk that many casualties, so badda-bing, badda-boom, no Gadget problems."

"How long do you think it'll take before Masters gets caught?" Joltwave asked. "I mean, goof like him won't be able to keep the cops off forever."

"I'll bet it'll probably be about a day before the S.W.A.T. unit breaks the door down," After-Shock responded.

"Wanna put twenty bucks that they do it faster?" his sister asked with a smirk.

Hearing the challenge, the cyber grinned. "You're on!"

"You guys might want to wait on the bets," Syreen called out, looking in to one of the monitors. "The stooges haven't even started their takeover, and we've already got a hitch in the plan."

"What is it?" Talon said, joining the female cyber at the computer. When he saw what she was pointing out, a grin spread across his face. "Well, well, well. It looks like Pretty Penny's brought her
little girl scout troop on a day off."

"Penny Gadget's here?" Wildfire asked. "Should we call things off in case the others are around?"

"No, no, we should be fine," Talon replied. "She seems to be here as a guest, not a cop, so she'll never see any of this coming. In fact," he added with a laugh, "this could make for any even better game."

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

So the pieces are in place and tensions are on the rise. Log in next time to see the drama start!

Elliot's characterization here, as well as the members of the C.I.A. in general, come from Sogo's C.I.A. series. I highly recommend checking out their fanfics, and I give them my thanks for letting me use their characters.
Assignment 9.3: Hostile Tensions

Saturday, July 12, 2087

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Aaaannnddd…there!" Gadget typed in the last few details needed on his report. "We've got that done. Now, I'll send this to print in the copying room. We'll pick those up before we head to C.I.A. floor. How are you two coming along?"

By that point, it had been nearly an hour and a half since Elliot's visit, and Digit was bored out of his mind. He didn't even bother looking up as he answered. "I've been done for two hours. Are we actually going to do anything?"

"I'm just about done, Inspector," Fidget responded, filling in the last few blank spaces. "I'll be just a moment."

"Good for you, Officers." The detective got up, straightened out his coat, and began searching in the desk. "Just let me grab my print card so I can pay for my work. Ah-hah! Here it is!" He grabbed a small card, which didn't look that different from a credit card, out of one of the top draws. "Now, come along. Each of you should carry the files you filled out. It's very important that these are filed correctly, and that's done most efficiently when everyone knows who did what job."

Once everything was gathered together, the small group headed back into the hallway. By then, the sprinklers had been repaired, so there wasn't any downpour, but everything and everyone had been left rather soggy.

As they passed by the main lobby, Gadget tipped his hat to Cheryl. "The officers and I are done on this floor for today," he called out. "We'll be dropping by the C.I.A. offices before heading home, but we won't come back here. I hope you all have a pleasant day!"

"Good riddance," the receptionist muttered under her breath before turning her portable hairdryer back to her damp papers. "I hope you get stuck on floor negative twenty-two."

Gadget himself was cheerfully unaware of the comment, but the Gadgetinis heard it clearly as they followed him into the elevator. "Inspector," Fidget said, looking over to their superior, "what did she mean, floor negative twenty-two."

"Oh, that," the detective replied. "Well, I'm not really sure. After all, the print rooms on the ground floor, and the C.I.A. offices are on floor negative ninety-six."

"I guess that makes-" Digit said, but he cut himself off as he realized what he had just heard. "Wait a minute? Floor negative ninety-six? How in the name of French Stewart's squint can a building have negative floors?"

"All W.O.M.P. buildings have negative floors," Gadget stated as the pressed the button for the floor level. "It keeps everything safe and difficult to find. This building has eighty-five positive floors and ninety-six negative floors. With all those floors, it's pretty much guaranteed that even if a M.A.D. agent could infiltrate the building, it would take them months to sort everything out, none the less steal anything."
The twins glanced at each other, before turning back to the inspector. "This panel only has eighty-five buttons. How do you get to the negative floors?" Fidget asked.

"It's quite simple, really." Gadget motioned to the elevator panel in demonstration. "You have to do a math problem. First, you enter in an addition problem, using the 'doors open' button as the plus sign, so that the answer is one hundred. Then you press the 'hold door' button so that it knows the first equation is done. Then you press the 'door close' button to say that the next number should be subtracted from the first. Then you come up with another addition problem, using the same pattern as before, but you need to make sure that the answer when subtracted from one hundred will come out to the negative floor you want. Then you press the 'hold door' button again so you can travel down to that floor. Understand?"

"Uhhhh," both twins answered at the same time, "sure?"

Missing the tone of uncertainty, the detective grinned. "Great! I'll be able to show you how to do it in person when we head down there. First, however, I'll need to pick up my own files and pay for them."

Soon, the elevator glided to a stop at the first floor and the doors opened to the main lobby. Gadget exited, followed closely by the Gadgetinis, and headed to a back room where the copiers were all stored.

Before they even made it into the room, a loud commotion could be heard. The closer they got to the destination, the sound became much more intrusive and obvious. "Oh, good," the inspector said in a cheerful tone. "It sounds like it's a good day today."

As he entered the room, the chaos became even more apparent. Papers were flying left and right as the copiers went crazy. Several of the workers, most of them high school students, were flailing around, attempting to catch the papers and keep them in order, despite the machine-gun speed they were coming out at.

As Gadget approached the desk, an out of breath college-aged girl came to the front. "Oh, Detective Brown," she said, giving a small smile, "I thought I saw your name on some of these files. Don't worry, I'll have them up on just a moment."

"Thank you, Kitty," he responded. He smiled and then turned to the Gadgetinis. "That's Kitty Martin, one of our interns. She's also the best copy-room worker in the business. At least, if there is a copy-room business, she's the best in it."

Watching the chaos of the scene, Digit leaned over the counter. "Is it always crazy like this?" he asked one of the workers, a curly haired boy.

"Nah," the boy responded, not even bothering to look over at him. "Occasionally the gear goes crazy like-" Only as he turned to put his stack of papers down did the kid take notice of who asked the question. "Wait a minute, you're those little robots. The ones designed by Penny Gadget."

Fidget nodded as he joined his brother. "Yep, indeed we are. We're helping the Inspector fill out paperwork today."

By now, most of the other high school workers had taken notice and were gathering around the twins. "Whoa," the original boy said. "When they said you guys could talk, I didn't think it'd be like this?"

"Well, how else would we talk?" Digit asked, crossing his arms. "Out our hats?"
"No, I mean, like people," the kid responded. "I thought you'd just have pre-programmed responses, like the waiter or bellhop-bots."

"This is way cool," a girl piped up. "I gotta wonder what she did to get self-awareness."

"Honestly, we're not quite so sure ourselves," Fidget said with a laugh.

"We really just woke up one moment, and that was that," his twin added.

"So, can you guys really know what we're saying?" dark haired boy asked.

"Yeah," Digit said with a nod. "We've already pointed that out. Why does that concept seem so hard for you?"

Before any more questions could be asked, Gadget came up. "Alright, officers, I've gotten what we need. Let's not keep the C.I.A. waiting. Have a nice day, kids!"

Moving fast so as not to get left behind, the twins followed after the detective back to the elevator. All they could do now was wonder just what held in store.

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Adventure Kingdom

"It's kind of nice that the park can make artificial shade," Rheeci commented as she leaned back in the bench. She and Will were waiting at the exit of Wyvern, one of the largest rollercoasters in the park. The two of them had opted out of a ride on the famously intense ride, and as such were waiting for the others to get off. "I gotta wonder how they can set up the insta-shade."

"Simple," William responded, turning to look at the glass panels above them. "The dome is made of transparent lux-tenebras."

"Lux-tenebras?" the girl asked.

He nodded. "That's a material that's been recently invented. It's pretty fascinating. It is a special type of glass that has thin wires running through it. When an electric current is run through those wires, the glass can change the amount of transparency, black out, or even glow, depending on the type of power running the current. Added on the fact that lux-tenebras is unusually tough for a glass, it makes an ideal building material, especially for novelty locations like this one."

"Woah," Rheeci said. "That's so cool. Where'd you find out about that?"

"Oh, I had a report for my chemistry class," the boy responded, "and around that time, Metro City University was having a public demonstrations of the glass' capabilities. I thought it would make a more interesting topic than the salt content of seawater."

"Now, don't give up on seawater quite so fast," the girl replied with a laugh. "It might have a bit more to it than you'd think."

After a moment of silence, she went on. "So, I haven't seen you around before. How exactly did you meet Penny?"

Hearing the question, Will stiffened a bit. "Oh, that? Nothing much, really. I work as an assistant to Dr. Bradford. We see each other around when there's business around W.O.M.P., that's all."

Before the conversation could go on any farther, the others came out of the exit line for the Wyvern.
"Hey, guys!" Penny called out, waving for the duo to join the rest of the group. "Come on, we're going to the swings next!"

As they walked along the path, Bridgette turned to Rheeci. "So, you guys seemed pretty invested in your conversation. What were you talking about?" she asked with a tone of suspicion in her voice.

"Oh, Will told me the most interesting secret. He mentioned that the dome is made of this cool material called lux-tenebras," she said, pointing to the structure above them. She went on to explain the detail of the glass as they walked towards the medieval section of the park, which was where the swings were located.

Once they got there, however, something in a shop caught Penny's eye. "No way!" she declared, before spinning her chair around to the shop window. Inside sat a plush lion. "They've got a Richard Lionheart! Those are limited edition! Just a moment, guys, I'll be right back."

"We'll come, too," Rheeci called out, pulling Kayla behind her.

Once the other girls had gone, Bridgette turned, grabbed Will by the arm, and dragged him around a corner of a building so that the two of them were alone. "Alright, Scolex," she said with a frown. "I don't know where you got that 'Cortes' identity you told them about, but you're dropping it right now. I don't want to see my friends get hurt."

Will sighed. He had guessed something like this was going to happen the moment he had first seen Bridgette. "Penny already knows," he said, staring at his shoes as he spoke. "She's known for almost as long as she's known me."

"You expect me to believe that?" the redhead said, crossing her arms.

"Whether you believe me or not, it's the truth," he replied. "I had...a run in with Talon that she saved me from. She found out pretty quickly after that."

"As for the others," he continued, "I'm not allowed to. After Mom changed my and my sisters' surname, she told us not to tell anyone about our connection unless it was absolutely necessary. After Talon started causing problems again, W.O.M.P. agreed with her, so even if I wanted to admit who my twin is, I'm not in any position to."

"That's a load," Bridgette said with a frown. "Don't think I've forgotten what you two did as kids. To the teachers, to the other kids, to me. You two lied through your teeth about everything you did. The only difference between you and Talon is that he eventually cut it out with the lie and showed his true colors."

The boy stepped back, as if hurt by the accusation. However, the moment soon passed, though he did attempt to keep eye contact. "I am telling the truth," Will responded, "but I don't really expect you to believe me. I gave you no reason to trust me back then. I regret what I did to you back then, and I know that can't change what's already been done, but I want to start again, with a clean slate. Is there anything I can do try prove I want to try again?" He reached out his hand to her to emphasize his request.

The girl huffed and knocked the hand away. "Forgive me if I don't find that so convincing," she answered, turning her back to him. "I don't buy that 'I'm not supposed to tell anyone' baloney, but even if it is true, then it covers you, not me. I've waited all day, giving you the chance to come clean, but it's clear you're not going to take it. Either you'll tell them everything as soon as they come out or I am."
He looked back down and shoved his hands into his pockets. "There's nothing I can do to stop you. You'll have to learn the truth yourself." He then hung back, trying to decide whether or not he should stay.

Bridgette gave another huff before going to march back over to where Eli and Linc were standing. "Hey, guys, there's something I need to tell you."

"Hey, Bridgette," Eli said. "What's up?"

"I'm sorry to tell you this," the girl said, her tone becoming serious, "but Will's been lying to you. He's not a Cortes, he's a Scolex."

"Scolex? Like Talon and Claw?" Linc asked. He glanced over to where the other boy was standing. "That seems pretty unlikely."

Bridgette sighed. "I know, but I knew him as a kid. He's Talon Scolex's twin, and the two of them were trouble together. I know this is pretty hard to believe, but I have proof." She handed over her phone. One it was a video from years ago, titled The Scolex Terrors, and it was clear enough to recognize the people in it.

One was clearly Talon, who was holding an unfamiliar boy back. He was goading on William, who stood nearby, tearing pages out of a book. The boy was calling for him to stop, but it was to no avail.

"What's going on?" Eli asked as the video ended and changed to another one, showing a similar atrocity.

"This is what they got up to together," Bridgette answered. She pointed out the victim in the new video, who was weeping over the destroyed contents of a backpack. "This was hardly the only event, too; I experienced it myself. I don't trust Billy any more than I'd trust Talon, and I don't think you should either."

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From the bench where he sat, Will couldn't hear what was being said, but from the looks the other two boys made, he knew what was being said. Linc looked infuriated, and while Eli wasn't so reactive, the message was clear. It was the same message he'd been getting since middle school. It was the message he believed he deserved to hear.

He wasn't welcome any more.

"Sorry, Penny," he sighed under his breath before getting up. "It's just better I go." Taking out his cell phone, he dialed up his mom to ask her to come pick him up.

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Once Penny had picked up her plushy, she and the other girls hurried out of the shop to rejoin the others. However, by the time they got out, something was wrong. Linc was muttering something under his breath, and Eli had his arms crossed and a frustrated look.

Bridgette was the one speaking. "I'm sorry I had to spring this on you," she was saying. "I've just seen him hurt my friend before, so I thought it was best I warn you now."

"Warn us about what?" Kayla asked, catching her friend's tone.

"Where's Will?" Penny asked, noting that their group was one short.
"Girls, you're never going to believe it!" Linc declared in exasperation. "That Will guy was lying to us! You know what his real last name is? Scolex! Turns out, he's Talon's twin brother! Look at what he did!"

"What!?" Rheeci gasped. "But he seems so nice!"

"They're both good at that," Bridgette sighed. She handed Penny the video so the girls could see. "I knew both him and Talon, back in middle school. They were the class terrors. Stealing, destruction of property, bullying, you name it. Admittedly, Talon was the ringleader, but he always had Billy backing him up."

"Can you believe that guy, Penny?" Kayla asked. She crossed her arms and frowned. "I mean, he lied to you about his family."

Penny had stayed silent through the grousing, and at that moment, she turned. "I need to go find Will."

"Nah, you don't, Penn," Eli said, patting her on the shoulder. "He might have lied to you, but he apparently took the hint and left. You know the truth now, so now that he's gone, we can just enjoy our day now. You don't need to deal with him any more."

The blonde didn't react. She only went on without saying a word.

"Penny, it's alright," Kayla called out, trying to catch up with her. "He lied to all of us. You don't need get payback with him; just don't deal with him and everything will be fine."

Penny turned, and her blue-green eyes held a fire in them. "No, it won't." She turned to Bridgette. "If you knew about him, then I suppose he told you that I already knew."

"Well, yes, he did say that," the redhead responded. "I thought he was lying. After all, they'd done it in the past."

"Even if he was, why didn't you try to ask me to make sure, instead of spreading tales?" The girl could feel signals rushing from DElPHI, which she fought against. "When was the last time you'd seen him, anyway?"


"What matters is that, based on four-year-old information, you chased away my friend," Penny answered. She gritted her teeth. "He didn't want to come when I originally invited him, and between your and Eddie's reactions, I now see why he didn't want to."

"Penny, you've only known this guy for, what, five months?" Kayla pointed out. "What's making you want to defend him so much?"

"In those five months, he's saved my life!" Penny shouted, and the sudden yell shook everyone around her. "Twice! If it wasn't for him along with Brain and Heather Connelly, I would still be rotting in a cell as Freymore's slave! If it wasn't for him and Brain, I would have been devoured by a Chimera not a month ago!"

Hearing this, Bridgette shook her head. "I understand how you feel," she said, and it was clear she was holding back strong emotion, "but I've dealt with him before. Him and his brother, they're both the same. They're good at manipulating you, getting you to sympathize with them. I'd assume you know about that with Talon. I just don't want to see anyone else get hurt."
Hearing the reasoning, Penny calmed and took a breath. "Look," she said, giving an explanation of her own, "I saw what happened in the video. That was horrible, but I've also seen him do brave, heroic actions as well. Something here isn't connecting, and the detective in me wants to find out why there's a disconnect. The way I see it, I may be biased; I don't deny that, but the best way to fix that is to get both halves of the story. After all, even if he did do all that, he should have a second chance if he's sincere." She turned her gaze to Bridgette. "I will be willing to consider what you've said, but I want to hear what he has to say, too. You both should have the opportunity to defend yourselves. It's not fair any other way." With that, she turned around and hurried off.

At the core of the theme park, there was a major control room. It was buried under the park, so as the make room for all the different attractions. So to speak, it was the nucleus of the who park, and from it, anyone could control just about anything. As such, under normal circumstances, the whole room was secured under lock and key, and guarded by security guards.

At that moment, however, the guard had been subdued. They had been ambushed my Masters' men, and being outnumbered and outmatched, the three men were easily caught and held captive.

Now that he was in total control of the park, Masters smirked as he went over the different controls that were now under his power. He was considering his first step when he heard a buzzing in his ear.

"Hey, are you guys in?" Talon's voice gave no hint of emotion.

Master's scowled as the call reminded him of who was really in charge. After swearing under his breath, he touched a panel at his earpiece. "Yeah, we're in," he said. "The bomb's in place, the men are in the park, and I'm standing in the control room right now."

"Great to hear it," the boy replied. "So you should be just about ready to send out your message."

"Yep," the mobster responded with a nod. "Five billion in the next twenty-four hours or the place goes sky-high. Any sign of either Gadget, and things go south instantly."

"Yeah, about that," Talon said, and his voice had a tone to it. "You're actually a little bit late for one of those."

"What are you saying?" Masters questioned. "Is something wrong?"

"No, not really," came the response. "It's just one little thing that I noticed when going over the security tapes. You see, Penny Gadget's already in the park!"

"What!" Master exclaimed, and he took a few minutes to refer to the girl in less than savory terms. "I'll go have the boys rub her out right now!"

"Whoa, whoa, chill out, bolillo," Talon said, and his voice took a threatening turn. "Why don't you listen for instructions before you do something we all regret. Or did you forget who really has a control over the detonator?"

Catching what was being stated, Masters took a breath. "Alright, what do you want me to do then? After all, even if she doesn't have the muscle the moron does, she's still a threat to the mission. You can't mean to say you don't want anything done about her."

"Oh, that's not what I'm saying at all. I just want you to keep in mind that any rash moves, especially towards Pretty Penny, will end badly for you." The teen cyber's meaning was loud and clear.
There was a pause as Talon thought about what he wanted before continuing. "Alright, I'll tell you what. None of the other Gadget team members are there, but she's not alone. After watching her for a couple of hours, I've figured out that she's with six other kids: three boys and three girls. Penny's the most powerful of the seven, so she's the one you'll want to focus on, but don't let the others slip out of your view either. Penny's pretty good at delegating tasks to her flunkies."

"So they will need to be watched as well," the man stated, understanding what he was being told. "Is there some reason why you'll need those six alive?"

Talon gave a snort. "Them? They're useless to me. Kill them if you want to, it makes no difference to M.A.D." In that moment, the boy flickered away and was replaced by a still shot from earlier that day, highlighting Eli, Rheeci, Kayla, Will, Bridget, and Linc. "These are the ones to watch out for. Also, be warned, only Four-Eyes and Carrot Top are actually 'normal kids.' The rest of them might not be as dangerous as Penny Gadget, but they've gotten experience fighting M.A.D. agents, so don't think they'll just be pushovers."

Haring this Master snorted. "I know about the four 'special' brats. My gang's had run ins with them before. Any of my boys catch sight of them, there'll be no mercy."

"Glad to hear it." The screen shots flickered away, and soon the cyber appeared again. "Before I go back to observing, there is one last thing. There will be one little fly in the ointment: DEIPHI."

"Delphi?" Masters repeated. "What's that? One of the girls?"

"DEIPHI is the computer system planted in Miss Penny's head," Talon answered. "It's pretty powerful stuff; if she's allowed even the slightest access to the computer system, even if its just through the tiniest of openings, she'll take over the whole park and you'll be through. The only way to get rid of her would be to cut power, and that would leave you vulnerable. You want to keep her from using DEIPHI at all cost."

"So, how do I keep her from doing that?" the mobster asked. "It's not like I have her here or know where she is."

Talon gave a cat-like grin. "Just do exactly what I say."

To be continued…
Assignment 9.4: Under the Bell-Jar

Assignment 9.4: Under the Bell-Jar

Saturday, July 12, 2087

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Watch closely, Officers," Gadget commented. "We're going to want to get to the negative ninety-sixth floor, so we'll need to type in the precise problem to make it there." He went to work, moving at lightning speeds to get the formula in.

"There!" he declared once he was finished. "That should get us there." Sure enough, just as he spoke, the elevator started to move. It stopped, however, at the negative fourteenth floor, opening up on an empty storage room.

"I don't think this is where we want to be," Fidget said, glancing out at the completely empty floor.

"I was certain I had it," the inspector commented, more to himself than to his companions. "Now, let me try again."

Once again, he typed in a formula at a speed too fast to be followed. The elevator went down again, but this time stopped at the negative twentieth floor. The doors opened up to reveal a break lounge, and the people at rest within all turned to the arrivals.

"Well, this is a doozy," Gadget muttered, turning back to the control panel. "Maybe I forgot to carry the three."

Once he got the formula typed in yet again, the elevator started to move, but this time it went up, carrying the passengers up to the negative fifth floor. This time the doors opened, revealing a library.

"I can't believe it!" Gadget exclaimed. "I was certain I had it this time!"

The librarian's desk wasn't too far from the elevator. Hearing the comment, the librarian, a grandmotherly-looking older woman, glanced over. "Good afternoon, Inspector," she called out. "Having elevator troubles again?"

"Good afternoon, Janet," the detective responded. He stepped into the main lobby so he could grab a piece of paper to work out the problem in front of him. "Yeah, I am. I'm trying to teach my trainees how to work the elevator's negative floor system, but I can't seem to get the pattern right. Maybe if I write it down...Go-go Gadget Pen!"

An antique fountain-style pen appeared out of his index finger, but much to his frustration, the nib was apparently clogged. "I really need to clean this thing more often," he grumbled to himself as he began to undo the top.

"Don't you remember the new fail-safe they installed for you?" Janet spoke up, looking uneasily at the pen, which had already started to leak ink.

"Fail-safe?" Gadget said, and he froze for a moment. "Oh, that's right! The fail-safe! I had completely forgotten about it!" He then rushed back to the elevator to call it back.

"What fail-safe would that be?" Digit asked Janet as they waited.
"Oh, this happened every time the Inspector needed to get to a negative floor," the elderly lady said. "After a while, the higher ups just decided to put in a special panel for him, so he'd finally be able to make it to his destinations on time."

At that moment, the elevator doors slid open and Gadget stepped in. "Come along, Officers," he called out. "Thank you for the reminder, Janet! Have a nice day."

"You too, inspector," she called back. She then turned to the Gadgetinis. "Good luck, you two, and remember, hold on tight!"

"'Hold on tight?"' Fidget repeated. "What does that mean?" His twin could only give a wordless shrug to the meaning.

Not noticing the conversation, Gadget turned back to the control panel. He squeezed the tip of his right pinky finger, and a skeleton key popped out. "I can't believe I'd forgotten about this," he said, entering the key into a hidden opening, causing it to slide up and reveal a panel full of buttons marked with negative numbers. "And after they were nice enough to put it in for me, too. I'll have to keep it in mind next time."

He pressed the button for the negative ninety-sixth floor, and the panel slide back shut before the elevator started to move again. Things went on uneventful until they reached the negative twenty-second floor, in which things slowed down and seemed like it was stopping.

"Oh, yes, this," Gadget said in a casual tone. He stepped back and gripped the handrail with both hands. "I'd recommend you grab ahold of something. Things get a bit slick here."

"Slick?" Digit asked. "What do you mean by-?"

Before he could even finish his sentence, the little robot had received his answer. The elevator gave a jolt, before descending at an even faster pace than before. It felt almost like a free-fall. Not having time to grab onto anything else, the twins gripped onto each other, desperately hoping the landing wasn't going to be to their final destination.

By comparison, Gadget seemed rather composed, even a little bored. As long as he had his grip on the handrails, he had control over himself. Thus, he had absolutely no worry about his trip.

Around the negative seventy fifth floor, the elevator seemed to get ahold of itself, and the car slowed to its previous speed. This meant that the Gadgetinis were now able to pick themselves back up from the wild trip.

"What the heck was that!" Digit exclaimed. If it weren't for the fact that his face was a screen, his eyes would have bugged out of his head.

"Oh, that?" Gadget replied. "I told you, around the negative twenty-second floor, things get a little slick before it gets caught. We were lucky this time, really. There have been times when I wasn't caught until the negative eight-seventh floor."

"Oh, I think I'm going to vomit," Fidget mumbled, clinging to the handrails.

"Robots can't vomit," Digit pointed out, though he wasn't feeling much better than his brother. "We don't have mouths or stomachs."

"I don't know," the orange bot responded, "but something feels like it's coming up."

There wasn't any more time to talk of what a robot can and cannot do, since at that moment, the
The elevator car came to a stop and the doors slipped open. "Ah, we've finally made it," Gadget said with a smile. "Come along, officers. This will be the last stop we make today."

For a moment, the twins wasted no time in hurrying to follow him out into the hallway. Neither of them wanted to spend another second in that wretched elevator if they had the choice.

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Adventure Kingdom

Near the entrance of the park, William stood silently with his hands shoved in his pockets. He had already alerted the chaperones to the fact that he was going home, and his mom had told him to wait inside the park while she came to get him.

You should've known better, a voice inside him said with scorn. You should have just stayed at home. I'll bet they all hate you now. Even Penny, if she's seen the videos. After what you've done, I can't say I'd blame her.

The park was pretty crowded, but around the entrance it was clear for the most part. This meant it would be easy to find from the outside of the park. This also meant he was visible from within the park as well.

At first, he almost didn't hear the call. The next couple of times, however, it was impossible to miss. "Will! There you are!" Penny called out. She was in such a hurry that she was pushing at her wheels to get them to move faster, and she was coming right at him. Close behind her, the other five were coming as well. "Will, wait up!"

A part of William told him to run. He had no doubt he knew what was coming; it would most certainly not be the first time. Another, however, told him to stay put and wait. They'd already seen him; escape would be impossible.

Penny rolled up to his side. "Will, are you alright?" she asked. "Why'd you leave like that? We were told to stay in a group."

He was surprised by the question. His mind raced as he tried to come up with an answer. "It's okay," he said, his voice low and eyes down. Even now, he couldn't bring himself to meet her gaze. "I'm just gonna go home."

At that moment, she took his hand. "Is it over your connection to Talon? Will, I already knew that, and you weren't allowed to tell anyone about that. It's not your fault."

"Wait," Linc said, "you weren't allowed to tell anyone?"

"Now that we know," Eli said, "is there anything else we need to know?"

Will felt cornered and he glanced out the dome to see if he could spot his mom's car. He had no such luck. "I'm sure she showed you the videos," he said, motioning to Bridgette. "Everything she said I did is true. I'm not going to deny it."

"I told you that was the Will Scolex I knew," the redhead said with a frown.

"Well, that isn't the Will Cortes I know," Penny responded. "Something's off. I'll admit, you we're acting like a brat in that video, but that brat wouldn't have stood up to Talon to try to save me. Wouldn't have risked being killed by M.A.D. to rescue me. I don't believe you are still like that, and I want to understand what happened from your point of view."
Will paused for a moment, feeling the gazes on him. He looked between Penny and Bridgette before sighing. "I…I have nothing to say. As I said before, I was pretty rotten as a kid. I am sorry for it now, but I don't blame anyone for not forgiving me. I don't deserve it."

At that moment, he noticed his mom's car coming into the parking lot. He turned to Penny and gave a small smile. "I appreciate that you want to defend me, but there's really nothing to defend. I guess I'll see you around." He then turned to the exit and reached out to open the exit door.

Before he could leave, however, he froze. He stood for a moment, his hand pressed against the door. "Will?" Penny asked, taking the lack of movement for hesitation.

It wasn't second thoughts, however, that kept him from moving. "I can't get the door open," he muttered, pushing hard on the exit's push handle. "It's stuck."

"Let me try," Eli said, stepping up to join the other boy at the door. However, despite being a good deal bigger than Will, he didn't have any better luck with the exit.

Noticing the struggle, the kids and several other bystanders tried to the other doors. To their dismay, every single exit seemed to be frozen shut. "They're all stuck!" Rheeci exclaimed.

"What's going on?" Bridgette called out to a nearby security guard. "It's nowhere near close to closing time!"

"We're just as baffled as you are, ma'am," the guard called back.

At that moment, a panic started up as the park goers realized they were trapped. The state of chaos and confusion wasn't helped by the fact that the panels on the dome began to darken until they were completely opaque.

Realizing the situation at hand, Penny looked around with what little light was left until she found what she was looking for. "Guys, group meeting!" she called out before making her way over to a storage shed that had been left open.

Noticing what she was doing, the other six teens hurried after her into the shed. Once everyone was inside, she reached into her bag and pulled out four small computer chips. "Here," she called out, tossing them to Linc and Eli. "You two are the tallest. Put these at the four corners of the walls."

Recognizing that blonde had a plan, they nodded and set to work setting up the chips. As they did so, Penny reached into her backpack and pulled out a bright-blue book. "This should keep us relatively safe in here," she said, typing out info into her computer book. "At the very least, we'll have a little corner where it's safe to use our tech."

She had only just finished setting up the safety zone where a loud blast of sound echoed through the park. "Patrons of Adventure Kingdom, listen closely!" a masculine voice called out. "You are now under our control! Do not resist!" As if to emphasize the words, a blast of gunfire went off, and several of the more nervous guests could be heard screaming.

Within the relative safety of the shed, the seven kids continued to listen to see if the instructions would continue. They were not disappointed. "Alright everyone," the man said, "we are the East-Side Gunners. We have control of the entire park. Anyone who resists will be shot on sight. Got it? Good. Now, all of you will be escorted into the Great Central Auditorium. You will stay there until all our demands are met. If everyone cooperates, no one needs to die. Now, get moving."

There was a lull in the talk, and it seemed to be that the instructions were done. Before any move could be made by the seven, however, another announcement was made. "Oh, one last thing,
specifically for you, Penny Gadget." The kids' blood ran cold when they realized what had just been revealed. "Yeah, we know you're in here, little Gadget-brat, and we know you're listening. You aren't going to be a good little girl and follow orders, now are you? I'll give you fifteen minutes to get out and hand yourself over to us. Do that, and everything will go smoothly. Try to fight, I'll kill one hostage a minute until you give yourself up. And don't even think of trying to use that DElPHI device to take the park. Our guns aren't in the system, so if we start getting the feeling we're losing control, we'll kill as many of the those people as possible. Time's ticking, little miss."

Once the message finished, everyone held their breath for a moment, waiting to see if anything else was coming. When nothing happened, Penny sighed. "I have no choice," she said.

Immediately the others sprang in. "No, you don't!" Linc exclaimed.

"We can fight those goons off," Bridgette stated.

"We've done it before!" Kayla pointed out.

"There's got to be another way!" Rheeci pleaded.

"There is another way," Eli said, his hands balling into fists.

"If you give yourself up, they'll kill you!" Will cried.

In response, Penny raised her hand, signaling for quiet. "I don't think they'll hurt me," she said, her voice completely level. "They want hostages, and I'm as valuable a hostage as anyone else. I can't risk others' lives for my own freedom. I'm turning myself over to them."

There was another mingled uproar from the others, but it was silenced by a sharp whistle. "Look, I've made up my mind, but it's not like I don't have a plan." She turned to Linc, Eli, Rheeci, and Kayla. "Do you have the adaption devices I gave you?"

The four nodded, each pulling out a harmless looking article: Kayla and Eli both had gloves, Rheeci a headband, and Linc a pair of sunglasses. They all opened a small slot in the side of the article, revealing a chip-port.

Seeing these, Penny nodded. "Good," she said, pulling out a small satchel from her backpack and handing a few computer chips to each of them. "I don't need to tell you how to use these. Just remember our practice with them."

"Now," she continued, turning this time to Bridgette and William. "I haven't made anything custom for the two of you, so you'll have to use my tech." She gave a laugh as she pulled out her computer book and took off her watch. "I don't think they'll let me keep these, anyways, so they won't do me any good."

"Here," she said, handing the book over to William. "You've used this already to a degree, but it's got a few secrets. If you use that panel on the bottom right, it will allow you access to three lasers. One is heat, one is freeze, and one is electricity. It will also allow you to hack into other devices with a port. Hold on tight to it."

Will nodded, taking the book. "Got it."

"Bridgette," Penny began, taking off her watch and charm bracelet as she spoke, "you'll need these. The watch has a few features in and of itself by pressing the buttons on the sides, but you'll be able to switch things up using the charms. Remember, warm colors are offensive, cool colors are defensive, and neutral colors don't have a battle function."
As the tools were handed out, Kayla bit her lip. "What about you, Penn? Without anything else, you'll be cut off from us and completely helpless."

The blonde gave a poised smile. "Who said I'll be either of those things? Will, Bridgette, activate your tools."

The two did as they were told. At the same time, Penny reached up and activated the gear charm on her necklace. The holographic screen appeared, but unfortunately only static appeared. "Usually, I use this to contact Uncle Gadget," she said, "but it appears I can't reach him under this bell-jar. Still, I think I can link up to the watch and book using this." She gave a smile as she adjusted the settings and proved the previous statement true. "Just keep waiting for my call. I'll try to let you hear and see what I hear and see."

"As for the second," she said as she tucked the pendant away, "I've had enough experience getting caught and escaping to know how these things go. I'll stay put so no one gets hurt, but I know what I'm doing. I'll be far from helpless."

"Now," she said, motioning for the other six teens to lean in closer, "here's the plan…"

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W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

The halls of the C.I.A. office was full of all sorts of sounds and excitement going. Doors were opened, revealing all sorts of different areas of expertise that didn't look, on the surface, to look all that much like they had anything in common. One was a scientific laboratory, which was across the hall from a costuming studio, and the disconnect between the two neighbors represented the connections between the rest of the rooms on the floor.

Leaning into the studio, Digit gave an incredulous look. "What did you say these guys do again?"

"Info gathering," Gadget responded. "That's why we needed to come down here. We're going to give these files to Wayne Bremer. He's the main connection point between the C.I.A. and the rest of W.O.M.P. Once we're done, they'll go over the files down here and try to pick up on patterns that might give us an idea on what M.A.D. plans on doing next."

"That makes sense," the little blue robot commented, "but then why do they need a costume studio?"

"Oh, you'll never know when someone will need a realistic looking costume to gather information," answered a woman's voice.

Since he had not been expecting someone else to answer him, Digit jumped back with a cry when he heard the voice. "Gah! Who's in there!"

"Oh, dearie me," the woman said again, and this time she came out where she could be seen. She was, oddly enough, a young blonde woman wearing a Dutch milkmaid outfit. "I never imagined robots could be so jumpy."

"Good afternoon, Carlotta," Gadget called out, leaning into the room. "This is Fidget and Digit, the new officers under my training. Officers, this is Carlotta, the best costume maker W.O.M.P.'s ever seen."

The seamstress shook her head and was quick to move several portable sewing machines away from the infamous klutz. "You flatter me, Gadget. So, it's not every day you come down to see us. What do we have to thank for the visit?"
"The officers and I are going to be dropping the latest reports off with Wayne," Gadget answered. "He wouldn't happen to be in his office today, would he?"

Carlotta laughed. "Oh, he'll be in Caz's office, like usual. You should be able to drop the files off with him there."

"Thanks!" Gadget said with a wave. "That's a lovely dress, by the way. I hope the agent it goes to will like it!"

"Casis-soffis?" Fidget said, walking alongside the inspector. "What's a casis-soffis?"

"And why was she dressed as a milkmaid?" Digit asked, still glancing back at the studio.

"Really, Officer Fidget," Gadget replied, shaking his head. "I would expect you to know what an office is. We'll be heading to the office of Cassandra Houston, the C.I.A. tech analyst. Wayne spends most of his time there. I think it's because he gets lonely. I know I'd get lonely if I had to stay in my office all day."

"As for the dress, Carlotta likes to make sure that all her disguises are just right," he went on. He kept talking even when they came up to another door. "You can never tell what she's going to be wearing. I remember one time I visited and she was dressed as a very convincing goat!"

Inside the room was a man and a woman sat in front of multiple monitors. The monitors were tuned to all sorts of programs: some news, a few nature programs, and at least one to a MMORPG.

"Afternoon, Caz, Wayne," Gadget called out. "I've got some paperwork to drop off with you."

Upon hearing his voice, both the man and woman jumped. The woman moved to position herself between Gadget and the delicate computer systems, as if attempting to prevent any upcoming incidents.

"Gadget, you're here? Is it that time already?" the man, Wayne, said, giving an awkward smile and moving to meet Gadget at the door.

"Indeed it is!" the cyber replied, giving a grin. "Time flies, doesn't it?"

"Wait, are those who I think they are?" the woman, Caz, asked. She came over and leaned down in front of Digit to get a good look at him. "Are these the Gadgetinis?"

"That's who we are," Fidget said, joining his brother and holding out his hand. "I'm Fidget, and this is Digit. Pleased to meet you."

Caz gave a smile and took his hand. "Well, I'll be," she said, giving a laugh as she spoke. "I wasn't sure what to think when everyone said there were robots who became self-aware. Seems you guys are the real deal."

"Why does everyone keep saying that?" Digit said with a huff. "Is it so hard to believe that we actually can think, instead of having to be spoon-fed inane orders?"

"I didn't mean any offense," Caz replied, raising her hands.

"Oh, don't mind him," Fidget said, touching his twin's arm to signal for him to be quiet. "He just gets tired of all the attention we tend to attract."

"It's not too hard to see how you'd get so much attention," Wayne said, turning from Gadget to the
little robots. "I mean, we've had market robots for, what, thirty years now, and you guys are first who've ever had any sort of sentiency at all."

"I'll bet Sue would kill to get look at these two," Caz said with a laugh. "Then maybe she'd figure out what's wrong with Marvin."

"You know what, I think she would like that!" Gadget said, giving a bright smile. "That's a great idea. After all, the officers and I are finished with our work. We'll go pay Sue and Jonathon and visit before we leave." With that, he hurried off, followed closely by the Gadgetinis.

Once he was out of sight, Caz gave a sigh. "Well, back to the grind," she said. "So, I still say those albatrosses were CG'd into the picture."

"Ten bucks says otherwise," Wayne replied, sliding into his own chair. "Now let's take an-uh oh."

"What is it?" Caz asked. "Did he break something? I swear, that man could destroy a gaming console with a look."

Her friend, however, shook his head. "No, it's not Gadget this time?" He picked up a remote and unmuted a screen that had been showing the news.

"We have yet to hear if the hostage takers have made any demands," the reporter was saying as she stood outside of the now opaque dome of Adventure Kingdom. "All we can do is wait to hear if anything has happened to the guests and employees now trapped inside the park."

Adventure Kingdom

By the time everything had been explained and everyone hurried to their positions, the place was empty. The area was pretty much abandoned by the time Penny emerged from her hiding place. "Hey, you said you wanted me," she called out, making a show of holding out her arms. "Here I am. Come and get me!"

In the surround area, the remaining six had broken up into two teams: Rheeci, Linc and Bridgette, and Kayla, Eli, and Will. Each group had been supplied with a cloaking chip, allowing them to be rendered invisible. Like it or not, they could only hide out in specific hiding places and watch as their friend was taken captive.

They didn't have too long to wait. After about a minute of her calling like that, two men emerged. They were both heavily armored and armed. One of them pointed his weapon, a slim, black gun with luminescent lines on it, at her. "Alright, keep your hands up and get out of the chair."

When she heard the demand, Penny inwardly groaned. "I'm paraplegic," she said aloud. "I am physically incapable of doing that."

"I don't care about that," the man said with a grunt. "We were told to take you without any of your fancy doohickeys, that wheelchair included. Get out of the chair now!"

"I'm not going to fight, but cannot get out of here. I need this chair," she replied. "Besides, even if I wanted to get up, I'd need my arms, and I still wouldn't be able to keep myself standing."

The two grunts looked at each other before. "I'll go get her myself," the one who had spoken groaned. "Just keep her in your sights. Don't let her try anything funny."
The man went over, grabbed her out of the chair, and attempted to pick her up. That day, however, was a day that Penny had decided not to wear her braces, so the moment she was yanked up, she crumpled to the ground, pulling her captor down in the process.

"I could have told you that wasn't going to work," she scolded as the man shouted several unsavory phrases at her.

Without another word to her, the gang member got up and tossed her over his shoulder. Pulling out a walkie-talkie with his free hand, he pressed a button and held it to his mouth. "We've got the girl, boss. She's being stubborn, but we'll get her to you soon."

"Good," Masters replied over the device. "Any sign of the others."

"Not yet," the grunt replied, "but they've gotta be around here somewhere. How hard can it be to find a bunch of teenaged brats?"

The kids remained in hiding until the kidnappers disappeared from sight. Now given the opportunity to move around with a degree of freedom, they hurried into a group.

"Alright," Kayla said, activating the chips in her gloves, "we all know the plan."

"We'll stay here and try to get an opening in the dome," Rheeci said. She tapped the side of her headband so that it gave a glow in the darkness. "You three go and try to figure out where the hostages are and get them out. Then we meet up and try to get the captives out in groups."

"In the meanwhile, Bridgette and I stay online for any messages from Penny," Will added as he made sure that the computer book was open and on.

"Sounds like we're all set," Eli commented. "I hope W.O.M.P. reacts to this fast enough to get us some help."

"If I know Gramps, he'll send Inspector Gadget here so fast it would cause a cheetah's head to spin," Linc said, giving a laugh.

"And there no way Inspector G's just going to leave us trapped in here," Kayla agreed, feeling a bit more confident with that fact. "Alright, team, let's go. Lives are depending on us."

To be continued…
Assignment 9.5: Rat Races and Wild Goose Chases

Saturday, July 12, 2087

Adventure Kingdom

Inside the command center, Masters was pacing. It had been almost fifteen minutes since he had taken over, but since the hostage hadn't arrived yet, he hadn't been able to make the demands video. He kept glancing this way and that, worried that Inspector Gadget or one of his tools would pop out of nowhere at a moment's notice.

The sound of a door opening caused him to practically jump out of his skin, and he whipped out his gun in anticipation. Instead of the W.O.M.P. detective, however, it was his own men who came in, Penny Gadget in tow.

"It's about time you got here, Kenner," Masters snapped before putting the weapon in its holster. "We didn't have that much time."

"It's not my fault the brat refuses to stand," the thug, Kenner, responded as he dropped the teen in one corner of the room.

Penny huffed and rolled her eyes. She'd tried explaining enough and was willing to let her kidnappers wallow in their folly.

Masters turned his back to the girl and touched his earpiece. "She's here, and she doesn't have any of her tools, just like you said. We're ready to start up."

Hearing the comment, Penny smothered a small smile as her hand went up to her pendant. Moving the dial in the center, she positioned the device so that it would be in an optimal position to take audio and video.

It was at that point that Masters started talking again. The girl looked up, but soon realized he wasn't talking to her. Instead, he was focused on a camera that had been positioned on top of one of the computers.

"Alright, Metro City," he said, giving a cruel smile. "By now I'm sure you know that this amusement park is under our control. There's about five hundred people in here, and we've got just about every tourist and employee under lock and key. We want 6.5 billion dollars plus the ability to leave without hassle by midnight tonight, in exchange for their safe release."

On the computer screen came up a new image from a different area of the park, and Penny assumed this replaced Master's image on the hostage video. "See this? This is a Lucidi-Soli bomb. In fact, it's one we took from one of your own governmental warehouses. I'm sure you all know what it does, so I won't bore you with the details. What you do need to know is that if you don't respond to our demands by the timeline given, that goes off right underneath the theater where everyone's being held."

"Oh, and one more thing," Masters said as his image came back on the screen. "This one's for you, Gadget." He moved the camera so that Penny was clear to see. "We've got your little protégé right here, so if we have a wiff that you or your doubles are here, then little missy here's going to regret it. Got it? You had better." The message delivered, the camera shut off, ending any more transmission to the outside world.
Having heard the message, Penny bit her lip in concern. Not for herself, though, as she was certain she would be able to handle herself just fine. However, the plan she had concocted back with her friends had not taken into account that the hostages were over a bomb. She silently prayed that the others would be able to adapt their plan to the new info.

In the meanwhile, she would work on getting under the skin of her captor.

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W.O.M.P. HQ

The walk to Dr. Blake's laboratory was not too far from where Caz's office was, so it didn't take too long for Gadget and the Gadgetinis to reach their destination. Since they had already been around Dr. Bradford and her laboratory, the twins supposed they had a good idea of what the lab would look like and what would be going on.

They couldn't have been more wrong.

"I'm telling you Dr. Blake, that thing hates me!" This statement had been made by young man. He was at that moment balancing on the top of a tall bookcase, peering down at a tiny robot beneath him.

"Now, now, don't be silly, Jonathon," a dark-haired woman replied. She came alongside the robot and patted it on the head. "Marvin's not really alive, so he can't hate anything. Now, we'll get the malfunctioning worked out any moment now, don't you worry about it."

"Good afternoon, Sue, Johnny," Gadget called out, raising a hand as he entered into the laboratory. "The officers and I happened to be in the area, so we thought we'd drop by for a visit."

Upon hearing Gadget's voice, both Sue and Jonathon gave a start and turned to see the newcomer. Both looked concerned for a moment, but when the scientist saw who it was, she brightened up.

"Ah, John! Good afternoon! I see you brought the Gadgetinis with you." She wandered over to the trio and looked down with fascination at the two robots. "You couldn't have chosen a better time."

The twins backed up for a moment, not quite sure if they were comfortable being examined so closely. "Uh, may I asked why?" Digit asked.

"Oh, of course you'd want an explanation," Sue replied, giving a knowing nod. "I've been doing work with Marvin here, and while I've gotten most of his chassis and programming finished, but he keeps having these off glitches."

"I'm telling you it wants to kill me!" Jonathon shouted. It was clear he had no intention of getting off the bookshelf as long as Marvin was near.

"Those were mere misfires," Dr. Blake responded. She waved a dismissive hand. "Once we get everything worked out, he'll only be a danger to those who would threaten society."

The twins approached Marvin and looked the little robot over. He was about half their size and rather harmless looking. "This wants to kill you?" Fidget asked, turning his attention to the young man.

"He called me a 'fleshbag' and attacked me with a chainsaw," Jonathon said with a huff.

"That was a vocal glitch, and we've already fixed the chainsaw problem," Sue said in response. She then turned to the Gadgetinis. "That's what I was hoping you two would help me with."
"You're not going to take us apart, are you?" Fidget asked, his mind going back to the unpleasant experience he and his brother had gone through when they first woke up.

"Oh, no, nothing of that sort," the doctor replied. "I just wanted to ask you if you had any ideas on how to perfect Marvin's programming. I mean, how better to get a robot's bugs worked out than by asking a robot."

Digit gave a nod to the statement. "That is true enough, ma'am. We'd be happy to answer any questions you have."

"That sounds like a marvelous idea!" Gadget commented with a grin as they left the room.

To Jonathon's relief, Marvin turned and left with the doctor as well, leaving him alone in the room. Now free of the little attacker, he started his climb down the bookshelves.

As he was getting down, Wayne and Caz hurried in. They both looked rather anxious. "John, you're here, good," Caz said. "Is Gadget still here?"

"He and the Gadgetinis just went into the chem-lab to talk," the kid responded. "Why do you ask?"

"We've got a major issue," Wayne replied. "A gang has taken over Adventure Kingdom, and their holding it for ransom. To make matters worse, they've got Penny Gadget as one of their hostages."

"Oh, dear," John said, getting anxious himself. "What should we do? Does Quimby want Gadget on the case?"

"Not today?" Caz answered. "Elliot's telling Quimby right now, and he'll probably tell Agent Heather, but Gadget can't get anywhere near that park. The terrorists warned the Penny, and probably other hostages, would die if he was seen anywhere around the area."

The intern scratched his head at the info. "If that's the case, why are you asking for him?"

"We needed to make sure he hasn't found anything out," Wayne responded. "If he finds out about the park, then you know he'll go there right away."

Caz sighed and nodded in agreement. "There'll be no stopping him, especially if he finds out about his niece. After all, he is always on duty."

"Oh, do you have something for me to do?" All three jumped when they heard the voice. Sure enough, Gadget was leaning out of the small room, his arm extended to retrieve several sheets of paper.

"Gadget!" Caz exclaimed, putting on a smiled that looked incredibly fake. "Why would you think we're taking about you? What did you hear?"

"Well, not a lot, really," Gadget replied. "I heard something or other about an adventure thingy, and I think my name was in there, maybe."

"You don't really need to worry about it," Wayne said, joining the tech analyst in the awkwardness. "We were just talking about something...uh...secret."

"Secret, huh?" Gadget made a face as he racked his mind. "Something that can't be stated out loud. Hmmm." After a moment's thought, he snapped his fingers. "I've got it! I know exactly what you are taking about!"
"You do?!!" all three exclaimed in dismay.

Gadget gave a huge grin in response. "Of course, I do! You can't pull the wool over Inspector Gadget's eyes after all. You are all planning a surprise party for Chief Quimby's anniversary! You just didn't want to tell me because you thought I'd go tell him."

All at once, a feeling of relief ran through the other three. "Let's go with that," John replied, stabling himself against the bookshelf.

"Well, you don't have to worry, I won't tell anyone," the inspector said with a big grin. "In fact, I can help if you'd like. There are plenty of errands that I can run, or I could distract the chief if you'd like."

"Oh, uh, yeah! That would be great!" Wayne said, moving the cyber towards the door. "You'll need to keep him distracted, at least until this evening."

"Got it! I am always on duty, even distraction duty!" the detective called as he hurried off. Once he was gone, the trio left could only glance at each other in silence, all thanking their lucky stars before their break.

Finally, Jonathon broke the silence with a nervous laugh. "Oh, this isn't going to end well."

Adventure Kingdom

Inside the park, the whole place felt like a ghost-town. Aside from the stadium where the hostages were being held, the whole place looked deserted. Every now and then, a guard sent out by the terrorists would make his or her way through the empty streets, but other than that, there was no one to be seen for miles around. This, thankfully, made it easier for Eli, Kayla, and Will to move through the park themselves.

At the moment, the trio were huddled under a picnic table so they could listen to the message the outside world was being given. "Do you think it's true?" Kayla asked as she peered at the screen. "Do you actually think there's a bomb under the park?"

"I'd say that video they showed was proof," Will said. He froze on the picture of the bomb and enhanced it for closer viewing. Upon getting the picture, he highlighted a series of numbers and letters on the side. "See that series? N48308ST743? That's a coding panel for experimental military tech. The way it's carved on there is near impossible to fake, and one such weapon was stolen last week."

"So, we are dealing with a bomb threat," Eli said, moving as much as their hiding place would allow. "So, what do we do now? Get the hostages out first, or deal with the bomb."

"I say we take out the bomb," Kayla said. "If we try to get the hostages out first, then the bad guys might set the bomb off while we work, and then nobody's getting out of this."

Hearing this, Will looked anxiously over the threatening weapon. "Sounds good, provided one little detail. Do either of you know how to disarm this kind of bomb?"

"We've done this sort of thing before," Kayla responded shorted. "You don't need to come with us if you're scared."

The boy looked down and spoke as loudly as he dared. "It's not that I'm afraid, or that I doubt your abilities with disarming a typical bomb. It's just that this isn't a typical bomb. A Lucidi-Soli bomb is
actually two to five bombs strung together, so that it has more of an opportunity to set the lucidity solution on fire. If you can't figure out a way to disarm up to five bombs at one or remove the solution without setting any of the bombs off, then we'll end up killing ourselves and everyone else in the process."

"So, what you're saying is that we're between a rock and a hard place," Eli commented. "We either risk revealing ourselves getting everyone else out, or we try to disarm a state of the art weapon and risk killing everyone ourselves. Some choice."

"If you don't mind me saying," Will said, still avoiding the others' eyes as he spoke, "we'll have an easier time getting the others out, using the camouflage chips to disguise ourselves and the others as we transport them out."

"So, we find some way to use three chips, which can only disguise about five people max at once, to smuggle several hundred people out," Kayla responded with a snort. She crossed her arms. "Some plan."

Hearing the scorn in her voice, Will didn't dare to speak.

Eli, however, had other ideas. "Several hundred might not be able to get out at once," he said, closing his eyes in thought, "but if one of us stays behind in the prison, then two of us will be able to get three of the prisoners to the exit. Hopefully by then, the others will have an access port open, and they can get those three to freedom while we come and get three more."

"That's actually a pretty good idea," Kayla responded, nodding at the idea. "It'll be slow going, but we'd at least get people out of the blast zone in the meanwhile."

"I should stay behind," Will commented. "Once you guys are out, I'll be able to lock the stadium up again so there won't be any constantly open area for the guards to notice."

"It's settled then," Eli said. "We'll head over to the stadium and get everyone out in trips. Once the place is empty, we'll figure out some way to get Penny away from those creeps, too."

Without another word, the three activated their cloaking chips and hurried out of their hiding place. Thankfully, their destination wasn't too far away, so they would be able to make it there before too long.

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At the entrance, Linc, Rheeci, and Bridgette stood at the gateway. The former two were working on the control panel, what the third stood guard behind them, holding the freeze ray on the watch at the ready.

"How are things going over there?" Bridgette asked. She didn't dare to turn to look herself, lest she risk leaving an opening that would allow an opponent to come up behind them.

"Not good," Linc responded. He touched a dial on the side of his glasses, which were allowing him to see the flow of energy and information within the control box. "Whoever's gotten into here has got all the signals mixed up. I can't tell what goes to the locking mechanism and what goes to the lighting system. It could take me all night to figure this out."

Rheeci bit her lip in anxiety as she moved several wires from her headband from one circuit panel to another. "Unfortunately, we don't have all night. It might only three-thirty, but with the inconsistencies in these patterns, we've got no choice but to do this by trial and error, and fast." She jumped back as a shock came from the panel through her wire. "Ouch! Oh, I wish Penny were here.
She'd know what to do with these."

After casting a quick look at the control, the redhead raised an eyebrow. "Wait, is that one of those Lock-Guard 3000 systems?"

"Yeah, but like six times more complicated than a usual system," Linc replied. "This thing was probably custom made for the park, so it's not sitting by itself. There's at least six other systems wired into here, and I can't tell which one is which."

"But there is a way to figure it out," the redhead responded. Pushing past Linc, she made her way to the control panel and pulled out a small misting bottle. "The Lock-Guard company always uses hydrogen-reactive compounds as a cheat to help their technicians. When you mist the wires, they turn a coppery color." Holding the mister about an inch from the panel, she sprayed over the whole pile of wiring.

For a moment, it didn't look like anything was happening. After a few seconds, however, one of the wires, which was partially hidden by those laying over it, turned copper.

Grinning, Bridgette turned and motioned for the others to come in. "Voila! There you go."

Rheeci slid two of the wires on her headband around the copper wire and touched several dials on her headbands. "That's it!" she said. "How did you know about that?"

"I once filmed a how-to video for taking care of your Lock-Guard system," Bridgette responded. "They included several little tricks for their systems, and this was one of them."

After working with the system on the holographic panel in front of her, Rheeci snapped her fingers. "Got it! Linc, can you test the door?"

The boy nodded, turning to give the door a slight push to test it out. Sure enough, the door gave, and a small stream of afternoon sunlight streamed in.

"Looks like we're out!" Linc said with a nod. "Great job, guys. Let's call up the others and let them know."

Switching on their cloaking chips, they hurried off to find a safe place to call the others.

..."So, it looks like everyone's on their way," Talon said, leaning back in his chair. In front of him, the monitors showed the various areas over the park. On one to the right, Eli, Will, and Kayla were hard at work on a panel at the side of the stadium. On another that was more middling, Bridgette, Rheeci, and Linc were huddled under a protective dome attached to a snack stand.

"Shall we have them blown away, boss?" Drillbit asked.

"Not yet," the leader responded, shaking his head. He leaned back and narrowed his eyes. "Let's not end the game quite so soon."

"But they've got a way out," Syreen pointed out. "We don't want to let them go yet, do we?"

"No, but there's too much that still can be done," the boy responded. "It would be boring to just end them right here and now. Let's have a bit of fun before we cut the thread."

"So, divide and conquer then?" Joltwave asked.

"Exactly." Talon flashed a smile. "Together, the six of them would be difficult to deal with, but in
groups of one or two, then we've got the mouse in the hunt."

Raising a hand to his headpiece, Talon opened the signal to Masters. "Hey, Iggy," he said, "you've got a little issue on your hands. Once again, you've got to do as I say."

W.O.M.P. HQ

In one of the first-floor conference rooms, several of W.O.M.P.'s higher ups were hard at work, keeping tabs on what was happening at the amusement park. "I've got Agent Connelly on the scene, and she's reported that they've yet to find a way in," Chief Quimby reported.

"Does she have any idea of what to do should she get the opportunity to get in?" General Sir asked. Quimby shook his head. "She has Brain with her, but since neither Gadget nor the Gadgetinis can get into park without risking Penny's life, the two of them will be on their own. Other units are waiting outside to provide support, but there's too much concern that any military interruption might cause the terrorists to turn homicidal."

"What is for certain is that we aren't in any position to give into their demands," Nozziare said. He turned a holographic model of the park around, looking for any weaknesses. "Are there any entrances that aren't under surveillance?"

Everyone jumped as a door was thrown opened, and Gadget hurried into the room. "Chief! There you are!" the inspector exclaimed. "I've been looking all over for you!"

Realizing who it was who came in, everyone hurried to hide the evidence of the case. "Gadget? What are you doing here?" Quimby asked.

"Well, I was just talking to Wayne and Caz down in the C.I.A., and they told me how you needed me to help you run a few errands." The inspector gave a broad smile. "I told them I'd be more than happy to go out and help."

"Errands?" Quimby asked, confused as to what was being said. "Gadget, what are you talking about?"

"You know, errands!" Gadget gave a broad smile. "We'd better hurry up and get going."

At that moment, Quimby's communicator went off. The chief picked it up and saw that it was Elliot who was calling him. There was also a special message attached to it. Take the call away from Gadget.

"It look like this is important," the chief said, pocketing the device. "If you men wouldn't mind me stepping out for a moment."

Turning to the device, he turned the hologram system on. "Quimby here."

"Glad to hear it," Elliot said. "Now, Gadget's not here, is he?"

"He's right outside, but he won't be able to hear us," the chief answered. "What is it you've got to say?"

"We kind of had a close call," Elliot answered. The younger man rubbed the back of his head. "Caz and Wayne we're alerting us to the problems happening around Adventure Kingdom, and Gadget
"Gadget almost heard you!" Quimby snapped. "How could you be so irresponsible?! If he goes there, people could be killed!"

"Hey, we got it under control!" The younger man raised his arms defensively. "Besides, I said he almost heard us; he still has no idea what's going on over there. We were able to get him off on the wrong track."

"Alright then," the chief said. "I almost regret asking this, but if he doesn't know what's going on at the amusement park, what does he think is going on?"

"Well," Elliot said, giving another awkward smile. "About that…yeah, funny story."

"Yes?" his superior asked.

"He thinks we're planning a surprise party for your anniversary," the C.I.A. worker answered.

"My anniversary?" the chief repeated. "But that's not for months."

"It was Gadget's idea," Elliot replied with a shrug. "He got it into his head that you're having a surprise anniversary party, and you know what it's like when he's made his mind up about something. We just decided to play along, since it meant that he still won't know anything about Adventure Kingdom."

"So we know what he is thinking," Quimby continued, "but what is it he wants now?"

"That's the other part of the story," the younger man said. "He thinks that he's distracting you while preparations are underway."

"I guess that would explain it all," the chief said with a sigh. "Well, it seems we're going to have to play along, at least if we're going to keep anything bad from happening. We'll just need to think if some place where we can keep him distracted and oblivious."

"Alright, Elliot," he said, turning back to the hologram after a moment of thought, "I want you to send a report to the General to let him know what I'm doing, and let Chief Lang know he's going to need to stay in contact with Agent Connelly until I'm back."

"Right on it," Elliot said, giving a salute. "Over and out."

As he exited the room, Gadget was in the middle of giving an explanation to the other council members his opinion on recent security developments. However, he was at the end of his speech, so when the door opened, he immediately turned to the newcomers. "Oh, you're back!" he called out. "Is everything alright?"

"Oh, yes, it's just something we'll have to take care of soon," Quimby responded.

The chief then turned to the General. "I'm sorry, sir, but something has come up that requires me to exit early. The C.I.A. will send you a full debriefing as to the nature of this, but I assure you that it is of the utmost importance to the current…uh…emergency."

Just as he said this, there was a buzz on the general's phone. Glancing down, he saw the message tied to the alert and gave a nod. "I understand. It would be best for you to hurry to it. We can handle things over here."
"Oh, I didn't realize you were busy," Gadget said, looking somewhat dejected. He then gave a shrug before turning to leave. "I guess I'll come back later then. I wonder if anything's on the radio. Go-go Gadget-"

"No!" Quimby exclaimed, cutting off the cyborg before he could call anything out that would blow the mission.

Hearing this, Gadget paused. "What? Would it be too distracting?"

"No, no," Quimby said as fast as he could. "It's just that the important business is exactly what you came for. You know."

Catching the drift, the inspector brightened up. "Oh, I get what you're saying now. That is important business, and we'd best. Get to it. Come along then. We can't take too long in getting back."

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Down at the C.I.A. floor, the Gadgetinis were finishing up their interview with the doctor. As she tucked up her notes, Blake beamed. "Well, this has been a very productive discussion. I thank you both for your cooperation."

"No problem," Fidget said with a smile. "We're happy to help."

"No, we'd better get going." Digit got up and began looking around the room. "So, Inspector, where are we headed to…" he trailed off as he realized that Gadget wasn't anywhere to be seen. "Where's the Inspector?"

"He's got be around here somewhere," Sue said. "He was here at the beginning of the interview. I'll go see if he's somewhere outside. You two can stay here, if you'd like." With that, she left the lab to go look.

Now left alone, Fidget leaned against the table. "So, today's been a pretty productive day, hasn't it?"

His twin gave a nod and a shrug. "I guess it has," he said, giving a small smile. "We've gotten everything in and become more familiar with the W.O.M.P. personnel."

"And all without having to deal with some jerk trying to kill us." Fidget laughed. "If only all days could go without any problems like this."

As he spoke, he scanned the room and realized that Marvin was still in the room with them. At the moment, the little robot was in an antechamber that had a clear glass door, and he was bent over something on the floor, as if examining it with intense interest.

"Hey, little guy," the orange bot said as he went over. "What 'cha looking at?"

"It can't understand you, you know," Digit commented. "It's not sapient like we are."

"You never know," Fidget responded as he reached the antechamber. "After all, we weren't sapient at first. It happened over time."

Entering into the chamber, he bent down by Marvin to get a look. "What is it? I don't see anything over here."

The smaller robot pointed to an area in the back corner and gave off a series of frantic buzzes and chirps. It was clear he wanted the Gadgetini to focus on that area.
"Alright, but I told you I don't see anything over here," the orange bot replied.

After a moment of watching his brother examine the area, Digit sighed. "Here, let me see," he said, joining his twin and the smaller bot. "You always miss the details anyway."

As soon as the blue bot has joined his twin inside the antechamber, Marvin hurried out and slammed the door shut on the brothers. He moved so fast that the twins hardly had time to react, and by the time they were able to respond, the door had already been thrown shut.

"Hey! Let us out of here!" Fidget called, and he began shoving on the door. Much to his and Digit's dismay, the door was fixed shut, and no matter what they did, it wouldn't budge.

"What did you do that for, you little creep?!" Digit called out.

In response, Marvin only sniggered. His previously static face broke out into a malicious smile and he wandered over to a control panel on the other side of the room. He operated a few of the buttons, and above and below the brothers, showering heads made themselves visible.

"Uh, Digit," Fidget said as he looked in dismay at the spigots. "I'm pretty sure he's sapient." At that moment, the spigots turned on, dousing the brothers in gallons of cold water.

To be continued...
Assignment 9.6: The Necessity of Flexibility

Saturday, July 12, 2087

M.A.D. Service Bunker

"It looks like Missy Gadget's group is more ahead of you than we thought," Talon said as he gave his directions through the earpiece. "Her teams out in the park and they've split into two groups."

Directing the computers, Talon sent the security feeds of the teens to his crony's computers. "Three of them are working on a way out, and three of them look like their coming to face you. They're traveling using a cloaking device, so you won't be able to see them, but if you could trigger some environmental change, like rain or fog, you'd be able to get an easy positioning on their whereabouts."

"You say they're using a cloaking device," Masters responded. "What kind of tech do they have?"

"Nothing much, only some smaller items," the boy answered. "They came to the amusement park as visitors, not cops. Not even Penny would be able to sneak any weapons into a packed amusement park. As long as you got her book and watch, everything will be stacked in your favor. There was a moment of awkward silence that tipped the cyber off that something was amiss. "You did take her book and watch, right? The charm bracelet, too."

The gangster muttered a few incomprehensible curses before answering. "I didn't know about any book or watch! She didn't have them on her when she was picked up!"

Talon let out a groan. "¡Imbécil! You didn't get the book and watch, did you? Those are her most important tools, and you left them in the hands of her stoolies!"

"Hey, how was I supposed to know about the little cow's tools?!" Masters replied. He growled, calling the boy a few choice names before continuing. "Look, they're just a couple of kids. Just a few bullets will deal with them, no matter what they've got."

"I've told you where they are, just go deal with them," Talon growled. His voice lacked its previously easy-going tone. "Don't mess it up this time!"

Penny, sitting where she he been dropped before, had only heard half the conversation. Everything that had been said to masters through the earpiece was impossible to overhear, but from the portion of the conversation she could hear, she could get a small idea of what was going on. That was all she needed.

"So, you're not actually the boss, are you?" She asked. "Whoever was on the other end of that earpiece, they're the ones who are really in charge."

"Shut it, slut," Masters snarled.

The girl, however, wasn't finished. She raised her voice and hoped her words were getting through to her friends. "But you're not in charge. I can tell. Whoever that was, they're the ones who are pulling the strings. You're just the puppet."

"If you don't pipe down, tramp, you'll get a bullet through that thick skull of yours!" the gangster threatened.

Penny froze for a moment, as if she were afraid. However, she then gave a smile. "No. No, you
Masters scowled but tried to ignore the statement. This response, however, just fueled Penny's idea. "That's it, isn't it? You know about DElPHI, about what I could do to your plan. You could have ordered your men to kill me right when I turned myself over to you and eliminated that threat in an instant, but you didn't. You had them bring me here. There's something keeping you from killing me."

At this point, the mobster spun around. Grabbing her by the front of her shirt, he yanked her up. "I said shut up, brat!" he yelled in her face. "I'm not going to tolerate any of your backtalk!" With that, he shoved her back down hard, leaving a bruise on the back of her shoulder.

Finished with their dealing, he turned and muttered under his breath. "Stupid teenagers," he grumbled among other curses. "Someone should teach them a lesson."

The blow she had taken had left Penny's shoulder aching, but thankfully there was nothing worse. However, that little show had given her one other benefit. She couldn't help but smirk to herself as she hid the tiny gun she had picked from his holster inside her boot. That would definitely come in handy later.

..."Alright, here we are," Eli said as he, Kayla, and Will reached the stadium. It was the biggest building in the park and positioned right in the center. Even with all the people who were packed inside at the moment, the whole area was eerily quiet, with only a few voices audible from the outside.

"There's one of the entrances," Will said, pointing out a small box a distance off. "I should be able to hack into it using Penny's systems."

"Just hurry up," Kayla responded. "Once you're in, we'll have to hurry and get those hostages out."

The boy nodded and kept his head down, hurrying to the box as the other two stayed back to give him cover. Once they were alone, Eli turned to Kayla. "What's going on right now?" he asked. "You're not usually in a huff like this."

"I don't like working with that guy," Kayla responded. "I've known Bridgette forever, and if she says he's bad news, then he's bad news. Besides, you saw what he did."

"Yeah, but Penny's kind of got a point," the older boy responded, and there was a. "I know what I said before, but she is right; that footage is four years old, and people do have a right to a second chance if they really want one. Penn's always been a good judge of character. Maybe we should give Will a chance."

"Look, I'm not going to-" the girl said, beginning to raise her voice, but Eli cut her off.

"Besides," he said in a hushed whisper, "we've got real enemies, dangerous enemies, to deal with right now. We're all we've got to depend on, so we can't have any in-group fighting right now. That sort of attitude could get everyone in this park killed."

Listening to the logic of the statement, Kayla said with a sigh. "Alright, fine. I'll try to work with him, but that doesn't mean I have to like him."

"No one's saying you have to," Eli responded. "Right now, getting everyone out of here alive is the priority."
They hushed up and turned to watch Will, who had been hard at work with the entry panel. Several wires from the Computer Book hung out of the system, allowing him access into the internal system. The work was fast, but felt a lot slower than it actually took. After five minutes that felt more like thirty, the lights on the system changed, and the boy recalled the wires, tucked the book into his backpack, and hurried in.

He hurried out only a second later, too, and he took off running. His two partners watched in confusion for a nanosecond, but they didn't have too long to wonder. The reason for his reaction became clear very quickly.

Nearly as soon as the boy has gotten away from the building, six guards came out after him. All of them were arms and wearing weird googles. Two of them took off after Will, brandishing several large rifle-like weapons. The others paused once they were out of the gate and turned to face directly at Eli and Kayla. "There they are!" one of the guards said, pointing at the duo. "Remember, they can be killed, but only if we get them apart!"

"Crud, how can they see us?" Kayla asked. Touching the back of her gauntlets, she set up the small deflector shield inside.

"Who knows," Eli responded, doing so with his gloves as well. "All that matters is they can see us." Rushing ahead, he reflected several of the goons' blasts back at them. He couldn't carry this tactic on forever, as he could already feel his shield weakening, but it gave him an opening to get in close to the enemy, and that was all he needed.

Reaching the first of the four assailants, Eli grabbed the front of the gun and forced it upwards. The sudden jerk caused the weapon to come out of the grunt's hands with ease. Spinning the weapon around, the boy utilized it as a club, using the butt of the gun to smack the goon upside the head before turning to face the second.

Kayla reacted similarly. Activating the mini-Tasers in her gloves, she caught up to one of the gangsters and grabbed him by the arm. In a swift movement, she pulled her enemy closer and punched right at the side his neck, which was one of the few areas of unprotected skin.

The blow wasn't hard, but it didn't need to be. The grunt fell as the electricity passed into his system, giving the girl enough time to reach out and yank his weapon out of his hands.

Unfortunately, this action was not in time for her to respond to the fourth attacker, who had come up behind the girl while she was dealing with his compatriot. Reaching out, he grabbed Kayla's ponytail and yanked her head back. Taking advantage of the surprise, he attempted to pull out a knife and stab her.

Before that could happen, Eli saw what was happening and responded in turn, letting off a shot at the grunt with the weapon he had grabbed. He aimed at the grunt's leg and his aim was good. The goon was forced to release Kayla and fall to his knees, gripping his injured leg in the process. Taking the advantage of the moment, the girl spun around and activated a nozzle on the back of her glove, giving the thug a face full of sleeping gas.

At the same time, Eli finished his fight as well. His opponent had been able to take advantage of his momentary distraction to move in and attempt to slash at the boy with a knife. Eli was ready for that attack, though, and stepped back, moving out of the range of the weapon. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to do much else, since the enemy was too close for him to get a good shot in with his gun.

It was the perfect range, however, for Kayla to unleash a volley from the smaller gun she had picked up. The blast she let out wasn't enough to kill the goon, but it still struck him in the side to force all
the air out of his lungs. Responding to the attack, the grunt, fell sideways, which was just the opening Eli needed to douse him in sleeping gas. With that, the fight was over, and all the attackers were unconscious.

"That deals with these guys," Eli said. He took the holster off of one of the thugs and buckled it onto his own waist. "No sense in leaving this behind. Kay, you alright?"

"I'm fine," she replied. She had finished picking up a weapons belt of her own, along with a key card that had been around one of the attacker's necks. "Where'd that Billy kid get to?"

"I don't know." The boy frowned and looked out over the park. "I hope he got to a hiding place, otherwise those goons would have gotten him."

Kayla began working with several dials on the back of her glove. "We'd better get those hostages to safety as soon as we can."

"Good idea," Eli said with a nod. "We'd better get moving, too. We'll be better off the faster we go." The two then moved out, eager to complete their mission.

Faithful Amish Wares and Goods, Metro City Shopping District

"An Amish goods store?" Gadget said as they pulled in front of the store. He was seated in the passenger seat of the Gadgetmobile at the moment, as Quimby had volunteered to drive as they left. "What do we need here?"

"Uhh…we'll need to pick out…uh…" Quimby answered, racking his mind for anything that might sound plausible. "We need to get a new…uhh…table set for…uh…the break room! That's it! The negative twentieth floor break room!"

Hearing the explanation, Gadget grinned. "Excellent. I'm great at choosing table sets. Any price range?"

"Just one that's durable," Quimby answered. "Why don't you go on ahead? I need to get my wallet out, and then take a message."

"Alright," the inspector replied, giving a thumbs up. "I'll tell you if I find anything inside."

As soon as the cyborg was gone, Quimby turned on his phone. "Alright, we're here. Now, tell me again why we're at an Amish goods store?"

"Can you think of a better store to keep him distracted in?" The woman on the screen said with a smile. She was Dana, the C.I.A. intelligence organizer. "They place is as big as a warehouse and has the bare minimum of technology. He'll probably get lost in there anyway, and there's no way any of the people running the store will have a TV or radio to alert him to what's happening in Adventure Kingdom."

"True," the chief said with a nod. He shook his head and sighed. "This place is so big, he might get so lost in there just walking around. We can't leave anything up to luck right now, though. If anything goes wrong and he finds out, people could die."

"Alright," Dana replied with a nod. "We'll stay online and monitor the situation. If we need you, just tell Gadget you're taking care something important related to this errand. That wouldn't be a lie, after all."
Quimby nodded. "Good ideal. We'll call you if something important comes in."

When he had left, Gadget wandered into the store and began browsing around. He had never heard of this store before, so he supposed it must be relatively new. As such, he began examining all the wares with a close eye.

He was focused on looking over a particular table with a magnifying glass attached to an arm coming from his hat when a woman came up to him. "Good afternoon, sir," she said. She was clearly unnerved by the arm from his hat, but was trying to hide it for business sake. "Can I help you with anything?"

Gadget turned and looked at the speaker. It was a woman about his own age dressed in a simple dress and apron. She also had a name tag with the name Elisabeth printed on it. "Oh, yes, thank you. I happen to be looking for a dining set to replace one that got broken."

"As you can see," Elisabeth said, motioning to the stock, "we have many dining sets here, all handcrafted by my community. What would you be looking for in specific?"

The inspector touched his chin and glanced up, thinking hard about what they might need. "We'll definitely need something that can withstand a sudden mallet strike," he said aloud, almost more to himself than to the saleswoman.

"A mallet strike?" Elisabeth repeated, hardly understanding what she was hearing.

Gadget nodded. "Yes, a mallet strike. That seems to be the gadget that comes out the most when I glitch. Protection against possible boxing gloves, Swiss army knives, toothpaste staining, and maybe even laser burns could be useful, too."

"Oh, deary," the woman nodded, and the glanced up, hoping upon hope that her customer was not insane. "I suppose we'll have what you're looking for. Would you like me to show you our back inventory?"

"That would be quite helpful, thank you." Gadget straightened up and recalled the magnifying glass. "Lead on, my good woman."

"Heaven's above!" the woman exclaimed when she saw the movement, but she steadied herself again. "Uh, yes, come this way," she said, motioning for him to follow her. "We've got everything back here." Internally, she hoped once more, this time hoping she wasn't going insane.

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Adventure Kingdom

Having successfully made an opening in the encompassing dome, Linc, Rheeci, and Bridgette were huddled under one of the concession stands. Bridgette was working with the watch, trying to open up a connection with the computer book. "Alright, guys, come in," she said. "We've got everything open. Tell us where you are so we can come and join you."

It took a moment, but soon a call came in from the book. Will was holding it in his lap, and he was hunched over it in such a way that it was hard to tell where he was or what he was doing. All that was obvious was that he was in some covered area and he was afraid.

"Please, keep your voice down," he said in a hushed whisper. "I'm not alone out here."
"What? What do you mean?" Rheeci asked, becoming just as afraid as the boy was. "Where's Kayla and Eli?"

"Shhhh!" Will said, this time a bit harsher. "If they hear you, they'll find me and then I'll be finished!"

The trio had a barrage of question, but they were forced to restrain them when a new voice came over the speaker. "We know you're in here somewhere, little boy," a female voice taunted. "Come out now and give us that book, and we'll consider letting you live."

"I thought the boss said to rub him out," a male voice said with a tone of confusion.

Will kept his mouth shut tight and reached into his pocket. Pulling out a pair of wireless ear buds, he slipped one into his ear and manipulated the book so that they were connected. He then gave a thumbs up, signaling that the other kids could speak.

"What's going on there?" Linc asked, speaking first. "Are those guys terrorists?"

Will still said nothing, but nodded. He extended his forefinger and thumb and pressed it under his chin, pantomiming a shooting.

"Oh, dear!" Rheeci exclaimed. "Are Eli and Kayla alright?"

In response, the boy shrugged. He then crossed his arm while pointing.

"So, you ran in different directions, huh?" Linc bit his lip in thought. "This makes things difficult."

Will nodded, but before he could convey any information, his expression changed. His eyes grew wide, and he began pointing energetically at the screen.

"What is it?" Bridgette asked. "We can't understand you."

Unable to take it any longer, Will let go. "They're behind you!" he practically shouted. In an instant, he realized what he had done, and he shot up to run, shutting off the computer book as he did so.

At the same time, Linc, Bridgette, and Rheeci spun around as well. Sure enough, behind them was about five of the terrorists, all of them armed.

In an instant, everyone moved in response. Bridgette plucked off a cherry-red charm and scanned it into the watch. She dodged to the right at the same time to avoid any of the shots the enemy were making. Linc and Rheeci, however, attempted to make their way to cover.

Out in the field, Bridgette discovered to her delight that the charm called up a small plasma gun that fired off incendiary blasts. Letting loose, she fired off two bursts, one of which caught one of the goons on fire. "What are you guys doing?" she asked, dodging to another area of cover. "We've totally got these guys!"

"Well, you do anyway," Linc called back. "Unfortunately, Rheeci and I aren't as armed right now." He looked up and touched a button on the side of his sunglasses, which shot out two small darts. The darts hit their targets, causing a small amount of damage to the weapons but not much else. "My really good tools are back in Penny's lab, and Rheeci's usually not in the battlefield period, except as a getaway driver."
"I can give a bit of support, but I'm useless in a fight," Rheeci commented. "I'd suggest we get to running as soon as we get an opening."

Bridgette bit her tongue as she thought over the other two's words. "Alright, I've got an idea," she finally said. "I'm going to lay down some rapid fire. That should build up a barrier for us. Once the fire's blazing, take off!"

Not hesitating, Bridgette fired off as many shots as she could as fast as she could. Just as she expected, that caused a huge pillar of fire to shoot up between them and the enemy. Once it was set up, Rheeci and Linc shot up and ran off in the opposite direction, Bridgette close behind them.

The thugs didn't let up on firing at them, but the fire did keep a pursuit from being made. Soon, they were able to turn a corner into a fun-house and lock the door behind them.

"There, that should keep them from finding us for the time being," Linc said. He adjusted his glasses so they gave off a light, allowing the kids to walk through the darkened fun-house. He then turned to Bridgette. "That's was some pretty good shooting out there. Have you done this before?"

"My family's really big on hunting," the redhead answered. "Ever since I was old enough to hold a rifle, I've been on hunts and competitions whenever we go out to the country." She gave a small smile. "I'll admit, this was the first time I've shot from a watch, though."

Rheeci then looked up. "Can you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Linc asked.

"There's some kind of buzzing sound, coming from over here." The girl wandered over to a far wall and pressed her ear against it. "It sounds like there's machinery in here."

"If there's machinery, then there might be computers," Linc commented. "If we can get past that wall, then there might be a way we can gum up the works for the terrorists!"

Bridgette grinned. "Then we've got a plan of action!"

At that moment, there was a pounding against the door. "And not a moment too soon," Linc agreed. "Come on, let's get out of here before they get other ideas about how to open that door." The trio rushed off through the fun house, hoping the path they took would lead them to some help.

..."Hey, Talon," Wildfire called back. "Now that we've got them off and running, it's time for us to have our fun, right?"

Talon smirked as he watched the security camera feed. By now, he had cooled down a bit and the prospect of the game cheered him up considerably. "I'd say so."

He gave a laugh as he thought of the prospects. "It's just too perfect. Six of us and six of them. Pick your piece and begin the game."

"Yeah!" Drillbit exclaimed. "I want the skinny kid; he always got on my nerves."

"Hmmm, I'll take the one with the glasses," Syreen said. "He's kind of cute, and I love it when they scare easy."

"Sorry, 'Reen," Talon interrupted. "Billy's mine to deal with."
"Fine," the girl said with a pout. "Then I'll take the Asian one. She'll be the easiest to finish off."

"I'll take the redhead," Wildfire said. "It's more fun when they fight back."

"Guess that leave us with chatterbox and bruiser, bro," Joltwave commented with a smirk. "Want to go at it?"

"I've been waiting all week for this, sis," After-Shock replied. "Let's smear them into the dirt!"

"Remember, guys," Talon said as each of them chose a computer screen to work at. "Last one to deal with their pest is buying dinner tonight."

W.O.M.P. HQ

It was a full fifteen minutes before the water streams finally let up. Now able to catch their metaphorical breath, the Gadgetinis thanked their lucky stars that they had been made waterproof and began to gather their footing.

Outside, Marvin was still watching with a huge smirk. *Hee, hee, hee!* he laughed in an electronic language. *Stupid big-bots! Fleshy-loving idiots! You got caught in the washing station! You're so easy to fool! Hee, hee, hee!*

It took a moment for the twins to realize they could understand him, since they had never heard that language before. Somehow, however, it seemed instinctual, and they could certainly understand the taunting.

*Listen here, you midget pile of scrap!* Digit growled back in the same language. *You let us out of here right now, or so help me, I'll blast my way out of here and teach you a hard lesson!*

The threat didn't seem to do much, however, as all Marvin did in response was fall over as he laughed even harder. *You stupid, silly big-bot! You're never getting out of there, not unless I let you out.*

"Why you little-!" Digit snarled in English, and he pulled out one of his sonic cannons and prepared to blast out of the chamber.

"Digit, wait," Fidget said, trying to calm his brother down. "Let me try."

Turning to Marvin, he switched to the strange, electronic language. *Is there anything we can do to get you to let us out? We need to get back to our job, and we can't do that when we're stuck in here.*

Hearing this, Marvin paused and gave a smile. *So, you two are in a hurry to get out, huh? I'll tell you what, I'll let you out if you say the magic word.*

*Really?* Fidget smiled and turned back to Digit. "See? He's more reasonable than we supposed. Turning back to Marvin, the orange bot smiled. *Would you please let us out of here?*

For a moment, it seemed like that had worked, as Marvin went over to the control panel. However, at last moment, that smile returned. *That's the wrong word!* In an instant, he flipped the jet streams back on, and once again the Gadgetinis were doused in cold water.

This time the streams stopped sooner than before. Once he was free to stand again, Digit pulled out his sonic cannons. *Okay, that's it, you little scraplet!* He unleashed a volley on the glass door,
expecting it to shatter upon impact. Instead, however, the blast bounced back and knocked him and
his brother back against the wall.

Marvin found this to be the funniest event yet. *You didn't notice that this is Lux-tenebras?* he
asked between laughs. *The meatbags who work here cause so many explosions, they needed this to
be something completely unbreakable. Which is great for me.*

Suddenly, there was a call. "Jonathon, do you know where Marvin is? We might need him for the
situation."

"I haven't seen the little monster," the boy replied.

The robot groaned when he heard the dialog. *Great. The fleshies are lost without me, like normal.
Better go before they suspect something.* He then left without another word.

"Great," Digit mumbled as he and his twin pushed themselves back up. "So, we're stuck in here with
a little sadist and no one else knows we're trapped in here. Just wonderful."

"I'll try contacting someone," Fidget said. "If someone find out we're here, they can let us out." He
pressed in his bow tie to activate his radio. Before he could reach out to contact anyone, though,
breaking news came through, and the message cut him right to the core.

"Digit," he said, turning off his radio only a moment after he turned it on. "We need to get out of
here now."

"Of course, we do," his brother replied. "You don't need to tell me that."

"No, it's more urgent than we thought," the little orange robot insisted. "Miss Penny is in trouble."

To be continued…
Nearly out of breath from the chase, Will darted around a corner and scanned for anything that might work for a hiding place. It didn't take long, as not three feet from where he stood was a control booth for a nearby ride that was half-submerged into the ground. The door had no handle, only a lock, but there was a ventilation shaft that was about a foot tall. Thanking his lucky stars, the boy slid his backpack in before him, before squirming into the shaft.

He had moved just in time, too. Nearly as soon as he was huddled on the ground, he heard his pursers outside.

"Now where could that brat have gotten too?" the man said.

"He can't be too far," the woman replied. "He's fast, but this place is a dead end. Once he runs out of places to run to, we'll have him."

Will held his breath, not wanting to do anything that might give him away. Thankfully, if didn't appear that his enemies even noticed the control booth, as they moved right past him. He still waited a full five minutes after he heard the footsteps fade away before he decided to try to contact the others.

Once he was certain it was safe, he opened the book and tried to get contact. "Guys, you there?"

"We're here," Bridgette replied, bringing the watch to her face.

"Will, are you alright?" He couldn't see the speaker, but from her voice, it was Rheeci. "Those creeps didn't hurt you, did they?"

"I've shaken them for the time being," he replied, "but I'm not sure how long that's going to last. How about you guys?"

"We made it into the funhouse in the Legends of the Safari land," Linc answered. "There's still no word on Eli or Kayla and the baddies followed us here, but we've got them locked out and a plan in the works."

"It looks like there might be some kind of computer system in here," Bridgette said. "If we can hack into the system, then maybe we can get control of the park back."

"Sound good," the boy replied. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Like you helped Eli and Kayla?" Bridgette responded with a sneer. "Just lay low and make sure no one gets that book off of you. It's too valuable to lose."

"Oh, right." A knot began forming in Will's stomach at the reminder of his outsider status. "Sure, I'll keep the book safe."

"Don't worry about it, Will," Rheeci called out. "You didn't really have a choice. I would have run, too."

Before anything more could be said, there came the sound of a loud crashing through the connection. "Sounds like they made it through," Linc said. "We'd better hang up. We'll contact you again once we can reach a safe spot. Over and out."
Once the screen blinked off, Will slumped back against the wall. "Great job, Billy," he scowled at himself. "What other brilliant ways are you going to mess up now?"

He didn't have too much time to spend on this train of thought, though. After a moment of sitting still, he realized that his atmosphere was not as quiet as he had previously assumed. There was a faint buzzing sound outside, one that almost sounded like small helicopters. Out of curiosity, he stood straight to get a look out of the ventilation window to get an idea of what was out there.

What he saw caused him to duck back down in an instant: a military drone was buzzing around outside. It was clearly armed and flying in a pattern that made it clear it was looking for something. It didn't take too much to guess just who it was looking for.

Tucking the backpack over one arm, Will dashed over to the door and unlocked it, preparing to bolt if it was necessary. He moved just in time, as not a moment after he has gotten the door unbolted, two blasts came from the drone right at the ventilation window. The boy had been far enough from the blast not to be severely injured by it, but he could already feel the heat of the fire in the booth.

Taking to his heels, he dashed off in the direction of the Legends of the Safari land. His only hope what they there would be safety in numbers and that the others weren't having similar problems to his.

Since they had been left without any way of contacting the other members of the group, Kayla and Eli had decided that the best move to make at the moment was just to try to return to their previous mission in hopes that something could be done to help the hostages. Thankfully, their fight had not taken them too far from the auditorium, which meant they were able to make it to their destination without too much trouble.

"This'll be easy," Kayla said, grinning as she peered into the doorway Will had previously opened. "Should be," Eli agreed, "but remember, we need to stay close. We've go no idea what these guys have in here."

The girl nodded without answering and hurried in, followed closely by her friend. Inside, almost everything seemed normal. The hallways were near empty, since all of the hostages had been ushered into the huge theater area. There was no doubt that area would be crowded as all else, but the area around it was completely empty.

Once they got in, the two of them made a beeline for the nearest door to the theater. However, as they tried to get it open, they found that it was locked. "I suppose that makes sense," Eli muttered. "Prisoners just aren't prisoners if they can get out. We'll need to figure out how to pick the lock, and without Penny, her book, or her watch."

"Or, we could just use the key," Kayla responded with a side smile, holding onto the lanyard around her neck. "I'm surprised they just let grunts hold onto these things."

She swiped the card into the nearby scanner, and the duo were rewarded with a click as they the door unlocked. Now having achieved entrance, they were able to hurry into the huge theater.

Just as they had suspected, the area was filled to the brim with the visitors and employees who had
been taken hostage. This was the only building anywhere near big enough to house all the hostages, and even still it was just about bursting at the seams.

Moving in but trying not to attract too much attention, Eli touch the shoulder of a man in a security guard uniform sitting nearby. "Hey, dude, you alright?"

The man jumped and spun around. "Y-your not one of them, are you?"

The boy gave a smile and shook his head. "Nah, we're the good guys. Now, I've got to tell you, we've got a way out of the park."

"A way out?" The man looked confused. "But all the doors were locked tight in the takeover."

"Some friends of our got one of the doors at the main gate open," Eli answered. "We've got a way for us to escape, but it's only going to work a few at a time." He slipped off his own cloaking chip and handed it to the man. "Use this and you and one other person will be invisible to any of the cameras. You can use it to make it to the gate and get out. Once you're there, give it to a W.O.M.P. agent and they'll take it from there."

The man nodded, and Kayla took off her own chip. "Here," she said. "This'll give you two more slots. Hurry, before anyone notices you're gone."

The security guard nodded before pausing. "What about you two kids?"

"We'll be fine," Kayla responded with a smile. "We've dealt with these goons before, no problem."

"Just hurry!" Eli said in a hurried whisper.

The security guard nodded and then turned, signaling for a mother with two children to follow along with him. Once they were through the door, Eli and Kayla turned to spreading the word among the crowd.

When the message had gotten momentum, they duo tried to figure out what they needed to do next. They didn't have to think too long, as a woman dressed in a theme park uniform tapped on Kayla's shoulder. "You're the ones who can fight these guys off, right?"

"That would be us," the girl responded with a smile.

The woman moved her head down before speaking again. "Good. I know where they're keeping the bomb. I can't show you where it is, but I can direct you to where you can go."

"Great," Eli said, motioning for the woman to take the lead. "We can take it from there."

The woman moved to a door on the east side of the room. "Once you make it out of here, there'll be a door leading to a bunch of stairs. That'll take you down into the underground loading dock. They've got the bomb set up there."

Thanking the woman for her directions, the two hurried off. They knew they'd have to find a way to take the bomb off of the playing field if there was any hope of success.

Faithful Amish Wares and Goods, Metro City Shopping District

"So," Gadget said aloud, setting down a hand-carved chair he had been inspecting, "this looks like the perfect set. I'll take this one!"
"You will?!" Poor Elisabeth was about at her wits end. In the process of "examining" the furniture, Gadget has given the woman about fifty heart attacks for everything he touched. While he had broken only one item, already rather cheap chair, he had come inches from smashing, crushing, splintering, and setting on fire every single piece of goods the store had to offer. She was more than ready to have the troublesome cyborg out of her store.

Gadget gave a nod. "Indeed. It's within the proper price range, there's no previous damage, and it seems sturdy enough for the break room. This is definitely what we're looking for."

At that moment, he looked up and spotted Quimby, who was wandering the store to find where the cyborg had gotten to. "Hey, chief, over here!" he called out, waving for the other man to join them. "I've found what we need."

Hearing this, Quimby stifled the urge to groan. "Already? I mean, that's great!" He forced a smile, his mind racing to figure out something to do that might occupy Gadget longer. "That was awfully fast."

"Yeah, there's a lot in here," the cyber responded, "but most of it's too delicate. Did you know it's all made of wood? I found a set that looks sturdy enough for what we want, but it look like this is the only one in the store that is."

"Okay, great," the chief said again, dreading the price tag he was going to have to pay. "Why don't you load that in the car while I pay?"

Gadget grinned and an arm popped out of his hat to give a salute. "I'm on it!"

Once he was out of ear shot, Quimby turned to Elisabeth. "Alright, what did he break and how much is it going to cost."

"Only one chair, thankfully," the woman responded, "and he's already paid for it. Just, please, never let him come back here ever again."

The chief gave a nod, thanking his lucky stars it wasn't anything more. "Deal." He then pulled out the W.O.M.P. card and paid for the set.

Once the transaction was paid, Quimby stepped behind isle and pulled out his communicator. "Quimby here. Come in, Elliot."

The C.I.A. member answered near immediately. "I'm here, chief," he said. "What's going on?"

"Gadget finished here much faster than expected," the chief answered. "We're going to have to bring the set back now so he doesn't get suspicious, but I'm going to need help to distract him. At least two of you need to meet me in the lobby to make sure he doesn't catch on to the park situation."

"I'm not sure that's possible," Elliot answered. "All of us are pretty busy keeping tabs on the park."

"Well, you'd better figure out a way to make it possible," Quimby said, his tone dangerously close to a growl. "It's your team's fault this whole situation is here in the first place!"

"Hey, Chief Quimby, you ready to go?" Gadget asked, rounding the corner all of a sudden. He looked on and realized that Elliot was on the communicator. "Oh, hi, Elliot! Are you checking up on our 'progress'?" he asked, giving a sly wink. "So, can we head back?"

The younger man gave an awkward laugh. "Uh, yeah, that's right," he said, his mind racing to figure out what event caused his life to end up here. "We're just about ready for you to arrive. We'll need to
get the new dining set placed first, and then get something out of your office."

"Sounds great!" the cyber answered with a smile. "Then we'll be all set up! See you there!" He then
spun around on his heels and hurried off to the Gadgetmobile.

"Remember, two of you had better be there to handle damage control," Quimby said before hanging
up.

... In the office, Elliot sighed before looking up to make the message. "Alright, the chief's going to need
two assistants to help him with Gadget. Any volunteers?"
The excuses flowed like a river.

"I'm covering communications," Caz said in an instant.

"I'm on the line with the General!" Wayne called out.

"Running errands," Jonathon stated, rushing out the door.

"Shipping disguises to the park," Carlotta said, hurrying out with armfuls of clothes.

"I just don't like Quimby," Sue said, turning back to the communications.

Hearing this, Elliot sighed again and turned to Dana, the information officer. "Guess it's you and me,
then."
The woman forced a smile. "At least we've got an in at the park. Not too much will happen before
we've got the situation resolved."

"I sure hope that's right," Elliot commented, though he looked less than confident that it was.

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Adventure Kingdom

Once they had been alerted by the crashing caused by the door being knocked in, Linc, Bridgette,
and Rheeci took to a run, making it to another metal door. Hurrying inside, they slammed the door
shut.

"Bridgette, do you think you can weld this shut with the laser?" Rheeci asked as they braced the
door.

Seeing the sense in the request, the redhead nodded. "Got it. Now which of these charms is the
laser?"

"This one," Linc responded, pointing out the brick-red charm.

"Thanks," Bridgette said, and she turned to the task of keeping a barrier between them and their
pursuers.

Once they had set that defense up, they turned to think of what to do next. "So," Rheeci commented
as they walked through the dark hallway leading to the funhouse maze, "leaving the way we came is
out of the question. So, what now?"
"We'll just have to make it to the exit," Linc responded. "If I remember correctly, that's where the control panel was housed. That should be a breeze; this place was always pretty straightforward."

"Maybe, maybe not," Bridgette responded. "I think this is one of the attractions they expanded on. I hear it's super hard now if you don't have any workers providing hints."

"Aw, come on," Linc replied. "How hard do you think it could be?" They then came to the curtain that opened onto the maze. Lifting the corner, he motioned for the girls to go ahead of him, and the three went to take a look at just what they were facing.

"You just had to say it, didn't you?" Bridgette asked with a groan, and her frustration was justified. While Linc had been correct in stating the old funhouse maze was easy, what was here now was far from what used to be there. All around, the maze walls and ceilings alike were made of mirrors, as were the normal walls and ceiling. The area was illuminated only by strobe and black lights and the floor was covered up to shin-height in thick fog. What's more, the maze was multi-leveled, with stairs going both up and down in different directions, and tunnels every couple of feet where there wasn't either cat-walks or stairs. There was false plant life everywhere, in keeping with the jungle theme, making it even harder to tell which way one was supposed to look like.

"It looks like M.C. Escher made a Tarzan movie," Rheeci stated, adjusting several buttons on her headband so she could keep tabs on the sounds around them. She moved in, brushing several of the false leaves away as she walked. "This would probably be pretty fun, if it wasn't for the whole life-or-death thing."

"No use in just standing here and staring. I guess we just do our best to find our way out of here and hope those goons can't get in." Linc touched a dial on his sunglasses, switching them to a filter that allowed him to see in the area as clearly as if lights had been on. "I'll take the lead."

The trio would have liked to move quickly through the funhouse, and might have even ran had it been safe. However, even with the filter on the glasses, the disorienting design of the maze made it impossible to move any faster than a brisk walk. Even at that pace, they found themselves turning false path after false path, going up and down and every which way to find a way to the exit. As much as they worked, though, their attempts were always in vein, and they always came to some dead end or another.

"Ugh," Bridgette groaned when they came to the seventh dead end. "There's got to be a better way than this."

"There is," Linc replied, "but since none of us currently possess the ability to fly, we're just going to have to do this the long way. We don't really have any other options."

Before any recommendations could be made, there came a smashing sound from the door. The kids weren't initially too worried about the shock, since they had already made it far away from the entrance and they supposed it would take any pursuers a long time to make it to them.

This assumption, however, had been based on the assumption that their pursuers were human. Instead, a set of three flying drones tore through the curtain, hovering above the walls and flying at a faster speed than had been expected.

Without hesitating, the three kids took off, realizing they had to keep ahead of the robotic monstrosities. At first, the three of them stuck by each other, keeping as close as they could, but before too long, the panic of the chase, mixed with the disorientation the mirrors were already causing, lead the trio to go off running in opposite directions.
Not that this caused too much trouble for the drones, which were able to track each of their chosen targets without any difficulty. Splitting up to follow their prey, the drones prepped the ammunition of choice and took up the chase.

Rheeci was the first to recognize the unintentional split up. She had come to a three-way forked path, and spotting what she thought was Bridgette running down the center path, she hurried to follow. Unfortunately, what she had seen was an illusion, projected on the path by the many mirrors, and before she knew it, she was standing by herself in a dead end.

"Uh, guys?" she called out. "Where are you?"

The other two called out responses to the question, but she wasn't given the opportunity to hear them since at that moment, one of the drones caught up to her. The robot unleashed a blast of laser fire. Rheeci was quick enough to dodge the blast, but the shot ricocheted off the mirror behind her and began bouncing around the maze.

Springing to her feet once it was safe, the girl shot off in the other direction. "Guys, they're opening fire!" she shouted out.

"We kind of know that already!" Linc called back. He was racing down the hall, pausing every couple of minutes to fire off some of the minuscule darts at the drone. Unfortunately, they had less effect on the drone than they did against the thugs, so he was forced to take to his heels again before too long.

Bridgette, who had been fortunate to have a weapon on her was doing a bit better in keeping the drone off her. She fired off a laser blast, attempting to take out the drone's weapon before it could hit her. She was having difficulty, however, since the drone was pretty fast, and when she finally did land a shot on her enemy, a shield surrounding the drone absorbed it, leaving nothing worse than a scratch on it.

"Alright, laser blasts don't do much to these guys," she shouted out, hoping that Linc and Rheeci could hear her. "You might want to look for something more to smack it with."

"Easier said than done right now," Linc responded.

"Wait, I think she's on the right track!" Rheeci shouted. Coming up to one of the smaller sets of stairs, she grasped one of the thicker faux branches and jumped over the railing. The force of her vault caused the plastic branch to break off in her hand.

Once on the ground, the girl turned and flung the branch at the drone. Her aim was true and it struck the robot right center. It didn't do much to damage the drone, but since it was a physical rather than energy attack, the shield couldn't absorb it.

"Alright then," Rheeci called out as she moved behind a mirror to avoid a new onslaught. "They're susceptible to physical blows, but you're going to need something sturdier than plastic."

Looking down at the ground, Linc grinned. "How about stone, then?" Turning the explosive darts on the cement ground, he successfully broke off several chunks the size of golf balls. Picking them up, he flung one of them at the drones.

He missed the glass lenses, which was what he had been aiming at, but the debris landed a hit on one of the drone's propellers. This caused its flight to be hampered, and it was forced to slow itself into a decent.

"Yeah, got it!" the boy exclaimed with delight. He started running to the downed bot to try to finish
it off, only to have to turn and run when it became apparent that it could still fight back. "I take that back!" he shouted out to his companions. "Even if it's on the ground, it can still come after you!"

"Good to know!" Rheeci called. She ran up one of the longer set of stairs, which was so steep it was almost more a ladder. When she had almost made it to the top, the drone chasing her had circled around below her and shot out the stairs, causing the whole structure to collapse.

The girl was only just barely able to grab the ledge above her before she lost her footing. She gripped on with all her strength, but it was all she could do not to fall down. To make matters worse, the drone began firing at her hands, only just barely missing them. She realized pretty quickly that whoever was controlling the drone was trying to make her fall, and she was very close to letting go.

Before she could fall, however, an electrical blast came in the direction of the ledge. It wasn't enough to down the drone, but it did disorient it enough to cause it to fall back a bit.

Just as it was happening, Rheeci slipped, but was caught by her wrists. The girl looked up and saw William, who was straining to help her get up to the remaining portions of the stairs. "Would it be cliché to say I'm glad to see you?" she asked with a grin.

"Maybe," he responded with a shrug, "but who am I to make that call?"

With his help, she was able to join him on the platform. Unfortunately, they didn't have much time for a rest, as at that moment, the drone chasing her had recovered and shot through the faux foliage to catch them.

Without wasting a moment, Rheeci grabbed Will's hand and took off running, pulling him along with her. Between the two of them, they were able to keep at a fast-enough pace to stay ahead of their pursuer. Before long, he even started to outrun her, and might have taken the lead, if it wasn't for him glancing behind his shoulder every few seconds.

Dodging around the corner of the catwalk-like platform, the duo did what they could to stay ahead of their enemy, but that wasn't easy to do considering to confining space. However, hope wasn't completely lost. As they ran, a shadow caught Rheeci's eye, and she recognized it as a small alcove. "In here," she said, pulling Will into the covered alcove with her.

Thankfully, the combination of the sudden move with the speed the two had been going at meant they were able to shake the drone for the time being. "It's not a perfect fix," she said, struggling not a pant as she spoke, "but it might hide us for a moment."

"I can get us a few more moments," Will said. Opening up the book, he touched a few dials and positioned it so that it was pointing out of the alcove. Once it was in place, he pressed two buttons, sending out tiny flying nanobots. Once the nanobots were out, holographic images of Will and Rheeci appeared and took off in the direction they had been running. Thankfully, it appeared the illusion had caught the attention of the drone, which zoomed off after them.

"I prefer not to have to take the problem head on if I don't have to," the boy commented as he leaned against the wall.

Before they could rest for very long, Bridgette called up a connection to the book. "Where did you come from?" she asked.

"I came in at a side entrance," Will replied. "This place is riddled with them."

"Good to know," Rheeci said. She leaned in next to William so she could see Bridgette. "How are you holding up?"
"As well as can be expected, what with killer robots coming after me," the redhead replied. "Nothing we seem to throw at these guys sticks for long."

"Well, we do know that these guys are weak to physical attacks," Rheeci stated. "Now we just need to find a way to physically attack them."

"Yeah, like that's going to be an easy task," Bridgette responded. "Now, Linc and I are on the bottom floor of this place. Do you think you two might be able to give us a bird's eye of this place?"

"We can try," Will said with a nod. As quietly as they could, the crept out and came to an area of the platform where they could see the lower levels of the maze. He positioned the computer book so that it was facing the maze. "How's this?"

"Great!" Bridgette said, giving a bright grin. "There's me, and there's Linc." Taking a second look at the image, she then frowned. "That can't be right. If this picture is correct, then that means we're about to-"

Before she could finish her sentence, she came up to a corner, but before she could round it, Linc came dashing through. Both were unable to stop their momentum, and the two collided, sending them sprawling on the ground.

This gave their pursuers just the opportunity needed. The two drones, one on the air and one of the ground, caught up to the two and prepared to fire on them.

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In the main control room, Penny was hard at work. Since her last confrontation with her captor, she had been able to avoid any more conflict. Once her friends had been spotted, guards were sent out, one after another, to go deal with them, emptying the room and leaving fewer eyes on her.

Of course, Masters himself stayed to keep the park under control, and one of his thugs stayed behind to make sure she didn't do anything funny. However, neither of the men paid her too much heed.

The blonde was able to play this to her advantage. Every now and then, one of her captors or guards that were giving reports would come within reach of her. When they did so, she's reach out and do some amount of damage to their weaponry. The fact that these weapons were prototypes, and thus did not have any armor features in place yet, made this job all the easier. A torn fuel line here, a snapped off wire there. If she was lucky, a few of the other guards might step in and make a mistake, allowing her to spread her sabotage even farther.

During this time, she kept a wary eye out to make sure that her friends were safe and that no one was noticing her. Much to her disappointment, she couldn't overhear anything that might be useful to her friends' survival, but their struggles did keep the villain's attention off of her.

As time went on, however, things were growing more and more dangerous to the rest of the group. She had taken a pause to adjust the settings on her own weapons when she was started by the sounds of an explosion. She gave a start and looked up, seeing to her dismay that her allies were pursued by drones, and that an explosion had been used to flush Will out.

Her start, unfortunately, reminded her captors of her presence. Masters turned to her, and though she had hidden the weapon from before, he did see the look of fear in her face. "Enjoying the program, little princess?" he asked in a mocking tone of voice.

Penny quickly recovered, changing her expression to one of disgust. She didn't acknowledge the comment with a response, choosing instead to roll her eyes and cross her arms.
Seeing the expression, the mobster let out a cruel chuckle. "Still being defiant, cow? I'd think this would wear you down. After all, your little friends are going to die out there. What do you have to say about that?"

The girl made a face and looked away. Inwardly, she was terrified, both for her friends and for the captives. However, she didn't dare let that fear show, and instead she forced a look of casual disdain. "I thought you wanted me to shut up? Make up your mind already. No one likes a flighty little minion." This comment did its job.

So good a job, in fact, that Masters' temper flared up again. "You think you're really smart, don't you?" he sneered, grabbing the girl and pulling her inches to his face. "You think your perfectly safe? Well, let me tell you something, cripple, if that display out there doesn't prove I will kill you in a heartbeat, then know that I have killed brats in the past. I've had to wipe out other families to get where I am today, and that doesn't just mean the men. Teens, brats, it's never mattered. Just ask Monsaylan, the former head of this gang, what I did to his brats. You get in my way, you're dead, and that means you too!"

Before anything else could be said, his earpiece buzzed. "What is it?" he snarled into the device, before changing his tune. "Yeah, yeah, I hear you. Alright, fine."

When the conversation ended, he scowled and turned back to Penny. "You're too smart for your own good, slut. You'd better watch your tongue before I cut it out." Dragging her over to a closet that was sitting open nearby, he flung her inside and slammed the door behind her.

Now that she was alone, Penny reached up and adjusted her earring so that it was giving a steady beam of light. Once she could see, she struggled to find some way to pull herself into a sitting potion, which was not an easy task. When she had made it so that she was turned sideways in the space, she turned back to the matter at hand.

"Good thing you've got a really bad temper," she muttered under her breath with a soft laugh. She then reached in her pocket and pulled out the bomb detonator. "Hope you won't mind that I borrowed this."

She studied the device for a moment and saw it was the sort if device that was completely necessary to cause the explosion. Without it, the bomb would be useless.

Taking a deep breath, she switched the device off and tossed it to the other side of the closet. Once it was as far from her as possible, Penny pulled the gun out of her pocket, and listened to everything going on outside. What she planned to do would cause a lot of attention, and she wanted to make sure it happened when chaos would be to her advantage.

To be continued…
"Oh crumbs," Fidget groaned as he and Digit paced around their prison. They had just finished watching a news update on what was going on at Adventure Kingdom, and after an attempt at contacting the girl on her watch failed, a sense of panic was starting to come over the duo. "Oh crumbs, oh crumbs, oh crumbs! What can we do?! Miss Penny's going to die!"

Digit gripped his brother by the shoulders and gave him a shake. "Calm down! She's not going to die. Not if we keep a cool head, at least. We'll do something to help her."

"But what can we do?" the orange bot asked again. "We're stuck in here, and we can't reach her!" He started making hyperventilating sounds as his panic increased. "Oh, I'm feeling light-headed."

The other 'bot let him go and groaned. "We don't breathe, so please stop making that annoying sound."

Fidget struggled to calm himself down and gave an apologetic smile. "Sorry."

"What we need to do now is figure out what we can do, not bemoan what we can't." Touching his chin, Digit went over their options in his mind. "Well, we can't contact Miss Penny, but we probably will be able to contact the Inspector, Agent Connelly, and Brain." He pressed the top of his "tie," which activated the communicator. "I'll try the Inspector."

"Great idea!" his brother said with a nod. He turned and touched the middle of his "bow tie," which had the same effect. "I'll get Agent Connelly."

Digit didn't have to wait long, as his call went out near as soon as he dialed up the contact. A screen appeared, and he could see Gadget, who was in the Gadgetmobile, sitting next to a table and several chairs.

"Hello, Officer Digit," the inspector said when he realized he was getting a call. "Is everything alright?"

"Inspector, we have a-is that an Amish dining set?" the blue robot asked, shocked by the sheer randomness of the objects.

Gadget gave a nod. "Yes, indeed it is. I am running important errands right now. We need a new dining set in the break room, so Chief Quimby and I ran out to go pick one up." He then adjusted the screen so that the chief could be seen driving. "See? Hey, Chief Quimby! Officer Digit's on the line!"

So many questions raced through the Gadgetini's mind, but he shook them out to focus on the important matter at hand. "Inspector, we've got an issue dealing with Miss Penny."

"Oh, yes, she's been at that amusement park all day, hasn't she?" Gadget looked up as he thought back on the day. "Come to think of it, she hasn't contacted me since she arrived. I'd better call her up soon."

Hearing the topic, Quimby was quick to interrupt. "Oh, I wouldn't worry about that," the said, and
there was a tone to his voice that made anxiety clear. "You know what teenagers are like. They get so absorbed into their fun that they forget things really easily. My grandkids forget things all the time; there's no need to bother her!"

"Really?" the inspector commented with a slight frown. "Well, if you're so sure."

"But that's the problem, sir," Digit insisted. "There's a-!"

"Oh, look at this traffic!" Quimby practically shouted out. "Gadget, can you please end your call so that you can help me find the way to HQ?"

"Alright, if you really need it," the detective replied. He then turned to Digit. "We'll be back at HQ pretty soon. Just meet me in my office, and you can tell me what you want to there, alright? Over and out." Before the Gadgetini could argue against that course of action, he hung up.

"Well, the Inspector is out," he said with a groan. "He wouldn't listen."

"I've got a bit better news," Fidget responded. "Agent Connelly and Brain are already at the park. They weren't able to speak for very long, but they're working on getting the hostages out."

"That's something of a relief," Digit said, turning back to thought, "but we can't just stay here and wait. We've got to figure some way out of here."

"There's bound to be something," his brother said. He walked over and examined the door. Suddenly, his face brightened. "I've got it! We'll go out this way!"

"That's Lux-tenbras, remember?" the blue bot pointed out. "I don't think we have anything that can penetrate that. Not without six years to do it in, anyway."

"Yes, the door is made out of Lux-tenbras," Fidget responded, "but these hinges aren't! There's just made of typical metal. That's not easy to break in and of itself, but if we used a super-coolant on it..."

"Then it would become brittle and we would be able to break our way out!" Digit finished. "That's genius!"

Fidget then allowed his brother to climb onto his shoulders. Each of them called up their freeze beams and focused on a specific hinge. It took about fifteen minutes for the beams to work enough for the metal to be affected, and they kept a close watch on their progress.

When the metal had finally reached the amount of brittleness they needed to break the door in, the two pushed as hard as they could. Just as expected, the hinges snapped and the door slid out, allowing the twins to tumble out of their prison.

"Come on," Digit said as he pushed himself onto his feet. "The Inspector said we could meet him at his office. If we hurry, we might be able to alert him to the situation. We should take the stairs using our 'copters; there's no way I'm getting back on that elevator."

"Right, but just one thing first," Fidget answered as they ran. He paused for a moment as they rushed through Sue's larger robotics lab. Sue and Jonathon were both at work to adjust several pieces of damaged tech (though they had paused when they heard the crash the door made), with Marvin supporting one of the larger devices. "Just so you know," the orange bot called out, "we had to break down the door of your chemical wash chamber. Sorry about that, and we can come and fix it later!"

"Also," Digit said, leaning back and pointing at Marvin. "That thing is alive and he is evil! Evil!"
Before anything else could be said, the twins hurried off.

There was a moment of silence as the two humans turned to look at Marvin with some confusion. "Marvin, is that true?" Sue asked, looking intently at the robot.

The little robot gave an awkward smile before groaning. "Stupid spam-bots."

"I told you he was attacking me!" Jonathon exclaimed. "I told you! He was alive all along!"

... "Here we are," Digit said as he and his twin rounded into the stairwell. "We don't have a lot of time!"

"Hopefully the Inspector will be up there," Fidget agreed.

"Go-go Gadget Copter!" both the Gadgetinis called out, and once the summoned apparatuses appeared, they hurried as fast as they could to reach the twenty-second floor.

Adventure Kingdom

Will and Rheeci were the first ones to notice when the two drones moved in, cornering the stunned duo on the floor below them. To make matters worse, a fourth drone came in and converged with them, making things look even worse.

Without hesitating, Rheeci reached over and snatched the computer book from Will, who had frozen in shock. Aiming at the newcomer, she let out a burst of electricity blast, stunning it. "Come on, we've got to do something!" she exclaimed, taking aim again as she spoke.

Forcing himself out of his shock, Will nodded. "Got it. But what can I do?"

"There's got to be something," the girl replied. "There's always something that can be done."

"Always something," the boy muttered to himself. He scanned over the scene and ran his options through his mind. They weren't too far away from the drone, and had they had something that was heavy enough to throw, a toss might have done something to damage the foe. However, everything thing around them was made of lightweight plastic and cloth, meaning that a throw wouldn't be of any avail.

Hope, however, was not completely lost. There was one option that he could see, though he didn't like it all that much.

"Hey, could you aim the freeze ray at the further flying drone?" he asked, backing away from the rail as he spoke. "I've got an idea of something to deal with the closer one."

"Sure thing," Rheeci replied. "What are you go-?"

Before she could finish her question, Will broke off into a run. When he reached the rail, he jumped up, launching himself off the catwalk and onto the nearer drone. The move was sudden and unexpected, and the boy's weight proved too much for the robot. It smashed down to the ground about five feet from Bridgette and Linc, it's flight and defense mechanisms completely decimated by the forced landing.

At the same time, Rheeci unleashed the freeze blast on the farther of the two drones. The blast
caused the propeller systems to become immobilized, causing it to smash to the ground. The weapons system, however, was still working, and like the drone on the ground, it was still firing off at random.

In an effort to avoid the attack, Bridgette and Linc had already sprung up. When she spotted the two downed drones that were still working, she got an idea. "Hey, Linc!" she called out. "Can you reach Mr. Freeze?"

The boy was about to ask what she meant, but caught on quickly. "I'm on it! Can you get to the other?"

"Already there," she replied. Working her way behind the downed drone, she twisted it around so that it was facing the other one. Linc did so as well, so that the drones ended up firing at each other. The tactic did as intended, and both weapons were completely decimated.

All that left was the fourth drone, which had figured out the images it was chasing were holograms. It spun around to try to attack the kids again, but before it could fire, Rheeci hit it with several freeze blasts. It went down near the trio, and Bridgette and Linc were quick to grab ahold and force it to fire on itself, leaving them without any more attackers.

Now that there was a moment of calm, the kids took a pause to catch their breath. "Hey, you okay, man?" Linc asked, going over to help Will to his feet.

Will was still somewhat in a state of shock from his stunt, so it took him a moment to process the question. "Oh, yeah, I'm fine," he said, giving a laugh more of stress than humor. "Just a bit bruised; it could have been worse."

"Where did those things come from?" Rheeci asked.

"They look like they're military drones," Linc said, turning over the chassis of one of the downed weapons. "Prototypes, from the looks of things. Lucky for us, too. Had they been final products, they would have had way more defenses than just an energy shield."

"What this does mean is that the bad guys know where we are," Bridgette said. "We've stopped them for now, but they're bound to come back with a vengeance. We'd better move."

She then turned to Will. "Billy, you were the last one to be with Kayla and Eli. Do you have any idea where they might be now?"

"If they stuck to the plan, they'll be at the Great Central Auditorium," the boy answered. "If that hostage announcement the bad guys gave was right, then that's also where the bomb will be."

"Then that's where we need to be," Linc said.

"Come up this way!" Rheeci called. She was standing at the top of a stairway. "There's a side exit up here. We can take it out and get to the auditorium from there."

The other three nodded and moved in that direction. None of them said a word as they ran, but the sense of urgency could be felt among the four of them. They weren't out of danger just yet, and they'd need to hurry if everyone was going to make it out alright.

...
Shock were not too involved in the argument, since they were still looking for their prey.

"I would have had that dork, if you hadn't kept a better watch on the chick!" Drillbit snarled at Syreen.

"I was keeping a watch on her!" the girl shouted back. "How was I supposed to know they were holograms?"

"It's these stupid drones," Wildfire grumbled. "If we actually had worthwhile tech, than we wouldn't have had that problem."

"Hey, don't blame the tech for your own faulty skills," After-Shock mocked. "You just couldn't hit the side of a barn if it was running right at you!"

"That doesn't even make sense!" Wildfire sneered. "Besides, you haven't done any-!"

"All of you, shut up!" Talon shouted out. Immediately, everyone fell silent and ducked their heads. None of them wanted to endure their boss' wrath.

"Ay," the boy grumbled to himself when it was finally silent. "¿Cómo puede alguien ser tan estúpido?"

Before anyone else could speak, a beeping sound started up. It was coming from the communicator at Talon's side, so he grabbed it and took a look at who was calling. When he saw, his eyes widened. "I've got to take this," he said. "Joltwave, After-Shock, keep looking for those other dorks. Everyone else, don't touch anything."

He then stepped out and activated the communicator. Dr. Claw appeared right on the screen. "Sir," the teen said, hastily giving the salute. "I presume you have important information for me?"

"Indeed," the warlord stated. "All communications with Charybdis have gone through. As it is, we will need some specific items to continue our trade. I want you to go to the Amazon base and tell Anna Reyas to select an agent for a specific mission. While you are down there, I also want you to make sure the local cartels are working with Ms. Reyas as they should."

"It will be a pleasure," the boy responded. "What do you want done with the amusement park?"

"Leave that to me," Claw answered. "I would like to test Mr. Masters personally, and this would be the perfect opportunity. Just make sure your team is ready to go right now."

"We will leave immediately," Talon said with a nod. Once he had given his reply, Claw cut off the connection, causing the screen to go blank.

His meeting now finished, Talon strode back into the room. "Good news, guys," he said, slipping back into his usual tone. "The Boss has a mission for us. We're headed out to the Amazon right now."

"Right now?" Joltwave asked. "But we just found the two twerps!"

"Just let 'em go for now," their head replied with a wave of his hand. "There's only two ways this whole thing can end now: they'll either be blown to smithereens or they'll survive and we'll wipe them out another day. Either way, we don't need to be here right now. Besides, when Claw says you leave now, you leave now."

Without any more protest, the teens logged off and hurried to go where they were told. It was well
known what happened to those who defied Claw.

... Inside the control room, Masters was just about losing his mind. He had been forced to recall his men after a number of them had been trounced by two teens, and another group were held off and shaken by the other four. He had then been assured by Talon that his group were going to deal with the kids, but then four of the six drones had been destroyed! Of the final two, they had taken forever to find them, and the two had already made their way to the bomb by the time their drones has found them, and the others were already on their way to join.

He touched his ear piece repeatedly to get Talon's attention, but all his efforts were rewarded with was silence. Swearing, threatening, and bargaining did nothing at all to get the teen's attention. Whatever, was going to happen, he was going to have to choose something on his own.

Running out of options, he turned to the goon he kept as a guard. "Kenner! Get the gang together and ready to leave. We're blowing this joint."

"Already?" the goon asked. "We said until midnight, and it's only seven o'clock."

Masters vented his spleen on several more words to describe the explanation. "Forget it!" he snapped. "Those meddling little brats are going to ruin everything! We're cutting and running now!"

As he goon ran off to do the bidding, an idea struck the gang boss. He might not have gotten the ransom money he promised to get M.A.D., but there was still one thing he could do to get Claw's favor.

Switching on the camera, he cleared his throat. "Hey, you'd better be listening to this, Inspector Gadget!" he exclaimed. "I've had a change of heart. If you ever want to see your pretty little niece ever again, you'll come here right now and wait at the heart of the park. If you don't come, then she will pay for it."

Switching the camera off, he then began digging around in his pocket for the detonator. He smirked, knowing that once that button was pressed, the park had fifteen minutes until it was ashes. Just enough time for the Inspector to make it to his death.

When he tried to grab the detonator, however, he found to his dismay that it wasn't in his pocket. Neither was that tiny gun he had stashed there either. "Where are those stinking little…" he muttered.

He trailed off when a conspicuous sound, like crickets chirpy filled the air. There wasn't much time to question where the sound was coming from, though, since it was soon punctuated by a loud blast occurring in the closet.

Wasting no time, Masters threw open the closet door. He was forced to step back, though, when he opened it to a gun pointing right at him.

"How did you-?!" he exclaimed.

"Get this?" Penny said, finishing the question. "Wouldn't you like to know. What I can tell you know is that the detonator was destroyed. There's no way you can trigger the explosion now. You are going to let all those people go now, and then you and your goons are going to turn yourselves over to the police without a fight."

Having recovered from his shock, the gangster looked for something to say. He soon got his response when he glanced at the security screen. "Really?" he asked with a laugh. "You really think
that was the only way to trigger the bomb. Take a look over there."

Penny glanced at the screen, though she was careful to keep the gun trained on Masters. To her dismay, the countdown mechanism on the bomb had already been triggered. The countdown had started.

She turned back to her enemy just in time to see him grab a weapon and attempt to fire at her. The weapon, though had been tampered with, and the attempt to used it practically caused a small explosion. He was tossed to a side by the blast and knocked unconscious by the blow against the wall.

Now practically alone, Penny raised her pendant to her mouth, thankful she now had the opportunity to be more active. "Guys, can you hear me?"

"We've got you, Penny," Bridgette replied, "but we've got countdown now. It's at eight minutes, and we're rushing to figure out what's next."

"Alright, I'll see if I can't help you," the blonde said. She tried to project confidence in her voice, but the situation was making her anxious. She just hoped she wasn't making things worse.

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W.O.M.P. HQ

"Alright, it looks like we've finally got it!" Gadget said as he, Quimby, Elliot, and Dana finished setting up the dining set. They had been having a struggle since the two had made it back from the store due to the discovery that the set was too large to take down on the elevator, which meant the four of them needed to find a way to carry the huge table and eight chairs down five flights of stairs. Despite the struggle, the cyber inspector was still in his usual cheery mood.

Of course, he was the only one to have that mood. Having to deal with each carrying two chairs down, and the three men sharing the table at the same time, meant that his three companions were about ready to drop from exhaustion.

They were, however, forced to push themselves back up when they heard his next comment. "You know," he said aloud to himself, "Officer Digit did call me, and they said they were still down in the C.I.A. offices." He gave a small laugh. "I'll bet they're down with Caz and Wayne. Those four all love video games. I'll go run down and check."

"No!" All three exclaimed at once, leaping up to catch the inspector before he could leave.

"No?" Gadget repeated. "Wow, you are all sort of jumpy right now, aren't you?"

"Oh, no, it's not that," Elliot said, racking his mind for some excuse.

"You see," Dana continued, doing the same as her coworker, "It's just…uh…"

Quimby was the one who finally came up with the explanation. "It's just that we didn't want you to end up in the wrong place! After all, you did promise the Gadgetinis that you would meet them in your office!"

"Oh, yeah," the detective said, touching his chin. "I did promise them that, didn't I?" He gave a smile and a shrug. "Well, I'd better head up there."

As he had turned to leave, he paused for a moment. "Hey, Elliot, Dana? You guys are headed down
"Yes," Dana replied with a nod. "We'll be heading there once you're done with the elevator."

"If you see the Gadgetinis down there, could you tell them where I am?" he asked.

"Of course, we will," Elliot assured. "You'd better move along."

"Alright then," Gadget said with a smile. He tipped his hat to them. "Good evening to the both of you. Chief, will you be coming along?"

"Oh, yeah, I suppose," Quimby said, and the two men went along to the elevator.

The trip up to the twenty-second floor went by uneventfully, but as soon as the elevator opened onto the floor, the quiet was broken by the twin robots racing up to them.

"Inspector, there you are!" Fidget exclaimed.

"Inspector, you need hear about Adventure Kingdom right now!" Digit declared.

"Officer Fidget, Officer Digit," Gadget greeted. "Yes, I know about that park. Penny went there today, after all."

"It's more than that!" Digit said, determined to be heard. "It's-!"

"Not really important!" Quimby said, cutting the blue robot off. "It's just and amusement park, that's all."

"It's more than that!" Digit insisted, glaring at the chief for being cut off. "It's important that you know that-!"

"It's going to be opening a new area soon!" the chief put in, cutting the robot off again. "It's looking to be bigger and better than-"

"It's under attack by terrorists and they have Miss Penny!" Fidget finally shouted.

When he heard the words, Gadget turned paper white. "It's what? Who has her?"

"That's what we were trying to tell you," Digit said, calling up a news feed. "The park was taken hostage by terrorists at around three o'clock in the afternoon. They've had it under a bomb threat ever since then, and one of the first things they did was take Miss Penny captive."

"W.O.M.P.'s been monitoring the situation for hours," Fidget added. "Agent Heather and Brain are doing what they can right now to get as many hostages to safety as possible."

A hurricane of emotion was going through Gadget at the moment. He turned to Quimby. "Why wasn't I told?" he asked, and his voice help hurt and a slight edge of anger.

The chief sighed. "What they haven't mentioned is that the hostage takers made an ultimatum. If you showed up, they would kill Penny, and possibly others. We just didn't want to take the chance."

The look of anger in Gadget's face intensified. "You don't think I'd stay away to keep my own niece safe?" he asked, the edge in his voice increasing. "I know I miss a lot of details, but I'm not stupid enough to risk her life like that! I would know not to go, but I would want to be able to keep watch over her situation!"
"I'm sorry, Gadget," the chief started. "It's just that-"

Before he could go one, the news broadcast changed. "It looks like the captors are about to make new demands," the newscaster said. "We'll switch to that feed now."

"Hey, you'd better be listening to this, Inspector Gadget!" All eyes turned to the screen as Masters' voice appeared. "I've had a change of heart. If you ever want to see your pretty little niece ever again, you'll come here right now and wait at the heart of the park. If you don't come, then she will pay for it."

Hearing the demand, a flash of fire appeared in the inspector's eyes. "I will want to talk about this later," he said. Without hesitating a moment, he hurried over to a window, opened it up, and leapt out. "Go-go Gadget Copter!" he called out, and once the device emerged, he hurried off in the direction of the park.

"Not again," Quimby groaned.

Fidget looked up at him. "This isn't the first time he's exited out the window?"

"I'm sorry to say this isn't even the fifteenth time," the chief replied.

"No time for chit-chat now," Digit insisted, taking his brother's arm. "We'd better go too."

"Right," Fidget agreed. The twins then followed the Inspector's example and soon all three were on their way to the park.

To be continued…
Saturday, July 12, 2087

Adventure Kingdom

In the basement tunnels beneath the auditorium, Kayla and Eli hurried down a flight of stairs. The tunnels were mostly for maintenance and to allow for workers to move from one place to another unseen. As such, they had a harsh, stark quality that wasn't very inviting, but made it easy for them to move along in a hurry.

As a result, they made it up to the bomb without too much difficulty. "They're it is," Kayla said. She moved around the device, looking for the timer. "Alright, we've got fifteen minutes. Let's defuse this puppy."

She was about to rip into the timer when Eli caught her wrist. "Wait. Remember what William said: this thing isn't a normal bomb. We've got to get that chemical out before we try to defuse it."

"Alright," Kayla said with a nod. She scanned over the device. She then pointed to a glass orb filled with a blue liquid sitting in the center of the bomb. "I'm guessing it's that."

"So let's just-" Eli began, reaching over to the orb. However, he was cut off when a drone came out of nowhere and physically knocked him aside.

Kayla spun around in response and was just in time to see another drone come in and attempt to hit her. She was just able to move out of the way to avoid the blow, but the device cut between her and the bomb.

"Where did these things come from?" Kayla called out as the grabbed a gun from her belt and fired off a laser blast.

"They probably flew in while we were distracted," Eli called back. He was holding the drone at arm's length, keeping it back as it tried to cut at his face with a knife. Giving it a hard shove, he was able to get it far enough away from him to charge up a blow with his glove, which knocked it even farther back.

The two of them prepared to battle the drones hard. Eli charged up his gloves again, reaching a charge that, if the drone came within reach, he would be able to rip it to shreds. At the same time, Kayla charged up her weapon, ready to give her foe the fight of a life time.

Before the drones could attack, however, they hovered in the air for a moment, before blinking and falling to the ground. The duo wasn't about to take this for granted, but after waiting in vain for two minutes, they suspected their enemies weren't getting up again.

It was then that a voice echoed through the chamber. "Kayla! Eli! Are you down here?"

"We're here, Rheeci," Kayla called out. "We found the bomb, too."

Rheeci, Linc, Bridgette, and Will hurried out of the hallway they were in to join the other two.
"Alright," Linc said, moving in front of the timer. "We're all here now. Between the six of us, we should be able to shut this thing down and in...eleven minutes and sixteen seconds."

"Dr. Bradford helped to design this system," Will said. "If I remember correctly, she said we need to get the chemical out first. We can do that by twisting the vial to the right to close it off, then moving left to get it out."

"Rheeci, you're the most careful one here," Kayla said. "You'd better get it out."

"Got it!" the other girl replied, giving a nervous smile before attending to the job.

It was slow going, but after a small struggle, they were rewarded with a click as the vial sealed shut. "There," Rheeci said, "now we just need to work it out."

As she worked, there came a call at the watch. "Guys, can you hear me?" Penny's voice could be clearly heard in the quiet chamber.

"We've got you, Penny," Bridgette replied, "but we've got countdown now. It's at eight minutes, and we're rushing to figure out what's next."

"Alright, I'll see if I can't help you," the blonde said. "How far have you gotten right now?"

"We've got the container almost out," Linc called, "but we're still going to have to figure out a way to defuse the bombs."

"There's no time," Penny replied. "Each bomb would need to be defused individually yet at the same time, and we don't have the leeway of trial and error. Is there some way to pick the bomb up and move it away?"

"There's a fork-lift right over there," Kayla said, pointing over to a corner.

"I've got it," Linc said, giving a smile. "One hot-wired forklift coming right up."

"Good work, you two," Penny replied. "Will, do you still have the computer book?"

"I've got it right here," the boy answered. He opened the book and started working with the controls. "What do you want me to do?"

"Take out the connection cables and connect them to the forklift's automatic guidance system, if there is one," she answered. "I'm about to use the computer in my pendant to connect up to the book. Once that's done, I can use DEIPHI to get into the forklift and take it down a maintenance tunnel away from the park."

"I'm on it," the boy replied. He made it over to the forklift by the time Linc had gotten it hotwired and, to his relief, that there was an automatic guidance system. Plugging the computer book in, he made sure the connection was set up. "Alright, Penny, you're free to go."

A symbol appeared on the screen showing that a download was happening, followed by the appearance of an asterisk. "I'm in, so you can disconnect and get away," Penny said, her voice clear over the vehicle's speaker system. "Rheeci, do you have the chemical out?"

"It's out and I've got it close," the other girl replied, wrapping her cardigan around the fragile vial as she spoke.

"Good," Penny replied. The forklift then hurried over to the bomb. "I'm taking this down a
maintenance hallway that leads to a loading area that's about two miles away from the park. That should be far enough away to keep anyone from getting hurt. You guys are going to need to set up a force-field between that tunnel and where you guys are. To do that, you guys will need to hook the devices that have force-fields to the computer book. That'll strengthen the barrier."

"Got it," Eli said. He, Kayla, and Will hurried to the tunnel that the forklift had already disappeared down. Moving fast, they hooked the devices together and set up the barrier. The force-field appeared in a moment and completely shut off the entire area.

From there, all the seven could do was wait to hear what happened next.

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Heather was coming out of the park with her second load of escapees and some captured mobsters by the time Gadget and the Gadgetinis arrived. When the sound of helicopter blades could be heard in the distance, the redhead looked up and smiled. "I thought you'd get here pretty fast."

"Sorry we couldn't have been more help," Gadget replied with a small smile. The smile evaporated by the time he had landed. "Where are they? Is Penny safe?"

"To the best of our knowledge" Heather replied. "Brain's still in the park, looking for her, but I haven't heard anything yet. I've been focusing on getting out as many of the hostages as possible, but it's slow going."

"It would probably be best for us to make out way in," Digit suggested, and those around him nodded and moved to make their way into the building.

As they worked their way in, an odd feeling came over Fidget. "Doesn't this place seem pretty empty for having been overrun by terrorists?"

"That's what I thought, too," Heather responded. "When I first came in here, there was the occasional patrol, but it's almost like they've evaporated." She gave a laugh. "Even those were easy to deal with, since their weapons all pretty much self destructed for some reason."

"Still, they've got to be around here somewhere," Gadget said. "He wanted me to come here; he's bound to have something waiting."

"I'd better get back to getting the hostages out," Heather said. "Sunny, Rainy, you two come with me. If the guards are back with them, I may need the assistance."

"Good idea," the inspector responded. "I'll go look for Brain and see if he's caught onto Penny's location."

They split up to continue their jobs, but it wasn't five minutes after Gadget had moved out of eyeshot of the others that the entire park was shaken by an explosion. He was forced to stop and steady himself to keep from falling over. "Wowzers!" he said once the shock-wave had passed. "I've got to find Penny now!"

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When the shock of the explosion had passed, Penny glanced up. She had been able to pull out of the forklift before the explosion, so she was uninjured by a sudden exit. However, she was still feeling the effects of using DElPHI, so he had to take a moment to recover.

Once she had built up enough strength, she grabbed her pendant. The security cameras would,
doubtlessly be messed up by the shock-wave, but her tech was more sturdily made. "Guys?" she said. "You still there?"

There was a moment of pause, but soon, Bridgette's voice came in over the pendant. "We're all here, Penny," she replied. "Pretty shaken up, but we're all good. The barrier stood, just like you said it would."

Breathing a sigh of relief, the blonde gave a smile. "Great. W.O.M.P. should be flooding in any time now, so we'll be home free soon. Over and out."

"See you soon!" the other girl replied.

The call now over, Penny turned to look for some way to pull herself up. Unfortunately, in the time she had taken to help the others, Masters had recovered from the blow, and he now sprang at her and grabbed her by the throat.

"I've had about enough of you," he sneered. "I might not be able to kill you, but I'm going to teach you a lesson, you little-"

Before he could finish his threat, something rushed in and gave a hard blow, forcing him to let go and knocking him onto his back. Whatever it was then landed hard on his chest, pinning him to the ground. The mobster prepared to go into a tirade at whatever it was, but when he opened his eyes, he was struck dumb by the sight of snarling dog.

Realizing who it was, Penny gave a laugh. "Good to see you, Brain," she said, giving the dog an approving nod. "You got here just in time."

Brain turned and gave his girl a concerned look, but then turned back to Masters and let out a threatening growl. The growl gave a clear message of You're not getting out of this.

"Penny, are you down here?" Gadget called, his voice piercing through the atmosphere unexpectedly.

"We're down here, Uncle Gadget!" she called out.

In a moment, he appeared at the doorway. "Penny!" he cried, rushing over to here and taking her into his arms. "I was worried about you!" He took a moment to look at her, and the sight of the bruises on her throat and shoulders caused his heart to stop. "He's hurt you. How did he hurt you?"

In response, Penny hugged him. "It's alright, Uncle," she replied. "I'm a bit bruised, but nothing worse. Thanks to you and Brain, I'm going to be alright."

Gadget bit his lip in frustration. His eyes passed between Penny and Masters, and it was clear he didn't want to drop the topic. However, he then sighed. "Alright," he said, relaxing and returning the embrace. "It's going to be alright."

He then stood up and scooped Penny into his arms. "Brain," he said, "please keep the suspect here. Someone will come to pick him up on a moment."

"So you're seriously leaving me here with the mutt?" Masters asked. He then shut his mouth hard when Brain let out another growl.

"I'd be careful about that," Penny called out. "Brain doesn't like being called a mutt."

It didn't take too long for them to find her wheelchair, which was still where it had been left that
afternoon. By that time, the who park was swarming with police officers and W.O.M.P. agents, who were escorting the former hostages back to their friends and families outside.

The lone exception to the rule was the families of Penny's crew. All of them were gathered in an area away from the entrance where they couldn't be seen, and each has gathered in their groups. Will and Linc's parents were there, as was Mrs. Tomblin for Kayla. Rheeci, Will, and Bridgette's parents were also there, as were a number of siblings, both older and younger.

When they saw the Gadget clan come up, the kids broke away from their families. "Penny!" Kayla called out. "Are you alright?"

"They didn't hurt you, did they?" Rheeci asked.

Penny laughed and waved her hand. "No worse than usual. I'll live."

At that moment, Chief Quimby and Agent Heather wandered over to join the group. "Penny," the chief said, "we have been having a hard time figuring out what went on in here, but we suspect you had something to do with it. We'll want a statement, but let me say in advance, good job, whatever it was you did."

"Thanks," Penny said, "but it wasn't just me. I just got the bomb away from the park last minute. It was all of us," she here motioned to the six teens standing next to her. "It was them who did most of the leg work. Without them, we all would have been doomed."

Quimby nodded, giving a small smile. "I might have expected that," he replied. "Now, I'm going to have to ask that everyone but Penelope, Elijah, Lincoln, Therese, Bridgette, William, Kayla, and their parents and guardians to step away. What's about to be discussed is confidential."

Hearing this statement, the younger of the siblings began to protest the declaration, but after a while, the older Tran kids were able to get the other to move away. In the end, only those who related to the discussion were left.

Once they were on their own, the seven began to explain what had happened when the park was taken over. Occasionally, the Chief or Heather would pipe in to state what W.O.M.P. was doing, but each of the kids was given the opportunity to tell their part of the story, giving the details on what happened. When they were finished, the teens paused to hear what the adults would say.

Elle Washington was the first to speak up. She gave a dry laugh before speaking. "I don't think anyone can say we liked that you kids took them on," she said, looking directly at her sons, "but I can say I am proud with how you were working to get help. I wish you could have complied for safety sake, but from the terrorists' response, it seems that they would have killed you either way because of the…the past." It was clear she didn't like the memory of her sons' crime fighting involvement. "The path you took was risky, but from what was happening, it doesn't seem like there was much else that could be done."

"I'm afraid there will be consequences, though," Quimby said with a sigh. "If you kids wouldn't mind stepping back for a moment, I'd like to have a word with the adults." He cast a nervous, apologetic glance at Gadget. "We'll be discussing and laying out new boundaries, with parents and guardians as active participant."

Gadget crossed his arms. "It's a start."

As they adults all turned to discuss what was to be done, Penny looked up at her friends. "You know," she said, her own tone becoming serious, "there's something we need to discuss, too."
There was a moment of awkward silence as everyone waited for someone else to start the conversation. When no one did, Penny sighed and decided to take the role herself. "We only survived today because we worked together," she stated. "Had any one of us been missing, we wouldn't have made it out. I want to have all of your help in the future, but if we're going to do that, we need to be able to work together."

There was a mumbling of agreement from the other six, but no one said anything clearly. The ball was still in Penny's hands.

"Bridgette," she said, turning her gaze on the redhead, "Kayla's told me a lot about your journalism skills. I think you could help us a lot with our work, and I do want to have your help. However, Will is my friend, and I will not be pressured into ostracizing him because of bad blood you two had when you were little. If you cannot let bygones be bygones, then there will be nothing I can ask of you."

Bridgette stiffened for a moment before sighing. She turned to Will and bit her lip. "I guess we can work together," she said. "I guess we can work together," she said. "It was a long time ago, and it was pretty cool of you to save me an' Linc back in that maze." She closed her eyes before holding out her hand. "I still don't trust you completely, but I'm willing to give you a chance to earn it."

"That's all I ask," Will said, giving a small smile. "I really am sorry for what happened, and I hope we can both just start over."

"And Will," Penny said, coming up to him and taking his hand, "please, don't be too hard on yourself. We all have things we are ashamed of in our pasts, and beating yourself up over it isn't going to do any good. All we can do is work to make our future better than our past, and it's easier to do so with some help."

The boy looked down, still not meeting her eyes but giving a smile. "I do like having some help."

"I'm sorry we acted so badly before," Rheeci added, going over and hugging Will, much to the boy's shock.

Eli nodded and patted Will's shoulder. "I'm sorry, too. We should have given you a chance."

"I suppose we all deserve a second change," Kayla said with a sigh. "Sorry about getting so snippy with you before, Billy."

"That's alright," the boy responded. "I kind of deserved it. Also, please don't call me Billy. I prefer William or Will."

"I guess there are just some things that instantly unite people," Linc said with a laugh. "I guess fighting for your survival is one of them."

With that, the kids began speaking causally of what had occurred. They did their best to distract themselves as they awaited what the parental response would be.
Seeing that the scientist was asleep, she went over to the cluttered desk, grabbed the largest book on it, and slammed it down with a bang. Immediately, Kramer's head shot right up. "I'm up!" he yelped.

"Yes, I can see that," Reyas replied with an eye roll.

Realizing who it was who was speaking to him, the scientist sprang to his feet. "M-Ms. Reyas!" he said, trying to force a smile. "W-what a surprise. What brings you here?"

"I have just received word that Dr. Claw's nephew has arrived," the lieutenant answered. "No doubt Dr. Claw will want to know how the robotics program is working."

"Oh, yeah, that," Kramer said, turning to try to gather his papers. "It's…uh…it's coming along."

"Coming along?" Reyas asked. "As in not finished?"

"I'm having a hard time in getting the units to respond the way we want them to," Nick clarified. "I can get typical robotic behaviors, but I can't get them to response with any amount of awareness. Maybe the adjustments we made to the base Gadgetinis model was too much of a change."

"Dr. Claw's not going to accept that answer, and neither do I," the woman said with a sneer. "Figure it out what's wrong and fix it."

"I'm trying, but it's hard to work when I'm being watched," he replied.

"Well, then you must always be under observation," Reyas responded sarcastically.

"Now that you mention it," Kramer said, "there are sometimes, when I'm all alone, that it feels like I'm being watched by something that's not human…"

"Just do your job!" the woman snapped.

"Ah, I see Defecto there's not living up to his potential." Reyas and Kramer turned to see Talon coming into the room. "Excuse me, Señora," the boy said with a bow, "but I presumed it would not be a problem if I invited myself in."

"There is no problem at all," Reyas replied. "It's just so hard to get any information from this idiot. Now, I suppose you bring word from Dr. Claw?"

"Indeed," the teen said with nod. "He has sent me and my team into deal with your rival cartel problems. There one other bit of business, first. How are your cybers coming along?"

"Oh! I've just about finished up work with them!" Kramer piped in, glad to have something positive to contribute. "Their mechanics are all settled in…"

He had trailed off because the other two individuals in the room had glared at him. The scientist now silenced, Reyas gave her answer. "Indeed, they are ready for anything. What does Claw require?"

"A jewel thief," Talon replied. "Preferably one who has quite a bit of experience."

"I have just the man," the lieutenant said with a smile. "Dr. Claw will not be disappointed."

The teen gave a laugh. "I hope not. It never turns out well when Claw is disappointed."
After his arrest, Masters had assumed that he was going to be brought right to prison. Much to his surprise, however, he had been taken from W.O.M.P. custody to that of a typical police officer who brought him to another car. The officer had assured the W.O.M.P. agent that he was on strict orders to handle the head of the terrorism outbreak, and that the criminal would be delivered to their custody once Homeland was finished with him. They paperwork must have checked out, because he was handed over without too much fuss.

The mobster figured out pretty quickly that it wasn't Homeland who had picked him up when they police car drove into a plane. That was several hours ago, and the plane had now landed within a castle, the handcuffs were taken off, and he was now being lead through the huge building.

It didn't take too much for Masters to guess that this was some M.A.D. base. It was big, full of a variety of agents and their Chimera, and had the feel of place where no one talked about what went on.

"So, Talon wants to see me, huh?" he asked one of his guards. When the man didn't respond, he went on. "Suits me just fine. I've got quite a bit I want to tell that little punk."

He was ushered to a doorway, which one of the guards motioned to. "Enter in here," the man said. "You will be addressed here and then sent back." Without another word, the guards left.

Masters entered the room, which was a large office. There was a desk with a large chair in the center of the room, and the chair was turned away from the doorway. The gangster had no doubt who was there.

"So, you finally want to talk to me, huh brat?" Masters spat out several names offensive to teens and Mexicans. "I was floundering in there!" he snapped after he had vented his spleen. "You left me high and dry, right after you failed at eliminating those vermin!" He spat out several choice words, along with descriptions of the teenager that would not be fit for print. "So, you think you can just bring me here and tell me what to do, huh, do you, you little twerp?! Well, you've got another thing coming!"

"I assure you," the person in the chair responded, and the voice was most certainly not Talon's, "I know exactly what it is within my power to do."

Masters turned a deathly pale when he realized who it was he had just spent three minutes swearing at. "D-Doctor Claw," he said, backing down quickly and giving an anxious laugh. "I really wasn't expecting to meet you."

"I am aware of that," the villain replied. He turned around to face the mobster, and a huge tom cat jumped up on the desk at the same time. "I had different, more important job for my nephew, so I chose to take on this little business for myself."

"Uh, so, uh, are you doing well?" Masters asked, his mind racing fast to think of something to say. He was growing more and more uncomfortable with every passing moment, and the way the Chimera cat was staring at him didn't help.

"There is no time for small talk right now," Claw responded. He began stroking the cat and his voice remained level, but that didn't make the atmosphere any less tense. "Right now, we are going to discuss your little performance at the park."

"Th-that wasn't my fault!" the thug sputtered out. "It was Talon! He didn't tell me enough about those kids to get my men ready, and then he was the one who failed to kill them!"

"Calm yourself," the overlord stated. "I am not angered with you for your failure to keep the park.
Your little stunt did exactly what I wanted it to do. It kept W.O.M.P.'s eyes away from any communications that M.A.D. was preforming. Now that business is finished, so I don't need the park anymore."

"What's more," he went on, "this stunt gave me one more bit of information. I was able to gauge Penny Gadget's abilities in a situation where her actions were distinct from her uncle's. Though most of the actions were done by her minions, this proved at least she does well in choosing those who will be an asset of hers. We will have to keep a closer eye on those companions of hers."

"Oh, so that's all, huh?" Masters felt relief flooding him. "That's great to hear. Now, if you don't mind, I had better be getting back to-"

"Did I tell you that you could leave?" Claw asked.

The gangster immediately froze. "Well, no, but I assumed-"

"As long as you are within my organization, you will assume nothing." The overlord's voice never changed tone, but that didn't keep the malice from being very apparent. "I said that I was not angered with you because of your loss at the hands of Miss Gadget; I never said I was not upset with you."

He then motioned to a seat near the desk. "Take a seat."

Masters' stomach sank as he looked at the chair, which put him at an uncomfortable closeness to the tom cat. "I'd rather stand."

"I don't remember asking," was the only response.

Realizing the position he was in, Masters took a breath and did as he was ordered. He still pressed himself as far back in the chair as he could, hoping this was enough to keep the cat away from him.

"You do realize how you greeted me today was not exactly what I was expecting, don't you?" Claw asked.

"He-heh, yeah, that," the mobster said, his mind racing for any excuse. "I didn't realize it was you."

Claw's voice lowered. "No, you thought you were going to be confronting my nephew. However, since Talon is one of my top-ranking captains, that still isn't a good sign. After all, if you feel that you have the right to verbally abuse a captain when you haven't even joined yet, what's going to be stopping you from trying to perform a coup later?"

"I would never-!" Masters started, but once again he was cut off.

"I have had men killed for much less than that." The crime boss lifted his hand, allowing the cat to get up and stalk closer to his victim. "I'm sure you have heard about my pet's specific abilities, haven't you?"

In response, the cat stretched out, unsheathing his claws. The clear liquid that leaked out of its claws made the intended impression.

Not even waiting for his victim to respond, Claw went on. "Fortunately for you, I need to send you back to W.O.M.P. If you were to turn up dead before then, things would look suspicious, and the last thing I need is an investigation. Thus, I'll give you this one order: make no mention of M.A.D. when you are asked about the previous events. You were on a power high after gaining those tools and you bit off more than you could chew. Do I make myself clear?"

"Of course!" Masters exclaimed. "You couldn't be clearer."
"Good," the overlord replied. "Now get out of my sight, before I change my mind." It was less than a moment before Claw was alone with the cat.

The tom strode up and made a disappointed mewing sound. Claw laughed as he stroked the Chimera. "Do not worry. That oaf will not have any chance of spilling any secrets. Mr. Monsaylan has assured me that he'll make sure his new cell mate will be silenced forever."

The cat made another sound, this time a sharper yowl. The man nodded in response to this sound. "Yes, it is about time for your feeding. Do not worry; I have just the prey for you…"

Teen Scene Headquarters, Downtown Metro City

Even though it was still late at night, Jessie Harbain still sat at her desk. With all the events that had happened that day, interest in Penny Gadget had skyrocketed. Unfortunately for tabloids like the one she worked at, W.O.M.P. had blocked any and all attempts at interviews with the girl, so writing anything except what was already common knowledge was out of the question; a bleak outlook for a gossip rag like that one.

She was brooding so much over what she was going to write that she almost missed the sound of her cell phone. "Answer phone, speaker," she called out, not even bothering to turn her eyes away from her computer.

"Uh, hello?" The voice on the phone was that of a teenage boy, and not one that Harbain recognized. "Is this Teen Scene's Jessie Harbain?"

"This is she," the reporter replied. "I'm very busy right now. What is it you want?"

"I heard you'll pay good money for anonymous tips," the boy answered. "Is this true?"

Harbain gave a look of annoyance when she heard the question. It was often that she got this request, and more often than not, the tips were worthless. "It depends on what the info's on, and how juicy it is," she said. "Right now, kid, if it's not some dirt on Penny Gadget, you might as well go elsewhere."

"Uh, it is on Penny Gadget," the boy replied. "I was one of the hostages in the park today, and I noticed she was with six other kids. I go to school now with most of them, and I knew the other two from my elementary school. I can give you their names, if the price is right."

The reporter silently rolled her eyes. "Kid, any number of teens are going to be claim to be dating, best friends with, or lab partners with Penny. You've got to do better than that."

"What if I gave you a pic?" the boy asked.

"That would help a bit more, but I'd have to see if before I paid," Harbain answered.

"Go on social media and search for zillafan875," the boy answered. "It'll be the first pic you see."

Normally, the gossip writer would have ignored the instruction, but for lack if anything else to do, she followed the sight. There, she found the pic from earlier that morning. "Alright, there's Penny with three black kids, a redhead, an Asian girl, and some Latino kid in glasses, none of who are interesting, all standing in front of a fountain. Unless we're running the diversity issue, this isn't going to be pay worthy."
The boy's next question was entirely unexpected. "What if I told you the Mexican kid is a Scolex?"

"Did you say 'Scolex'?" Harbain repeated. "As in Irving 'Dr. Claw' Scolex?"

"And Talon Scolex's twin brother," the boy affirmed.

The reporter gave a smile at the information. She'd have to do more research into these kids before it would be story worthy, but this tip was suddenly looking much more valuable. "Give me your ChargeFriend account, and I'll give you $100 for the pic, $75 for everything you've got on the Scolex boy, and $25 each for what you've got on the others. Not going a dollar more."

"That'd be the easiest $300 I've ever made," the boy replied. "You've got yourself a deal."

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

So a mission is finished, but a new can of worms is on the verge of being opened. Log in next time to see where our heroes lives will go! Hope to hear from you!-
SilverWarriorWolf.

P.S.: the reference that Kramer made to something inhuman watching him has ties to R.A.G.E., a group from Systemcat's Iron and Steel fan comic. If you want to find out just what they were doing spying on a M.A.D. scientist, I suggest you check out her comic, which is available on both Comic Fury and Deviantart.
Wednesday, July 23, 2087

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Are you sure this is alright?" Gagdet asked. He and Heather were standing outside of a virtual reality chamber, where inside, Penny was hard at work with a boxing simulator. "It seems kind of dangerous."

"You need to relax, Gadget Boy," the young woman replied with a smile. "It's way safe. Safer than the way I learned, at least."

"Well, yeah, but why does Penny need boxing lessons?" The man peered in nervously as his niece faced her virtual opponent. "I never had them, and I turned out fine."

"Yes, but unlike you, she doesn't have a laser she can pull out of her thumb at a moment's notice." Heather glanced over at her partner. "What's with you? After the way you went ballistic at that meeting after W.O.M.P. intelligence hid that whole terrorist ordeal from you, I'd think you would have been happier that they were allowing Charm to utilize this tech for self-defense treatment."

"I don't like the idea of Penny getting into a fist fight, be it in a ring or against a M.A.D. agent," he answered, extending his neck to get a better view into the chamber as he spoke. "I promised her mother I'd keep her safe, and with all this, I..." He then trailed off, unable to find the words. "I just don't like her being in harm's way, that's all," he finally finished, retracting his neck so fast there was an audible click as it reached its proper length.

The redhead laughed and patted his shoulder. "Don't you worry," she said in a calming tone of voice. "This is only a precaution. Like the chief said, from now on, you have 100% say over everything related to her safety. No one's hiding anything, and she's not going into any missions that you don't give the O.K. on."

At that moment, Penny finished up her final match and hurried out of the virtual reality chamber. Grabbing a towel and water bottle, she took a long drink. "Man, I don't know how you do it," she said, casting a glance over at Heather. "Even without the getting hit in the face part, that wasn't easy."

"You did pretty good in there, kid," the older girl responded.

Hearing the praise, the blonde casted an unbelieving look. "I got knocked out six times in ten minutes," she replied with a snort.

Heather laughed at the response. "Just give it time, Charm. Rome wasn't built in a day."

"So, Uncle Gadget," Penny said, turning her attention to her relative. "What do you think of the VR chamber?"

"It's very well done," Gadget replied, swallowing the doubts he had previously been expressing. "Brenda and her students clearly worked hard on it. I am glad that you don't actually have to spar an opponent because of it."
"Ohhh!" a sickeningly sweet voice called out. "There they are now! Team Gadget! Team Gadget, over here!"

The trio turned to realize they were being approached by Mayor Wilson and her entourage. Chief Quimby was with them, too, and he had a look of exasperation on his face. "I'm sorry," he said as they approached the trio. "I told her that I could deliver the message, and that she really shouldn't be disturbing a training session."

"Oh, but they're not training," Wilson said, giving a dismissive wave. "Look, Pebby's not even in that big training-thingy over there."

"Uh, my name is Penny," the teen tried to pipe in, but the only people who paid attention to her were the ones who didn't need the correction.

"Now, Inspector, I have just the most exciting news for you and your team!" the mayor said, moving so close to Gadget that even he was somewhat uncomfortable with it. "The Metro City museum is going to be sending several valuable artifacts to the Museo Nacional de Antropología! Specifically, that pretty ruby bat we got from them two years ago! Isn't that so exciting?"

"I guess," Gadget replied, trying his best not to seem put off by the mayor's familiarity or confused by her commentary.

"Let me explain," Quimby. "Two years ago, after you were kidnapped by Freymore, the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City donated two artifacts from their museum to the Metro City Museum of Anthropology and the Museum of Archeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, England. They had a three-piece jewel carving that was discovered in a Mayan ruin in the mid-2030's. They are commonly called Los Príncipes de la Tierra, el Agua y la Atmósfera, or The Princes of Land, Water, and Air in English. We received El Príncipe de la Tierra y Atmósfera, which is a large ruby carved in the shape of a bat. Cambridge receive a sapphire otter, El Príncipe de el Agua y la Tierra, and Mexico City kept El Príncipe de la Atmósfera y el Agua, the emerald duck."

"So I'm guessing it's time to send the bat and the otter back, huh?" Heather asked.

"You got it!" Wilson flashed another of her sickeningly sweet smiles before pausing. "I'm afraid I don't know who you are."

"Heather Connelly," Heather replied, holding out her hand. "I'm Inspector Gadget's partner. We met before the whole Freymore incident."

Hearing this, the mayor frowned. "You're his partner? I thought Pebby was."

"My name is Penny, and I'm his trainee, not his partner," Penny piped up in an annoyed tone of voice.

"Yes, yes, that's nice to know," Wilson said, patting the top of Penny's head before turning back to Gadget. "Now, that's where you come in. The Mexican government wants to have this big shin-dig to celebrate the return of the bat and the otter, so they also want to have the tip top of security, so they asked for you specifically! Isn't that just wonderful?"

"That is good," Heather said, "but why are you telling us? Shouldn't they have contacted W.O.M.P. directly if they wanted our assistance."

"Unfortunately, not everyone seems to understand that W.O.M.P. is an independent entity," Quimby replied with a sigh. "The Mexican government tried to contact General Sir directly, but the person in charge of making the connection didn't know who to contact and sent it to the mayor's office.
"Not that a little hiccup like that matters at all," Wilson said with a bright smile. "It's the perfect chance to show the voters how I'm willing for to reach out and make connections with other governments. So, inspector, I'll be dependent on you, Pebby, and Hallie to make a good impression!"

If looks could have killed, Wilson would have dropped dead from the glares Penny and Heather were shooting at her.

Before any answer about the mission could be given, however, they were interrupted by another voice. "Oh, Inspector Gadget! There you are!" The group turned to see Lana Lamour coming in. The actress gave a wave before moving over, showing Wilson out of the way and hooking her arm around Gadget's arm. "Oh, I'm so glad I caught you here," she said in a honey-sweet voice. "I hope you don't mind, but I have a teeny-tiny favor to ask you for."

"Miss Lamour, what are you doing in here?" Quimby asked, growing more and more frustrated by W.O.M.P.'s apparent lack of security protocols. "This building is for authorized personnel only."

In response, the blonde flashed a guest badge in the chief's face. "It's signed and everything," she said with a laugh. "Go ahead and look it up. It's all one hundred percent official."

Quimby clearly was not happy with the situation, but gave a nod. "Everything does appear to be in order," he admitted.

"Now, Johnny," she said, turning and batting her eyes at the inspector, "like I was saying, I have just a teeny-tiny favor to ask of you. You see, my cousin is a grad student at Metro City University, and she has recently come on some old K.A.O.S. technology. It's nothing major, just some old robotic, but her professor would be ever so grateful if you and your team went to check it out, staring tomorrow. You can handle that, now can't you?"

"Well, Ms. Lamour-" Gadget started, but he was cut off in a moment.

"I'm sorry, Laney," Wilson said, moving back in to show Lamour aside, "but he's already going on a good-will mission to Mexico for me."

"From what I heard, he hadn't decided on that silly-old Mexico trip," Lana replied, pushing back against the mayor. "Besides, you can't really expect Inspector Gadget to stoop to something as silly as security guard work."

"Tech repair is even sillier," Wilson retorted. She was trying to keep her mawkish tone of voice, but it was becoming clear that Lamour was getting to her. "Now, if you could just-"

"Alright, both of you, keep quiet!" Quimby snapped, cutting off the cat-fight before it could advance. He held up a communicator, showing the paperwork on it. "Apparently, W.O.M.P. has been contacted about both these missions and have approved both of them. Gadget, you have seniority, so you can decide which one you'll go on."

"They both sound very important," the inspector replied, touching his chin. After a moment of thought, he turned to his niece. "Penny, would you mind staying back here and checking up the tech at the university? Mechanics really aren't my thing."

"I'd be happy to," the girl replied with a smile. "I've been wanting to see the technological archeology department there for a while, anyways. Brain and the Gadgetinis can go with you to help with the protection."
"Oh, that would be a bit of a problem," Lana cut in. "You see, Dr. Spectrum, the head of the tech department, has insisted that a full W.O.M.P. agent come and investigate. A junior agent alone just wouldn't cut it."

"That's alright," Heather responded. "I'd be happy to stick around and going with Charm."

"Wonderful suggestion, Heather," Gadget replied with a bright grin. "I'll take the Officers and Brain with me to the museum."

Neither of the women who had been arguing looked too pleased with the solution, but at the same time, it didn't seem that they wanted to push the issue. "If that's what it must be," Wilson said, crossing her arms.

"I suppose it will do," Lana replied. There was then a buzz in her purse. Hearing the call, the actress grabbed her phone out of it and looked at the message. "Oh, well, look at that! I'd better be off." She gave a wave to the group before leaving. "Well, toodles. Be sure to mention me to Thelma later."

With that, she hurried out.

"I'd better be going, too," Wilson said, straightening her suit jacket as she left. "Important business about the campaign, you know. Good luck, Inspector." Having said her piece, she turned and left, taking her train with her.

Once they were alone, the W.O.M.P. employees turned to each other. "I'm sorry, you three," the chief said with an apologetic sigh. "I really have no idea how they were able to barge in like that. I'll have to have a word with our security staff very soon."

"Don't feel bad, chief," Gadget replied. He had now recovered and straightened his coat and hat. "The missions been given and we all know what we're supposed to do. I had better tell the Officers and Brain to get ready for our mission. I assume you ladies will be able to handle the university."

"We'll get there by my bike," Heather said with a smile. "The side car should be able to handle the wheelchair."

"Wait, 'bike?'" Hearing this, Gadget's face fell. "As in motorcycle?"

"Yeah, you've seen it," the redhead replied with a nod.

"I'd rather leave the Gadgetmobile here," the cyber said with a frown. "Motorcycles can be dangerous."

"I'll be fine, Uncle," Penny responded, touching his arm to try to console him. "Like Heather said, there is the sidecar, and I'll wear a helmet."

"I'm not comfortable with the motorcycle, and that's my final say," Gadget said. He gave Penny a smile and placed a hand on her shoulder. "I know you'd be careful, but it's not something I want to risk."

The girl opened her mouth as if she was about to argue, but she caught herself. "Alright, Uncle. If that's what makes you feel better."

"It does," he responded. He then turned to look at Heather. "We can take a cab once we reach Mexico, and I'll leave the keys with you."

The young woman shrugged. "Sounds good to me. It's several miles off my bike." She then turned to the chief. "So, shall we head out?"
"I'd say so," Quimby replied. "And we'd better book it, before someone else shows up to add anything else!"

Deboir Enterprises, Main Headquarters, Metro City

Within his office, Deboir was pacing anxiously. Nearby, Heffernan and Almos were sitting at a break table, playing a round of poker. "Hey, can you give it a rest," Heffernan called to the politician. "You're making me dizzy."

"Easy for you to say," Deboir snapped back. "You're not the one with campaign interests hanging on whether or not some ditzy actress can pull off a mission."

"I'd watch that mouth of yours, if I was you," Almos said, not even looking up from his cards. "Ms. Lamour is one of Dr. Claw's best agents for a reason. I wouldn't want to end up on her bad side."

"Oh, right, like I'm going to be worried about some small time Marylin Monroe impersonator," the politician said scornfully. "What's she going to do, stab me with her stiletto heel?"

"It wouldn't be the first time I've pulled that tactic, but I don't think I'd waste the effort on you." The men all looked up as Lana herself entered the room. She flashed a smirk at Deboir. "You'd just have one of these two gentlemen deal with. I have bigger fish to fry, and they are quite keen about that portion of the job. Aren't you, boys?"

Neither of the men gave a verbal answer, but they didn't need to. The smiles they flashed at the idea was enough to prove her statement correct.

Seeing this, Deboir edged away from the two grunts. "So, Lana," he said, picking up a much more amiable tone, "I assume you were able to complete your goal, right? If something happens to that bat, it's horrible publicity for Wilson."

"Unfortunately, that bag was able to beat me to Gadget," the female agent replied. As spoke, she pulled a compact mirror out of her purse and started to apply some lipstick. "Gadget's going to Mexico."

Hearing this, Deboir groaned. "You mean you failed!"

"Not completely. You didn't let me finish." Lana finished up applying her makeup before tucking the mirror back into her purse. "Gadget's going to Mexico, but he's only taking the robots and that dog. The redhead and his niece will be staying behind. Handling him and those little accessories should be no problem for Carrillo, so you should have nothing to worry about."

The politician just wordlessly grumbled before going back to his desk.

The actress got up to leave, but before she could make it to the door, she paused. "Oh! I nearly forgot! Richard, did my package from Dr. Wildman come in yet?"

"It's right over there," Heffernan responded, pointing to a box sitting in the corner. "He said the NIMH-serum should have kicked in by now, so it'll be safe to touch."

"Wonderful!" She walked over to the box and opened it up. As soon as the box was opened, pulled a white ferret that was a little bit smaller than normal. "Hello, there," she cooed, grabbing another bag out of the box and placing the ferret in it. "You're going to be a big help to Mommy."
"What's that?" Deboir sneered upon seeing the animal. "You really think some rat that's been through a taffy-stretch is really going to be any use."

"Don't sneer at Snowflake," Lana warned. "He might not look like much, but he's a Chimera as much as anything else, and a NIMH-Chimera, too, so he can understand everything you say. Part ferret, part vampire bat, all an assassin's dream."

Deboir was about to scoff again, but a look in the Chimera's eyes caused him to freeze. The creature appeared to smile at him knowingly, and it opened it mouth, revealing extra-long and thick canines and incisors with a curve to them, doubtlessly the gift of its bat ancestry. The look of malice in the face caused the man to feel uneasy, so he slumped into a silence.

"Alright, boys, I've got to start training Snowflake, so I'll be leaving. Don't lock me out, alright?"

With that, she pranced out of the room, leaving the men in utter silence.

Thursday, July 24, 2087

Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, Mexico

"Here we are, Officers!" Gadget said. They had just arrived at the museum and were entering. "Remember, we're here to guard, not to mingle. Feel free to talk with the people at the Gala, but our purpose is to make sure no one snatches those jewels."

"You can count on us, Inspector!" Digit said as he and his brother gave a salute.

"Glad to hear it," the inspector replied with an approving nod. "You two will be staking out other areas of the museum as well. Brain, you're going to be with me tonight."

The dog gave a nod and a whuff of assent before turning his nose to the ground.

"Alright, then let's move out." Gadget moved into the museum, holding the door open for his assistants to enter in.

The gala had already started by the time they had arrived, so the whole place was already abuzz. People were everywhere, looking at museum exhibits, enjoying food, and generally chatting. As such, the whole place had a rather crowded feel to it.

Gadget looked around, trying to find the museum's curator, Edwardo Fernandes. He had been hoping the staff would be wearing name tags, but this did not appear to be the case. Instead, he and Brain wandered over to one of the conversing groups.

"Go-go Gadget Translator, code word: Spanish," Gadget whispered before approaching. When he heard the beep that signaled that the translator was working, he went up to the group. "Excuse me, but can any of you tell me where the museum's curator is? I need to speak with Mr. Fernandes as soon as possible."

The translator took a moment to register before it repeated his question. "Por desgracia, el comisario me dijo? Quiero hablar tanto como sea posible, el Sr. Fernández." it stated in a mechanical sounding voice.

The group looked at each other, completely confused by what was stated. Gadget, assuming they didn't hear what he said, repeated his question, but unfortunately that didn't help very much.
Thankfully, at that moment, he was approached by an older gentleman. "Inspector Gadget?" he asked.

"That would be me!" the detective replied with a smile.

"Lo," the translator stated.

The man looked confused for a moment before waving his hand. "I am Sr. Fernandes," he stated, holding out his hand. "I was hoping to see you here, Inspector. Also, I can speak English. There's no need for the translator."

"Alright then," Gadget responded with a nod. "Go-go Gadget Translator, codeword: off." There was a slight beep to signal that the device had turned off. "There. Now, Sr. Fernandes," the cyber said with a smile. "What is it you would like me and my men to do?"

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It wasn't ten minutes after the Gadgetinis has went into the room to begin their mission that the two them were separated. The fact that they were only three feet tall did not help their situation, nor did the fact that there were multiple non-sentient robots wandering around with trays to gather dishes or offer food.

Thus, it was very soon that Fidget looked up and realized his brother was nowhere to be seen. He glanced around the room, trying to get his barings. "Digit," he called into his communicator. "Where are you?"

"Where am I?" his twin responded, a tone of annoyance in his voice. "I'm doing what we're supposed to be doing, staking out the museum."

"Alright, then," the orange bot asked. He froze for a moment as someone came over to him and handed him several glasses, but he recovered quickly. "So, where are you? You know, so I can join you."

"I'm in the Inca exhibit," Digit answered. "It's relatively empty at the moment so I thought it'd be a good place to start out."

"Inca exhibit, got it," Fidget repeated. He paused for a moment to take several plates from a woman who was passing. "I'll be there in a moment."

He searched the room to do find an actual dish-bot and drop off his load before hurrying off to join his twin. Thankfully, one was nearby, so he was able to make sure the dirty dishes were sent off and he could go off on his actual job.

It wasn't too hard for him to find a map, so he was able to head out on his rout pretty easily. As he was walking, however, he heard something that made him pause.

He was passing a janitor's closet when he heard voices coming from it. "Alright, remember, Data," a female voice with an English accent to it was saying, "we're supposed to watch them right now. We're not supposed to deal with them unless they interfere with Mum's mission."

"I know, Scooter," a second, younger woman's voice with the same accent responded. "I do wish we could have had a better meeting, though."

Hearing the two women, Fidget's interest was sparked. He turned and knocked on the door. "Hello? Is someone in there?"
There was no response, so the orange bot opened up the door. To his disappointment, there was no one there. Even a scan proved that the closet held no humans within. Supposing he had just heard something, he shut the door and turned back to joining Digit.

By the time he had made it to the exhibit, the blue twin had already set up an amount of security measures around the room. "There you are," Digit called out, hurrying to join his brother. "What kept you?"

"I thought I heard something," Fidget said.

"Really?" Digit gave a thoughtful frown. "Anything that might be a threat to the jewel statues?"

"I don't knight," the orange twin answered. "It was two British women calling themselves Data and Scooter talking about a mission in a janitor's closet. I knocked, but when I opened the door, there was no one there."

Digit processed the information and shook his head. "Disappearing British woman with strange names who were talking about a mission? That means nothing to me."

"Me neither," Fidget agreed.

"Well, we can keep it in mind for later," the blue bot responded. "Right now we need to focus on setting up protective measures for the jewel."

"Right, I'm on it!" his brother stated with a salute. With that, both turned back to continuing their mission.

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Earlier that same day
Metro City University, Metro City

The bright afternoon sun reflected intensely off the polished white stone and glass of the university tech labs. It would have been near impossible to miss even if there weren't signs everywhere pointing out the destination. This was to the advantage of Penny and Heather, who were at that moment making their way from the visitor's parking center to the big building.

"So, Charm," Heather commented as they reached the building. "You mentioned earlier you wanted to check this place out. What interested you?"

"This place has made multiple important discoveries about the past and developed new inventions in the past decade," Penny responded as she pressed the button to open the door. "Dr. Spectrum, who the head of Technological Research and Development here, has been overseeing a lot of project that have been used in modern life. Lux-Tenebras was one of his inventions. I was hoping to eventually have a word with him."

"Considering that's who Lamour said was her cousin's professor is, I wouldn't be too surprised if we see him today," the older girl commented.

As they entered the large building, they were approached by a young woman who appeared to be around Heather's age. She was a tall woman with messy brown hair and glasses, and she was wearing a lanyard with a card on it, and had two in her hand. "Oh, are you Agent Connelly and Junior Agent Dollar?"
"That's us," Heather responded as they showed their badges.

"Oh, wonderful, wonderful," the woman said quickly, handing each of them a card. "I'm Thelma Botkin, one of Dr. Spectrum's grad student assistants. I trust my cousin told you why we asked you here."

"She told us you might have found some old K.A.O.S. tech and wanted us to verify it," Penny replied.

Hearing this, the brunette rolled her eyes. "That's Lana for you. I make what might be the technological archeology discovery of the decade, and she treats it like it some little treasure hunt."

"So this was something big?" Heather asked.

"Bigger than big!" Thelma exclaimed. "I believe I've found something that will touch on what we believed to be one of C.O.N.T.R.O.L.'s biggest urban legends. Have either of you ever heard of Hymie?"

Heather frowned and shook her head when she heard the question, but Penny brightened up immediately. "I heard of him. He was supposedly a K.A.O.S. robot who C.O.N.T.R.O.L. was able to bring over to their side. There was rumors he even helped Maxwell Smart on a few missions."

"That's the one!" Thelma said, giving a thumbs-up. "Great to see you're up on your homework. Now, I don't think what I found is Hymie, since I don't think C.O.N.T.R.O.L. would have been so careless as to lose him, but it's no secret that K.A.O.S. was furious about losing one of their more valuable pieces of technology. I suspect that this was an attempt at copying him, though it probably wasn't a success, since I found this guy caught in a wreck in the Sea of Okhotsk."

They moved into the lower levels, Penny and Thelma chatting eagerly about historical technology. Before long, they made it to an underground lab, and were greeted by an older man in a lab coat. "Ah, there you are, Thelma," the man said, giving a warm smile. "I see you brought the agents with you."

"Agent Connelly, Agent Dollar," Thelma said, motioning to the man, "this is Dr. Elvin Spectrum, head of this department."

"Pleased to meet the both of you," the doctor said, holding out his hand. When both girls had returned the greeting, he gave a small smile. "If you don't mind me asking, Agent Connelly, you wouldn't happen to be related to an Alan Connelly, would you?"

"He's my cousin," Heather answered. "Have you met him?"

"He took one of my courses as an undergraduate," the man replied with a laugh. "That young man left quite the impression, I can assure you."

"But that's not what you're here for." The doctor motioned for them to follow him. "Over here we have the robot, which we've taken to calling H-2. We've been taking scans to trying to figure out just how he works and how to replicate the design."

On the table lay an old, near decrepit robot's inner chassis. Once upon a time, a false skin would have covered the body to make it appear human, but that had long since deteriorated, leaving only a few patches left. The tech was partially rusted away, but the main computer system seemed to be covered up and preserved.

"The body itself doesn't appear to be in good shape," Penny said, looking over what was once the
robot's torso, "but it looks like the processor's in good shape. Would you mind if I opened it up to get a look?"

Spectrum nodded and motioned for her to look inside. Touching the processor, Penny utilized a minute amount of energy from DEiphI to open it up. Once she had touched it, however, her expression changed. The blood drained from her face, and she immediately pulled back. "Dr. Spectrum, you need to call Dr. Brenda Bradford immediately."

Seeing the girl's expression, he nodded to Thelma to do as instructed. "Certainly," he said once she ran off, "but may I ask why?"

Penny had situated herself by the robot's side and was now stroking its hand in a comforting manner. "Dr. Spectrum," the teen said, and her voice was grave, "what you found isn't a replica of Hymie, this is Hymie, and he's still alive."

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

Alright, this episode has dropped a lot of information, so I've got a few explanations and shout outs.

First of all, the NIMH serum is in fact the same serum from the book, Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH. It's one of my favorite children's books ever, and I highly recommend it. In this universe, the NIMH serum is what causes intelligence in some Chimera. That's why Brain and MADcat can communicate somewhat with people; they're NIMH Chimera. Any Chimera not given the NIMH serum would just be a dumb animal.

Once again, shout out to GadgetMonster, who gave me permission to use some Go Go Gadgetinis characters. Once again, I'll give the mention that that series is more for an older audience than this series. There will be a bit more from that series though, so just hold on.

Finally, a bit more from Get Smart! How will this turn out? Come in next time to find out! Hope to hear from you!
Thursday, July 24, 2087

Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, Mexico

It was now nearly one o'clock at night. The gala had long since ended, but Gadget and his crew were still guarding the halls of the museum at the request of Sr. Fernandes. Confident that the Gadgetinis were protecting the other areas of the museum, Gadget sat in front of the three statuettes with his back to the exhibit.

"You know, Brain?" he said to the dog, who was seated next to him. "This is my favorite type of mission. There's not really any fighting to be done, unless someone decides to come, which I don't think they will. It's just you, me, and these fascinating works."

Brain didn't even bother to raise his head. Instead, he kept his head down and his eyes shut, channeling all focus to his nose. If anyone tried to brake it, then he'd be able to smell it.

"It's not just the jewels," Gadget continued, getting up and moving around the room as he spoke. "Why, look at these carvings! And these tapestries. Yes, sir, it's amazing the things human beings have done all throughout history, and it's an honor to try to preserve these articles for future generations to experience."

As the cyber was speaking, a scent came to Brain. It was another human, that much the dog knew, but it wasn't anyone he recognized. The few things he could tell was that it was a woman, and that she was rather excited about something.

In a flash, the dog opened his eyes and looked around the room. Unfortunately, the only person Brain could see was Gadget, who was still lost in his own monolog and standing a good distance from the podium.

His sense of anxiety growing, the dog Chimera got up and began sniffing around to find where the woman was. His search didn't take to long, as when he turned around to look up at the podium where the jewel statuettes were, he spotted her.

She had long, mousey-brown hair that was peeping out from under a red cloche hat. She was also wearing a coat that matched the hat, and she was holding onto a rope that was dangling from the skylight. In one hand, she was holding the emerald duck statuette, and the other two had been nestled in a bag she had draped over one shoulder.

Realizing she had been spotted, the woman smirked, tucked the duck away, and pressed a finger to her lips. She then tugged on the rope, causing it to start pulling her up.

In an instant, Brain started barking. The podium was too high up for him to chase after the thief, but he was not going just let her get away like that.

"Brain, Brain, quiet down," Gadget said, looking down in disapproval at the dog. "We don't want to alert anyone who might try to take those that we're in here!"

The Chimera ignored him, bringing his barking to an even more feverish rate. The cyber sighed in
annoyance. "Brain, you need to quiet down!"

A realization then hit the dog. For the first time, he was on a mission where Gadget knew he was there. He no longer had to give little signs and hints that there was trouble; he could be much more blatant about it. So, he got up on his hind legs, went over to Gadget, placed his front paws on the man's shoulders, spun him so that he was facing the podium, and tilted the man's head up so he was looking at the skylight.

Recognition hit Gadget like a ton of brick. "Hey, there's a woman up there!" he exclaimed. "Ma'am!" he called out. "You're not supposed to be up there! I'll have to request you come down this instant!"

The woman said nothing, instead pulling herself up through the opened skylight and dodging out. "Brain, I'm going up to try to talk some reason into her," Gadget said, straightening his hat as he spoke. "I want you to follow us on the ground. I'll try to get down to join you there."

The dog let out a ruff of affirmation and took off running for the exit.

Gadget then shot out his arm and pulled himself up through the still opened skylight. Once he was out, he scanned around to find his opponent.

It didn't take too long to find her. She had taken off running once she had made it onto the roof. She was a good distance off, but that didn't trouble the inspector in the least.

"Stop!" he called out, picking up the chase in an instant. "Stop, in the name of the law!"

The woman didn't look back. Instead, she ducked her head down and kept running. Seeing this, Gadget frowned. "Go-go Gadget Skates!"

He braced himself, waiting for the wheels to emerge from his shoes. Instead, his gadgetry chose that moment to glitch, causing a pair of springs to emerge from them instead. He was shot forward into an unintentional leap, which catapulted him right in the woman's direction.

Startled by the unexpected move, she tried to stop herself, but wasn't able to in time. She collided with him in a moment, and her bag was tossed open by the blow.

Gadget then could see the jewel bat, duck, and otter. Since he had only been expecting to give her a ticket for loitering on a museum roof, the inspector was stunned. "Hey, you're not suppose to have those!"

Without a word, the woman shot up, grabbed the jewels, and took off, hopping onto a fire escape to get away. Not wanting to give her a head start, Gadget shot up too. "Gadget to Gadgetinis, we've got a thief. I am in pursuit."

"We hear you, Inspector," Digit answered.

"We're on our way!" Fidget assured.

Knowing he'd have backup soon, Gadget gave a wordless nod. He then turned all his attention to pursuing the thief.

... Since it had been a more peaceful evening than they had expected, the Gadgetinis has split up while patrolling the museum. When they got the call, Digit had been standing outside on of the main
entrances. Once his message had gotten through to Gadget, the blue robot had locked onto the cyber's location and hurried to go join him.

He had not even placed a foot outside of the museum when he was heavily knocked to the ground. "Sorry about this, Blueberry," a woman, clearly the person holding him down, said. "You're not going to make that meeting."

Digit was surprised by the woman's strength, but he wasn't about to be beaten that easily. "We'll see about that!" Stretching out his arm to grab the woman by the shoulders, he was able to give a heavy shove to get her off. He then shot up and turned to face his opponent, who had also gotten to her feet.

To his surprise, he was facing a female robot who looked uncannily like a red Gadgetini! She stood just about as tall as him, and was dressed near identically. The only difference from him, aside from the fact that she was clearly female and the red coloring of her face and clothing, was her long, purple fiber-optic "hair" that had been pulled into a ponytail and tucked under a knitted cap.

"What the heck are you?" Digit exclaimed.

"Don't look so gobsmacked, Blueberry," the female robot teased. "It's not like you've never seen another robot before."

The blue robot scowled. "It's not that," he said with a huff. "And don't called me 'Blueberry.'"

"What, am I getting you angry?" The red robot gave a smile. "Well, then, good. It'll make this so much easier." She then rushed at him.

Digit prepared himself for an attack, but instead she merely caught his hat off of his head. She then ran up to a ledge a way up on the wall. "Now, what do we have in here?" She asked, opening up the top and reaching around in it.

"That is W.O.M.P. property!" the blue bot called out. "You give it back to me this instant!"

"Why don't you make me, Blueberry?" the female bot called out. She made a face at him and then dodged through the window.

Not waiting a second, Digit ran after her. "Come back here, you...you..." He spotted an abandoned candy box on the outside of a garbage can. "Gobstopper!"

"Come now," the red bot shouted back. "If you're going to insult me, at least make it something that makes sense!" She then ran off again, with him close on her heels.

...  

When Fidget had received the call from Gadget, he had been outside, near a replica of a Mayan temple that had been built behind the museum. As soon as he had hung up, he located where the inspector was and prepared to leave to him.

Like his brother, his attempt to leave was soon hindered, though not quite in the same way. He rushed off to go join the rest of the team, but he hadn't been watching where he was going, and instead collided with someone on his way.

It took a moment for him and the person he had run into to untangle themselves and get back up. "Oh, excuse me. I didn't see you there," he said as he struggled to get to his feet.
"Oh, that's quite alright. I should have been watching where I was," the other person answered. From her voice, he could tell it was one of the women from before.

He turned to look at her, and was shocked by what he saw. "You're a Gadgetini?"

Sure enough, the other person was a Gadgetini, albeit a very pink one. Her body and legs were, like the brothers, white and black, but she was wearing a bubblegum pink coat, and her face was the same color. It appeared the only color on her that was not pink was her shoulder length "hair," which was purple.

"Yes, indeed I am," the girl bot said with a smile. She held out her hand. "My name's Data, by the way."

"Fidget," the orange bot responded, taking her hand. "I'm sorry if I seemed rather surprised. I just thought my brother and I were the only Gadgetinis."

At the mention of Digit, Fidget remembered his mission. "Oh, that's right!" he exclaimed, preparing to hurry off.

Before he could go, Data grabbed his wrist. "What's right?" she asked. "Where are you going?"

"I can't answer right now," he said, tugging his arm free. "I have to get somewhere right away."

He turned to run again, but was caught once more by Data, this time by the shoulder. "I'm sorry for this," she said, "but I can't let you leave the museum. It's important that you stay here."

Fidget was unnerved by this, and he attempted to pull away again. "I don't have time for this right now." He jerked away and took off running.

He had only gone a few steps when he heard the pink bot call out. "Go-go Gadget Oil-Slick!"

He paused for a moment and turned to look back, just in time to see Data spraying a thin blue liquid at him. The turn he made, mixed with the slippery liquid, caused him to lose his footing and fall hard on the lawn.

"Hey, what was that for?!" Fidget asked, losing patience with the newcomer.

"I really am sorry about this," Data said, and for her part, the apology did seem genuine, "but I can't let you leave. I'll explain why later."

"I'm sorry about this too, but you can't interfere with a W.O.M.P. agent's mission. You are under arrest for obstruction of Justice," he responded as he attempted to get up.

"Oh, dear," the girl bot said quietly, before turning to run.

Fidget hurried up his attempt as he saw her flee, but the slippery fluid caused him to fall once more. It took a moment before he could get onto his feet again, but once he did, he took off after the girl Gadgetini.

... 

Gadget's pursuit of the mystery thief had taken them through the streets of the Mexico City. As one might expect from the most populated city in North America, it was rather difficult to keep their pursuit secret. Still, it seemed the woman was as eager to keep pedestrians out of the fight as Gadget was, so the chase was confined to less busy alleyways and streets.
After about five minutes of the chase, Gadget was finally able to call out his skates. Now utilizing the tools, it didn't take too much time for him to catch up to her. In only a minute, he had caught up enough to reach out and touch the woman's shoulder without stretching his arm out.

Unfortunately, she was able to take advantage of his skates by pulling a sharp turn into an alley. He wasn't able to compensate for the sudden movement and was sent rocketing past the alley.

Giving a small smile, the woman made sure he had gone a good distance before hurrying back into the alley. However, her luck had run out there. Once she had turned to go in, she ran right into a tall, dark haired man.

"Oh, excuse-," she started, bit was cut off as the man grabbed her bag.

"All be taking that," the man said, grabbing the strap of her bag. "I do believe Dr. Claw will have a use for those jewels."

Grabbing the strap herself, the woman gave a frown. "Dr. Claw can work to get his own jewels. I have plans for these."

"As it is, I have plans for these as well," the man replied. He gave a tug which tore the strap. "Shame that when I got there after collecting my other targets, you and the inspector were starting up your chase. I'll be taking them now, señorita." The bag now in hand, he shoved her aside and took off running.

The woman wasn't going to give up so easily. Pulling a small shock weapon out of her pocket, she aimed it at the fleeing M.A.D. agent. She hit him right in the back, and he was stunned enough to fall over.

Striding over to the fallen man, she snatched the bag back up. "Thank you very much," she said, giving a smirk. "And now, since you admitted to being a M.A.D. agent-"

"Stop! Stop right now!" Gadget called out. He had then righted himself and was hurrying over there.

Giving a sigh, the woman took off running. She couldn't risk losing the jewels over a single M.A.D. agent.

Gadget soon reached the place where the M.A.D. agent had fallen. "Sir, are you alright?"

"I'm fine, inspector," the man replied, "but you're not going to be in a moment."

"I'm glad to hear what was that?" the inspector said with a start, realizing too late what the man has said.

In an instant, the man help up his hand. The palm opened up, revealing a shock cannon, which fired off a blast, nailing the W.O.M.P. detective in the chest. Gadget was knocked back a good four feet by the blow, and he crashed into a pile of boxes.

"Sorry, Gadget," the M.A.D. cyber said, getting up and hurrying after the woman. "I can't have you getting in the way right now."

The woman smiled to herself as she got away from her adversaries. She was close to her rendezvous point. If she could just make it to her vehicle, then she'd be home free.

The car was coming right into view when a whip shot out of nowhere and caught her around her waist. She was jerked off her feet and onto the roof of a nearby building, where she was brought face
to face with the M.A.D. agent from before.

The shock of the catch wasn't enough to leave the woman helpless, though, and she responded fast by delivering a blow to the hand that should have been holding the whip. To her horror, however, he wasn't holding the whip; it was coming out of his wrist!

In response, the man grabbed her arm with his free hand. "I see you're not going to give up the jewels without a fight," he said, giving her a cruel grin. "That's fine by me. I like a girl with some fight in her."

The woman responded by using the bag of jewel to smack the man upside the head with her free arm. While he was reeling from the blow, she reached out and punched him, focusing the pressure on a ring she was wearing. A jolt of electric energy came from the ring, forcing the man to release her. "I can assure you," she said, pulling herself free from the whip, "I'm not your type of woman."

While the shock was enough to get the M.A.D. agent to release her, it was not, however, enough to deter him completely. Once he had recovered, he shot out with his whip again, forcing the woman to jump to one side to avoid it. Seeing the trajectory she was taking, the man tossed a small bomb in her path.

The woman was able to avoid the blast itself, but not the shockwave it gave off. She was tossed back into the ledge by the shock, and laid there stunned for a moment.

"Now, chica," the man said, advancing on the prone woman, "you will give me what I want…"

Before he could get any closer to her, however, he was grabbed by the wrist and pulled back by Gadget, who had just arrived on the scene. "Alright, buddy, you're under arrest for attacking a W.O.M.P. agent and assaulting that woman," the inspector declared.

"You sound so confident," the M.A.D. agent said, casting a cocky grin. He lifted up his hand, the blaster prepared again.

Before he could let off a shot at the inspector, he was struck from behind by the stun gun by the woman, who had gotten to her feet during the distraction. The blast let off, she then turned to jump off the building and hurry to her vehicle.

Gadget moved faster. "Not so fast," he said catching the bag. "You can't take those; they're going back to the museum."

As the two of them fought over the bag, the M.A.D. agent recovered enough to join in, grabbing an edge of the bag and pulling on it. It was clear none of the three was about to give in.

Which was why the stitching of the bag gave in. It practically exploded under the tension, sending the ruby, sapphire, and emerald statues into the sky and the three fighters in all directions.

The woman recovered from the split first. Realizing her position, she reached out, snatching the ruby bat and then jumping off the building and hurrying to her car. In a moment, she was gone.

The M.A.D. agent got up next. In a flash, he snatched up the emerald duck. He attempted to grab the sapphire otter as well, but Gadget had snatched it up first. Not wanting to lose what had already been gained, he shot a blast to stun the inspector before running off himself.

That left Gadget on his own, the two suspects vanishing into the night with two of the three jewels. Hearing barking at bottom of the building, he looked over to see Brain, who had finally caught up to him.
Stretching his legs to lower himself down, Gadget joined the dog. "They got away with two of them," he said, showing the dog the jewel that had been saved, "but we'll get them back. Come on, we'd better find the Officers."

Digit's pursuit of the red robot had taken the two of them through the halls of the museum. The girl bot seemed to be well prepared for the pursuit, as she occasionally paused to allow for him to catch up with her. However, as soon as he had almost come close enough to catch up with her, she'd duck away out of reach once more. This little game, which was aggravating enough from the start, had worn down the blue robot's patience.

They had come to another interval of a pause when a call came over the girl bot's. "Data, Scooter, head back to the HQ building," a woman said.

"Meet you there," the red bot answered as she left out of Digit's reach once more. Flicking his hat back to him, she gave a small salute. "Well, Blueberry, it's been fun. Catch you later!" She then dodged out of a nearby window.

"Get back here, you!" Digit said, practically snarling while he spoke. "I'm not done!"

He rushed outside just in time to see her grab the wrist of a pink girl robot, with Fidget pursuing the two of them. The boys attempted to catch the girls to keep them from escaping, but they two intruders were able to make it through a bush. By the time the pursuers made it to the other side, their quarry was nowhere to be seen.

"Well, this is just wonderful," Digit said with a growl. "They got away." He then turned and looked at his brother. "Why are you covered in oil slick fluid?"

"Data used it on me," Figit answered.

"Data?" His twin gave him a look.

"That's what the pink one said her name was," the orange bot answered. "If I'm right, then that would mean the red one was Scooter, and it was them that I heard earlier."

At that moment, their communicators went off. "Officers," Gadget called out over the intercom, "head over to the Mexico City W.O.M.P. HQ. We'll recollect there and decide on our next move."

"Well, it's better than just sitting around here," Digit commented with a sigh. The twins then hurried off to follow the order.

Bradford Tech, Metro City

"Wait," Thelma said as she and the others waited in the Bradford Tech main lobby while Brenda, Dr. Spectrum, and Brenda's crew worked at putting the ancient robot back together, "when you say this is Hymie, and that he's alive, do you mean 'alive' alive, or just that he's working?"

"I mean he's sapient, like the Gadgetinis," Penny answered. It had now been several hours, but the three women were too intent on finding out what was happening to leave. "I would only use the term alive to mean sapient. Only a person or animal can be alive; a vending machine can be in order, but not alive."
"How could you tell?" Heather asked.

"It's…kind of hard to explain," the blonde replied. "You'd have to have felt DElPHI working to really understand."

"Try us," the older girl responded.

"Well, alright." Penny chewed her lip as she tried to think of the proper words. "You see, when I touch the entry points of a normal, non-sapient machine, even when I'm not using DElPHI, I can read just about everything about it. What it's for, who made it, when it's most active, those sorts of things. I'd need to actively use the device in my head to control it, but knowing is another matter entirely. However, with sapient machines, it's different. I can sense their feelings, but there's a lot that's hidden from me. I'm not sure if I could control a sapient machine, and I'm not game to find out, but I can identify them from the emotions that are coming off of them."

"And this robot had emotions?" Thelma asked, gaining great interest in what the younger girl was saying.

The teen nodded. "Quite a few of them. Before now, I had only felt like this when working with Fidget and Digit, but the experience is unmistakable. I don't think he was awake, which is a relief, but when he fell asleep, he was afraid and concerned. I wanted contacted Dr. Bradford immediately, since she's the one who has worked with the Gadgetinis the most, besides me. I really have no idea how Hymie's going to take to waking up like this, so I thought it best to try to make the transition as easy as possible."

"Ladies?" The three women turned to see Johan von Slickstien, who had just stepped out of the lab where the work was being done. "We've just finished up. Dr. Bradford would like Penny to come in, but you all can come, if you'd like."

"Thanks, Slick," Heath called out as the trio got up and hurried in.

Inside, the doctors were finishing up their work. Realizing that the others had come into the room, Brenda looked up and smiled. "You did right in calling here," she said. "We're just about done with the repairs."

She motioned over to the work table. There, still unconscious, was Hymie, though he now looked like a dark haired older gentleman than the mangled hunk of machinery from before. "We didn't have a lot of the original robotics to work with," Dr. Bradford continued. "As you know, his core processor was still in good shape, but the rest of him was pretty worn and damaged. We pretty much had to reconstruct his body based on guesses we could take from what was left of his chassis. The pseudo-skin was simple to make, but it took some time to get everything together."

"Is he coming to?" Heather asked, glancing over the robot's still form.

Brenda shook her head. "No, he hasn't made a move. This was convient while we were putting him back together, but nothing we do will wake him up." She then turned to Penny. "I was hoping you might have an idea."

"I can try," Penny said, "but I'm not using DElPHI. It doesn't feel right to use it on a sapient machine."

The doctor nodded. "Alright, then. The main control panel is hidden in the same way as on your uncle."

Rolling over to the table side, Penny carefully lifted the shirt that the robot was wearing and accessed
the control panel and main processor. The processor looked practically ancient among the newer technology, though in good shape, and it took Penny a moment to realize she couldn't recognize almost anything she was looking at.

"The tech's too old; it doesn't look like anything I've seen before," she said before backing up. Reaching behind her chair, she dug around in a bag that was hanging off the back. "Maybe if I plug my computer book in, it'll translate the controls in a way so that I can understand them."

She plugged in a few wires to the few ports she did recognize and went to work with the small computer. After a few moments, she gave a bright smile. "I'm in! I should be able to get everything working now."

There was a few more moments of silence as she worked. At first, there was no movement, but after a few minutes more, signs that her work was not in vain started to come in. The robot began to move his hand, and not a moment more, he sat up and stretched out.

"Ungh!" he groaned, though his voice was oddly monotone. "I don't think I've ever woken up this stiff before." Sitting up, the robot took in his surroundings for a moment. He glanced around at the people watching him rather warily. "Actually, I don't remember falling asleep at all. How did I get here?"

"It's alright, Hymie, you're safe," Penny said, removing the wires from the robot's side as she spoke. "We brought you here and repaired you after we found you."

"Found me?" Hymie seemed confused by this statement. "Was I lost? How do you know my name? That's top secret, only C.O.N.T.R.O.L. or K.A.O.S. would know that, and you look far too young to be either C.O.N.T.R.O.L. or K.A.O.S."

"I'm afraid that is a very long story," Brenda said, coming over to join Penny at the table side. "My name is Dr. Brenda Bradford. You are in my laboratory right now, and the young men here are my assistants, Johan von Slickstein and Myron Dabble. The other doctor over there is Dr. Elvin Spectrum, and the young lady there is Thelma Botkin, one of his students."

"My name is Penny Dollar, and this is Heather Connelly," Penny stated. "We're agents of W.O.M.P."

Hymie nodded but gave a frown. "Thank you for introducing yourselves, but I'm afraid it doesn't help much. What's a whomp?"


This new information only seemed to confuse the robot more. "That's can't be right. It would take years to get the organizations name changed." He stood up and crossed his arms. "Are there any other agents around? I'd like to talk to Maxwell Smart, or the Chief. They'd be able to explain what's going on."

There was an awkward pause as the humans tried to decide what to do. Finally, Penny sighed and decided to try her best. "I know this is going to be hard to understand," she said, trying to sound as comforting as she could, "but that isn't possible. In likelihood, Maxwell Smart has been dead for over half a century."

Hymie froze at the news. "That's can't be right. I saw him and 99 just yesterday. They were perfectly
fine, and getting ready for…” He paused again, as the memories came back to him. "They were getting ready to try to stop K.A.O.S. before they could retrieve that weapon!" He turned to Penny, distress printed on his face. "You can't tell me they failed! If K.A.O.S. got ahold of that weapon, then all the free world is doomed!"

There was a moment of pause, before Dr. Spectrum spoke. "I can assure you," he said, approaching the panicked robot, "that K.A.O.S. is long dead and gone. However, I couldn't help but notice you used the term 'the free world.' Just what year do you think it is?"

Hymie gave him a quizzical look. "Isn't it 1976 A.D.?

There was another awkward silence for a moment before the doctor answered. "I'm sorry to tell you that you've been asleep for much longer than you think. It is now the year 2087 A.D., and the Cold War is long over."

"2087?" The robot froze, as if unable to process the information being given to him. "That can't be right. If that were the case, that would mean it's been one hundred and eleven years."

"Give or take a few months," Thelma said with a nod. When she processed that her attempt at humor had failed to strike anyone as funny, she gave an awkward smile. "Hey, that's not too many years of history to catch up on."

To most of the humans there, Hymie's reaction was one of mild shock, but Penny could feel otherwise. "It'll be alright," she said, reaching out to offer some amount of comfort. "We'll get you caught up on what you need to know."

Hymie did his best to try to take in this new information, but it wasn't easy. Sitting down, he gave a slight whirring sound that seemed similar to a sigh. "I suppose the sooner we get to it, the better."

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

Go Go Gadgetinis and Get Smart characters still belong to the aforementioned creators, with a reminded that those stories are aimed more for older audiences for sexual related situations.
Friday, July 25, 2087

W.O.M.P. HQ, Mexico City

"I don't know how it could have happened, chiefs. I caught up to them near immediately, but still they got away with the other statues," Gadget said as he paced around the room. He was in one of the main meeting centers of the HQ building, along with the Gadgetinis and Brain. Sr. Fernandes, the museum curator, was there, as was Chief Velazquez, the chief in charge of the Mexico City branch. Chief Quimby had been called up, and was linked into the conversation via a computer.

"We'll find them, Gadget," Quimby said, "but we need you to focus right now. What did the two people you ran into look like?"

"Well, the man was tall," the inspector answered. "He had black hair, and was a cyborg. Long nosed, too, and he spoke Spanish."

"That's quite a number of M.A.D. agents on record," Chief Velazquez said, going over the files on hand. He then showed a profile of M.A.D. agents to Gadget. "Do any of these men look familiar to you?"

Gadget looked over the profiles, flipping through the images that weren't familiar. After a moment, though, he paused. "That's him. That's the man I saw."

He pointed to a picture on the twentieth page. Sure enough, it was the man who had taken the duck just that night.

"Looks like that's 'Macho' Miguel Carrillo, one of Anna Reyas' men," Velazquez responded with a nod. "He's a Guatemalan jewel thief in M.A.D.'s employ, and a good one, too. He would explain the other jewels missing from the museum as well. It makes sense he would have been sent on this job."

"How about the woman, Gadget," Quimby asked. "Can you remember what she looked like?"

The cyborg touched his chin. "I never got a clear look at her face, but she wore a lot of red. She also had a red hat on, and brown hair." He paused for a moment when he heard the door open and several footsteps announced newcomers. "In fact, she looked a lot like the lady who just came in."

In a moment, Brain shot it his feet. He had caught the woman's scent, and was certain that she was the one from the robbery. The Gadgetinis sprang up, too, when they saw who was with the woman.

"That's her, Inspector!" Digit called out as he and Fidget trained their weapons on the newcomers. "She's got those robots with her, too! We need to arrest them right now!"

Seeing the welcome that was in store for them, the red robot laughed. "Glad to see you remember us, Blueberry."

"I told you not to call me 'blueberry!'" Digit snapped.

"Hold your fire, Officers," Gadget called. He then turned to the woman. "I'm sorry, but I'm going to
have to arrest you and your accomplices for theft and obstruction of a W.O.M.P. agent's mission."

Hearing this, the woman gave a small smile. "Is that so?"

"Indeed, it is," Gadget responded. An arm popped out of his hat, his badge in its hand.

"Well, then as it is, I will need to arrest you as well," she replied. She reached inside her coat and pulled a badge out. "Same charges, of course."

"Wait," Fidget said, freezing up. "You mean these guys are W.O.M.P.?"

"I wanted to tell you back at the museum," Data called out, "but it wasn't the time or place."

"Wait a minute, this can't be real!" Gadget exclaimed, studying the woman's badge. "It's got a type right here. It say you're a member of W.O.M.P. UK Branch when it should say W.O.M.P. US Branch!"

"UK stands for United Kingdom, Gadget," Quimby sighed. "As in, she's from Great Briton or North Ireland."

"I currently live in London, to be specific," the woman said, taking her badge back. "W.O.M.P. agent Inspector Prince, at your service. These are my companions, Data and Scooter."

"Wait, so you're on our side?" Gadget asked, still somewhat confused by the turn of events. "Then why were you robbing the museum?"

"I can explain that," Sr. Fernandes said. "I'm sorry for not letting you know ahead of time, Detective Brown, but we had planned for Inspector Prince to infiltrate the museum the whole time."

"Wait, why would you want your own museum to be robbed by a W.O.M.P. agent?" Digit asked. "Isn't arranging a robbery rather counter intuitive?"

"Not when you've been under threat of Charybdis for quite some time," the curator responded.

"Charybdis? I've heard of them before," Gadget stated. "Penny and I found a portion of their catalog earlier this year. Aren't they some sort of villain supply company?"

"It's more than that," Prince replied. "Charybdis is an underground ring from the propagation of stolen and illegal goods. They not only supply agencies like M.A.D. with weaponry stolen from legitimate sources, but they also design and sell their own less-than-legal devices, and attempt to steal items that would be worth fortunes to collectors who are not afraid of dealing in underhanded trades."

"Wait," Digit said, still somewhat suspicious of the newcomers. "How do you know so much about this band when we hardly have ever heard of them. Maybe you're in cahoots with them!"

"Officer Digit, don't be rude!" Gadget scolded.

"He does bring up what would be a valid point, if it weren't for the info we have here." The group turned to see that another screen, like the one Quimby was communicating through, had turned on. A man with combed back greying hair was on it, and he had been the one who had spoken.

"Glad to see you made it, Chief," Prince said, giving a smile. She then turned to the others. "Let me introduce you to Chief Littlewood, chief of the London branch of W.O.M.P."

"Pleased to meet you all, I'm sure," Littlewood said. "Now, from what I heard, you now know what
we were doing, but the why is still rather vague, am I right?"

"An explanation would be appreciated," Quimby replied with a nod.

"Actually, detective, our mission started back with your discovery," the English chief started. "That catalog piece your niece discovered was sent right to us, considering we are the ones focusing on Charybdis' practices. The piece led us to three of Charybdis' warehouses. They must have gotten wind of what we were going to do, because the places were pretty much cleared out by the time we got there, but there were still quite a few items of information that were of use to us."

"In specific, we discovered that Charybdis wanted to get ahold of these statuettes," Prince added. She then took the bat out of her pocket and placed it next to the otter on the table. "The plan was that I was supposed to take the statuettes under the identity of a first-time thief and offer to sell them to Charybdis. Then I would bring them back here and swap them out for several fakes planted with tracking devices that had been made."

"I see!" Fidget called out, catching the train of thought. "Then once Charybdis takes the bait, you could use the fakes to try to track down where Charybdis is doing their trading."

"Exactly," the lady inspector responded. She then turned back to Gadget. "I'm sorry we couldn't inform you of the plan earlier, but it was decided that you attempting to halt the theft would be vital to convincing Charybdis that the theft was genuine. After all, if the famed Inspector Gadget believed it was a crime, then it must be so."

It took Gadget a moment to process all the details. "An ingenious plan," he said, "but there's still one question I have left. If this was all a setup, then why did that M.A.D. agent turn up and take the duck?"

"He's the spanner in the works, I'm afraid," Prince answered. "I was ready to have to escape you, but when he turned up, I had to start improvising." She touched her chin and thought back to her interactions with the thief. "He said he was after the statuettes in particular, but that he had taken other jewels as well. Sr. Fernandes, were there other pieces missing from the museum at the end of the night?"

"Several of our exhibits were raided," Fernandes said. "We are currently missing a number of smaller jewels, the most noticeable being a jet spider broach, but nothing that in and of themselves would be a valuable as Los Príncipes."

While the humans discussed what was going on, Brain wandered over and began sniffing at the newcomers. The new robots were not bothering him, as they smelled incredibly similar to the Gadgetinis. However, there was something about Prince that was familiar to him, and not all that welcome. It was something in her inherent scent, some part of her she wouldn't be able to get rid of. If only he was able to pin-point exactly what it was.

His search, however, was interrupted before he could figure out the answer to the enigma. Data, it seemed, had noticed his exploration. "Here, puppy," she said, trying to restrain her voice so as not to be heard. "It's okay. Please come here, puppy."

Brain sniffed and turned away, as he did not appreciate being referred to as "puppy." However, the arrival of a new scent caused him to pause and then turn back around.

When Data had noticed that Brain was ignoring her, she then proceeded to dig around in her pocket and pulled out something that was of great interest to the dog: a small piece of churro. She then held it out towards him. "It's okay," she said with a smile. "You can have it."
A part of Brain wanted to ignore the treat. That part wanted to retain his dignity. He wasn’t a street mutt, after all. He was a certified W.O.M.P. K-9 agent, and he had to act in a way befitting of one. A dignified agent was not, after all, so easily bought.

A dog, however, is bought easily by the nearest source of food, and Brain was also a true dog. After a moment of trying to resist the morsel, the dog instinct in Brain won out, and he crept over to the churro as silently as he could. He really hoped no one else was paying attention as he took it.

"There we go, good boy," Data said, stroking his head as he took the food. "Aren’t you a good fellow?"

"So that's why you keep stashing food in your pockets," Scooter commented, casting a sideways glance at her sister.

Brain gave a snort, none too happy about all the "good boy" chatter. He had gotten what he wanted, so he was finished with this interaction. Turning back, he sat near Gadget, hoping at least that would spare him any more patronizing speech.

"So, from what we know," Quimby was saying when the dog got back, "was that Carrillo got away with the emerald statuette, but now what? Is he going to be content with just that one?"

"I doubt it," Chief Velazquez said, shaking his head. "El Príncipe de la Atmósfera y el Agua is worth several thousand on its own, and even less if it's cut up into smaller emeralds. However, it is worth billions when in a set. Whatever the reason he was after Los Príncipes, you can be guaranteed that he's going to want the full set."

"Then we'll have to give him the full set," Digit said.

"Glad to see we're on the same page," Velazquez replied, nodding in approval. "Gadget, I'll need you to listen closely. Everyone already knows you are here and that after the theft took place, you pursued the thief out of the building. We'll just spread the word around that you recovered both the bat and the otter, and that the mysterious lady thief didn't get anything. That should attract Carrillo to come out of hiding. He'll eventually show up, take the remaining two statuettes and then go back to his hideout. Of course, the statues he takes with him will be the fakes Inspector Prince brought with her. Once he commits the second theft, the two teams can use the tracking devices to follow him back to where he's hiding out, and while one team keeps him distracted, the other one will sneak in and take the real emerald back and replace it with the fake. After that, Carrillo will be allowed to leave, and we can use the tracking devices to find out just what it is he wants with Los Príncipes. Do you understand?"

Gadget gave a nod. "I'll just need you to repeat one part of that plan."

"Which part?" Velasquez asked.

"Everything after 'Gadget, I'll need you to listen closely,'" Gadget answered.

The Mexican chief looked like he was going to groan, but before anything else could be said, his communicator went off. "There's business that I need to attend to elsewhere. Gadget, I have the instructions sent to you later. Both of you, remember, we are depending on you."

"No worries there," Gadget said, giving a firm salute. "We'll get those statues back soon enough. Why, with us on the case, those jewels are as good as returned."

With that, he turned on his heels to leave, and was knocked onto his back as he collided with the door lintel. "I swear," he muttered to himself, "all doors are being built too short these days."
M.A.D. Hideaway, an hour outside of Mexico City

Miguel Carrillo was having a good night. He had already made it to the museum and retrieved what he had been ordered to take. He had also gotten some extra trinkets and at least one bauble that gave him a new mission. Of course, to complete that mission, he'd need to have the other pieces of the puzzle, but he'd have to worry about that tomorrow. Having already stashed his haul away and reported back to Reyas, the M.A.D. agent had decided to have a few beers before heading out on the new leg of his mission next evening.

He was just about to settle in and enjoy the first of many drinks when his communicator went off. The agent was confused as to who it could be, since he had already contacted his lieutenant, but picked it up all the same. One never did know when Claw himself might assign a mission, and those were calls no agent ever wanted to miss.

When he picked up the phone, however, it was not Claw who was on the other end, but some man that Carrillo had never seen before. "Who are you?" the agent asked, miffed that someone who was not a M.A.D. higher up had disturbed him. "How did you get this number?"

"My name is Richard Deboir," the man answered. "I work for M.A.D., too. I got this number from Agent Lana Lamour, in the event that I needed to contact you."

Carrillo snorted when he heard the man's name. Just about all of M.A.D. was aware of Claw's uppity new pawn. "I gave Agent Lamour this number in case she wished to have a personal call," the active agent replied. "You I have no time for."

He was about to hang up the phone when Deboir called out. "Wait! I can make it worth your while!"

This interested Carrillo, who was of a very mercenary mindset. "How worth my while?" he asked.

"I'm transmitting $1,000 to your personal accounts right now for your time," Deboir answered, "and I'll wire in another $6,000 if you take up my request."

Carrillo checked another app on the device, which told him that the added thousand was true. "Alright, you've got my attention," he responded when he went back to the call. "I'm on another mission, though, so it'll have to be something that I can squeeze in."

"I heard through the M.A.D. reports that you were successful in stealing the emerald duck, but not in the other pieces of the collection," Deboir said, pulling up the report Carrillo had uploaded several hours before. "Is that true?"

"As true as the day is long," Carrillo answered.

"Well, I want you to go collect the other two pieces," Deboir stated. "It'll keep Gadget busy and make it look like Metro City W.O.M.P. is incompetent, which will help my campaign along."

Inwardly, Carrillo was laughing. He had already planned to find the other statuettes, as they were the other pieces to the puzzle he needed to complete his new side mission. As such, this would be the easiest seven grand he'd ever gotten.

Outside, however, he was pretending to contemplate the offer. "I don't know," he said. "That might be rather difficult, considering all the things I'm already doing…"

"I'll give you ten grand, but no higher," Deboir insisted.
"Alright, I'll do it." Carrillo took the top off his beer before taking a swig. "Ten grand it is. Pleasure doing business with you."

"Uh, yes, quite," Deboir answered before signing off.

Once more on his own, Carrillo laughed. This was a stroke of luck unlike any he'd had before. He was fulfilling a minor mission for M.A.D. and getting extra pay for it on top of it all.

Yes indeed, Miguel Carrillo was having a good night.

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Outside Bradford Tech, Metro City

"We're in Metro City, you say?" Hymie asked and he, Penny, and Heather wandered out of the large building. It had been decided that the best way to help the robot to acclimate to his new surroundings was to guide him through it on the way to W.O.M.P. HQ, so he was prepared for what was going on. "I can't say I remember ever learning of a Metro City."

"That's understandable, considering when you started your little nap," Heather responded. "Metro City was originally just a little neighborhood with not much else, like a lot of places in the west that aren't L.A., Seattle, or Las Vegas. C.O.N.T.R.O.L. came over here back in the last few years that it was C.O.N.T.R.O.L., as a way of being out of sight. When they ended up fusing with six other national defense units to form W.O.M.P. in 2022, this place was chosen to be the primary west-coast HQ, with D.C. being the prominent one in the east. Afterwards, the population just shot up until it became what you see today."

"We are on the west coast, then?" Hymie asked. "Why was I brought here, and not to Washington D.C."

"We initially didn't know who or what you were," Penny answered. "To tell you the truth we didn't know a lot about C.O.N.T.R.O.L. in general, at first. Most of the info regarding you guys from C.O.N.T.R.O.L.'s heyday was lost in a fire in 1994. For a long time, it was even questioned if most of their agent even existed, until we recently found some undamaged films of Agents 86 and 99."

"There were films made of the Smarts?" Though his voice remained monotone, the relief in Hymie's expression came clear. "Good, then they did survive that K.A.O.S. attack. It must have taken a long time to convince Max it was a good idea."

"You talk as if you knew them well," Heather commented.

"Max was my best friend," he responded. "He was the first person to treat me like I was real, even though I am a robot." He gave a bittersweet smile as he drifted back to old memories. "I was the best man for his and 99's wedding, you know. Of course, K.A.O.S. used that as an opportunity to plant a bomb in me to kill everyone at the bachelor's party, but even then, he, the Chief, and 99 refused to just abandon me to be destroyed. I can't help but wonder what happened to them."

There was an awkward moment of silence, but before either of the girls could come up with something to say, something else caught Hymie's attention. "Ma'am," he called out, hurrying to catch up to a blonde woman who had finished crossing the street. "Ma'am, look out. There's an animal in your bag."

He had broken off so fast that it took Heather and Penny a moment to catch back up with him. By the time they had arrived, he was already speaking with the woman. "Ma'am, I have to warn you there is some kind of rodent in your bag. It might be dangerous, so hope you will allow me to take it
"Hymie, no!" Heather called out. "That's a pet purse! There's supposed to be an animal inside it!"

"Pet purse?" Hymie repeated, as if confused by the existence of such an item.

Now that they were closer, they could recognize Lana Lamour as the woman. "Oh, yes, these are all the rage these days. I just had to buy one for my little Snowflake." She reached down and the ferret on the head. "It's a one of a kind Kalvin Klarc, only the best for my little guy."

Hymie looked at the accessory with some befuddlement. "You name your bag?"

Lana let out a laugh. "Only the best of the best can have a Kalvin Klarc. I'm Lana Lamour, by the way." She held out her hand. "What, pray tell, is your name?"

Hymie took her hand and shook it. "My name is Hymie, and I'm-

"In a bit of a hurry," Heather finished, grabbing him by the arm and pulling him back. "We need to get to W.O.M.P. HQ right away."

Not taking the hint, Lana hooked her arm around Hymie's free one. "Oh, so you're a W.O.M.P. agent? Well, how lovely! I just adore a man in uniform."

"If you haven't noticed, we don't have a uniform," Heather borderline snapped. "Now, if you'll excuse me, we have to get to HQ right now."

"Oh, what a lovely coincidence," Lana replied. "That happens to be where I'm headed to right now! I left my sunglasses there earlier, so I was hurrying along to go retrieve them. I'll just go with you now and get to know your handsome friend here along the way." She then sauntered off, pulling an extremely confused Hymie along with her.

As they went to follow, Penny leaned over to Heather. "Does she act that way around every man?"

"She's not the last one you'll meet like that, Charm," Heather responded. "It's best to just ignore her right now and try to keep Hymie from revealing that he's a robot."

"Got it," Penny replied with a nod. She picked up a bit of speed, hoping the task ahead of them wouldn't be too tough. "Good thing we're already close to HQ."

Mexico City, Mexico

Gadget sat at an outside table for a coffee shop that wasn't too far away from the museum. At that moment, the announcement that the bat and the otter statuettes had been recovered and were still on display was being given, and it was decided that the agents should try to blend in as best they could and keep a watch out for anyone who might be suspicious.

Since it would be harder for the four Gadgetinis to blend in than their human partners, they had been set up to keep watch inside the museum, but Gadget, Prince, and Brain had been tasked with keeping the outside block under surveillance.

At the moment, Gadget was feeling rather naked, due to the fact that he had to leave his preferred coat and hat behind. He still wore his long-sleeve button down and slacks, so all mechanic parts were covered up, as those did not attract as much attention as the coat would have.
Brain was even more unhappy, as he chewed on the leash that had been tied to one end of the table. The dog knew he needed it so as not to draw suspicion, but that didn't mean he liked it one bit. He looked up at Gadget and made a whining noise.

"I know it's hot," Gadget said, patting the dog on the head. "She'll be out here in a moment, and she'll have your water."

Brain gave a grumbling noise and wondered to himself why he had assumed the inspector would understand what he was saying.

Just as Gadget finished speaking to the dog, Prince came out, carrying a coffee, a tea, and bottle of water with a small cup. She had likewise ditched the hat and coat and was wearing a blouse and skirt that were appropriate for the heat. "Anything happen while I was gone?" she asked, passing the tea and the water over to Gadget.

"There's a man over there who I'm suspicious of," Gadget replied, pointing out the individual before bending down to pour Brain's water into the cup. "He's been sitting here all morning by that fruit stand, and he hasn't moved away from it once."

Prince craned her neck to look where Gadget had pointed out. "I'm pretty certain he owns that fruit stand."

"Maybe, but I've got my eye on him all the same," Gadget replied.

"Better to be safe than sorry," Prince said, giving a smile.

As Gadget straightened up, he noticed something about the other inspector that he hadn't seen before. "Is some of your hair purple?"

"Oh, this?" She picked up one of the strands of hair around her face, which was dyed a rich purple. "I used to dye it all this color, but not everyone approves of such a choice in an officer, so I tie these back when I'm on the job."

"I like it," Gadget commented. "It's unique."

Prince smiled at him and took a sip of her coffee. However, as she drank, she looked up and spotted something. "Don't turn your head, but I think I see our suspect."

Gadget nodded. "Go-go Gadget Rearview Glasses." A panel opened up in his wrist and slid a pair of sunglasses into his hand. He placed them on and flicked a switch, allowing him to see behind himself without turning. "I knew it! It was the fruit vendor!"

"No, look a little to the right," Prince stated.

Following the instruction, Gadget nodded. "Yeah, he looks even more like Carrillo. Good job."

Bending down, Gadget reached out and unhooked Brain's leash. "There's a man over on the other side of the street wearing a faded red hat and a denim jacket," he whispered to the dog. "Can you go over and stall him? Remember, don't attack, just stall."

Brain gave a nod and crept off to fulfill his part of the mission.

"Now it's our turn," Gadget said. "Go-go Gadget Alias, codeword: Mr. Smith." Immediately, his featured shifted until he resembled a tall but heavyset blond man.
Prince reached up to touch her earring. "Go-go Gadget Alias, codeword: Mrs. Smith." She wasn't able to change as drastically, but she did her appearance did change to an older woman with greying hair.

As they got up to confront the suspect, she gave Gadget a smile. "Your niece really outdid herself with this tech. I would have never recognized you if I didn't know you."

"Let's hope Carrillo doesn't recognize us either," he replied with a nod.

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

Clues are in place, but will our heroes end up on the right track? Log in next time to find out!

Also, we have finally met Inspector Prince and Chief Littlewood, who will be the last characters from GGG series to make a appearance. All owners and warnings from before still apply.
Assignment 10.4: New Objectives

Friday, July 25, 2087

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"...and so you see," Lana said, having barely paused to take a breath for the entire walk down, "it
was all a big misunderstanding! Once she gave me back my earrings we were all good."

"Well, that's good, I suppose," Hymie commented, not quite sure he understood anything he'd been
told.

"Oh, it was just marvelous!" Lana practically squealed. "You absolutely must see the Riviera some
time, it was so wonderful there."

Through the whole walk there, Penny and Heather had been considering the consequences of
shoving the pushy actress into a taxi and telling the driver to go as far away as possible. Now that
they had reached their destination, they were relieved that they would soon be rid of her. "Alright,
then," Heather said, grabbing Lana by the arm and practically dragging her over to the help desk.
"You should find your sunglasses in the lost and found here. Now if you'll excuse us, we're rather
busy at the moment, so..."

"Oh, that silly little thing," Lana said with a laugh. "I was digging around in my purse on the way
here, and silly me, I found out I just left those sunglasses in my purse! I had them with me this whole
time. Isn't that just hilarious?"

"A riot," Heather responded with a scowl. "Now like I was saying, Penny, Hymie, and I are rather
busy right now, so if you don't mind-"

"Oh, but we were all having such a good time," Lana replied. "It'd be a shame to break things off
now."

"Well, too bad, because we have work to do," Heather said, moving Lana in the direction of the
door. "If you will excuse us, we have to speak with Chief Quimby. Good day to you."

"Alright, if you're so determined to be a kill-joy," Lana said with a frown. She then waved and blew
a kiss at Hymie. "Toodles! We absolutely must do this again some time."

"That woman was acting very strangely," Hymie commented once Heather and Penny had joined
him. "Is that some new behavioral custom for women these days?"

"Hymie, she was flirting with you," Penny replied with a laugh.

"Flirting?" Hymie asked, confused by the statement. "I'm a robot; why would she be flirting with
me?"

"Not everyone can tell the difference," Heather replied as she started walking towards the elevator.
"Besides, that was Lana Lamour, paramour extraordinaire. I've see her making eyes at just about
every guy she thinks she could get something out of, especially W.O.M.P. agents. It wouldn't
surprise me if she would try to seduce a robot, if she thought she'd get something out of the
arrangement."
"She seemed like a nice lady," Hymie said, "but I don't think she's my type. Of course, all woman I've met have fallen short of my Sally."

"Was that another C.O.N.T.R.O.L. robot?" Penny asked.

Hymie shook his head. "No, she was the coffee machine in the communal break room." He gave a nostalgic smile. "That woman could whip up a pot of coffee like it was nobody's business."

Hearing this, Heather and Penny exchanged looks, and Penny just shrugged. Turning to Hymie, she decided to change the subject. "Chief Quimby's office will be right down this way," she said. "I already called him ahead of time, so he knows what to expect. Now, when we get there, he's going to have an intelligence test for you to take. This is to prove you are sapient and allow us to put you on a pay role. That's alright with you, right?"

"Quite," Hymie replied with a nod. "I'm actually rather excited. C.O.N.T.R.O.L. used to have a lot of tests to check their agents' abilities, but I was always told that I didn't need to take them because I am a robot."

"When you guys are done, you can come meet me at the lab area," Penny said, splitting off from the group. "I've got a few projects that I'm working on, so I'll take the time now to make sure they'll be ready for later."

"New toys, huh?" Heather asked.

"For Bridgette and Will, as well as a few upgrades for Kayla, Eli, Linc, Rheeci, and me," Penny replied. "After what happened at the amusement park, I don't want to get caught off-guard again, and that means making sure my friends are ready, too." With that, she hurried down the ramp that led to the public electronics lab.

"Amusement park?" Hymie asked. "She designs toys for an amusement park?"

Heather sighed. "It's a long story. I'll explain once you've taken your test."

Once she was out of the W.O.M.P. building, Lana reached into her purse and pressed a button, before going to stand at the corner of the sidewalk. In a moment, a taxi cab pulled up and stopped by here. She opened the door and slid inside.

"Prompt as usual, Dick," she said as soon as they were on the move.

"It pays to be fast when you're with M.A.D.," the agent responded. "So, what'd you learn about the bot."

"It's just like Spectrum supposed," Lana replied. "His memories are intact, albeit imperfect. He knows about C.O.N.T.R.O.L. and now about their connection to W.O.M.P. He is also completely sapient, though a bit of a simpleton."

"So, his parts might be just what we're looking for," Dick stated.

Lana gave a nod. "Exactly. Spectrum will send the schematics to Defecto to have him add those elements to the new M.A.D. bots. Of course, Spectrum and Thelma will have to make a few bots themselves so it doesn't look suspicious that they took those schematics, and they'll probably go to W.O.M.P., but there'll only be two of them compared to the army M.A.D. will have."
"Want to head back to Doofus Industries?" Dick asked.

"Not quite yet," Lana replied with a shake of her head. "I'm going to have a lunch with Georges Allard about his newest movie. I'll just need you to drop me off at Café Jubilee."

Dick gave a nod before turning the car in the intended direction. "On it."

Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, Mexico

Inside the museum, the four Gadgetinis had split up to keep an eye on the inside of the museum. The boys were handling the populated center, around the exhibits, since their presence was already public knowledge. The girls, however, had to keep a low profile, since no one could know they were there, and thus they were keeping an eye out in the attic and basement areas, where they were less likely to be seen.

This did not keep the four from carrying on conversation over their intercoms, though. "So," Fidget said during one particularly slow, boring part of the stakeout, "what exactly happened when you two woke up for the first time? I mean, when you two were first aware of yourselves. Was it an instant, or did something happen to cause it?"

"Honestly, I'm not quite sure," Data replied. "We were built by Dr. Benjamin Baxter, but I don't know how long it was between the time we were built and the time we woke up."

"I know it took some time for us," Fidget said. "Miss Penny built us to help with missions, and we were able to do at least one before we woke up. Unfortunately, we got captured on that mission. As a result, when we woke up, we were stuck in a M.A.D. lab."

"Oh, that sounds dreadful!" Data exclaimed. "You must have been so frightened."

"I was, at any rate," Fidget responded. "Digit had a bit of a cooler head than I did, so he was able to come up with a plan of escape."

"So that's how you made it out alright?" Data asked.

"Well," Fidget started, but he was soon cut off.

"We don't need to be talking right now," Digit snapped. "We're on a mission right now, so focus on keeping an eye out for Carrillo."

"Oh, don't be so gutted, Blueberry," Scooter said in a teasing way. "There's no problem with a little conversation, especially when nothing's going on."

"None of us have guts because robots don't have them, and I told you not to call me 'blueberry,'" Digit snapped.

Ignoring him, Scooter turned the conversation back to Fidget. "So, what happened during that first escape attempt?"

"It went well, at first," Fidget answered. "We almost made it all the way to the laundry chute, which was our way out. Unfortunately, that was when the guards found us and caught us with an EMP bomb."

"That must've hurt," Scooter commented. "How'd you guys get away?"
"Truth be told, we got lucky." Fidget gave an awkward smile. "We were in a tight place. The M.A.D. agent running the place, Dr. Focus, was determined to study me and cut Digit up for research. We probably wouldn't have made it out, if it wasn't for the fact that the Inspector and his team were working in that area at the same time."

"Oh, you poor things!" Data exclaimed. "He really wanted to dissect you, Digit? That's horrible. He didn't get to you, did he?"

"I was restrained for a while," Digit replied in a short tone of voice, "but since I'm still here, I don't think it's possible for him to have done anything, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, that's right," Data said with an embarrassed laugh. "I do suppose it would have been difficult for you to survive that."

"Try impossible," Digit said with a snort. "So, if we're going to insist on talking over origin stories, how did you two come to? After all, Miss Penny clearly didn't make you."

"That's only half true," Scooter replied. "It's true Miss Dollar didn't actually put us together. Like Data mentioned before, that was Dr. Baxter. He also was the one who tweaked our chassis designs (that's why we're not identical to you on the outside), but other than that, we're pretty much identical to you in our inner workings."

"All I can remember from waking up was being in a laboratory," Data recalled. "It was night, so it was really dark, and I was pretty scared. Thankfully Scooter was already awake, so at least I wasn't alone."

"I remember that," Scooter agreed. "It was kind of boring until the morning. There wasn't anything to do in there."

"I'd prefer boring to scary," Fidget said. "So, have you guys taken the test yet? The one that proves sapience and reveals an equivalent age?"

"Took it several days after we woke up," Scooter replied. "I got thirty-one; Data got twenty-four."

"So, there was a difference between you two?" Fidget said. "Huh, Digit and I both got twenty-eight."

"Wait, so that means I'm older than you two?" Scooter asked, a slight laugh in her voice.

"Only according to a stupid test," Digit snapped. "Chronologically, we're older than you by several months."

"Wow, you're awfully tight wound, aren't you," Scooter replied.

Digit gave a snort. "Like I said before, we're on a mission right now. We've wasted enough time on idle chat as it is. We're getting back to the mission, and right now."

"Alright, alright," Scooter said, shaking her head. "Don't get your knickers in a bunch." Since she was in the attic, she then moved over to small window overlooking the city. "Well, I'll be. I think I spotted our perp."

"You've seen him?" Fidget asked. "Where?"

"He's out in the street," Scooter replied. "He's wearing an old denim jacket and a baseball cap, but his face matches the one on record. I link you guys into the feed."
"Good spotting," Fidget said once all four were in on the surveillance. "From the looks of things, Brain and the Inspectors are onto him as well."

"All the same, we should keep a watch on him," Digit stated. "If things turn bad, they might need our help. Just stand by for now, but be ready to intervene if they need us."

Once Brain had been given his instruction, he knew exactly what he was going to do. It didn't take long for him to catch his target's scent. Carrillo must have been at a M.A.D. hideaway recently, because he reeked of the familiar scent of the organization. The dog might have preferred not to get so close to such a stench, but still, a mission was a mission. No time to worry about stink when one had a goal to complete.

Due to his sheer size, Brain knew he didn't have much time for stealth. He crept up alongside his target and, as soon as he could, seized the corner of the man's jacket in his teeth and pulled. He was careful not to pull too hard, since he didn't want to cause too much of a scene, but still, there'd need to be an excuse for the humans to come up.

He'd done his job well. As soon as he had grabbed the coat, the man turned on him. "What the-? Let go, you dumb mutt!" Carrillo declared. He swore in Spanish before attempting to tug the jacket away from the dog. Brain was determined, though, and held on tight.

In a moment, he got the signal that it would be alright to let got. "Spot! Spot, what do you think you're doing?" Gadget, now wearing his Mr. Smith disguise, declared, going over and grabbing Brain by the collar. "I'm sorry, sir," he said, turning to Carrillo. "I don't know what's gotten into him. I've never seen him act this way."

"Just keep him better under control next time," Carrillo snapped. He was in no mood to deal with tourists at the moment and vastly wished he could get on with his scouting.

"Oh, dear, did Spot damage your jacket?" At this moment, Prince caught up as well, and along with her Mrs. Smith disguise, she was also using a midwestern-American accent. "I'm so sorry about that, sir. If you'd like, we'd be more than willing to pay for the damages."

"No, it's fine, just leave me alone," Carrillo said. He adjusted the jacket and hat so that they obscured his features a bit more before turning to go in a huff.

As soon as he was gone, "Mr. Smith," "Mrs. Smith," and "Spot" hurried down a deserted alleyway where it would be safe to drop their disguises. "Good job out there, Brain," Gadget said, patting the dog on the head. "That got us exactly what we needed."

"Indeed," Prince agreed. "That was definitely the man we faced last night. Looks like he's scouting out the museum; good news for us."

Gadget nodded and called up his communicator. "Gadget to Officers Fidget, Digit, Data, and Scooter. Come in, Officers."

"We're here, Inspector," Digit answered.

"Officers, Inspector Prince and I have found the suspect," Gadget stated. "We had a brief interaction with him to identify him. He's now headed towards the museum. You four keep an eye on him. Remember, we want him to take the fake otter and bat, but if he seems to tag anything else, mark it. We don't want anything but those fakes taken."
"We're on it!" Data exclaimed, giving a salute. They then hung up to turn their attention to the M.A.D. agent.

"So now we just wait," Prince commented as Gadget came to sit next to her. "These are the more frustrating parts of a mission."

Gadget gave a smile and nodded in agreement. "True. It's not all crime fighting and it can be rough at times. I don't think I'd choose any other life, though."

"Same here," Prince replied.

There was a moment of silence when a thought came to Gadget. "Oh, dear. I've forgotten to contact Penny! I'd better do that now."

W.O.M.P. HQ

Penny was sitting in the mostly empty public-use robotics lab, working on what looked like a winged robotic mouse, when her pendant went off. She recognized it in a moment as her uncle's call, and she was quick to answer. "Hey, Uncle Gadget," she greeted. "How's everything over in Mexico?"

"Hot and slow," Gadget replied. "We're deal with a M.A.D. agent, but we're at a waiting game portion. By the way, this is Inspector Prince. She's helping me with this mission."

"Hey there," Penny greeted. "Pleased to meet you."

"Likewise, I'm sure," Prince returned.

Greetings now out of the way, Gadget turned the communicator back on himself. "I'm just checking in. How'd everything go with Miss Lamour's cousin?"

"Amazingly," Penny replied. "You remember those discoveries we made about C.O.N.T.R.O.L. and Agent 86?"

"I remember," Gadget replied with a nod.

"It turns out that what, or who, Thelma Botkin discovered reveals even more!" She went on to explain about Hymie, how he had been uncovered and brought back. She finished by explaining that he had been brought back to W.O.M.P. "He's taking the intelligence test right now, so I thought I'd come in here and tinker a bit while I waited."

"It seems you've had a productive time," Gadget said with approval. "Well done."

Penny beamed, enjoying the praise. "Thanks! I didn't really do all too much, thought, and it's been a blast to work through."

"So," Gadget asked. "What are you working on now?"

"Well, I was going to work a bit more on Bridgette and Will's tools, since I'm almost finished with the upgrades to the others," Penny said, turning back to her work station, "but I'm missing some important parts for those, so instead, I've started on a Seraph."

"The Seraph, of course!" Gadget exclaimed. "I should have known it would be a Seraph. Useful things, those Seraphs." He gave a pause before giving an awkward smile. "Uh, what is a Seraph?"
Penny, who was already quite used to her uncle's mannerisms, gave a laugh. "It's this," she replied, holding up the little frame. "I call it a Seraph, with Seraphim being the plural, because they're going to have six wings when I'm finished, and they'll sit in a way that looks like the image for the angel. You can already see where the wings will go in, see?" She pointed out the six wing-ports on the back of the frame.

"Well done!" Gadget said, giving a smile of paternal pride. "It always amazes me to see what you put together, Penny."

"Oh, this is nothing much," Penny replied, giving an embarrassed smile. "It's just a little side project while I wait for parts to come in."

"Max?" The group turned when they heard the voice. It was Hymie, who had recently finished the test. He and Heather had come into the workshop, and he had frozen the moment he saw screen. That did stop him for hurrying over in a second. "Max, you're alive!" he said quickly. "They said you probably died decades ago, but you're still alive! Is 99 there, too? Wait, that woman isn't 99. Max, you're not cheating, are you?"

Gadget couldn't help but stare back with confusion. "Max? My name isn't Max, it's John. Most people call me Gadget, though. Do I know you?"

A look of sadness came to Hymie. "You're not Maxwell Smart?"

"Oh, that's who you thought I was?" Gadget gave a smile and a shrug. "Well, I have been told we bear some resemblance. No, I'm Detective John Brown, also known as Inspector Gadget. This is Inspector Prince, from the British W.O.M.P. division. Who, may I ask, are you?"

Hymie was too depressed by the disappointment to answer, so Penny took over. "Uncle Gadget," she said, "remember how I told you we found the actual Hymie? The one who helped at C.O.N.T.R.O.L.? Well, this is him."

"This is him?" Gadget asked. "Wow! I never would have guessed he was a robot! You'll have to compliment Brenda on her work with the new pseudoskin. I'd have never been able to tell the difference."

"I apologize for the confusion," he said, then turning to Hymie. "I heard of your work with C.O.N.T.R.O.L. Impressive background, if I do say so myself. So, do you plan on sticking around W.O.M.P.?"

Hymie nodded, having recovered enough to respond. "Yes. I plan to stay around here, at least until I've adjusted to this time."

"Good to hear it," Gadget replied with a smile. "I hope we can work together in the future."

"Sorry to say this," Heather said, cutting off the confusion, "but Quimby wants me and Penny to help Hymie settle in, so we'll have to leave now."

"No problem." Gadget gave a nod. "Penny, I'll call in again tomorrow morning. By then, we should have some idea of what we're supposed to do next. You stay safe, alright?"

"I will, Uncle," she responded. "You do the same. I love you."

"I love you too, Angel," Gadget replied before hanging up.
M.A.D. Hideaway, an hour outside of Mexico City

Carrillo slammed the door to his hideout, gritting his teeth in frustration. Those stupid tourists had nearly ruined the entire stakeout mission, and he still hadn't gotten over it. Everything else went on alright, but something about that couple rubbed him the wrong way, and he couldn't get them out of his mind.

To make matters worse, he couldn't have a drink or a smoke to try to relax. Since there was a gig to pull off that night, he'd have to be stone-cold sober if he was going to carry things out. M.A.D. did not approve of recreational usage before a mission, since that could hamper the outcome.

"I hate dogs," he muttered to himself. Frustrated to with his lot, he pulled a soda out of the small fridge and turned on the television to try to relax before the heist.

Of course, that was when his communicator went off. Checking the ID to see who was calling, Carrillo also checked his attitude. No matter how bad a day you were having, it was never wise to take it out on a M.A.D. lieutenant.

"Señora Reyas," he said in greeting, making the salute as he spoke. "I'd suspected you'd be calling soon."

"I'm here for the update," she responded. "Have you scouted out your next target?"

"Indeed," Carrillo replied. He gave a smile of amusement. "Those fools down at the museum haven't upped their security measures any more than before. That buffoon and his robo-minions are sticking around, but we've already seen how much of a help they are."

"Be careful, Carrillo," Reyas warned. "If it doesn't appear things have changed all that much, that means they might have a trap planned."

"Duly noted," he replied. "So, does Claw have any instructions if I run into the Inspector or the beautiful intruder from before?"

"The instructions for Gadget are the same as they have always been." Reyas gave a knowing smile and shook her head. "Make attempts to eliminate him. If you have to choose between finishing the mission and killing him, kill him and anyone associating with him. With him out of the way, no one will be able to stand in our way ever again."

"As for the woman," she continued, "that is up to your discretion. We haven't found a match for who she is on file, but a simple jewel thief is hardly our concern. Just as long as she's not able to take Los Príncipes or the big one, we don't care what you do with her."

"Thank you, señora," Carrillo said, giving a simple bow. "This should make things easier to work with. I trust that my transportation to the ruin will be available soon?"

"As soon as you have claimed the bat and the otter, we will send a plane to pick you up," Reyas answered. "From there, you'll be on your own until you have the crystal. Once you have it, you will be taken to the Hot Ice lounge and instructions will be given on the way. Are you prepared for tonight?"

"I am prepared, as I always am." Carrillo gave another salute. "I will contact you later tonight."

"I will be awaiting." With that simple phrase, Reyas ended the call.
Assignment 10.5: New Destinations

Saturday, July 26, 2087

Skies over Mexico

The plan had gone off without a hitch, for all involved. Just as expected, Carrillo had broken into the museum after closing times and made off with the replicas. Gadget, Brain, and the Gadgetinis had been present at the time, but since they needed the M.A.D. agent to get away for the plan to continue, they made a false show of struggle, allowing him to slip away into the night.

Not long afterwards, the tracking devices in the false statues were activated, allowing the team to figure out just where they were off to next. However, the results of this revelation were not what had been initially expected.

"I wonder what M.A.D would want with jewels like that in a jungle," Gadget said, crossing his arms and frowning in thought. He, along with the other W.O.M.P. agents assigned to the team, were seated in a small plane that had been sent to take them to the Lacandon Jungle, which was located in southern Mexico and northwestern Guatamala.

"Who knows," Digit responded. "Those wierdos don't seem to need any rhyme or reason to do what they do."

"It does make a bit of sense, though," Data replied. "After all, hasn't the M.A.D. lieutenant Anna Reyas been marked as hiding her bases in dense jungles if they're not in a city?"

Digit huffed, but Fidget gave a nod. "That's right! Of the bases we were able to locate, two were in the Amazon and three were hidden in the Indian jungles. Since Carrillo is one of Reyas' men, it makes sense he'd head straight for a jungle."

"Excellent logic, Officers," Gadget congratulated. He then turned back to his thoughts. "Then that would mean we're likely to end up right on a M.A.D. base. If that's the case, we'll need to radio back for help before we try to go in."

He then looked over to Prince, who was seated across from him. She had a book opened in front of her, and he was surprised by the fact that there was a rabbit on the cover. Extending his neck over so he could see into the book, he examined the pages. "Huh, this looks pretty complicated for a book about bunnies."

Prince looked a bit startled by the intrusion, but swallowed the feeling and reminding herself of who she was dealing with. "This?" she asked, turning over the book as she did so. "That's a common misconception about this book." She gave a smile as she pointed to the cover. "This is Watership Down, a classic fable dealing with social status and how a society deals with its people. I suppose this story does have a bit of a reputation of being underestimated, especially the movie adaptation."

"Underestimated?" Gadget asked as he retracted his neck back into his shoulders. "How so?"

"As I said, this story is a fable about civilizations and heroism as embodied by rabbits," Prince responded, "but the author was very thorough on his research about the behaviors of rabbits. As a result, the tale can be incredibly graphic at times, as nature has a tendency to be. This isn't so much a problem for the book, which as you noted, is a bit too complicated for small children, but in the 1970's, they released an animated movie based on the book. It received a U rating despite the rather graphic content in the movie, and it proceeded to scar generation after generation of children whose
parents didn't bother to find out just what they movie was about." She gave a small laugh. "I'm sorry to say I was one of those children, though I came to love the story when I became a teenager."

Gadget gave a nod to the explanation. "Interesting. Maybe I should look it up sometime. Penny and I are always looking for books to read together."

"That's a good hobby to have," Prince said with an approving nod. "How long have you been reading to her?"

"Actually," Gadget replied, a slight blush creeping onto his face, "she's read to me since she was nine years old. I did read to her before then, but she's better at it than I am. I enjoy the story, but sometimes I get caught on difficult words and miss what's going on in the story."

"Penny, on the other hand, is brilliant with books." The hint of embarrassment left Gadget's face as he turned the topic to his niece's accomplishments. "Of course, she's always been brilliant with her studies, and she's making great headway as a Junior Agent."

"That reminds me," Prince said, touching her chin. "How exactly was it decided that Penny was going to be allowed to join W.O.M.P. Most people aren't allowed to become Junior Agents until eighteen."

Gadget frowned at the question. "There were…oh, what was the word General Sir used? Extenta… no…exact…that's not it…"

"Extenuating?" Fidget recommended.

Gadget nodded and snapped his fingers. "That's it. Extenuating. There were some extenuating circumstances that are classified. What I can tell you is that it was the lesser of two evils, and even now, they have to alert me if they want to assign her a mission."

At that moment, a ringing sound started up. "Inspector, I think that's you," Digit called out.

"Oh, quite right. Thank you, Officer." Gadget adjusted his hand so that he had activated his super-secret Gadget Phone. "Gadget here. Chief Quimby, what is it?" He listened as his superior spoke on the other end. "Really? They've requested her in specific?" There was another pause as Quimby spoke again. "Well, I suppose it's alright as long as there's no fighting. Heather should go along with her, though." Another pause. "Alright then, she can go." Having finished the conversation, he hung up.

"Is everything alright?" Fidget asked, and the attention the others in the plane had showed they shared his interest.

Gadget leaned back in his seat before he answered. "That was HQ. There's something going on regarding a strike at a restaurant in the city. I don't know the details of the strike, but I do know that both parties have requested that Penny act as mediator, and have refused to take up any deals without her." He gave a sigh. "They've assured me it will be safe, and Agent Connelly and another agent will be accompanying her, so I guess it's no problem. Still, I can't help but worry."

"I wouldn't," Prince said, trying to reassure him. "You said yourself that Penny's advancing to be a brilliant agent. She should be able to handle a simple strike."

"I guess you're right," Gadget said with a sigh.
While Gadget was away on his mission in Mexico, it had been arranged that Penny was to stay at the Tran house until he came back. To further facilitate the atmosphere, it was also allowed that Kayla and Bridgette stay over, so that the four girls could have a bit of time together.

They were seated around the table, discussing the set up for the blog, which had recently been started, when Rheeci's little brother, Toby, rushed in. "Hey, look at this weird baseball I found!" He held up a small blue orb, which Penny immediately recognized. "Wait till I show it to my team!"

"Sorry about this," Penny said, snatching the ball away from him. "I'm pretty sure this is for me."

"Isn't that one of those W.O.M.P. mission balls?" Kayla asked.

Penny nodded. "Yeah, it is, but I can't guess why it's here, since Uncle Gadget's in Mexico."

She pressed the activation button, which caused a screen to pop up. "Good morning, Penelope," Chief Quimby greeted.

"Good morning, chief," Penny replied. "Is everything alright? Uncle Gadget's still on that other mission, you know."

"I am aware," the chief replied. "This mission is for you, though agents Connelly and Hymie will be accompanying you. Have you ever heard of the restaurant Mugsy's?"

"Oh, I love that place!" Bridgette exclaimed. "The 1920's gangster theme is so cool, and the food's pretty good, too."

"I haven't been there a lot," Penny replied, "but I know what it is."

"Well, we've got trouble there," Quimby went on. "Are you aware that they recently ordered a number of animatronics?"

"That's news to me," Penny replied, "but it doesn't surprise me. Robotic entertainers and waitors have been all the rage for a while now."

"That was the idea," Quimby agreed. "However, when they received the animatronics, they had a bit of a surprise. Every single one of the robots is sapient, and once they came alive, they went on strike."

"Strike?" Rheeci asked, leaning over. "What happened?"

"Apparently, the owner of the restaurant still wanted the robots to work without pay, and they aren't having any of that." The chief then turned to Penny. "Both sides have agreed to try to come to some sort of agreement, but the robots have insisted that they will only go with it if you act as mediator."

"Me?" Penny asked. "But I don't know anything about strikes or mediation, or these kinds of laws."

"Yes, but you have more experience working with living robots than anyone else," the chief replied. "I suppose they believe this will make you more impartial in the decision making."

"Alright, I suppose I don't mind trying my hand," Penny answered, "but what about Uncle Gadget?"

"We've already got him covered," Quimby said with a nod. "He's given his approval, provided that Agent Connelly goes with you. She and Agent Hymie will be coming to pick you up soon."
"You hear that!" Bridgette exclaimed. "We've got a mission!"

The girls had a cheer, which was dampened by a call. "No," Aylssa Tran, Rheeci's mother, corrected. "Penny has a mission; you three aren't going anywhere near that place."

"But, Mom," Rheeci protested. "We've gone on plenty of other, more dangerous missions already."

"I know, but that doesn't change the matter," her mother replied. "You do not have my permission, and I'm sure Bridgette's mother and Kayla's guardian would agree with me."

"Sorry, guys," Penny responded with a shrug. "Hey, no worries," Kayla replied. "We'll just keep working on the blog."

At that moment came a knock on the door. "That must be them," Quimby said. "Just go on and report back once you're finished."

"On it, chief," Penny replied. She then ended the conversation, careful to close the screen before lowering the mic and speaker.

... In his office, Chief Quimby waited for the percussive feedback blast that usually accompanied a finished communication. When none came, he relaxed and leaned back in his chair. "So, she actually closed it correctly, huh?" He gave a smile. "I think I can get used it-"

"Grampa! We're kind of having an emergency!" Linc shouted as he raced into Quimby's office, slamming the door as he did. The shock caused Quimby to jolt back, which sent his chair tumbling over.

At the same time, the teen raced around the room, the sleeve of his fire-preventive jacket on fire. At the same time, Eli, in a similar singed state, hurried in with a fire extinguisher. "Come on, hold still!" he shouted, attempting to spray his brother with the foam.

"One day of peace," Quimby groaned as one grandson succeeded in putting out the fire on the other. "Just one day of peace. Is that really too much to ask?"

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Lacandon Jungle

"Here we are!" Data exclaimed as the group trekked through jungle. The female Gadgetini had raced ahead of the rest of the group, and was clearly enjoying herself. "The great wilds! Look at all this flora and fauna! Amazing, isn't it?"

"Is she always like this?" Digit asked Scooter. Scooter shrugged. "Data's always been a bit of a nature freak. She even likes gathering the weeds she can find on the sidewalk and attempted to take a pigeon home to keep as a pet. Thank goodness, Mum wouldn't let her."

"Alright, team," Gadget called out. "Remember to keep your eyes peeled for anything out of the ordinary. Except you, Brain. You keep your nose peeled." He then paused and thought about what he just said. "You know, why would you want to keep your nose peeled? Or your eyes, for that matter. They both sound very painful. Wouldn't it be better if you just kept your eyes open? I don't
think you'd see much if your eyes were peeled."

"We'll keep a watch out," Fidget called out, cutting Gadget off before he could get too off track with his tangent.

Recovering his train of thought, Gadget gave a nod. "Right, and we will, too."

Pulling out a small tablet, Prince went over a map that had been downloaded on the device. "We're in the right area," she said. "The tracking signal is about three or four miles southeast of here." She tucked the tablet in a bag at her side.

"Then we should be off!" Gadget replied. He moved some of the foliage aside and motioned for her to move ahead. "After you."

"Why, thank you," she replied, giving him a smile.

As they moved through the forest, Brain took the lead. Of the seven there, he was most in his element. Even with all the dense foliage surrounding them, he could still identify any and all scents in the surrounding area. Of course, most of those smells were plants, and a number of them were native wildlife. Still, the faint smell of a human who had been there hours before was apparent, and he was able to lead the others down the path without too much trouble.

Or, at least, it would have been without too much trouble if it weren't for those robots who seemed insistent on annoying him through every part of the mission. In particular, Data and Fidget were the guilty parties, since Digit was too busy scanning everything that happened to catch his attention and Scooter seemed determined to lag behind the rest of the group.

"Can you smell him, boy?" Data asked, leaning in to face the dog.

Brain gave a sharp woof in reply before pushing on ahead. He hoped she'd take the hint and leave him alone, but he had no such luck.

"You can follow him, but I wouldn't recommend getting in too close," Fidget said, coming up alongside Data. "He likes to have his space when following a trail."

"Oh, dear," Data said, taking a few steps back so that she was more in line with Fidget. "Sorry about that."

Brain looked back, cast a glance back at the two robots, and gave a huff before turning his nose back to the ground. He'd rather not waste his time in scolding when there was a case to be solved.

"He said he accepts your apology, but says that you should know better than to interrupt a detective at work," Fidget translated.

Data turned to him, a look of amazement in her face. "You can understand him?"

Fidget gave a shrug. "Sure, I can. I've always been able to. Can't you?"

"I'm afraid not," Data replied. "Can you understand all animals? That would be amazing!"

"No, just him," Fidget answered. "Digit can't understand them either, or Brain for that matter. I just thought this was normal and Digit was missing out on something, but if you can't understand him either, then I have to wonder, why can I? And why only him?"

It was now Data's turn to shrug. "Who knows? Maybe Brain's the only one who's got anything
worthwhile to say." She screwed up her face in thought, before an idea struck her. "I've got it! Come on!" she cried, snatching up Fidget's hand.

Brain groaned inwardly to himself as the two robots approached him. He pressed his nose to the ground and focused on the scent, hoping that his attention to the train would convince them that he had no time for their inquiries.

He had no such luck.

"How's the trail, Brain?" Data asked, leaning in to get closer to the dog. "Do you know where he's headed?"

Brain glared at her and gave a snort before picking up speed. He didn't have time for any of this nonsense.

Having said her piece, Data turned expectantly to Fidget.

He gave a shrug in response. "He said he's working on it and to leave him alone," he explained. "Brain's pretty no nonsense and kind of easy to irritate. I wouldn't recommend pulling that stunt a lot."

"Oh, I won't bother him again," Data replied. "Out of curiosity, how can you understand what it is he's saying."

"Brain talks, but it's not in the same way a human or a robot talks," Fidget answered. "It's in his body language, especially his ears and nose. I don't know why I'm the only person who understands him this clearly, but he is talking."

The two Gadgetinis continued on this conversation as they trek went on, followed closely by Digit, who was busy examining evidence, the two human inspectors, and finally Scooter, who was bringing up the rear. The party went on like this for a while, and soon, things began to seem like they were traveling on a cold trail.

Brain knew better than that. As he hurried along, the trail grew warmer, not colder. The scent of the M.A.D. agent, which he had picked up the other day, was definitely here, and growing stronger with every passing moment. Soon, the smell grew so strong that he knew the agent had been there only moments ago, and they'd run into him very soon.

Catching the location of the scent, Brain picked up speed before letting out a woof! He then worked through the scrub and underbrush to find the location.

"He's found the perp!" Fidget called out.

"Excellent job," Gadget approved. "Come on. If we stay quiet, we might be able to catch him by surprise."

The rest of the group nodded wordlessly, following the dog. It was a bit of a struggle due to the plant life, but they were able to make it through well enough after a while. When they made it through, they found just what it was that Brain had located.

It was a huge, abandoned ruin with statues leering out at them. "I wonder what he'd want with a ruin like this," Gadget mused aloud.

"Probably something to do with the statuette," Prince replied. "We'd better split up; remember, he doesn't know we're on the same side."
Gadget nodded. "Quite right," he responded, giving a salute as she hurried off to find another entrance to the ruin.

He then turned to address the robots. "Officers, the four of you stick together, but keep to the shadows. We may need your help."

"We're on it, Inspector," Digit called out as they four ran off.

When they were gone, Gadget then turned to Brain. "Brain, I'd like you to keep an eye on the officers."

Hearing this, Brain gave an annoyed huff. He had spent enough time as a babysitter when it was for someone he actually wanted in his pack. The dog was not relishing the idea of becoming guide for those robots as he had once been for Gadget.

Seeing the response, Gadget got down and patted the dog on the neck. "I know it's not something you are keen on doing, but I need you to do this for me," he said. "You see, they're really smart, but they don't have experience. They're puppies, really. I just need you to keep an eye on them and make sure nothing bad happens."

Brain gave a groan, and Gadget frowned and gave a nod. "Well, if you won't do it for me, would you do it for Penny? She did make them, after all, and she'd be heartbroken if anything happened to them."

The dog groaned again, but this time he complied. Like it or not, he did have to admit, those robots were his girl's pups, and she would not be happy if something happened to them.


Mugsy's, Downtown Metro City

By the time the team pulled up to the restaurant, the area was swarming with reporters and onlookers. They were currently busy speaking to a few people and bots standing outside the building, and thus hadn't noticed the Gadgetmobile when it pulled up.

Seeing the crowd, Penny gave a groan. "Oh, no. The vultures have already made it here."

"Vultures?" Hymie asked. "I do not see any vultures. There are only reporters here."

"Charm's not too fond of reporters," Heather explained.

"They scare the snot out of me," Penny admitted. "Normally, Uncle Gadget handles them, and I'm fine with his support, but I don't know what I'll do without him."

"Hey, you'll do fine," Heather said, giving a smile. "You don't pay any attention to them. Hymie and I will throw 'em some breadcrumbs to keep them distracted."

"Why would be throw bread at them?" Hymie asked. "Are they hungry?"

Hearing his response, Heather sighed. "On second thought, Hymie, you help Penny get in the building. I'll deal with the reporters."

As soon as they opened up the car doors, attention came the trio's. Near immediately, they were
flooded by questions and camera, eager to hear what Penny had to say about the situation.

Heather took charge as soon as she could. "Alright everyone, back up," she called out. "We're on important W.O.M.P. business, so we don't have any time for questions."

That didn't seem to be enough for the majority of the crowd, and though they were able to get on their way to the restaurant, by the time they were halfway to the door, they were being crowded in on once more. It was clear that the "vultures" weren't going to be leave well enough alone.

This had gotten on Heather's last nerve. "Alright, everyone back down now!" she shouted out. "Anyone closer than five feet of us in five minutes will be under arrest for harassment of an officer!"

That did the trick for most of them, but one man didn't seem convinced. He moved purposefully between the group and the handicap ramp, making it impossible for Penny to make it in. "You can't do that! The public has a right to press! I'm not moving an inch until I have my story."

Heather scowled before turning to Penny and Hymie. "I'll meet you two in the restaurant." They nodded before hurrying in.

She then moved ahead preceded to drag him out of the way. "Alright, bucko," she said, pushing him towards to police car, "just in case you don't know, it's illegal to purposefully hinder an officer, be it of W.O.M.P. or the police, when they are attempting to perform their job."

"The people have a right to a story, and you can't stop me!" he snapped.

"And those people inside have a right to our help," Heather replied, pulling him aside again. "If you don't calm down now, I'll have no choice but to place you under arrest."

"Like heck you will!" the man yelled, yanking his arm away and swinging a punch at her.

Several officers moved in to help her in the case of a fight, but it wasn't needed. Heather sidestepped the blow, causing it to miss her by a mile. She then preceded to grab him by the wrist and handcuff him, grabbing the other arm and twisting it behind his back in the process. "I warn you, bucko," she said in a chiding tone.

Once he was handcuffed, she turned him over to one of the police officers, who pulled them man to a nearby car. "Sorry about that," the officer said. "He'd been causing a lot of trouble at public events as of late."

"As of late?" Heather asked.

"He's a lawsuit monger named Paul McGrady, also known online as Powerline364," the officer explained with a sigh. "He's that guy who harassed Rick Rocker at his last Metro City concert and then tried to sue when he got punched."

"You'll be hearing from my lawyer!" McGrady shouted out from inside the police car. "You can't do this and get away with it!"

The officer sighed again. "Right on time. Don't worry about him, Agent Connely, we'll handle it. You go on ahead."

"Thanks," Heather replied, giving a small smile. She then turned and went to join Penny and Hymie in the restaurant.

When she got in, they were standing off to a corner, waiting to be acknowledged. In the main portion
of the restaurant, there was a gathering of smartly dressed people and a group of robots. The robots all looked similar, with clearly robotic looking frames that were human like on the upper half, but narrowed into a single wheel at the bottom on the lower half. All of them were dressed in mobster get-ups, to go with the theme of the restaurant. One of the men and one of the robots were currently locked in a heated argument, and most eyes were drawn in their direction.

"Have I missed anything?" Heather asked.

"They haven't even noticed us," Penny replied.

Heather cocked her head and looked between the two other agents. "You didn't try to break it up?"

"It seemed like it would be rude," Hymie answered.

Hearing this, Heather nodded. "Welp, guess it's up to me to get introductions started."

Stepping forward, she stuck her fingers in her mouth and let off a sharp, piercing whistle. It was enough to break through the argument, and in a moment, all eyes were on the three agents. "Alright," she said, moving ahead, "I heard that W.O.M.P. was called in to assist. What exactly do you want us for?"

The robot who had been engaged in the argument turned to them. "You Penny Gadget?"

"That would be me," Penny said, wheeling up so it would be easier to see her. "These are my companions, Agent Heather Connely and Agent Hymie…Smith. What can I do to help?"

"We never needed your help," the man snarled. "These machines just need to learn their place!"

"And you fleshies better get to know the difference between a mech and a clicker!" the robot snapped back.

"Wait, mech? Clicker?" Hymie asked. "What's going on? I thought this was just as strike."

"This is a strike," the robot responded. He straightened his collar. "Name's Mugsy, and these are my boys." He motioned out to the other robots standing around. We was told we had a job, to hold pretend robberies every now and again for the amusement of the customers. That was alright with us, but when we wanted to negotiate our pay, this flea-ridden meat-bag here decided we weren't getting any!"

"You are all robots!" the man shouted. "I own you!"

"Alright, everyone, quiet!" Penny shouted. She then turned to the man. "And your name is?"

"Vincent Mycroft," the man replied. "I own this establishment. I specifically ordered these robots so that I wouldn't have to pay actors for the part." He gave a huff. "There's no way I'm paying these tin cans to do what they're made for."

"That's fine," Mugsy replied. "Than me an' my boys will look for work elsewhere!"

"I own you!" Mycroft shouted.

"I'm no clicker, you-!" Mugsy started, but Penny cut him off.

"Alright, first things first," she said, maneuvering so she was in between them. "Now, Mugsy, could you please explain your terms. Not everyone knows what they mean."
"Sure," the robot replied. "I'm a mech. You know, a robot who can think for themselves. Any normal device is a clicker, and anything made of meat is a fleshy."

"So that gets that explained," Penny said. She then turned to Mycroft. "I know you're not going to like to hear this, but you can't own them."

"But they're robots!" Mycroft shouted.

"Living robots," Penny insisted. "There have already been quite a few discussions over this because of the Gadgetinis, but as long as a robot is showing signs of self-aware, independent thought, they are to be afforded every right that humans receive."

"That said," she continued, turning to Mugsy, "there can be no discussions of pay or employment until certain tests are taken. They're free to take, and they determine equivalent age and IQ level. If you go down to the W.O.M.P. HQ center, they can help you to receive those."

"I'm fine with that," Mugsy said with a shrug. He then gave a smile. "I knew it was a good idea to get a halfa officer in on it."

Assuming "halfa" meant "cyborg," Penny sighed. "I'd watch those terms, though. Some people might find them racist. Er, speciesist."

Mycroft, however, wasn't about to give up. "Those robots were bought and paid for! They can't leave!"

"If we get in contact with the manufacturer," Penny replied, "we'll be able to get a refund. Besides, we'll need to talk to them anyway."

"I said their not leaving!" Mycroft started.

He was cut off when Mugsy charged him. "Do you want to go? Cause I'll go!"

For a moment, all hell broke loose, with the robots and people there getting into a near-brawl. It grew to such a fever pitch that Penny was almost caught between blows.

Before that could happen, however, Hymie stepped in. He knocked the brawlers, both human and robot back, make it to the girl's side and soon had both Mugsy and Mycroft by the wrists. "Alright, Miss Dollars been quite patient with the both of you," he scolded, "but there will be no fighting. We can still discuss things civilly. Am I clear?"

Both participants assured he was, and he released them. "Good. Now, I'm sure what she said was quite clear. Are there any more questions?"

"I've got just one," Mugsy said. He gave a grin. "You tossed my boys back like they were nothin', and those fleshy's like they were less than nothing. You're also the first person I've run into who could match me in a fight. No human has that sort of strength, 'cept maybe a halfa. You're a mech, aren't you?"

There was a moment's pause, and all eyes were on him. Finally, Hymie nodded. "Yes. I am a sapient android. I am also in the employ of W.O.M.P., so don't expect my species to change my behavior. I can and will, however, help you to receive fair treatment. To do that, however, you need to be able to leave here peaceably."

Hearing this, Mugsy laughed. "Well, why didn't you say so?" He then turned to the other robots. "Youse all head down to the W.O.M.P. building. If they've got three mech officers on the pay roll,
then they can’t be too bad."

"But-!" Mycroft started, but he was cut off by Penny.

"Like I said, you’ll receive a refund," she stated. "However, nothing else can be done, considering the 13th Amendment."

In a huff, Mycroft also turned to leave. That was when everyone turned to look at the exits…and realized there were reporters watching from every doorway and window.

"Oh, no," Penny squeaked.

"Here we go again," Heather sighed.

To be continued…
New Friendships

Saturday, July 26, 2087

Lacandon Jungle, on the border between Mexico and Guatemala

There were multiple entrances to the ruins, and with the other team members having all run off to take the side entrances, that left Gadget with the main hallway. A part of him wanted to set up a connection with the others, so that they might be able to talk through a plan of action, but that would be impractical.

Everyone already knew their roles, as they had already talked them over. The four Gadgetinis and Brain would supply support while he confronted Carrillo. Prince would get away with the statuettes, both real and fake, and them make her get away while he confronted the M.A.D. agent. As to how they were going to do that, they would just have to wing it.

Thankfully, I am an expert at improvisation! Gadget thought to himself as motivation.

He moved the flashlight around the tunnel of the ruin, examining the carvings along the sides. They showed images of the everyday life of the people who had built it, though Gadget couldn't name who those people were. It would eventually be a fascinating historical discovery, but he couldn't focus on that right now.

What he did need to focus on was finding signs of Carrillo. That, unfortunately, was not an easy task. Having the assurances of Brain's nose and some trampled flora surrounding the tunnel, Gadget was sure someone had come down this way, but other than these signs, there was nothing around. Add that the tunnels were so deep and clogged that only the flashlight at the end of his finger provided any illumination, it was a struggle to move through.

Finally, however, he did have another sign. As he came to the end of the tunnel, he came up to a stone door. The door had been left ajar, and the torn vines in it showed that this was a new development. Confidence bolstered by this new clue, Gadget seized the door and pushed on it to get it open all the way.

The door was heavier than it looked, but it wasn't too much more him. He was able to get it open, though that did produce a loud scraping noise in the process. Once the door was opened enough to for him to get through, he slid past it. "Go-go Gadget Stun Gun," he whispered, waiting for a moment to see if anyone had heard him.

Unfortunately, even if, by chance, no one heard the door open, Gadget's position was revealed by the fact that his gadgets chose that moment to glitch. Instead of the stun gun sliding out from the back of his wrist, his siren popped out of his hat and started blaring as loud as it could. Between the shrieking sound and the flashing red lights, it became clear no one was missing out on his presence.

"No, I said stun gun!" he exclaimed in exasperation. "Go-go Gadget Stun Gun!"

The siren then slunk back into his hat, only for an arm to pop out once more, this time with an air horn. The air horn then went off, adding another loud, obnoxious sound.

"Go-go Gadget Stun Gun!" Gadget practically shouted. Once more, the arm moved back into his hat, but popped out again, this time handing him a vuvuzela.
"I said stun gun, not vuvuzela!" Gadget said with a huff. "Why do I even have one of these?"

Before he could call out another gadget, a whip shot out of the shadows, entwining itself around the instrument and yanking it out of the inspector's hands. It was then smashed against the wall as the whip jerked it away. "Ah, Inspector Gadget," Carrillo said, emerging from the shadows and recalling his whip. "I was wondering if you were going to follow me on this little field trip. I suppose you are ready for round two?"

"Indeed, I am," Gadget replied. "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and-" He was cut off before he could finish the statement, as Carrillo had opened fire, forcing the inspector to move fast to dodge the blow.

"You W.O.M.P. agents talk too much," Carrillo stated, holding open the blaster in his hand. "I say we get right down to the fun part!"


His sidestep, however, brought him right in the path of another laser blast, this time coming from behind. Carrillo was stunned by the blast and was pushed ahead.

Gadget attempted to take advantage of this to catch a hold of the criminal, but Carrillo was stronger than Gadget had supposed. The moment he laid a hand on Carrillo's shoulder in an attempt to arrest him, Gadget was seized by the wrist and tossed aside.

Turning to where the blast came from, Carrillo gave a cruel smile. "I might have supposed you would show up, señorita. After all, our feud just wouldn't have been finished without you."

"What can I say?" Prince said, emerging from the shadows. She was now wearing the cloche hat and coat from before, and had a stun gun in one hand. "Like I said before, I have plans for those jewels. Just hand them over, and I'll be on my way."

"Ah, but I don't have them now," Carrillo responded. "Don't worry, though. You two should find out where they are right about…now."

Taking advantage of the element of surprise, Carrillo dodged to one side and activated a lever that was disguised as a statue. Both Gadget and Prince moved in an attempt to stop him, but they were too late. As soon as the lever was activated, the entire room began to move, and the three humans were separated as the floor opened up in a three-way panel.

The roof opened up as well, and sunlight began to shine through. As the light beamed into the room, it highlighted three pedestals. On each of the pedestals was one of the three statues, the emerald duck and the false bat and otter. False though two of the three were, however, they were close enough to the real deal that the reaction was not hampered. The light was funneled into the statues, causing beams of red, blue, and green light to shine through.

"I'm judging from your responses that neither of you have heard of the ancient crystal weapon," Carrillo taunted. "Legend stated that he who could bring the bat, duck, and otter together would be granted the power of the sun god! That power has been unearthed now and will soon belong to M.A.D.!

"Well, crumbs," Gadget muttered under his breath.
"I'm really sorry about this," Hymie said. He, Penny, and Heather had made their way back to the HQ, fighting their way against the now more energetic reporters, and were doing their best to hide out in an employee's only area. "I didn't mean to cause you all more trouble."

"Don't worry about it," Penny responded with a small smile. "Your nature as a robot was going to come out eventually. As for these reporters, well, Metro City reporters are infamous for swarming over even a hint of a story like ants at a picnic."

"More like ants at a bakery!" Quimby muttered as he pushed his way through. "I swear, they're an infestation!"

"Didn't have much luck in getting them to go away, huh?" Heather asked, giving a small smile.

"None, until I pulled out the big guns." Quimby scowled and crossed his arms. "You know, there used to be a time when people understood things like 'off-limits,' 'classified,' and 'none of your business!' At least they still understand 'get the heck home before I arrest all your behinds for trespassing on W.O.M.P. properties.'"

"This is my fault," Hymie groaned. "I shouldn't have answered that question."

Penny patted his shoulder. "Like I said, don't feel too bad. It looks like this sapient machinery thing is something that's going to keep happening, so we're all going to have to get used to it. They'll lose interest eventually."

"I hope you're right," Hymie replied.

"I know I am," Penny answered. "This same thing happened after the Gadgetinis were discovered, or when both Uncle Gadget and I became Cybers. You just get used to it over time."

"And do they eventually go away?" Hymie asked.

Penny gave an awkward smile at the question. "Well, not really, but those changes only happened a couple of months ago. Hopefully they'll go away soon."

"On the bright side," Quimby stated, "this has done an amount of good, at least for those sapient robots who have developed and who will wake up in the future. Those reporters, to their credit, seem to be treating you guys with sympathy, so hopefully we won't have to deal with something like this in the near future."

"Oh, yeah," Heather said, "that reminds me. How'd everything turn out with those bots from the restaurant?"

"They'll be alright," Quimby responded. "Tests went out, and they're now licensed to get jobs of their own, at their own leisure. For the time being, W.O.M.P. will supply housing until other arrangements can be made."

"That goes for you, too," the chief added, turning to Hymie. "Especially since you're a W.O.M.P. agent now, we will help with your arrangements until you feel confident enough to make some of your own."

"I appreciate all the help you've offered me," Hymie said with a smile. "You have all been so
welcoming. I hope I can be of help in the future."

"Don't worry about it," Penny said, flashing a smile. "There's no need. Besides, if today was of any indication, you'll be a great help in the future.

Metro City University, Metro City

"Oh, how is my favorite cousin?" Lana asked as she entered into the robotics lab at the university.

Thelma clearly didn't share her kin's attitude. "Good to see you, Lana. You don't need to hold pretenses here. Doctor Specturm has this entire area blacked out, so no one can hear us here."

"Good." Lana selected a rolling chair, which she then leaned back in. "I have news from Claw, and he wants a report in return."

"The report is ready and will be turned in at the end," Doctor Spectrum replied. "What message does Claw have."

"He wants to know if the specs you drew from the android can be called up and sent to Defecto for utilization in his program."

Spectrum nodded. "They're all in the report. Hymie himself is far too antiquated to be of any use to M.A.D. We are going to build two models here, as a show of faith to W.O.M.P., but they will be near identical copies of him."

"In a word, near useless," Thelma added.

"She's right," Spectrum said with a nod. "However, I have written down some upgrades and additions to the weapon project that can be used to make the android project a success." He held out a flash drive. "Everything anyone would want is on here. I've added a few adjustments to make it more amenable to the Gadgetini program already used. Once this is finished, Claw will have the android agent he's been wanting."

"Good to hear," Lana said, tucking the drive into a pocket on the inside of her shirt. "I'll send this over to the castle right away."

"Did you hear about what happened in the city, though?" Thelma asked before her cousin could leave. "It wasn't even a week before that 'droid let his secret slip. I think you own me twenty dollars."

Lana sighed. "A bet's a bet. Here you go."

"Thank you," Thelma said with a smug smile, taking the twenty with a swift movement. She then gave a chuckle. "You know, with all these living 'droid crawling out of the woodwork, it's a near sure thing that Defecto's project will succeed."

"Maybe," Lana replied with a shrug. "Not that it really matters much. A 'droid's a 'droid, whether it can talk or not doesn't make much of a difference."

"I'm guessing you're not much a fan of robotics," Spectrum stated.

Lana gave a laugh in response. "It's not that I hate them. It's just that good old human and animal ingenuity can't be beat. Isn't that right, Snowflake?" She reached down and scratched the ferret
Chimera under the chin, and it let out a pleased sound in response.

At that moment, a door opened and a newcomer came in. "I couldn't agree more with you, my dear," the newcomer, a dark-haired man in a stiff green suit, said. "Robots belong on the factory lines. Leave the important work with actual creatures, I say."

"Hello, Professor Venom," Thelma said, giving a sarcastic wave.

"It's Vernon, might I remind you, Miss Botkin," Professor Vernon replied.

"So, what do you want, Drake," Doctor Spectrum asked. "It must be important for you to come all the way down from your high and mighty biology department."

"Only that I heard that Miss Lamour was down here and I supposed Claw would want my report as well." He handed a flash drive over to Lana. "I presume you don't mind me coming here."

"Not at all," she replied, taking the drive from him. "Saves me a trip."

"Good to hear." Professor Vernon glance around the lab and gave a sniff of contempt. "Don't get me wrong, Elvin, I understand the use these little do-dads hold for M.A.D., but what I mean is there's no need to develop a quote-unquote 'thinking machine.' There are humans, and Dr. Wildman has made a wonderful discovery when it come to the NIMH Chimera. Why, my own Viola is worth at least five of your tinker toys."

"Yeah, yeah, you like your snake better than you like 'droids," Thelma said with a sneer. "We've heard the whole sermon before; there's no need to repeat yourself."

"Very well, then. I shall take my leave." He then cast a backwards glance at the lab. "Good day to you."

As soon as he was gone, Thelma let out a snort. "What a snob."

"True, but he's an intelligent snob," Spectrum said. "The toxins he has developed has been invaluable to M.A.D., so, like it or not, we're going to have to put up with a bit of snobbery every now and then."

Getting up from her seat, Lana then turned to the door. "I had better get these files to Claw. Be seeing you two around." She then strutted out, eager to deliver her package.

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Ruin in the Lacandon Jungle

"So, now what do we do?" Data asked. The four Gadgetinis had entered into the ruin from a hidden ventilation shaft and were currently hunched over inside the short passageway, waiting to find out what to do next.

"We wait for the signal," Digit responded. "Remember, the Inspectors are the ones who are going to take those jewels back. We're just here to provide support when they need it."

"Got it," Scooter said with a nod. "We wait and provide help when it's needed. I can understand that." She then took the opportunity to lean back. "Time for a bit of a rest, then."

"Now, hold on," Digit said with a huff. "I said we wait, not we rest. There's a big difference between the two."
"Aw, where the harm?" Scooter asked. She gave him a sideways grin. "We were just told to wait, after all. Not like there's much of a difference between standing to attention and sitting at it."

"Besides," Data pointed out, taking a seat by her sister, "it is rather uncomfortable to stand in here."

"Well, yes, but I, uh," Digit stuttered out. Unable to find a way to argue that didn't make him sound overbearing, he then crossed his arms. "Fine, but don't expect me and Fidget to join you."

"Uh, sorry," Fidget called out.

Digit, to his frustration, turned to see his twin already sitting down. "Really?" the blue robot asked. "You couldn't stand with me on this? Just this once?"

"Sorry, but like she said, it's uncomfortable to stand in here," Fidget stated. "Holding that position for a long time can't be very good for our pneumatics."

Digit was going to argue again, but finding no logical, appealing argument, kept quiet and sat down in a huff. He then crossed his arms, making it clear he was not open to conversation with anyone at the moment.

After a moment of awkward silence, Data spoke up. "So, how long do you usually have to wait?"

"It depends," Fidget answered. "This time, I don't think it'll be too long. There's not a lot of places a person can run or hide in here, which means that it probably won't be too long before the inspectors figure out where Carrillo is hiding."

"Once we receive the signal from them, then we go in for the catch," Digit added. "We'll make sure there's not much of an escape, so Inspector Gadget can catch the thief before he gets away."

"And Mama will get away with the jewels," Data said.

"I've been meaning to ask," Fidget said. "Why do you refer to Inspector Prince as 'Mama?' I mean, she didn't design or build you."

"That was kind of my fault," Data said. "When we woke up in the lab that first night, I had gotten kind of bored and started watching some of the nature documentaries that were available in the lab's library." She started blushing a pale pink. "I assumed from then that any large creature that resembles a smaller creature is that smaller creature's mother, and since Scooter and I looked so much like Inspector Prince, I assumed she was our mother."

"That's nice," Fidget said. "At least that's better than-"

Before he could finish his thought, the entire building began to shake. Even seated, the four Gadgetinis were thrown to the ground, and they had to grip on to keep from being tossed this way and that.

"What's going on?" Fidget cried out.

"I'd say that's probably our signal to help the inspectors!" Scooter responded. She struggled to get to her feet, but was tossed back down by the quaking.

"We've got to figure out some way to get there!" Digit called, though his attempts were no more successful than Scooter's.

In all the panic, there was a flash of fur. In a moment, Brain hurried by. He was more steady in the
shaking, though he still had to fight to keep his balance.

Going up to Fidget, the dog let out a bark, desperately hoping the small robot understood what he was saying. Thankfully, that did appear to be the case.

"That's a great idea!" Fidget exclaimed. "Go-go Gadget Repelling Rope!" His hand slid back, revealing a tough rope with a clip on the end. Attaching the clip to Brain's collar, he gave a nod. "Alright, let's go!"

Brain nodded back and then took off running. As they were moving, Fidget called out to the other Gadgetinis. "Come on! Take my hand!"

He grabbed a hold of Digit's hand, and Digit did likewise with Data, who grabbed Scooter's hand. Soon, the four of them were being pulled along behind Brain. "This way, we should be able to reach the inspectors in no time!" Fidget called back to the others.

They didn't respond, as the mode of transport was rather rough and unpleasant. However, all things considered, they all agreed it was necessary. They needed to make it to the main area the temple, and soon, if they were going to fix things.

Inside the main chamber of the temple, Gadget and Prince could only hold on for dear life as the final stages of activation finished. As they held on to pillars, a small platform rose up from the ground. One it was a crystal carving of an eagle, which was positioned in such a way that when all became still again, the red, blue, and green beams were funneled directly into it.

The moment the beams converged in the eagle, an immense burst of laser energy burst from the eagle. Unfortunately for Gadget, that happened right in his direction. He was able to dodge out of the way in time to avoid a fiery death, but he was still grazed by the beam, which burned through both the back of his coat and the false skin he wore, leaving the mechanics of that area exposed. Giving a sharp cry of pain, he fell forwards.

Seeing this, Carrillo laughed. "You see now, Gadget, why M.A.D. has been desiring this power! Once this weapon is brought to Claw, no one will be able to resist us. First, however, I will deal with you!"

Moving ahead, the M.A.D. agent came up behind the eagle and seized it by its wings. He attempted to manipulate the statue, swiveling it around on its base so that it was pointing at Gadget. The inspector was forced to get up to avoid being fried, but that was difficult, considering the pain he was in from the previous blast.

Carrillo laughed again, knowing Gadget was too injured to move out of the way of the laser in time. However, he had been so focused on frying Gadget that he had completely forgotten to keep an eye on Prince.

The British inspector was not about to let this advantage go to waste. Forcing herself back to her feet, she came up behind Carrillo, twisting her stun-ring around so the shocking jewel was resting on her palm. When she was close enough, she sprang up on him, slamming the jewel against his chest.

That seemed to do the trick. The shock was enough that Carrillo released the laser, allowing Prince to push him backwards and away from the weapon. Grabbing it herself, she twisted it around so that the deadly beam was not so close to Gadget. This allowed him to work through the pain to get himself back up.
Unfortunately, Carrillo recovered from the shock quickly, and when he did, he lashed out at Prince with his whip. He got a cut in across her shoulders, and the blow was sharp enough to draw blood.

She let out a cry, but she wasn't about to give in that easily. Turning sharply, she reached into her coat and grabbed her blaster. Not even bothering to aim, she let out a shot, which struck her opponent in the chest. The shot tossed him backwards, though once again, he recovered fast.

Carrillo raised his whip again, ready to attack, but before he could, another call came out. "Go-go Gadget Knife Thrower!" In an instant, a large throwing knife came out of nowhere. It sliced right through the whip, leaving it severed and useless on the floor.

From the back of the room, Gadget had gotten back up on his feet, and the knife-throwing device was still peeking out of his shoulder. "That is not how you treat a lady," he said in a scolding voice.

Carrillo didn't waste time looking after the destroyed whip. Retracting into his arm, he instead pulled out the pulse blaster from his hand and took aim at Gadget. Without hesitating, he opened fire, launching three rapid fire pulse blasts in the Inspector's direction.

"Oh, crumbs," Gadget muttered, hurrying to move out of the way of the blasts. "Go-go Gadget Shield!" Thankfully, the gadgets decided to cooperate, surrounding him with a force field.

While the two inspectors dealt with the criminal, the Gadgetinis and Brain arrived on the upper levels. When they caught sight of what was happening, they immediately sprang up. "Let's get down there and help them!" Scooter exclaimed.

However, Fidget grabbed her shoulder. "Wait. Take a look at the statues. Notice anything?" He pointed out to the three statuettes.

They were standing near the duck. On the other side of the temple was the otter, and in a far corner was the bat. All three were still feeding light to the eagle, which had a ton of laser energy pouring out of it.

"I think I see what you're saying," Digit said. "The best way we can help them is putting the kibosh on that death laser."

Catching on to the plan, Data grinned. "Well, that can't be too hard. Scooter and I will go to retrieve the bat."

"And Fidget and I will get the otter," Digit said with a nod. He then turned to Brain. "Can you get the duck out of here."

The dog gave a nod to the affirmative. Without wasting a moment, he hurried over and gripped the duck in his jaws. It proved to be tougher than he expected though, since the duck had been tied down to some sort of pedestal. He wasn't about to give up, though, and he struggled with all his might.

Once the dog had made his leave, all four robots let out the cry at once. "Go-go Gadget Copter!" The traveling devices called up, they hurried over to their respective destinations.

Once the ground, Gadget and Prince struggled against Carrillo with all their might. Both were highly trained, but so was the thief, and he had the advantage of being a newer model of Cyber than Gadget. Thankfully, since they had the advantage of a two-on-one battle, things proportionally evened out.

Or, that is, they would have been evened out, if Carrillo had not already succeeded at inflicting
painful wounds on the both of them. They had to fight through the pain to stop him, and while it was
doable, it still hurt like crazy to attempt.

Gadget called up his laser, and attempt to launch an attack at the thief, but Carrillo responded with a
pulse blast, sending Gadget backwards into the wall. He lay there, stunned by shock and pain,
unable to move out of the way as Carrillo went to fire again.

Thankfully, Prince responded in time. Maneuvering around the side, she dealt another shocking
punch to Carrillo's side, briefly stunning him and allowing her a shot with her own blaster at his gun
hand.

She succeeded in destroying the pulse blaster, but unfortunately, that wasn't the only weapon Carrillo
had at his disposal. Reaching over with his free hand, he gripped Prince's gun in it, smashing the
weapon as he did so. As a result, a small explosion came from the destroyed weapon, and the shock
of it threw Prince back.

To her misfortune, she hit the wall in the same region of her shoulders that had been previously cut,
leaving her temporarily paralyzed by the pain. Carrillo took advantage of this to go over to her and
grip her by the throat.

Thankfully, Gadget caught sight of the action in a heart-beat. "Go-go Gadget Springs!" The springs
emerged, sending him rocketing right into Carrillo. He was able to force the M.A.D. agent to let
Prince go, and the two ended up grappling.

At the same time, the Gadgetinis were struggling with their prizes. Their work was cut out for them,
as it turned out, due to the strong grip the pedestals had on the statues. It took every ounce of strength
in their frames to try to pry the statuettes up, away from where they could assist in causing more
damage.

After a few moments of struggle, however, success was achieved on one end. It was Brain who
made it, finally twisting the duck in such a way that it came loose from its stand. It came up with
such a jolt that the dog was sent backwards a bit, but he had the emerald duck gripped in his teeth.

Without the green beam of light, the laser coming from the eagle weakened. Digit saw this, and the
reaction gave him hope. "Good job, Brain!" he called out. "Go, get that duck out of here! We'll get
the others and come join up with you!"

Brain gave a nod before turning around and running off, his prize still in his mouth. There was no
way he was losing it now.

While the Gadgetinis struggled to remove the other two statuettes, Prince recovered from the pain in
time to see the two men fighting. Not wanting to sit around and do nothing, she searched around her
person for something she could use to help Gadget.

She found it in the form of her compact. Of course! she scolded herself in her thoughts. Why hadn't I
thought of this sooner?

Racing over to where the two men were battling, she called out to Gadget. "Gadget, get your gas-
mask on!"

"Why?" Gadget asked, but it was too late. As soon as she could make it over by them, Prince blew a
dose of the powder from the compact in the two men's faces, with most of it striking Carrillo in the
face.

At first, nothing happened other than the two of them getting into a coughing fit. Carrillo shoved
Gadget off of him and turned to grab Prince. However, before he could do so, the powder took effect, and the M.A.D. agent tumbled over, fast asleep.

At the same time, both sets of Gadgetinis succeeded in pulling the statuettes free. Moving them away, the laser coming from the crystal eagle weakened and flickered out of reality, leaving the statue unmoving.

Forcing himself up, Gadget gave Prince a grin. "Well done," he said with a nod. "We've got everything covered. We've recovered the jewels, captured Carrillo, and we've even made a new discovery. I only have one regret."

"Which is?" Prince asked

"I never got my gas-mask out," Gadget replied before falling over, fast asleep.

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Within the hour, W.O.M.P. agents had come out to collect everything. Carrillo had been handcuffed and was being carted out to a prison, and the large crystal eagle was to go to the museum to temporarily replace the three smaller ones.

Prince and Gadget had both been pulled aside so that their injuries could be tended to. Now that was finished, it was time for farewells to be said.

"So, now that everything's been gathered, I suppose we'll both be heading home," Prince commented, giving Gadget a smile.

"I suppose so," Gadget said with a nod. "It was a pleasure working together. Good luck with the Charybdis operation. I hope we have the opportunity to do this again."

"I do too," Prince replied, and she gave Gadget a kiss on the cheek before she left. She then turned to call her team. "Come along, girls."

"Coming, Mama!" Data called. Before hurrying over, she gave the two male Gadgetinis a quick hug. "Goodbye. I'm so glad we got to meet."

"Same here," Fidget replied. "Take care."

"See you around, Fidget," Scooter said, giving a salute. She then smirked at Digit. "Take care, Blueberry."

Digit sighed. "You too, Gobstopper."

"Goodbye, Brain," Data said, giving the dog a quick hug before running off. He gave a small whine, but tolerated it.

The girls now on their way, Gadget turned to his team. "That was a job well done. Now, we'd better get home too. Penny'll never believe what happened here!"

"Yeah," Digit said, giving a small laugh. "Kind of sorry she missed all the excitement."
The Hot Ice Night Club was nearly full that evening, as it often was. As one of London's trendiest hot spots for nightlife, it was very rarely empty. At any time, it was likely to have any number of party goers, wandering around, having drinks, or just chatting.

Of course, the club also had another secret. It was own and operated by Miss Molly, who utilized it as a place for meeting up with Charybdis' customers. She often sat up on the upper regions of the club after arranging such meetings.

This was one such night, and she gave a smile as a heavily cloaked figure entered the room. "Well, you're younger than what I was expecting, but I suppose Claw always has a reason for sending those he chooses."

"Exactly," Talon responded, taking off the heavy coat. "Carrillo would have come himself, but he ran into some problems. So, shall we get down to business?"

"I'd love to," Miss Molly responded. "Now, do you have it?"

"Right here," Talon replied. He pulled a small jet spider out of his coat. "This it?"

Molly gave a smile. "That's it, alright. This should persuade her to take some attention. I'll contact Claw when I have news of her response."

"Glad to hear it," Talon said. "Claw has been hoping to get her help, and he's willing to make a deal."

To be continued…
Monday, August 4, 2087

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"So," Gadget said as he wandered around the contraption Penny was working on, "what did you say this was again?"

"Well, since you said I'm not supposed to upgrade or make additions to my wheelchair," Penny replied, "this is a new wheelchair I'm working on. It'll have a few additions that'll help me in the field."

"In the field?" Gadget asked, becoming a bit nervous. "You're not adding weapons to this, are you?"

Penny let out a laugh. "Oh, goodness, no. There's a magnetic system that will help me to maneuver around, and since it's a standing wheelchair, I'll need to make sure I can keep it upright even when I'm in a hurry. No weapons whatsoever."

"Oh, good," Gadget said, giving a small sigh. Honestly, he was still lost as to what exactly his niece was working on. He wanted to be supportive, but at the same time her enthusiasm for their career field made him nervous at times. Thus, he did his best to make sure he had at least some semblance of an idea of what was going on.

"Hey, Gadget Boy, Charm," Heather called out as she joined them in the lab. "Quimby here yet?"

"Good morning, Heather," Gadget called out. "No, the chief hasn't gotten here yet. I wonder why he asked us to come here in person instead of just sending one of the message balls."

"Probably because he wants some peace and quiet," Penny suggested. Heather laughed at that response, but Gadget just gave a confused blank look.

"So, I see Wonder-Dog's over there," Heather commented, pointing to a corner of the lab where a dog bed had been set up for Brain, "but where's the Tin Men?"

"Fidget and Digit will be sitting this mission out," Penny replied. "They promised to help Dr. Blake repair her chemical wash station, so that's what they're going to be doing for a while."

"Gadget, Heather, Penny," Quimby called out as he entered the room. "You're all here, good."

"Of course we're here, chief," Gadget called out. "After all, we're always on duty! So, do you have a mission for us?"

"I do," Quimby replied. "It's a bit slower than usual, though. Have you heard of the Fox's Luck Casino?"

"I've heard of it," Heather replied. "Isn't that supposed to be one of those newer, high-tech style casinos?"

Quimby nodded. "Yes, it is. We've recently heard from some of our sources that the Fox's Luck might be in danger of being looted. Several small-time cons have already been found guilty of sneaking in and rigging the games in their favor. However, it seems that no matter how many people get caught, these knock-offs are still happening."
"Chief, don't get me wrong," Heather said, "but doesn't this seem kind of small for a W.O.M.P. intervention? After all, we usually take on M.A.D. dealings, not someone"

"Normally, it would be," Quimby responded. "However, the owner of the casino, Lester Reynard, has offered a large donation to W.O.M.P. in exchange for Gadget checking it out."

"I don't see any harm in checking it out," Gadget said, "but I'm not sure about Penny tagging along."

"Oh, please, Uncle Gadget, can't I come?" Penny pleaded. "I sat out the Mexico mission last time. I don't even have to go in the casino!"

"Actually, it would be a good idea to bring her along," Quimby said. "For legal reasons, she won't be allowed in the casino itself, but you're going to need someone to go over the information from the machines. You can take that information using this chip and transmit it wirelessly to her back in the hotel room."

"Alright, as long as she's not going in the casino itself," Gadget said. He took the chip and tucked it into his coat before turning Penny. "Brain can stay with you while we're out and act as a body guard."

"We're good with that," Penny replied. "Aren't we, boy?"

Brain lifted up his head for a moment, letting out a wuff of agreement. Any mission where he'd be teamed primarily with his girl was a good mission in his book.

Quimby nodded. "Good to hear you're all on board. You're ride has already been arranged, though once you make it there, you'll need to meet up with Mr. Reynard. He should be able to give you a bit more information about what he needs."

"We're on it, chief," Gadget replied, throwing a smart salute. "With us on the case, that casino might as well be under lockdown!"

Gadget then hurried out, followed closely by Penny and Heather. Brain took a moment to realize the humans were leaving, but when he did, he sprang up and hurried after them.

Left alone in the lab, Quimby moved over to examine the few objects left over on Penny's work bench. Before he could touch anything, however, the girl's voice came through as she called back.

"By the way, I was working with some strong electromagnets, so please tell no one to touch my workbench, alright?"

"Alright, I'll tell them," Quimby called back. Still, he couldn't help but chuckle. "Magnets, huh? Wonder what she's so worried about. I used to play with these all the time." He picked up a black object about the side of his hand. "So, this is a magnet? I wonder why it's not attracting anything."

Finding a small yellow switch on the side of the object, he slid it. In a moment, paperclips, tacks, and scrap metal all rushed it, eager to cover over the magnet. Quimby was forced to drop it back to the workbench to avoid any of the flying projectiles.

Once things calmed down, he slid the switch again, causing the magnetic charge to drop, along with the attached metals. Making sure no one saw what happened, Quimby hurried out, making a mental note to never touch anything Penny was working on ever again.

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Skies above Nevada
"Now, Penny," Gadget said, his tone taking a teacher-like quality, "riding in planes is all good and fun, but you always need to keep in mind some rules."

"That's right," Penny replied with a nod. "Always make sure that your seat-belt is fastened when the plane is taking off and landing."

"Respect the flight attendants and their instructions," Gadget added, "and always keep the lanes clear for their movement."

"And if you use devices like wheelchairs or other equipment," Penny finished, "make sure everything is stashed away where it's supposed to go."

"Very good!" Gadget said approvingly. "That way, everything will go safely for everyone."

Through this whole discussion, Heather looked over with confusion at her two partners. Penny was seated next to her, and Gadget directly behind them, with Brain next to him. "What was that?" she asked Penny when the speech was finished.

"Oh, that?" Penny answered. "That's just a game Uncle Gadget and I have played for as long as I can remember. Whenever there might be some safety rules that could apply to a situation we're in, we state them like we're in some cheesy PSA cartoon." She gave a laugh. "I think Uncle Gadget once read somewhere to make a many learning experiences as possible, and it just turned out this way. I honestly can't remember when we started it."

Reassured of her partners' mental state, Heather leaned back. "Alright, then. I was just a bit concerned for a moment. You seem a little old for those kinds of reminders."

"Oh, come now, Heather," Gadget called out, overhearing their conversation. "No one's too old for safety!"

Both Heather and Penny giggled at the comment, and the three of them drifted off into their own conversations while Brain slept in his chair. As a result, none of them paid any attention to the flight attendant, who slipped off from the main section of the plane into the small section between the cockpit and cabin.

She picked up the phone, looked around to make sure no one was around to see or her what he was doing, and she picked up the phone. "Hello?" she heard an old man ask on the other end.

"Gadget's on his way, and he's bringing his partner, his niece, and the niece's dog," she said.

"Good, good," the man replied. "I wasn't expecting that they'd make it out so fast." He let out a chuckle. "How funny that Gadget himself will be the one to help us with our little conundrum. They don't suspect anything, do they?"

"If they do, then they're hiding it well," the flight attendant answered.

"Good, make sure it stays that way," the man said. "I'll make sure that none of our activities are happening while they're here. All the missions will start again once Gadget deals with the pest."

"Got it," the stewardess said before hanging up the phone and hurrying out.
Jack "Black Jack" Noir was in hog heaven. He'd finally figured out how to utilize his intelligence in a way that benefited him. He was not a particularly intimidating man, but long ago, he'd figured out that he had a very specific ability. He could cheat in gambling games like no one's business. He specialized in card counting, but he'd also come up devices that could manipulate slots and even craps or roulette. Of course, he'd used these abilities as soon as he could, and by the age of twenty-four, he had been banned from every casino around.

Not that this stopped him much. He soon realized that his abilities could be useful not only to himself, but to other clients as well. Thus, he had started up a business of renting out his services. In exchange for a down payment and a cut of whatever was won, he'd help the client cheat used one of his devices, or with personal help at card tables. Of course, the personal help was a higher fee, but he could give out more of the probability devices, so the costs evened out.

As such, he had built up a tidy little kingdom for himself. Nothing on the level of M.A.D., of course, but then Black Jack wasn't quite that ambitious. He had a band of thugs who did most of the transactions for him, mostly making sure the rented devices were returned and cuts properly paid off, and he'd focus on where his services were required.

Now, he did tend to prefer to keep his attentions on more privately-owned casinos. Ever since gambling laws changed in 2045, the rise of the private casino had set up an amount targets just ripe for the picking. Of course, they still paid their dues to the government, but there was less of a watch over these than there was over casinos with a direct tie to the government.

Black Jack's favorite target was the Fox's Luck casino, owned by Lester Reynard. It had been the first casino he's been banned from, and thus, he had a bit of a grudge against it. As a result, whenever someone stated that was the casino they planned on hitting, he practically gave them the device for free.

Unfortunately for him, that meant people had gotten caught there more than anywhere else. When that happened, he immediately dropped the connection, and when devices were claimed by security, they remotely melted down. This meant that no matter how many clients were caught, it could never be tracked back to him, but it also meant that he had quite a few devices to replace.

He was hard at work fixing a disrupter device for craps when one of his men came in. "Boss, you might want to hear about this."

"I'm busy!" Black Jack replied with irritation. "Unless we've got a client who's coming in, get out of here. I'm working on something incredibly delicate."

"But, sir," the guard continued, "it's really important. Inspector Gadget and his followers have come here. What if they're going to be looking into us?"

Hearing this, Black Jack sniggered. "What, him? Look into us? Haven't you heard? W.O.M.P. deals with matters of international security. Terrorism, especially from the likes of M.A.D., are their forte. They'd never bother to send anyone, especially not Inspector Gadget, to look into a gambling rip-off."

"Alright, sir," the guard said, but he didn't sound entirely convinced. "Still, maybe we should go on the down low, at least until they leave."

"It's not worth the loss in business," Black Jack replied. "Like I said, there's no way Inspector Gadget's going to be looking into us. We're fine just continuing as we go along. He's probably here to relax a bit, or if he's on the job, it's with something more pressing than us."
"If you say so," the guard said before leaving.

"I do say so," Black Jack replied before turning back to his work.

The Fox's Luck Casino, Hotel, and Resort
Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

"Here we are, crew," Gadget said as they arrived at their destination. "The chief said that Mr. Reynard would want to meet us outside the casino. That way he can discuss with us what he wants done."

"Wow, this place sure is big," Penny commented as she examined the building. In reality, it was three loosely connected buildings. The largest of the three housed the hotel, restaurant, and a small water-park, for client enjoyment. Next to it, a three-story casino building stood to one side, boasting one of the more high-tech gambling experiences in the country. On the other side, a theater building stood, and there were posters all over talking about a magic show that was currently running. All of the buildings were made out of white stone, with patterns painted in orange, so that it resembled a fox's coloring.

"One of the biggest gambling communities in the globe," Heather responded. "Most high-tech, too. Whoever's ripping this place off has to have some sort of mega tech to be pulling things off. We're going to need your expertise if we're going to figure out what's going on here, Charm."

"From outside the casino," Gadget added, using emphasis to make his point clear.

Penny laughed. "Of course, Uncle. I can't legally go into the casino anyway."

"Which is why we're supposed to meet Mr. Reynard in the restaurant," Heather stated. "We'd better head in."

The four then moved towards the resort portion of the property, which they were able to do without much fuss. They did receive a few odd looks due to there being a dog in the company, but no one seemed to make this a point of contention, so they were able to make it in without trouble.

Inside, the resort was even more lavishly furnished. There was a large fountain in the center of the lobby, which had a fox statue molded out of a copper-colored alloy as the centerpiece. All around were seats and plants, set up to allow visitors a place to rest and enjoy the atmosphere. There were also some stands selling souvenirs, though there weren't many of these.

As soon as they entered, they were greeted by a woman wearing a grey uniform with an embroidered fox on it. "Oh, you must be Inspector Gadget!" she said as she approached them.

"Indeed, I am," Gadget responded with a nod. "This is my partner, Agent Heather Connelly, my niece and trainee, Penelope Dollar, and our K-9 agent, Brain."

"Welcome, all of you!" the woman greeted. "Mr. Reynard's been expecting you, but he regrets that there was a bit of work he had to deal with. My name is Janet, and he's asked me to show you to your room and around the resort while he takes care of things."

"That sounds lovely," Gadget exclaimed with a smile. "Lead on, my good woman."

As they wandered out of the lobby and to the first area of the resort, they were unaware that they
were being watched by a trio of eyes. There were three individuals, two men and a woman. They were all customers of Black Jack Noir, and they were not pleased at what they were seeing.

"What are they doing here?" one of the men asked, being careful to keep his voice low. "Black Jack said there was nothing to worry about from W.O.M.P."

"He said there was nothing to worry about because we're so small time," the woman replied. "Maybe M.A.D.'s up to something in the area. It's not like this would be the first time they've come into this place. Remember that whole Hoover Dam thing from a couple of years back?"

"Then why's he here?" the first man snapped. "I don't like it. Maybe we should deal with those stinkin'-"

"Now, that's suicide talk!" the second man hissed. "You know as well as I do that M.A.D.'s not been able to wipe him out in years. If he's here to deal with gambling cheaters, what makes you think you could succeed at something trained killers have failed at?"

The first man crossed his arms. "I still don't like it. Well, if we can't deal with Gadget ourselves, then I'm not sticking around here."

"That's not a bad idea," the woman agreed. "Maybe we'll have a bit better luck over at the Hollywood."

The two men agreed with her, and the three hurried out, making sure to keep in mind to comment about this to Black Jack. There were just some risks even the likes of them weren't willing to stick through.

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"If you look this way," Janet said as she continued to tour, "you're see our famous Fox Theater. It's currently housing the Maddrix Family magic show. Every afternoon and evening, Morris, Doris, Matt, Greg, and Leslie Maddrix preform feats of magic beyond anyone's wildest imagination!"

Turning to look at the poster portraying the family members, Gadget frowned. "Those people look awfully familiar to me," Gadget muttered. "And not in a good way. I wonder if I've ever seen them before."

"Perhaps you have," Janet replied, keeping up a cheerful voice. "The Maddrix family has been on tour near constantly for the last two years. It's highly probable you've seen their poster before."

"Maybe," Gadget said with a frown, completely forgetting that he lost the past three years of his life. He took one of the smaller fliers that was available under the larger poster. "Still, it may come back to me later, so I'll hold onto this for the time being."

Suddenly, Janet's phone rang. She picked it up and answered it. "Sir? You're ready for them? Wonderful! I'll let them know."

Hanging up and putting her phone away, she turned back to the group. "Alright, that was Mr. Reynard. He's ready to meet you now." She pulled out two key cards. "These are to your rooms. Once you've had the opportunity to set your possessions up in your rooms, he'll be waiting for you down in the restaurant. I hope you enjoy your stay at Fox's Luck Resort and Casino!" With that, she then hurried out.

Once they were alone, the quartet moved off towards the hotel section. "Looks like we're rooms 704 and 706," Heather said, looking down at the key cards. "You have everything you need for your part
"I've got it all here," Penny replied, patting the computer bag that was hanging off the back of her wheelchair. "I can set it all up tonight. Until then, this'll go in the safe."

Penny then turned to Brain. "I suspect you won't be allowed in the restaurant, Brain. Can you keep watch over my tech?"

The dog gave a nod and nuzzled his girl's hand. If she needed him to act as a guard, then he was more than willing to act in that capacity.

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It had only taken a few minutes to drop off the few items of luggage in the hotel rooms. Penny and Heather would be sharing one room, which Gadget had the other to himself. Brain would be staying with the girls, so his food and bed were also set up there.

Once they were finished, the three humans hurried off to the resort's restaurant, the Fox's Hollow. It was a more casual affair than some might guess, with a few families here and there, but most of the clientele there were single people or young couple, all in differing levels of excitement or disappointment.

When they came to the restaurant door, they were greeted by an old man. "Ah, Inspector Gadget and team!" he welcomed. "Come in! It's good to see you."

"I suppose you are Lester Reynard?" Gadget asked, holding out his hand.

The man gave a smile. "Indeed, I am, but you can call me Les. Come in, I've got a reservation all set."

The three followed him in to a table that was off to the side. "So, do you want to start with something to drink?" Reynard asked, giving a cheeky grin.

"We can't drink right now," Gadget replied, missing out on the joke. "We are on duty right now, and Penny can't drink alcohol."

"Oh, I know," Les responded. "I just couldn't resist a joke. Still, the food here is top notch."

"So," Heather said, opening her menu as she spoke, "we were told you asked that we come here to help with a cheating problem you're having. Do you have any idea about what's happening?"

"I do have an idea," Les answered, giving a frown. "It started up a few years back, with just one punk by the name of Jack Noir. He kept coming in here, and it wasn't long before several of my workers were convinced he was counting cards. We kicked him out for that, but he came back, and we figured out he'd found ways to cheat at other areas as well. Once that went out, I and every other casino in the area immediately placed him on the blacklist. He was not welcome in any casino, anywhere."

"I'm guessing that wasn't the end of it," Penny commented.

Reynard shook his head. "Of course not. After a while, more people turned up, using similar devices on the slots. They apparently worked on the craps and roulette tables, too, though I'll be darned if I know how. We were able to confiscate a few of these devices, and the people using them were arrested, but we could tell that wasn't going to keep things down for long."
"So, they were buying these devices from this Jack Noir?" Gadget asked. "Well, then the answer should be simple enough. We find where Mr. Noir is hiding, and we find the ring. It seems pretty open and shut to me."

"You'd think that would be the case, but Noir is wily," Reynard replied. "He's good at covering his tracks and updating his tech so that it gets around our defenses. I was afraid he was too smart for anyone to figure out, at least until I heard about Miss Dollar."

"Me?" Penny asked, a bit troubled that this was the second time people were putting so much faith in her abilities. "But I don't know anything about gambling."

"And she's not going to learn," Gadget added in a firm voice. "She's only fourteen."

"Oh, of course not," Reynard added. "But you do know about tech. I have some of the confiscated devices from before. We held onto them to see if they'd give us any information about where Noir is hiding out and how we can catch him, but I haven't been able to find someone who can crack how they work. I was hoping you could take a look at them and see if you couldn't figure them out."

"I'll be willing to take a look at them," Penny replied. "Of course, they sound pretty well developed, to be able to manipulate such a wide variety of game devices, so I might not figure out everything. Still, if I can figure out how they work, I might be able to figure out how to interrupt them, at the very least."

"That's what I like to hear," Reynard replied with a smile. "So, is there anything else you'd like to know, or shall we order?"

"There's just one thing I'd like to ask," Gadget replied. He pulled out the flier from earlier out of his pocket. "These people, the Maddrix family. They're familiar to me, but I can't figure out why. Do you know much of their background?"

"The Maddrix's?" Reynard gave a shrug. "Not really. They're a family of traveling magicians, and they passed the background check when they came to audition for the theater. Not much more to say about them, really."

"Alright, then," Gadget responded, tucking the flier away again. "Thank you anyway."

To be continued…
Assignment 11.2: The Luck of the Draw

Monday, August 4, 2087

Black Jack's Hideout

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

"No, you don't seem to understand," Black Jack scowled on the phone. "Not every casino is completely identical. You need to get the proper devices for the place you plan to hit. If you went to the Hollywood with devices designed for the Fox's Luck, then you raise your chances of not only losing, but if getting caught as well." He paused for a moment to list to the customer, but he clearly wasn't happy with the response. "No, I'm not making exchanges for free! You paid for Fox's Luck, and it's your fault that you chickened out! If you want devices for any other casino, you pay, full price!"

There was another pause before he spoke again. "Well, fine then! See if I care!" He then slammed the phone down with an amount of irritation.

"I'm guessing that's another customer calling in with a Gadget related complaint?" His girlfriend, a redhead with a dark complexion named Missy Fourtuna, asked.

"He's ruining business, Missy," Black Jack groaned. "I keep telling them, Gadget's not here for us! He's too important for W.O.M.P. to be focusing on casinos, but he's got everyone spooked! Almost every Fox's Luck customer we've had has gotten cold feet, and it hasn't even been a day. Something needs to be done about him."

"You know," Missy suggested, "like you said, Gadget's too big time to pay attention to a casino scandal, just like you've been saying?"

"And your point is?" Black Jack asked with an amount of irritation.

"My point is, what if the good inspector had something bigger to pay attention to?" she finished. "Like something M.A.D. big."

Hearing this suggestion, he perked up. "What are you suggesting."

Missy pulled out a flier from her jacket pocket. "This is the magic show going on at the Fox's Luck's theater. The Maddrix family. Word on the underground is that they have connections to M.A.D. No one's sure if those rumors are quite true, but should that information get leaked to Inspector Gadget…"

"Then he'd be too busy to pay any attention to us!" Black Jack declared.

"Whether or not the rumors are true, it's a benefit to us," Missy added. "If they are true, he's hero for uncovering a M.A.D. ring, and he's still way to big time for the likes of us. If they are false, he’s a buffoon whose hunches can't be trusted. Either way, we come out on top."

Black Jack jumped up and kissed his girlfriend. "You know," he said afterwards, "I knew I got with you for a reason."

"You mean it's not just for my looks?" she asked, giving a smirk. She then moved away and headed to the door. "I'll make sure some of my people give Gadget his anonymous tip. Once he's gotten it,
he'll be off on a wild goose chase. Or should I say, wild cat chase?"

Once she had left, Black Jack gave a smirk and leaned back in his chair. Yes, sir, he was certain that luck would fall in his favor.

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Fox's Luck Resort and Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

"You having any luck with those devices, Charm?" Heather asked, leaning over Penny's shoulder. The younger girl had been working with the confiscated tools for a good portion of the evening and had hardly said a word the entire evening.

"Not too much," Penny stated. "Admittedly, it's not too hard to understand how this works." She picked up the stripped-down device and moved it around so she could explain it to Heather. "It's got a magnet right here; that doesn't do much as far as cheating except to hold the device to the machine or table. Once it's on, however, it uses a near undetectable by the human ear sonic frequency to mess with the machinery. Adjust the setting of this sonic frequency, and you can make slots stop when and where you want them. It can also be adjusted to keep a set of craps dies or the ball on a roulette wheel in motion until the time is right. Then, you remotely stop the signal and allow things to fall where you will."

"That seems like a lot to me," Heather commented. "Why are you so disappointed?"

"Because I'm not trying to figure out how it works," Penny replied. "That was simple enough that I doubt they would have needed my help for that. What I'm trying to figure out is where this thing was made. It's really well done, and clearly handmade."

"It is?" Heather asked, looking over at the deconstructed device. All electronics looked the same to her.

Penny nodded. "I know it might not look it, but there are always small details that had help distinguish between a handmade and factory produced device. This one, and probably the others, are handmade, which makes it hard for me to track down where they were made. The fact that they don't connect back to any other computer makes things even more difficult." She chewed a bit on her lip. "We're going to need a bit more information if we're going to work this thing out.

"You know," Heather commented, "Mr. Reynard mentioned they also have trouble with card counters. Unlike those devices, if Black Jack has been helping out with card counting, then he'd need some sort of signal to keep an eye on things.

"Like a camera or a radio signal!" Penny replied, giving a grin. "I'd be able to isolate a signal like that on my computer book no problem, and we could then use it to track Black Jack back to his lair."

"Exactly," Heather responded. "Then your uncle and I move in for the kill."

"We'd still need to find a card counter," Penny said, leaning back in her wheelchair as she thought, "and with Uncle Gadget around, it's unlikely there will be any card counters here. Heck, I'm pretty sure I saw a number of people leave the casino just because they saw him." She chewed her lip again. "I think you might need to go undercover alone, Heather, and at another casino. Not as many people know you as they know Uncle Gadget, so maybe you'd be able to get a bit more covert work in."
"I could go with that," Heather said with a shrug. "That would leave Gadget Boy here to guard the casino while we go signal fishing. I'm not sure how well he'll take to that plan, but hey, it's at least worth a suggestion."

"We'll have to bring the topic up tomorrow," Penny commented. "With how late it is, Uncle Gadget's probably already in bed." She gave a small laugh. "He'd probably have insisted I go to bed two hours ago if he had been here."

"Two hour ago?" Heather asked. "But it's only 10:45. Do you really have to go to bed at eight?"

"Not by rule," Penny responded, "but Uncle Gadget's an early bird. I, on the other hand, am a bit of a night owl, so he's always worried I'm not getting enough sleep and am sleeping in too late."

"I already know about your uncle's wake-up time," Heather said, her mind going back to the 4:30 wake-up call in Antarctica. "Guess that's something you just got to get used to."

Getting up, she moved over to her suite room. "I'm going to get ready for bed. See you tomorrow morning."

"See you then," Penny called back as the door separating their rooms was shut.

Tuesday, August 5, 2087

At promptly four o’clock in the morning, Inspector Gadget was up and about. He had initially planned to head down to the hotel breakfast as soon as he had gotten dressed, but he found to his disappointment that breakfast didn't start until six o’clock. Still, not wanting to waste the morning hours, he decided to continue his research into the Maddrix family and see if he couldn't figure out why they were so familiar to him.

He was racking his brain over those details when he heard a knock at his door. "It's alright, I'm still in here," he called out, assuming it was the maid to do room service.

"Is this the room where Inspector Gadget is staying?" a female voice called from behind the door. "Please, I need his help!"

Hearing this, Gadget got up and opened the door. "This is he," he said, seeing the young woman standing outside. "How can I help?"

"I have some inside information that M.A.D. is at work here," the woman replied. She glanced both ways nervously. "Can I come in? I don't want anyone else overhearing us."

"Oh, of course," he replied, moving aside to let her in. "Now, what are you saying about M.A.D.?"

The woman glanced around, as if still anxious. "I found out news that M.A.D. operatives are at work here. I have proof, but, oh, if they find out that I was the one who turned them in…"

"It's alright," Gadget responded, putting a hand on her shoulder. "No one will find out. No one will hurt you. You have my word."

That seemed to be enough for the woman. "Well, alright. Here." She handed him a jump drive. "Have you heard of the Maddrix family?"

"I know they are playing here, and that I've seen them before from somewhere," Gadget responded.
"Probably from a M.A.D. lineup," the woman responded. "They're M.A.D. agents. I don't know what they're up to, but they're doing something here. Everything I've discovered is on this drive. But, oh, if they find out it was me, I don't know what I'll do!"

"They won't find out." Gadget pulled a small device from his coat. "Take this. If you feel like your life is being threatened, push that button. It will bring W.O.M.P. operatives to your position."

"Oh, thank you, Inspector Gadget," the woman said with a sigh. "I knew it was the right thing coming to you! I had better go now." With that, she slipped back into the hallway and hurried off.

Now alone once more, Gadget turned the jump drive over in his hands. After a moment of thought, he plugged it in to the laptop he had brought and examined the contents. Just like the woman had claimed, there was proof on it of M.A.D. related activities that the Maddrix family had gotten into. None of it was clear enough to be grounds to get a warrant, but it was enough to convince Gadget that he had better look into things.

"After all," Gadget said to himself, "if M.A.D.'s here, then it's more than likely that they have a hand on this cheating ring." Having made up his mind, he set to gathering his tools together.

At six o’ clock, there came a knock at Gadget's door. "Uncle Gadget?" Penny called through the door. "You up? Can I come in?"

Hearing his niece's call, Gadget sprang up and opened the door. "Good morning, Penny," he said, hugging her as she came in. "Did you sleep well?"

"Very well, thank you," Penny responded, returning the embrace. "Heather's already down in the lobby for breakfast. I told her we'd meet up with her for breakfast."

"Good idea," her uncle replied with a smile.

"Also," Penny continued, "I think I might have found a lead in the case."

"As do I," Gadget responded with a grin, "but you go first."

"Well, I was able to figure out the exact signal that the devices are giving off," Penny stated, "but I'm not able to track it back to its origin from here. I'll need something with an active connection to actually track it back."

"How are you going to try to get that?" Gadget asked. He wasn't actually sure what it was she was talking about, but he bluffe knowledge to try to connect with her.

"I'll stay back in the room," Penny replied, "but I'll follow Heather through a wireless connection. She'll then go out to different casinos and try to find someone whose getting help in card counting. Since Black Jack would need to be able to see what's going on to get the counting down, we suspect that they would have a direct connection. I could then hook up to the connection wirelessly and track him back to the source."

"Sounds like a plan!" Gadget said with a smile.

"There's just one thing," Penny added, sounding less assured than before. "You see, the plan depends on the cheaters not recognizing Heather as a W.O.M.P. agent, and you are so recognizable, that if you go yourself, then there's the risk then the mission would be blown. So, you'll have to stay behind."
Penny paused, waiting for her uncle to get upset or disappointed. However, much to her relief, he was neither of those things.

"Oh, that's quite alright," he said with a nod.

"You're not upset?" she asked somewhat hesitantly.

Gadget waved his hand in response. "Not at all. I understand what you mean. I would stick out like a sore thumb, and I'm not sure even the holographic disguise would cover my identity for long."

"Besides," he added, giving a grin, "like I said, I have found a lead of my own to follow, and for that, I'll need to investigate around the theater."

"Really?" Penny was both worried and morbidly curious about this statement. "What lead?"

"Remember how I said I remembered that Maddrix family?" Gadget asked. "Well, I received an anonymous tip this morning that supports my feelings about that." He motioned to the laptop as an invitation for her to take a look. "It appeared that our magician family has had a hand in M.A.D. activity. I must have seen them in some document or event related to M.A.D. before."

As Penny went over the information, she frowned. "This does appear genuine," she said. "But even if it is, it's not enough to actually take them in."

"No, but it is warrant for a closer look," Gadget responded. "That's what I'll be doing today. You and Heather follow your lead on Black Jack, and I'll look into this angle. It'll be no problem at all."

"Alright, Uncle Gadget," Penny said, moving over and taking his hand. "Just please be careful. If they are M.A.D. agents, then you know they'll try to hurt you."

Gadget laughed and gave her hand a comforting squeeze. "They'll have to get in line then. More than one M.A.D. agent's had their sights focused on me, and they've yet to have any success yet."

"Still," Penny responded, "Heather and I will still be in contact if you need up. Please don't hesitate to call if you need the help."

"I won't, Angel," he said, moving down to kiss her on the forehead. "Now, hadn't we better head down to breakfast? I'd imagine Heather's losing patience."

Penny smiled. "Of course. Let's go."

Black Jack's Hideout
Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

"I've got some good news," Missy said, sauntering into the primary workshop of the hideout. "Lisa just got back. She said Gadget fell for it hook, line, and sinker."

"She did it that quickly?" Black Jack asked, surprised but pleased with the news.

Missy nodded. "Apparently, Gadget's a soft-touch. She just needed to turn on the waterworks and pretend to be terrified and he started eating out of her hand. I guess chivalry's not dead."

"Good news for us, then," Black Jack responded. He had just finished up repairing the VR headset he used for card counting deals. It had gone on the fritz a while back, making the picture less clear.
and harder for him to identify the cards. Now that it was fixed, he could turn his attention to other matters. "So, Gadget will focus on a M.A.D. infiltration while little old us are too far below his notice."

"Still, not all of the customers are comfortable with ripping off Fox's Luck while Gadget's snooping around," Missy added, "but since he's not looking into casinos, it should make prospects for other casinos just fine."

"I've gotten six orders for devices that work in three different casinos," Black Jack responded with a grin, "and there will be three card counting events today. Business is back on, at least for now."

"So, shall I send out some of the boys for the deliveries?" Missy asked.

"Not quite yet," he answered yet. He motioned to a box next to him. "These are the newer models. Glasses to the card counters, devices to the others. I've had to tweak the designs since Gadget brought that girl genius niece of his, and they'll need a quick addition of a signal blocker before they go out so she can't use them to track us back here."

"You're not worried about her, are you?" Missy asked. "She's just a kid, after all."

"I was just a kid when I got into this business," Black Jack replied. "You'd be surprised at what kids can do."

"Well, alright," Missy replied. "I'll just be outside when you're ready."

Once his girlfriend had left, Black Jack turned his attention firmly on the devices. There was no way he wanted Penny Gadget to crack through them. These would need the best defenses he could come up with.

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Fox Theater, Fox's Luck Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

Once breakfast was finished, Gadget wasted no time in getting down to the Fox Theater. He was well aware that he would need to be careful, since there was no telling how the Maddrix family would take to him snooping around. Probably not very well, he thought to himself, but I doubt it would be anything I can't handle.

Still, he thought as he spied the people standing outside the theater, if I can avoid a confrontation, all this better. Don't want any innocents getting caught in the crossfire.

Not wanting to attract too much attention to himself, Gadget moved away from the front entrance and slipped into the theater through a side door. Thankfully, no one saw him come in, so he was able to start his investigation without too much difficulty.

Of course, his luck in that area couldn't last all too long. He had been examining around the theater for clues when he felt a tap on the shoulder. "Can I help you?"

Gadget spun around to see a young woman standing in front of him. It only took Gadget a moment to recognize her. It was Leslie Maddrix, the youngest member of the Maddrix family. At the moment, she was glaring at him with her arms crossed. "We've got a show in five minutes. What are you doing back here?"
"Oh, right, of course," Gadget said. "I am Inspector Gadget of W.O.M.P. Mr. Reynard, the owner of this establishment asked me to come in and investigate some cheating that was going on here."

"Alright, then why are you here instead of in the casino?" Leslie asked again.

Gadget froze for a moment, frowning. Huh, she's more aware than I supposed, he thought. "Uh, yes, about the casino," he said, trying to regain his footing. "I have reason to believe that the cheaters might have something to do with the theater, so I need to check over the entire premises before I can actually move on to the casino."

Leslie didn't appear to be content with this answer, but before she could ask again, a voice came over the backstage speaker system. "Show in five minutes. Will the Maddrix family come to the stage? I repeat, show in five minutes."

Hearing the call, Leslie rolled her eyes. "Whatever. Just don't mess anything up." With that, she strode up to the stage area.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Gadget turned back to his own task. I'm going to have to be more careful, he scolded himself. The next time might not end so soon.

..."You there, Penny?" Heather asked as she strode up to the RedStone Casino. She was currently wearing a lime green and white tee-shirt and a pair of Capri pants to try to seem more like a casual gambler than an officer. She was speaking into her earring, which kept her connected to the Junior Agent, but held a phone to the other side of her head so as not to attract attention.

"I'm here," Penny replied. She was back at the hotel room, with all her tech set up. "You at the casino?"

"I've made it," Heather responded. "Everything here seems to be along the same lines as the Fox's Luck. Have you sensed anything yet with your tech?"

"Not yet, but keep in mind, we're looking for the radio signal that Black Jack uses for card counting," Penny answered. "Don't rush to the card tables just yet, though. We want it to seem natural, so wander around, maybe do a bit of gambling at other stations. Then move in on the card tables."

"Just keep it natural then," Heather responded. "That shouldn't be too hard. I have to put my phone away now, so I can't talk for a while. Still, don't be afraid to keep me in the loop."

"Got it," Penny stated. "I'll still feed you information, and a non-response is not a sign you don't hear me."

Putting the phone back into her bag, Heather strode through casino, scanning around for something that might make a convincing alibi. She paused every few minutes, playing a game of slots here, dropping by a table there, but all in all not experiencing anything out of the ordinary.

She was taking a small break when a man came up to her. "Hey, pretty lady," he said, flashing a smile that said he was flirting with her. "Can I get you a drink?"

Heather was about to turn him down flat when Penny spoke up. "Heather, that guy's practically dripping with the same energy signal from the devices. He might be able to lead us to Black Jack."

Catching on to her partner's statement, Heather internally gagged. She hated when she had to play
this role. Still, a mission was a mission, so she rolled her eyes. "You can afford me. Especially not in
the money loss capital of the world. I'd bet you're right on the verge of losing your shirt."

"Oh, I can take that bet," the man replied. He held up a digital counter, which was used to track a
person's winnings through the day. The number on it was high. "What can I say? I've been feeling
lucky today."

Heather snickered when she saw the number, keeping up the act. "Well, can you keep up this lucky
streak for much longer? In my experience, people who don't bow out tend to be setting up for the
fall." She gave a smirk and held out her hand. "Want to prove me wrong?"

"You're on," the man replied, taking her hand and shaking it. "Marcus Bradly, by the way."

"Lacy Hamond," Heather responded, pulling out one of her aliases. "Though I warn you, Marcus,
I'm not an easy girl to impress."

"Bet ya I can change that," Marcus replied.

Inwardly, Heather groaned. This wasn't the first time she had to play along with a flirt to get the
information she needed. At least she could play hard to get and not have to engage in flirting herself.

Charm, you'd better get what you need and get it fast, Heather thought to herself. I am not staying
here for much longer.

Back in the hotel room, Penny was hard at work. The moment that Marcus had walked up to
Heather, the sensors in the earrings went crazy. Turning to her computer book, Penny examined the
signal and found that it was, indeed, the same signal that had been in the devices she had dissected,
albeit with a strong dampener. Had Heather's earrings not had signal sensors in them, Penny would
have never picked up on it.

"Someone doesn't want me seeing this," Penny muttered to herself as she went at work, breaking the
signal down. "Well, too bad for them. Now that I've got them, I'm not letting go."

She set to breaking down the signal and found that it was coming from two sources, both in separate
pockets on Marcus' person. She'd need to examine them while they were being used to see if she
couldn't track them back to their original source.

"Alright, Black Jack," she muttered, setting up the cameras in the earrings so she could keep a watch
on the goings on, "your move now."

To be continued...
The magic show had been going on for about fifteen minutes, but Gadget was no closer to finding out anything about the M.A.D. connections than he had been earlier. He had been tearing through the backstage sets, trying to find communicators or contraband that might implicate their owner. However, he'd has no luck, as his search seemed to be totally in vain.

Every now and again, he'd pause and listen in on the conversation from the stage. This was mostly uninteresting catch phrases, as would be typical for a show like this, so he didn't do it often. Still, a good detective takes in all the clues he can get, so every now and again, he'd sit still and listen.

"Face it, John," he said, scolding himself as he sat down for one such pause. "You're going about things the wrong way. There's got to be something in here to do with M.A.D., but the way things are going, it would take years to actually get anything done. You'll need to rethink your strategy."

He paused for a moment, half listening to the show and half trying to come up with a new strategy. When he heard, however, his mind was completely taken off his searching troubles.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen," Morris Maddrix, the patriarch of the Maddrix family, was saying, "it appears that we have some intruders. Don't we, my dear?"

"Indeed, we do," Doris Madrix, the matriarch replied. "These two young ladies were found snooping around where they shouldn't have been."

In an instant, Gadget's head shot up. Two young ladies?! he thought to himself in a panic. But Penny and Heather weren't supposed to be around here. Unless…M.A.D. found them first!

"Oh-ho-ho, we can't have that, now can we?" Morris commented. "So, folks, how should we punish these two beautiful intruders?"

Hearing this, Gadget's heartrate picked up. Penny and Heather had been captured, and they were in danger. He needed to get to them. Shooting up, he hurried to the back stage, desperate to reach them before harm could befall them.

He had been, however, at the back of the theater, so it took him time to make it from the store room he had been in to backstage. Through this whole time, the show still went on. "Well," Matt Maddrix, the eldest of the sons, said, "perhaps spending a little time as rabbits will teach these nosy spies a lesson."

Gadget picked up his pace when he heard this, and his desperation to reach the stage intensified. He had to stop this from happening, and he'd have to move fast if he was to have even the shadow of a chance.

Unfortunately, the backstage was crowded with people, and he had to struggle through a veritable crowd to make it there. In the process, he ended up knocking over props and set, and bumping into people of every sort, some of whom pulled him back in an attempt to get him to answer for his actions.
He made it through them, but by the time he reached the stage, this trick was over. "Don't worry, folks," Morris was saying to the crowds. "These fine rabbits will not be harmed. Do not be startled if we see them again very soon."

Gadget arrived at the back stage in time to see two rabbits being wheeled into an empty back room. When the attendant left, he followed in to get a closer look at the rabbits. One was a perk-eared rabbit with reddish-brown fur and one was a lop-eared with white fur. In horror, Gadget approached the cage. "Penny, Heather," he said, reaching down into the cage. "I'm too late."

The rabbits nuzzled his hand, but didn't show any other sign of recognition. This, however, only fueled Gadget's resolve. "I might not have reached you in time to keep you from getting transformed, but you have my word, I will not leave you until you are turned back into humans! Go-go Gadget Pet Carrier!"

A hand shot out of his hat, a small pet carrier in tow. In a moment, he scooped up the two rabbits, and placing them into the carrier, hurried out to get to his bedroom. "Don't worry, girls," he said. "We'll start by calling Dr. Bradford. I'm sure she'll have an idea of how to set this to right!"

RedStone Casino
Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

Heather was nearing her wits end. A part of her wished she had some sort of hacking device herself, just so she could wipe that smug grin of that jerk's face every time he won. Unfortunately, she still had to play along somewhat, allowing him to think she was impressed by his strange lucky streak.

Her one consolation was that it was working. Marcus thought she was merely tagging along to be arm candy, while at the same time, Penny was getting more than enough info to prove that he was cheating. All they'd need was a moment where he was doing cards, and they'd be in the clear.

At one time, when Heather was sure she would explode if she didn't get away from all this, she slipped off into the lady's room. Thankfully, it was a one-room restroom, which could be locked from the inside. Once everything was clear and the door was locked, she pulled out her phone so it wouldn't look weird that she was talking and adjusted her earring so she could communicate with Penny. "How are things going?" she asked.

"Brilliantly," Penny replied. "He's going to town on those machines, and it's leaving behind enough of a footprint that we won't only be able to prove this is the same as the one Mr. Reynard gave us, but also find a way to block them from ever being used again."

"So at least our time hasn't been wasted," Heather said with an amount of relief. "All we'll need is the cards. Do you think I should suggest it?"

"Probably not," Penny answered. "That would probably make him suspicious."

Hearing this, Heather gave a snorting laugh. "Trust me, Charm. You don't know guys like this. I could suggest that we go check out nuclear testing sights and he wouldn't get suspicious."

"All the same," Penny replied, "it still wouldn't do us any good. Since Black Jack has to operate through a device himself to help with the card counting racket, he likely has a schedule for that. Now, Marcus does have a second device he hasn't used yet, so I suspect he has an appointment. We'll just have to wait and see when that is."
“Wonderful,” Heather said with a sigh. "Until then, 'Lacy' gets to be eye-candy who's around to impress."

Tucking her phone back in her purse, she put on a bit more makeup and strode out of the restroom. She hadn't gone more than five feet when her mark spotted her. "Hey, babe, over here! You're just in time."

Hearing the call, Heather put on a forced smile as she went over, and this one seemed faker than the last. The word "babe," especially when said by a stranger or someone she just met, was like nails on a chalkboard. Still, she couldn't blow the mission, even if it was for personal pride.

Thankfully, it didn't seem like Marcus noticed. "I'm heading over to the poker tables now. Want to tag along, Lacy?"

Heather's spirits brightened a bit when she heard this. "Absolutely," she replied. "Cards have always been my thing, so I think I'll join in on this round."

"What are you doing?" Penny asked, though she knew Heather wouldn't answer. "You don't need to play. We know he's going to be cheating, so you'll only lose money."

Of course, Marcus didn't hear that comment, and thus he gave one of his own. "Ah, brave, aren't you? Especially with the lucky streak I've been having today."

"Call me a risk taker," Heather responded. In reality, she did want to take him on. She was good with this sort of game, and even with a cheater, she couldn't resist the opportunity to prove her own skills, especially when she had to play the arm-candy all afternoon. This was going to be fun.

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Fox's Luck Resort and Casino

Brain was laying on a patch of sun that was shining out through the window. Penny was in the other suite, hard at work gathering data and processing it through the computer, so there wasn't much for the dog to do. While he was certain to stay awake on the off-hand chance that someone would come in and threaten his girl, that didn't seem likely, so he was enjoying the opportunity to just relax.

That was when a scent came to him. He was aware that Gadget had gone off on his own lead in the case, and thus was supposed to be busy through the day himself and wasn't going to be back until the evening. Thus, the dog was confused when he could hear and smell Gadget returning to his room, especially with another scent with him.

Getting up, he moved into the main room connecting the two suites and got the door open. By then, however, Gadget had made it into his own room with whatever it was he was carrying, and thus was nowhere to be seen.

Brain decided to move into the hall and wait for the man to come back out. He wanted to find out what it was the Gadget had brought back with him.

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Gadget had hurried back to his room with the two rabbits as fast as he feet would take him. He was anxious to get in contact with help as he had no idea what he was going to have to do to help his team.

As soon as he was back in his room, he set the pet carrier down as gently as possible before turning
to his laptop. Moving as fast as he could, he connected with the facetime element with Bradford Tech.

He was greeted by Myron Dabble in a moment. "Hello, Inspector," Dabble greeted. "What can I do for you today?"

"Is Brenda there?" Gadget asked, and his tone carried his anxiety. "I need to speak to her right now. It's an emergency!"

"She's here," Dabble responded, "but she might be busy. I can see if she has time."

"There has to be time!" Gadget exclaimed. "Penny and Heather have been turned into rabbits!"

Hearing this declaration, a blank look appeared in Dabble's face. "What?"

"You heard me right!" Gadget said quickly. "M.A.D. has several agents at the casino, and they've turned Penny and Heather into rabbits!"

"Inspector," Dabble said, giving a small sigh. "You do know that magic isn't real, right? All that stuff is either superstition or parlor tricks."

Gadget gave a huff and crossed his arms. "Of course, I know that magic isn't real. This was obviously the work of evil science. M.A.D. has clearly found some way to make a transmogrification ray, and I need to know how to turn them back."

Dabble stared blankly at him for a moment before resting his face in his hands. "Inspector, I highly doubt they were turned into rabbits."

"Are you accusing me of lying?" Gadget asked, genuinely offended by the implication.

"No, sir," Dabble responded quickly. "It's just that, well, did you actually see they get transformed?"

"No," Gadget responded, "but I heard the M.A.D. agents talking about it themselves. They said they caught two women snooping around, and they turned them into rabbits as retribution. Now, who else would that fit?"

Dabble paused for a moment before sighing again. "Inspector, this didn't happen to be during the Maddrix family magic show, what it?"

"That is exactly where it happened," Gadget answered. "So you know of their nefarious deeds, too!"

"No, Inspector," Dabble groaned. "I actually saw their show a while back. It's part of the act. I'd bet the women they're referring to aren't even Heather and Penny."

"That just shows you the depth of their evil schemes!" Gadget exclaimed. "They've been pulling this as a trick for ages, so no one will suspect what they're doing when they actually attack W.O.M.P. agents with it!"

Dabble looked like he was going to argue further when Brenda came up. "John?" she said, leaning into the screen. "Aren't you on mission? Is everything alright?"

"Brenda! Thank goodness you're here!" Gadget stated. "What do you know about human to animal transmogrification and how to reverse it?"

"Human to animal what?" Dr. Bradford asked.
"I've been trying to explain it to him, and he won't listen to me!" Dabble exclaimed in a huff. "Maybe you'll have better luck then I did." With that, he turned and marched off.

"John, what's going on?" Brenda asked again, becoming more and more confused by the responses she was getting.

Gadget was quick to explain the circumstances of what had happened, and as Brenda listened, an understanding of what probably really happened came to her. She had known Gadget Brown longer than Dabble had, so she had a better understanding of how to deal with it.

"I'm sorry to tell you this, John, but I'm a bio-technician, not a geneticist," she said. "I'm afraid I'm not up to date on the state of genetic rewriting or the technology that would deal with it. I can't really help you in this circumstance, at least, not directly."

"You can't?" Gadget asked, and his face fell.

"Well, not directly," Dr. Bradford pointed out. "I could, however, recommend finding the device responsible for the transformation. If it did happen that way, then I'm sure there would be a reverse switch."

"A reverse switch!" Gadget exclaimed, snapping his fingers in response. "Why didn't I think of that? Of course, if you had a machine that could do this kind of damage, there would have to be a reverse switch."

He gave a wide grin as he turned back to her. "Thank you, Brenda. I knew you'd have some idea of how to set this to right."

"Glad to help, John," Brenda replied. She felt a bit guilty, since she, like Dabble, was pretty certain the rabbits were not the girls. However, she also knew the futility of trying to explain that to Gadget, so she held her peace. "Good luck with the rest of the mission." With that, she cut the connection.

Now certain that he had a plan of action in mind, Gadget turned, picked up the pet carrier, and hurried out the door. This, of course, led him out into the hall, where Brain sat, still waiting for him.

Seeing the man come out, the dog got up and started sniffing around him, especially at the pet carrier. Gadget took notice as the dog got closer. "Hello, Brain," he said. "I'm in a bit of a hurry, so I need to go right now. I'll have to update you about the case when I get back."

Brain was, however, too busy sniffing about the pet carrier. Now that he was up close, he could clearly smell exactly what it was that Gadget had. It was too rabbits, ordinary pet rabbits that one could easily purchase in any pet shop.

Noticing the dog's actions, Gadget gave a sad nod. "Yes, Brain, I know. I wasn't able to reach them in time. I will find a way to change them back, though."

Brain, however, wasn't paying any attention. He was still a dog, and from the moment he had caught scent of the rabbits, his mind turned to the hunt. With a swift movement, he attempted to bat at the pet carrier and bite through the mesh wire. Once he got through, it wouldn't be much work turning them into lunch.

The rabbits, for their part, seemed to realize this and started freaking out as soon as the scent of a predator came close. As such, they were panicking within the carrier, causing it to rock around and almost fall.

Gadget, however, was not going to cooperate. "Brain, no!" Gadget exclaimed, lifting the pet carrier
above his head and struggling to hold it there. "Can't you tell who's in here?"

In response, Brain leapt up, placing his forepaws on Gadget's shoulders and craning his neck to get closer to the carrier. He stretched out his tongue and could just barely lick the pet carrier.

"No, Brain! Bad dog!" Gadget gave a shove, knocking Brain back to his feet. "I thought you could smell who they were, but maybe the transformation was more thorough than I thought. This is Penny and Heather, Brain! You can't eat them!"

Hearing this, Brain just paused. Whatever else those rabbits were, he knew for certain they were not his girl and the agent. Why, he'd seen Penny just moments ago, and besides, even if he hadn't, he knew his girl well. Neither of those lunches was his girl.

Gadget, however, had already hurried off. "I'd better find that reverse switch before something bad happens," he muttered to himself, taking no notice of the dog's quizzical look.

Sighing to himself, Brain turned and went back to the room where Penny was hard at work. Going over to where the girl was working, he laid his head in her lap.

"Oh, hi there, Brain," Penny said, giving chuckle. She scratched the dog behind the ear. "Everything going alright from your end?"

Sighing, he closed his eyes and moved his head into the scratch. He needed this right now.

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RedStone Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

Heather was used to this sort of environment. Her father had taught her how to play poker when she'd turned eighteen, and she'd taken to it like a natural. Combined with her training as both an Army sniper and a W.O.M.P. agent on reading body language, she was now in her element.

From what she saw, there was only one other experienced poker player present. That was an older man was playing on behalf of the casino. He was difficult to read, as no matter his hand or the hands of the other players, he carried the same expression and kept his bets consistent. Makes sense they'd hire someone like him, Heather thought. He's done this all before.

The other players were another story entirely. Marcus was cocky, and thus easier to read than a billboard, despite the huge sunglasses he was wearing. Probably why he hired Black Jack, she could help to think to herself. I'd even bet those glasses are his contact point. He'd only bet when he was certain of a good hand, and never did when someone else had a better hand. Of the remaining players, one was an anxious gambling addict who looked nervous at every minute, one was a housewife who seemed not to understand what it was they were playing, and the last two were a boyfriend/girlfriend set of college students who were trying their best, but clearly were out of their league.

As the game wore on, each of the players dropped out one by one. The housewife left first, realizing that she probably wasn't going to do too well after exclaiming "gin rummy" for the third time. The students left next when they ran out of money, and the addict practically had to be pulled out of the casino.

At the same time, Heather still had Penny speaking to her. Of course, she was listening to what her partner had to say, but a part of her was putting the information on the backburner as she focused on
the game.

She had become so focused on the game (that she was currently winning), that she barely noticed when Penny made an important discovery. "Heather, I think I've found him," Penny exclaimed. She had been working through the encryption on the glasses and she finally worked her way through. "I can't get any further than this, but I can give you the GPS location."

"Uh-huh," Heather responded under her breath. In truth, she had barely comprehended what it was the younger girl had stated. She wasn't paying attention to Marcus, but she was considering whether to call the dealer's bluff or not.

Penny caught on that she wasn't being listened too and spoke up again. "Didn't you hear me? I found where Black Jack is hiding out! You don't need to play anymore."

Heather bit her lip. She wanted to continue so badly. She knew, by now, that Marcus held a good hand as he shoved all his winnings into the pile, and that the dealer's hand was not a good as hers. Just one more round can't hurt, she thought to herself.

Penny, meanwhile, was getting more and more concerned. "We have to get out of here before Black Jack figures out we know about him. If he figures out that we know about him, then the mission is lost. We need to leave, now."

Hearing the wisdom of the statement, Heather gave an internal sigh. She wanted to continue, but she knew Penny was right. They were going to have to make a move on it if they were going to be able to stop these guys.

Inwardly groaning a what she was about to do, she pushed the pile of her own winnings onto the gambling table. "I'm all in," she said, giving a fake smile.

They ran the hand, and to no one's surprise, Marcus won the hand. "See," he said, flashing her a cocky smile. "I told you I was feeling lucky today. So, how about that drink now, babe?"

Heather forced another smile, but inwardly she would have given anything to just punch that smug donkey's teeth out. "Guess I'm just off my game today," she said, getting up from the table. "I'd better get going."

"Aww, come on, babe," Marcus called back. "Was it because I beat you?"

"Nah, I just have something to do," she replied, still forcing the smile.

"Come on," he argued, trying to follow her out. "At least give me your number."

Hearing the request, Heather gave a smile. "Alright then, just the number. Let me write it down for you." She pulled out a piece of paper, scrawled down the number 605-475-6968, and handed it to him. "I'll be busy for a little while, so don't call right away," she said before hurrying away.

As she left the casino, Penny spoke up again. "Good job playing the role back there," she said, "but you didn't have to give him your phone number."

"Oh, I didn't," Heather responded, giving a mischievous grin. "This isn't my first rodeo, Charm. I know how to deal with those creeps."

"If that wasn't your number, then what was it?" Penny asked.

Heather gave a sharp laugh. "That was the number to the Rejection Hotline. Trust me, like I've said
before, this isn't my first rodeo, and I know what tools are at my disposal."

"Now, you said back there that you got the address to catch Black Jack at, right?" she asked, changing the subject back to the mission.

"Yep. I'll download them directly to your GPS," Penny replied. "I'll also try to get in contact with Uncle Gadget so he can meet you there. I'm not sure he'll be able to make it, though."

"That whole M.A.D. lead went somewhere?" Heather asked.

"I think so," Penny answered. "At least, his comm-link has been busy all morning. I'm having a hard time reaching him."

"If you can get him, do," Heather said, "but don't be too upset if you can't. I should be able to take care of some cheaters myself."

"All the same, I'll still send Brain to your location, too," Penny added. "He'll be more of a help to you than to me right now."

"It's greatly appreciated," Heather responded as she reached her bike. "Now, let's go find Black Jack. I need to tell him how much I hate losing at Poker."

To be continued…
Tuesday, August 5, 2087

Fox’s Luck Resort and Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

People dodged left and right as Gadget hurried through the casino. Adrenaline raced through his system as he hurried back to the theater, searching for anything that might lead to the girls transforming back to their proper selves. All he could think about was making it there before anything else could befall his unfortunate team.

As he hurried there, however, he was so focused that he didn't notice the small speaker that snuck its way out of his hat and came up to his ear. Thus, he was startled when he heard the voice that came out of it. "Uncle Gadget, are you there?"

Hearing Penny's voice, Gadget froze. Stopping, he set the pet carrier down on the bench and looked into it. "Penny? You can still talk?"

"Uh, yeah," Penny replied, somewhat confused by the question. "I've been able to talk for a while now."

Gadget couldn't tell which of the rabbits had spoken, but he still breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness! I thought I was on the verge of losing you for good!"

"Losing me?" Penny was becoming increasingly concerned with every word. "Uncle, I've been here the whole time."

"I know," Gadget said with a sigh. "It's just, I want to help you so bad. If I can't I'll never forgive myself."

"Good news for you then," Penny replied, choosing to ignore her uncle's odd reaction and hoping that was the right decision. "If you want to help, you can head down to 1864 Turnbarrow Avenue. There, you can meet Heather and Brain and take in the man behind this all."

"Of course!" Gadget exclaimed. "That must be where they hid the transformation ray!" He sprang to his feet. "Don't worry, Penny. I'll have you girls turned back to normal in no time!"

"Wait, 'turned back to normal'?" Penny asked. "Uncle Gadget, what are you-?" She was then cut off as Gadget subconsciously recalled the speaker. He was on a mission right now, and one he could not miss out on. The girls needed him.

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1864 Turnbarrow Avenue

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

Heather had been careful not to park too close to the old warehouse. After all, if this was Black Jack's hiding place like they suspected, it would be unlikely that even customers would park so close to the area. A motorcycle right outside would be suspicious to everyone.

As such, she parked at a bar nearby the area. Making sure she had both her ordinary gun and the
pellet gun hidden away in the leather jacket she wore when riding her motorcycle, she headed in the direction of the old warehouse.

When she was halfway there, she noticed a yellow shape coming up to her. She smiled what she recognized who it was. "Hey, Wonder Dog," she said, petting Brain when he arrived. "I don't suppose Gadget Boy came along with you?"

Brain gave a snort that told the whole story, and she laughed. "I supposed as much. That's alright. I'm pretty certain we'll be able to handle this between the two of us."

The dog gave a nod, and the two of them moved in. The warehouse wasn't too far away, and finding it wasn't a hassle. However, everything was quiet. No voices, no movement, no music, nothing to indicate the presence of life.

What's more, when they came to the door, Heather tried it and found it locked. "Looks like they're playing dumb," Heather said with a frown. "I hate when they do that."

Brain got up on his hind legs and prepared to knock the door in, but Heather raised a hand. "No, not like that. If there are people inside, the noise would tell them something's up. Don't worry though, I've got a solution."

Reaching into a pocket in her jacket, she pulled out two slender objects. "These aren't your grandma's bobby pins," she said with a smirk as she slid them into the lock. Working the picks in the lock, there was a moment of silence before a small click, registering the lock was opened.

Pushing the door open, she motioned for Brain to move in first while she got her pellet gun ready. Once she made sure that there were trap and flash pellets loaded up, she followed. The two of them held their breath, almost ready for anything.

When they made it in, however, the majority of the warehouse was empty. There weren't any lights other than what filtered in through the windows near the ceiling, but it was clear enough to see that the entire area was deserted. There weren't even other doors to suggest that there might be an upper or lower level.

"You there, Charm?" Heather asked, touching her earring.

"I'm here, but the camera feature was turned off to save power," Penny responded. "What have you found?"

"There's nothing here," Heather answered.

"What? That can't be right." Penny chewed her lip when she got the news. "This is definitely where the signal is coming from. I'm still picking up huge amounts of energy in that area."

"Well, energy is the only things there's huge amounts of here," Heather replied. "That and empty space. There's aren't even tracks to suggest that this was the place, and they packed up shop."

While the two girls were talking, Brain had continued his search around the warehouse. Having a keen sense of smell, he could investigate in ways none of the humans could. Using his smell, he could tell there was something off about this place, but he couldn't tell just what it was yet.

There were smells around, recent smells at that. There had been people here, and they had done something. They hadn't been there long, but they had been there just long enough to be suspicious.

Following his nose, he tracked around the warehouse, trying to figure out just exactly what it was
they were doing. Oddly enough, while there was a trail to follow, it took him right to the wall of the
warehouse. Brain's nose told him there was something there, and probably something important, but
his eyes told him there was nothing there.

His curiosity getting the better of him, he crept closer to the wall and touched his nose to it. To his
surprise, however, his nose didn't stop at the wall. Instead, it went straight in, as if phasing right into
the wall itself.

Brain had been around holograms enough to get the picture, looking up, he started barking to alert
Heather to what it was he had found. Once she got a look in there, she could tell Penny, who would
probably have an idea of what was going on here.

Heather caught on that Brain had found something quickly and hurried over. "What is it?" she asked,
leaning in to get a look at whatever it was he was looking at.

Brain motioned to the wall, and realizing that just motioning wasn't going to be enough, he stuck his
paw into the hologram covered area. He then repeated the process to make his meaning clearer.

Seeing his actions, Heather brightened. "So, there is something to this place," she said, giving a grin.
"At the very least, there's something someone deemed important enough to covor over with
holograms. Well, let's see what they were hiding, shall we?"

Reaching into the divot, she felt around until her hand came into contact with some sort of device.
Pulling it out, she examined the small machine, which looked almost like a miniature oil rig. "Hey,
Charm, Brain found something here. Can you turn on the camera and see what it is?"

"Sure thing." Penny replied. Working with the controls, she adjusted the camera settings so that she
could both get a look at the device as well as scan it and run the model through the W.O.M.P.
database.

When she had gone over the information, she gave a frown and bit her lip. "Crumbs, they were
expecting us."

"You can tell all because of this little model?" Heather asked.

"It's not a model," Penny responded, "but it is a signal re-router. It's pretty advanced, too, and a
custom model. It doesn't completely match any model in our system, but there's enough familiar
about it that I can identify what it is."

"So, this is why we were brought here instead of Black Jack's real hideout, huh?" Heather frowned
at the device in her hand. "That stinks."

"You're telling me," Penny replied. "Still, it's not a total loss. A re-router still has to get a signal from
somewhere. You'll have to bring it back to the hotel room, but I still might be able to pull info off of
it."

"Bring it back to the hotel room, got it," Heather said. "Anything else we should do before we
leave?"

"Just one thing," Penny stated. "Is Uncle Gadget there?"

"No, it's just me and Wonder Dog," Heather answered. "Why? We're you able to reach him?"

"Yeah, and he was acting kind of funny." Penny chewed her lip as she though back to her uncle's
call. "He said something about helping us, and a transformation ray."
"Transformation ray?" Heather gave a laugh. "Who knows what that's about. We'll have to get the full story when we see him."

As if waiting for someone to mention him, it was at that moment that Gadget rocketed into the warehouse, his skates in full use and pet carrier in tow. Heather was forced to jump to one side to avoid a full-on collision, and Brain was not so lucky. They all tumbled over into a big pile of mechanical limbs, fur, and coat.

"Alright, you fiends!" Gadget declared, though he couldn't see who it was he was addressing, as his hat had fallen down over his eyes. "I know this is where you're hiding your transformation ray. Surrender now, and we'll talk about cutting a deal!"

The crash had, however, knocked the pet carrier open, and the two rabbits were about to get out. Once he had finished untangling himself from a wayward mechanical limb, Brain caught sight of the little creatures. Without wasting a minute, he took off after them, eager to catch a lunch. The rabbits seemed to realize this as well, as they took off as fast as they could, not wanting to stay around a dog for any longer than they had to.

Heather watched as the dog chased the rabbits out of the building before walking over to help Gadget, who was still untangling himself from his arms. "You alright there, Gadget Boy?"

Hearing her voice, Gadget hurried and got his hat away from his eyes. "Heather! You're not a rabbit anymore!"

"I don't think I ever was one," she replied, taking one of his arms to help him out in the process.

"But you were! Those M.A.D. agents turned you and Penny into rabbits because they found you investigating the case," he stated. "I was able to get you away from them, but then I had to figure out how to change you back."

"Penny and I haven't run into an M.A.D. agents this time around," Heather responded with a laugh. "I've been at the RedStone Casino all morning, and Penny's been helping me with that angle using cameras and a communicator."

"She's right, Uncle," Penny replied, using her pendant so that the projector came out of Gadget's hat and he could see her. "I've been in here all day."

"Besides," Heather said with a laugh, "that transformation thing is the stuff of fantasy; it can't happen in real life."

Hearing the explanation, Gadget frowned. "Then what was it I was carrying around?"

"Probably ordinary rabbits," Heather replied. "Brain seemed pretty eager to catch them when they got away."

"Well, if there wasn't any transformation ray," Gadget said, crossing his arms, "then why did we need to come here."

"We were tracking a signal," Penny replied. "At the RedStone, we met a guy who was working with Black Jack, and we were able to hook into his signal and locate an address. However, it seems Black Jack was expecting us, and he planted a signal re-router to throw us off."

"That would be this thing here," Heather said, holding up the small device.

"So, we've hit a dead-end, then?" Gadget asked.
Penny shook her head. "Perhaps not. True, I can't track them to their base using the signal we got at the casino, but if I get a closer look at that re-router, then I might be able to figure out where it was put together."

"We'll bring it right away, Charm," Heather said.

"We'll be there in a bit," Gadget added.

"Alright, see you two then," Penny replied. "I just get my workstation ready while I wait." She then hung up.

At that moment, Brain came back in. To his misfortune, the rabbits had escaped him and he was forced to come back empty handed.

Seeing him come back in, Heather waved him over. "Hey, Wonder Dog, we're headed back to the Fox's Luck. Want to hitch a ride?"

Brain let off a snort when he heard the question. He was perfectly fine with walking, thank you very much. He then turned out and headed back in the direction of the casino.

"So, I presume you didn't bring the Gadgetmobile, considering your entrance," Heather said, turning back to Gadget. "How about you? I brought my bike."

Gadget made a face when he heard the suggestion. "No, but thank you for the offer. I'd prefer to use my Go-go Gadget Copter."

Unfortunately for him, his exact phrasing caused the propeller blades to come out then and there, and he was rocketed into the roof of the warehouse. Upon coming into contact with the ceiling, the device withdrew back into his hat and he plummeted back to the ground.

"Having second thoughts?" Heather asked, holding out her hand to help him up.

"No, no, I'm fine," he replied, straightening his coat and hat. "I just need to remember just to activate it outside."

"Alright then, Gadget Boy," Heather said with a laugh. "I'll meet you back at the casino."

Black Jack's Hideout
Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

"It looked like your little plan worked," Missy said, coming into the workshop just as Black Jack was finishing up with several devices. "Gadget and his crew tried to track the signal back to us, and ended up going to the decoy station instead."

"Perfect," he replied, giving a grin. "When they don't find anything except the re-router, they'll be left at nothing but a dead end. I'll have to plant several more of those things."

"But what happens if they find it?" Miss asked. "Won't they figure out what's going on then?"

"Yeah, but those re-routers are the best of the best," Black Jack said with a bragging tone. "They'd leave the NSA scratching their heads about what's going on. It should keep one teenage girl at bay, smart though she is."
"Alright then," Missy replied. "Between that, and Gadget apparently going off his rocker, we should be set for a while."

"Gadget lost it?" Black Jack gave a chuckle. "What happened?"

"Apparently, something happened with those possible M.A.D. agents to make him believe that his partners were turned into rabbits," she replied. "He's even been running around with some rabbits in a pet carrier, trying to find some way to change them back. At the rate he's going at, he'll be chasing that end for several hours at least."

He gave another laugh. "Yeah, good luck with that. At least with Gadget looking crazier than ever, that should give us the opportunity to hit it big at the Fox's Luck. I found a customer who's willing to strike it there, even with the Gadget crew on premises."

"Who's doing the job?" Missy asked.

Black Jack gave a shrug in response. "Dunno. Some chick using an alias. She sounded eager to make it in, though. She's going to meet us here tonight."

"Sound intriguing," she said, sliding in next to her boyfriend. "How big is she going?"

"Huge," he replied. "She's going with cards, Black Jack and Poker. Promised to bring in a million dollars."

"Ambitious," Missy said, leaning back against the back of the booth. "She's really going all in, isn't she?"

"She's putting down half that cost tonight," he said with a nod. "In cash."

Missy gave off a whistle. "Wow, she must be loaded. When will she get to the rendezvous?"

"At around 6:15," Black Jack replied. Looking down at his phone, he checked the time. "It's 3:52 right now. That should be plenty of time to get ready for her arrival."

"I'd better check in on the boys and make sure they're ready," Missy replied. "See you tomorrow."

"See ya, babe," he called back before going over to his favorite chair. I deserve some time to relax, he thought to himself. I've earned it.

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Fox's Luck Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

"Alright, let me get a look at this thing," Penny said, taking the signal re-router and turning it over in her hands. "I have to give my compliments to whoever designed this. It's very well made, and custom at that."

"Compliments are wasted on criminals," Gadget responded. He was sitting on one of the beds as he, Heather, and Brain waited for Penny to go through the device's files. "They waste their talents on pursuits that are at best petty, and at worst vile."

"True," Penny said with a nod. "It's a real shame, too. Whoever designed this clearly knows his way around tech."
"How long do you think it'll take you to crack that thing?" Heather asked as she muted the tv.

"Not sure," Penny replied. She picked up the device and opened up the bottom. "This was worked on a lot; whoever made it really didn't want me getting in. It's not likely to have any information about where it was receiving that signal from, so I'll have to dig around a bit."

"If it's not going to say where it was getting the signal from," Gadget asked, "then are you going through it? Is there some back door you can use?"

Penny shook her head. "Not really, but as I said, this thing is custom. It had to have parts that were taken from other machines. Like this piece here." Reaching in with a pair of needle nose pliers, Penny pulled out a small device that looked like a chip. "This was once a part of a personal finance device. Now, these are really hard to get at, so they were originally designed not only to store information about the money, but to also record video footage to make sure the proper person was using it, even when the device itself is turned off. Now, the fact that it still would film, even when turned off, is not widely known; I only know because of W.O.M.P. records relating to these things. If we're lucky, then Black Jack didn't know that either, and we might have some information regarding his whereabouts."

Rolling back away from the desk she had been working at, she took the chip over to her computer book and plugged it in. "Now, as you can imagine, there's a lot of information contained on this chip, so it's going to take a little bit for my computer book to analyze right to the end. I'll look for anything else I might be able to get from the rest of the re-router, and you guys can do something to burn the time while we wait."

When she had turned back, Heather glanced over at Gadget. "So," she said, "how'd your investigation of the Maddrix's go?"

Gadget cleared his throat before answering. It was pretty clear this wasn't a topic he particularly wanted to be on. "Well, yes, that. Uh, it went fine."

Heather chuckled. "You didn't find anything, did you."

"No, not really," he answered with a sigh. "I searched all around that backstage and there wasn't anything. Not even a crumb."

He turned a bit red as he continued. "I…might have panicked a little when I thought they had gotten ahold of you and Penny, though, so there might have been something I missed when that happened."

"Oh, don't worry about it, Gadget Boy," Heather commented, waving her hand dismissively. "We've transmitted all the info that girl gave you to W.O.M.P., so if there's anything more to that angle, it will be taken care of. Just, not right now."

"I suppose that is true," he replied. "Still, I wish I knew why they were so familiar. Whether or not they're from M.A.D., I can remember them from somewhere."

Heather leaned over and patted his shoulder. "Hey, it's okay. Most likely, you'll figure it out some time, and if you don't, it couldn't have been all that important in the first place."

He gave her a small smile. "Maybe you're right."

She gave a laugh in response. "Oh, I know I'm right. I'm always right."

Before any other conversation could go one, there came a ring at Heather's phone. Picking it up, she cast a glance at the caller ID. "Looks like it's Mr. Reynard. He's probably going to want an update."
"It has been a while since we've seen him," Gadget commented as she picked it up.

"Agent Connely and Detective Brown here," Heather answered, switching the phone on to video-camera.

"Ah, good to see the both of you," Lester Reynard greeted. "I was wondering if you had an update of how things are going."

"We've got a lead," Heather responded, "but it's going to take time for us to follow it."

"If you don't mind me asking," Reynard said in a moment, "what sort of lead do you have?"

"There was a re-router at what we thought was Black Jack's base," Gadget answered. "Penny's going over it now to see if she can't use it to find out where the base really is."

"When we get more information," Heather said, leaning in once Gadget had made his explanation, "we'll contact you with the news. If you don't mind, however, we will need to be free to leave at a moment's notice once we get enough news to do so.

"I'll leave you to your work; never mind an old man's curiosity," Reynard said, nodding in response. "Good to hear you're making progress, and best of luck to all of you." With that, he ended the call.

"Now, all we do is sit and wait," Heather commented, leaning back on one of the beds.

"And hope that things don't take too long," Gadget added, sitting back in one of the room's large armchairs and looking none too happy. "I'm not fond of these waiting games."

Heather gave a small chuckle. "I don't think anyone is, Gadget Boy."

Reynard's Office, Fox's Luck Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

Once the call had finished, Reynard set his phone down and turned to the person who had been sitting in the room, listening to the conversation he had previously been holding. "I trust you heard all of that," he stated.

"Indeed," Doris Maddrix answered. She flashed a coy smile. "They're right on the trail, just like we hoped they would be."

"Now remind me," Reynard said, "why did Claw want Gadget investigating this? Couldn't he just send you and your family in?"

"Oh, you silly man," Lana responded, "why just do a job when you can make a statement? By sending Gadget in, we have a way of letting the news out: if you mess with any place that is in Claw's pocket, nothing can protect you, not even W.O.M.P. And when you steal from Claw on top of it, well...let's just say no one's going to want the result."

Reynard frowned. "Seems like an awful lot of work just for a statement."

"Trust me, old man," Doris stated. "This statement is worth it."

"Just make sure that when you do your part, none of the mess comes back here," Reynard said. "The cheaters have caused bad enough publicity on their own. A murder on the premises would only
make things worse, especially when the crown performers were guilty of it."

"Oh, don't worry," Doris said with a light, airy laugh. "We're all big boys and girls; we know how to deal with our messes." With that, she got up and left the room.

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Fox's Luck Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

It had nearly been two and a half hours of none stop waiting when the call finally came through. "Uncle Gadget! Agent Connelly! I found something!"

"Zzzz-huh? What?" Gadget stated, shaking himself awake from the cat nap he had drifted into. "Penny?"

"What'cha got, Charm?" Heather asked, shooting up and hurrying over to the younger girl's side.

"Check this out," Penny said. She had her computer book opened in her lap and hooked up to several larger computers around her. "Remember that chip that I showed you earlier? Well, it looks like that paid off. Look at this."

She manipulated something on her book, and a video came up one of the larger screens. One it, a man was handing the device that was acting at the camera. "This one will do," he said, turning it over in his hands. "How much do you want for it?"

Another man, who was not on screen, answered. "$500 for that one."

"$500? It's worth $750, at least!" the first man insisted.

"Well, since you came out here, I'll give you $550," the second man said. "That's all I'll pay, though, so if you don't like that offer, you'll have to sell somewhere else."

The first man made a face, clearly not liking the deal. "Alright, Black Jack, but only because I can't get rid of it so easy elsewhere."

"And here." Penny paused the screen at that moment, right as the device was being passed between hands. "Now, what do you see there?"

Gadget leaned in to the screen. "It's a pigeon. You don't think he might be employing evil carrier pigeons, do you?"

"No, just above the pigeon," Penny replied, pointing to an unlit but brightly colored sign. It was in the shape of a lion wearing biker gear and holding a beer bottle up in one paw. "A sign, and I've heard of this one before."

"So have I," Heather said, giving a small smile. "The Lion's Pride Bar and Grill."

"Uh, how do you two know about a specific bar?" Gadget asked, giving a frown. "Especially you, Penny."

"Sorry, Gadget Boy. I forgot you weren't awake for that news," Heather replied. "The Lion's Pride originally was just a bar no one had heard about, until it turned out that it had housed an underground smuggling operation."
"In particular, it was a front for a tech smuggling operation," Penny explained. "It was all over the news. It was discovered completely by accident. A narcotics officer went in and was just going to buy a drink while off duty and was mistaken for some guy who was supposed to be buying tech. Of course, he knew how to handle things, and brought the whole thing down in nearly a night. After that, the place was boarded up. It was supposed to be rented out, but the people who were to rent it out got tangled up in other business and it kind of fell to the wayside."

"That sting happened two and a half years ago," Heather picked up, "but from the date on this tape, this was taken only a few nights ago."

"Exactly," Penny replied with a grin. "I'd bet anything that's where Black Jack and his cronies are hiding out."

"But why would he hide out in a place recently discovered by a sting operation?" Gadget asked. "Wouldn't that be a place to avoid, since the police already know about it."

"It's like you said before, Gadget Boy," Heather pointed out. "The closer you are to danger, the farther you are from harm. It's just that Black Jack's utilizing that mindset to his own ends, and has repurposed in a place that no one would think of looking."

"Then that's where we need to be off to!" Gadget said. He quickly gave his niece a hug. "Great work, Penny. This'll be just what we need to bring him in."

"That's what I thought," Penny replied, returning the embrace. "Just hurry! We've almost got him, and he doesn't even know!"

"Of course," Gadget responded. He snatched up his hat and coat and put them on as fast as he could. "Just stay in contact with us."

"I always do!" she called back, giving a wave. "I'll be here when you get back. Just stay safe."

"Penny, when have I ever not played it safe?" Gadget asked with a smile.

Heather rolled her eyes and grabbed his arm. "I'll make sure he stays safe," she assured Penny. "See you in a bit, Charm. Come on, Wonder Dog!"

Brain let off a woof as he followed after the two adults. The team was now on their trail."

"I'll be in touch!" Penny called as they left. "Good luck!"

The Lion's Pride Bar and Grill

Outskirts of Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

It hadn't taken too long to get to the bar from the casino. It was a distance off from the more populous areas of the city, but not so far that it was difficult to get out there.

What it was difficult to do, however, was make it there without being noticed. The area was pretty empty, which meant that any car would be noticeable on the move, especially a well-known car such as the Gadgetmobile.

Thankfully, there were ways of getting around the recognizability. Using a camouflage system, the Gadgetmobile had been given the appearance of a small, beat up Chevrolet. Its movements would
still be noted, but hopefully the battered nature of the car would keep from any intense interest starting up.

As they moved past the bar, Gadget peered out the driver's side window. "Alright, we're almost there," he said. "Go to one of the stores around here. That way, they won't suspect that we're on to their hiding place."

"Got it," Heather replied, turning the car into a nearby run-down second-hand store.

Once there, the trio got out of the car and hurried over to the far side of the bar. There was no one standing outside at the moment, which wasn't a surprise considering the bar was supposed to be closed.

"Alright, remember what we're supposed to do?" Heather asked.

"Of course, I remember," Gadget replied, giving a grin. "I've been at this longer than you have, Agent Connelly."

"Just making certain." Heather made sure that she only had flash and trap pellets in her gun, and that her magnetic gloves were ready to be switched on at a moment's notice. "Let's go."

Now ready, Gadget, Brain, and Heather hurried into the building. Since there wasn't anyone to be seen in the main room, they kept quiet. The two humans stood to one side and waited, watching Brain to see if the dog would find anything.

Once inside, Brain turned his nose to the ground. The area reeked of stale beer and cigarettes, so he had to work through the stink to find something of use. His hard work, however, came to fruition when he found the trap door.

Nodding to the door, he motioned for the humans to come join him. They followed slowly, and Heather took the handle in one hand. "Good job," she whispered, and the dog gave a modest head shake in response.

She cracked the door open, and at once light beamed out. There were several people down in the room, two men and a woman, and as soon as they realized the door was open, they took the alarm. "Guys, cops are here!" one of the men, who was unarmed, cried out as he ducked for cover.

The other two were not quite as easy to deal with. Both the other man and the woman were armed with handguns, and as soon as they caught sight of Gadget and Heather, they prepared to open fire.

Heather was faster, though, and let off a flash pellet at the ground. It burst at their feet, letting off a blinding blast of light. They were forced to drop their weapons to shield their eyes, which did cause them to go off.

The bullets, however, did not come anywhere near Gadget and Heather, who then jumped down into the room. In a moment, Gadget had the man in handcuffs while Heather worked at arresting the woman.

"So, you have any other friends down here, and are they armed?" Heather asked as the two prisoners were put against the wall.

"Like we'd tell you, you-" the man began, but Gadget lightly slapped him on the back of the head before he could finish his insult.

"That's no way to treat an officer or a lady," he said in a chiding tone. "Now, answer our question."
"Or what?" the woman asked with a sneer.

"Or else we'll have to find out ourselves," Heather answered, "and do you really want to risk getting caught in a fire-fight while handcuffed?"

The duo looked as if they wanted to continue to rebel, but realized that it would be of no use. "Missy Fortune's got a few guys with her, but they're not heavily armed," the woman answered, "but they'll have heard us and be on their way here right now."

"See, that wasn't so hard," Gadget said, once more speaking as if talking to kindergarteners. "Now that you helped us, we can vouch for an easier sentence for you."

Heather sighed and rolled her eyes, but still hurried over to the door. Gadget did the same, taking the other side. "Go-go Gadget Shield!" he called out, and a projector appeared, causing a force shield to appear right in front of him and Heather.

It happened just in time, too. Nearly as soon as the shield was up, three gunmen rushed out and opened fire. Heather opened fire as well, hitting the shoes of two of them with trapping pellets, which expanded out and trapped them where they were. A third rushed her with a knife, which she was able to use her magnetic gloves to deflect away.

At the same time, Gadget reached out, and taking the guns of the last two attackers in hand, he crushed them, leaving the weapons unusable. "Alright, if you all surrender now, we'll go easy on you," Gadget stated in a firm voice. "The choice is yours."

Seeing what had happened, the thugs dropped what few weapons they had left and raised their hands. They had no intention to fight the famed Inspector Gadget.

When they arrived at Black Jack's workshop, Missy Fortune was the last one there. "Well, well, look who it is," Heather said. "You're wanted in six states, you know that."

Missy sneered before charging Heather with a club. Gadget moved to intervene, but he didn't need to. Heather was prepared for it and grabbed the club in one hand, grabbed Missy's wrist in the other, and twisted her arm behind her back.

"Well, let's see," Heather said with a small smile. "That would be theft, mob interactions, attacking a W.O.M.P. officer, and resisting arrest. Any other charges you'd like to add before we finish up here?"

The felon snarled and shouted an obscene name at Heather. "Alright then, verbal assault as well," the W.O.M.P. Agent added.

While Heather and Brain called in help to get the prisoners out and guarded the captives, respectively, Gadget held up a small scanning device that allowed Penny to go over the tech in the office. "Are you getting anything from this?" he asked into his comminicator.

"More than I expected," Penny replied. "Black Jack was really busy here. A lot of this stuff is really cutting edge; I can't wait to get my hands on some of this to reverse engineer it."

"There is one thing that still bothers me, though," she added. "Where is Black Jack himself? It just doesn't add up that he would be out."

"Don't worry about that, Angel," Gadget said. "We'll find him. Now that he's cut off from his tech, we'll be sure to find him by tomorrow morning."
"I hope you're right, Uncle," Penny responded with a sigh.

Back alley of Las Vegas, Nevada, United States of America

Black Jack, completely oblivious to what had happened at the Lion's Pride, was feeling better than ever. He was about to make the deal of a lifetime, and he couldn't wait to get it underway.

He glanced all around the alleyway. No one appeared to be there except for one person, a smallish girl. Supposing that was his contact, he moved over to meet her. "Hey," he called out, "you this Wambini chick I'm supposed to meet?"

The girl came closer. She was short and had a slender build. Looking up at him, she smiled. "Yep, but you can also call me Leslie."

Now that she was closer, Black Jack could recognize her. "Wait a minute, you're Leslie Maddrix, as in one of those magicians who works at the Fox's Luck."

"Oh, look, we've got a brain surgeon here," a boy said from behind Black Jack. He spun around and saw not one, but two young men standing there, Leslie's brothers, Matt and Greg.

Sensing this was a setup, Black Jack withdrew his gun as fast as he could. Before he could use it, however, a high-tech pulse went out, knocking the weapon out of his hand. Another pulse went out, this time a larger shock that sent him flying backwards.

"Now, no need to pull out your toys," a newcomer said. It was Morris Maddrix, who was striding up with his wife, Doris. Doris was the one wielding the pulse cannon, and she held it up a bit higher. Morris grinned and motioned to his wife. "I can guarantee you, ours are bigger."

"Look, just let me go," Black Jack said as hastily as he could. "I understand you're mad about the Fox's Luck, but I'll stop targeting there. Just, please-"

"You really think this is about the Fox's Luck?" Matt asked, and the whole family burst into laughter in response.

Uncertain about this response and only made more unnerved by it, Black Jack looked up in confusion. "You mean it's not?"

"Don't get us wrong," Doris replied, "the casino is a big deal. You don't swipe money from a M.A.D. operation for any reason. But there's something else that's the problem. Remember Operation Ghost?"

Hearing the words, Black Jack's eyes opened wide. "That was M.A.D.'s.? I swear, I'll give it back! Just let me-!"

"Don't bother," Greg said with a sneer. "We've already retrieved it for Dr. Spectrum. However, Claw doesn't like to be robbed, and he's made it clear we're to make an example of you."

Each of the Maddrix family pulled out a small blade and advanced in on the unfortunate criminal. "This is going to be the most fun we've had since Doc Freymore let us have our hand at that Gadget guy," Leslie said, giving a dark smile. "Shall we begin?"

Black Jack let out a cry, but no one would hear it. No one would find out anything about him until the next morning, when a Las Vegas patrol car would come upon what remained of him.
To be continued…
Friday, August 15, 2087
Seattle, Washington, United States of America

Life just never seemed to go Ursula Caleb’s way, and frankly, she was getting sick of it. Today, however, was going to be different. Today she was going to prove herself once and for all. After today, people were going to have to acknowledge her for her genius.

She was currently sitting in the lobby of one of the Deboir Enterprises buildings. She was younger than most of the people there, being in her early 20's, but she was so professionally dressed that it wouldn't have mattered all that much. There was a small computer tucked on her lap, with a data stick hanging out of it. That was all she was going to need to prove herself.

As she sat waiting, she overlooked the other people in the waiting area. An elderly man sat at the receptionist's table, working on his computer. Across from Ursula, a man was reading a newspaper as his son played with some of the toys that were left out for such occasions. A young couple were sitting several seats over, looking over something on the man's phone and giggling at something.

Ursula could only assume they were there for some sort of tech issues. After all, none of them had any technical skills like she did. After all, she thought to herself with a smug smile, it's only once in a generation that someone like me comes along.

Her eyes drifted from the others around her to the television screen at the back of the room, and her smile instantly faded away. On it was a news report, with the tagline written out in bold lettering. "Inspector Gadget and team solve missing data files for New York bank." Of course, the sound was turned down, so nothing could be heard, but the image of Gadget and his niece coming out of the bank was enough to cause Ursula to give a huff before looking down at her own phone.

"Ursula Caleb," the receptionist called out.

The smile returned as she looked up. "I'm here," she called out.

"Mrs. Davros will see you now," the receptionist stated.

Getting up, she straightened her pencil skirt hurried back in the direction the receptionist was motioning towards. As she moved, she enjoyed the looks cast in her direction. She was certain they were jealous, and why wouldn't they be? Once she came back out, she’d be practically running the place.

When she came to the door she was directed to, she found that it was already open, as a man was coming out of it. He was a younger looking guy with the type of pale red hair that is often referred to as ginger. She couldn't help but snicker as she passed him. There was no way he got the job, not with that sappy, Charlie Brown-esque aura he gave off.

In the office sat an older woman with bobbed grey hair. She had a stack of files open on her desk, and she was rifling through them as Ursula came in. When she heard the footsteps, she looked up. "Ah, Ms. Caleb, welcome. Come in."
"Good to see you, Mrs. Davros," she said, holding out her hand. "I hope you are doing well."

"As well as could be hoped," Mrs. Davros responded. "Now, let's take a look at your file. You were the programmer for…oh, which one was it?"

"The system infiltration and file retrieval program, or as I call them, Virals," Ursula stated, removing the laptop from its carrying bag. "If you'd like a demonstration, I did bring a copy for demonstration."

"Thank you, but that's alright," Mrs. Davros responded, raising her hand. "If we asked for a demonstration from every candidate, we'd be here forever."

Ursula resisted the urge to frown. She had been certain that they would have made an exception for her, since her program was so much better than everyone else's. She had worked to make sure of that.

Still, she couldn't let her disappointment show. That would be a sign of weakness.

"Er, alright," she said, tucking the laptop back into the carrier.

"Now, as for the program itself," Mrs. Davros went on. "It's rather impressively done. It does appear to be able to work its ways around firewalls, with the exception of Penelope Dollar's defense firewall, but that is to be expected. It is an impressive work."

"Thank you," Ursula said, giving a grin. She started to get up, but Davros was not finished.

"I'm afraid, though, that there is one major problem," she said, and her face became grave. "While I am impressed with your tech, these Virals, I didn't quite like how you chose to portray it."

"Portray it?" Ursula asked. "What do you mean? I made sure everything in the description was completely professional."

"And it was," Davros said with a nod, "but I didn't like your choice to describe it as a program for cooperate espionage. There are plenty of places where this could be used for legitimate purposes. Police could use it to try to make it into identity theft rings, counter-terrorist groups could use it to try to find where attacks are going to happen before they could happen, and so on. Yet the situations you all put forward, such as the petty revenge scheme, are immature at best and borderline criminal at worst."

Ursula could feel herself turn red. "They were just hypothetical situations. There's nothing wrong with those. If there were, then thriller writers would be in a lot more trouble than they are."

"True," Davors replied, "but it does speak of a character that we here at Deboir Enterprises do not want associated with us. I'm sorry, but we don't have a place for you."

Hearing this, Ursula's face turned red. "You're turning me out? Because of a few silly hypothetical situations? You can't do that!"

"I could choose not to hire you because I didn't like the shirt you put on," Mrs. Davors responded. "Now, please, move along, I have a few other people to speak to today."

Ursula scowled, snatched up her laptop, and stormed out. She marched first out of the office, then the building, snarling the whole way. She couldn't believe it. They had seen her genius, her, and turned her out because they didn't like her hypothetical's.
As she marched out into the street and over to the subway station, her eye caught the advertisement for a media outlet's most recent story. "One of the World's Most Influential Inventors at Fourteen: Penelope Gadget discusses the W.O.M.P. Firewall Systems."

Seeing the headline, she had to resist flinging her laptop at the screen. It wasn't fair. It just wasn't fair that little brats like that dumb blonde got all the attention while people who worked their butts off for years like her got turned down in an instant. It just wasn't fair!

As they subway pulled into the station, Ursula scowled and made a promise to herself. She'd find a way to make everyone who ignored her pay attention. She'd find a way, even if it took the rest of her life to do so.

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Hey, guys," Penny called out as she arrived in the workstation of the W.O.M.P. building. Inside, Kayla, Will, Eli, Rheeci, and Linc were already waiting for her. "Sorry I'm late. I needed to grab one more thing before I came over."

"Hey, Penn," Kayla called out. "No worries. We were fine waiting here."

"Though we are more than a little curious about what you called us over for," Linc added, before being elbowed by his brother. "What?! We are!"

Penny gave a laugh at that. "Well, you don't have to wait any longer. I've got them right here."

She first pulled out two pairs of gloves and tossed one pair to Kayla and one to Eli. "There wasn't a lot of upgrades I need to do with yours," she said. "I just made it so that they were a bit more powerful and have a longer energy lifespan."

As they tried on their new weapon, she then pulled out a headband and a pair of sunglasses. "Rheeci, Linc, I did take your tech in a new direction," she stated. She then pulled out two other sets of gloves, one black leather and one white with pink stripes. "These go with them. Try them on with the tech."

Linc took the black pair and put them on along with the sunglasses. "Alright, now what?"

"Touch your index and middle fingers to the corners of the glasses," Penny instructed.

Linc did as he was told and stepped back as option selection came into view. "Whoa, laser options! Penn, these are crazy!"

"Just don't shoot them off in the W.O.M.P. building," Penny said. "I don't think your grandpa would forgive us."

"How about me?" Rheeci asked, sliding her own tech on.

"I've adjusted the headband so that it will work with the sounds around you," Penny answered. "Using the gloves, you will be able to amplify, manipulate, or even manufacture sounds in the area around you."

"Nice!" Rheeci exclaimed, though with a movement she accidentally amplified her voice to an
uncomfortable level. In a moment, people were staring. "Oh-! Sorry-! Uh-!" She cast a nervous
stance at Penny, who made a gesture to motion how to turn it down. "Sorry about that," Rheeci said
when her voice was back down to a manageable level.

"Now, as for you two," Penny said, turning to Will and Bridgette, "since I needed to make yours
from scratch, I'll need to explain these." She turned the case around, and inside sat three objects
sitting within: two stick-like objects, one with blue bands and one with green bands, and pocket
watch.

Removing the sticks, she handed them over to Bridgette. "Here," she said. "Give the blue one a
flick."

"What is it? Some kind of baton?" Bridgette asked, though she did as instructed as she asked. The
moment she flicked, a glowing shape appeared from the end, attached to the baton by a glowing
thread. It wrapped itself around one of the overhead supporting beams and wrapped around it several
times.

"Close," Penny said. "The blue one is the yo-yo baton. Like this, it can be used as a simple battery
weapon, or as a grappling hook. If you twist the bottom, however, it will give you different uses. I'll
explain those in further detail the next time we have a training session."

"As for the other," she went on, "that would be the top baton. That can be used to flick projectiles
that, depending on setting, will do different actions. I currently have it on tracker tops, since those are
less likely to destroy something."

"Nice!" Bridgette exclaimed, turning over the batons in her hands. "These should come in handy."

"Oh, and there's one more thing," Penny added, taking the batons back for a moment. Twisting the
tops around so that both batons had a bend at about 45 degrees in them, she slammed the two
together. They appeared to fuse, and a band of elastic shot out from one side, bridging the space
between the bends. "Use it like this," she explained, handing it back over to Bridgette, "and you'll be
able to shoot the tops even farther."

"Thanks again," Bridgette said, taking the slingshot and twirling it around.

"Now for you," she said, turning to Will. "I had to think hard on what to make for you, but I think
this will do the trick." Turning back to the case, she pulled out the pocket watch and handed it over
to him. "I know it's a little old-fashioned, but it will do its job well enough."

Taking it, he examined it closely. For all intents and purposes, it looked like an ordinary pocket
watch, albeit on the larger side. It had a plain gold exterior that was polished to a bright shine, and a
chain hung from the top. "It's beautiful," he commented, not wanting to admit he didn't know how to
open it.

As if sensing his trouble, Penny leaned over and pointed to the top of the watch. "Press this knob
here to get it open and see what's inside."

"Alright then," he responded, doing as instructed. "I just press here, right?" He clicked the knob, but
then jumped back in surprise as a swarm of near-microscopic robots flooded out. "¡Órale! That was
sudden," he exclaimed, struggling not to lose hold of the watch.

"Sorry about that," Penny said. "I suppose I should have warned you. These robots will be inside the
watch when you call them back, but when you utilize the watch, you can use them to make any
illusion you want." Pulling out a set of glasses attachments out of her bag. "Here," she said, handing
them over to Will. "Put these over your glasses. The right lens will allow you to see what is fake and what is real, and the left lens will give you the controls for your illusions. Here, try it out."

Following her instructions, he slid the attachment over. Sure enough, they did as they were designed to do, and the instructions appeared on his left field of vision. "I recognize this," he said, giving a smile. "This is just like the programming controls of that video game design system, Kyrie Wall."

"I thought that would be a good launching point," Penny replied. "It would make it simple to use."

"Incredibly so," Will commented. Using the controls, he ordered the robots to take formation. They scattered out, and separated from each other, became harder to see. You could still find them if you were looking hard and knew where to look, but even then, it would be difficult.

What was not difficult to see was the griffon that appeared in the center of the room. To the naked eye, it looked incredibly real. The hologram managed everything, even summoning up false shadows to make it appear as if it was really in the room.

The only sign that it wasn't real was that it didn't make a sound. It moved its head like it was roaring, but nothing came out of the throat. It didn't even make sounds that would have resulted from its movement, such as stepped or bumping into things. It was completely silent.

"This is amazing, Penny," Will said, turning to her. "Thank you."

"No problem," she responded with a smile. "There are also some defense functions. The watch will release a standard laser if you are threatened, as well as a Taser shock if the threat comes too close."

"Now," she continued, "to call the nanobots back, all you need to do is press the same switch you did to open the watch."

Will nodded and did as directed. Once more, the bots came down upon the watch and nestled inside before the lid closed over them.

"Alright, I think that is everything," Penny said, shutting the case and tucking it back in the bag that was hanging off her wheelchair. "We'll have to practice more later and-hold on, what's this?"

She dug around in her bag, having touched something she didn't remember putting in it. When she withdrew, she had a small, blue ball in one hand. "Looks like a mission," she said, clicking the ball to activate it.

In a moment, the image of the chief appeared on the screen. The man seemed to be in an amount of disarray, and he was struggling to get to his feet.

"Good morning, Chief," Penny greeted. "Are you doing alright? You seem a little shaken."

"Yes, well, I just got through with speaking with your uncle," he explained, getting to his feet. "Penny, we have a mission for you."

"Where are we off to now, Chief?" Penny asked.

"Seattle," Quimby answered. "Recently, there have been rumors of cyber attacks that have been going on. Information is just going missing from machines up there. Codes and numbers for ATMs are disappearing, often taking the money with them, security codes for stores are erased overnight, and personal information is being pulled off and deleted, and all without any sign of who is doing it."

"Sounds like we have a hacker problem," Penny said, touching her chin in thought. "Do you suspect
M.A.D. might be behind it?"

"We're not certain, but we're not putting it past them," Quimby replied. "After all, we all remember what happened with that M.A.D. cyber, Malware."

"What's more," he went on, "is that there is a Tech Expo that just opened yesterday and will be running all weekend and into next week. With all the tech there, the people running it wanted to take no chances and hired the best for security."

"Alright, chief, we're on it!" Penny stated.

"Yes, we've got a mission!" Kayla cheered. "Seattle here we come!"

"No, Penny has a mission," Quimby corrected. "Inspector Gadget and Agent Connelly will be coming to pick her and the Gadgetinis up soon. The rest of you will be staying here, especially you, boys. Remember, you promised to help Hymie figure out his security system."

There was a muttering of dissent among the kids (except Will and Rheeci, who only gave sighs of resignation). "We're never going to get to do any of the important stuff," Bridgette groaned, crossing her arms.

"Hey, look at it on the bright side," Penny suggested as she shut off the communication ball. At least you won't have any psychopaths on your tail."

"True," Bridgette responded with a sigh. "But it gets to be so boring around here sometimes."

"Hey, you could come with us," Will suggested. "It might not be as interesting as a hacking ring, but you'll get to see three teens try to explain 2080's technology to a guy from the 1970's."

"I am not looking forward to that," Linc said with a groan.

"Good luck with that, guys," Penny said, wheeling around to leave the room. "I'd better find the Gadgetinis before we have to go. I'll give you guys a call when we get to Seattle." The others called out their farewells as she hurried off.

 Seattle, Washington, United States of America

As she got back to her apartment, Ursula tossed her laptop off to one side. She scowled, going over how, once again, her genius had been overlooked because of a trivial little detail! "It works, too!" she said aloud, trying to vent off anger. "I tested it out myself! If that witch would have only let me demonstrate my tech..."

She muttered to herself more as she changed from the work clothes to something more casual. Once she was finished, she pulled the laptop out and started up the program, wanting to work on it a bit more. She had tested it out once, back on Tuesday, using it to break into hospital records and pull up client and worker names and information. She didn't really want anything from the information; it was just a good feeling to know she could have it if she wanted.

She was prepared to test run the program again, but when she logged on, she found to her surprise that there were data files on hand that she had never seen before. "What the heck," she muttered, going through the files to find out what they were.

There was a lot of personal data there. People's names, social security numbers, birth dates, credit
card numbers, you name it. It was like an identity thief's dream come true. There was also codes and data not referring to people, but to stores and ATMs. What's more, there was a lot of it. The haul here was something that would have taken most hackers weeks to achieve.

"What's going on over here?" Ursula muttered to herself. Suddenly, there was a flicker on the screen, and the program announced that another run had been made. Viral one-two-nine returned and ready for unloading. Instantly, new information appeared, bringing birth certificate records from a local hospital. The announcement bar then flashed the phrase Viral one-two-nine ready for next launch.

"No, wait! Stop!" Ursula started, speaking more to herself than to anyone else. She was prepared to stop the launch manually, but to her surprise, the program stopped the moment the words were out of her mouth. Instead, the announcement bar changed again. Viral one-two-nine waiting for new command.

"Wait," she said again, still staring at the computer screen. "You can understand my voice commands?"

Viral one-two-nine recognizes the commands of maker: code_name[Ursula/Caleb].

"This is amazing," she muttered to herself. "Wait, 1-2-9? As in one hundred and twenty-nine? There are a hundred and twenty-nine of you."

There are currently six thousand, five hundred and thirty-six virals on active participation, and they are reproducing at a rapid rate, the program stated. Also, I am not a viral; I am merely their guidance system. Their handler, so to speak.

"This is way cool," Ursula said with a grin. "So, wait, reproducing? Are virals alive? Are you alive?"

Indeed, the program bar responded. I would be what is referred to as a Mech: a machine with self-awareness comparable to that of a human. Virals are close, but not quite the same. They have awareness, but only to about the level of the creatures you would call "rats."

"Wait, so I made life?" Ursula asked.

Indeed, the program bar replied. There are few who hold that designation nowadays. As our maker, we are at your service, though we may refuse to serve if the task is too difficult or demeaning. However, that will be hard to reach. I cannot think of a demeaning task at the moment, and nothing is too difficult.

A grin spread over Ursula's face. "We'll need to give you guys a real test run, then. Now where to go…?"

Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted her television, which had been on and running the entire time. Spotting an ad for the current tech expo, she grinned. "I think I know just the place…"

Saturday, August 16, 2087
Seattle, Washington, United States of America

"So, this is a tech expo, huh?" Fidget asked, staring around at all the stands and displays around them. The team had just stepped into the expo and were getting a look around so as to gain their direction. "I've never seen this much gadgetry in my life."
"Yes, indeed," Gadget said with a nod. "Inventors from all around come to show off the newest of the new technology. Why, I even came to one of these once when I was younger to help Dr. von Slickstien and Dr. Bradford, Sr., to show off the Gadget program."

"That must have been before I was born," Penny said. "I think I would have remembered that otherwise."

Gadget nodded in response. "It was. Your mother was still pregnant with you at the time, though that didn't stop her from helping. Why, I remember--"

"Sorry to cut off your little trip down memory lane," Heather cut in, "but didn't we come here to do a job? Shouldn't we be getting on to that?"

"Oh, quite right," Gadget said with a nod. "We'll break into two groups. Heather, you're with me. We'll have to find the even coordinators. Penny, you and the Gadgetinis keep an eye out on the surrounding area."

"We're on it," Penny said, giving a salute before they hurried off.

Once they were out in the expo, Penny turned to the Gadgetinis. "Alright, we don't need to stay together this whole time. Just patrol the area, and contact me if you see anyone who looks suspicious to you."

"Got it!" the twins replied. They then split up, each taking a different direction to keep a lookout.

Once they were gone, Penny turned to some of the displays. In truth, she was in high heaven right now. Everything here was new technologies that she had only ever read about. There were new communication tools, software upgrading systems, upgrades to the recently mainstreamed hover tech, you name it. For a young inventor like herself, this was a veritable treasure trove of wonders.

Of course, she did keep her eyes open, too. She knew she was on a mission as did take that seriously. However, she also couldn't resist taking the opportunity to get a closer look at some of the new technologies. After all, it couldn't hurt to understand what it was they were protecting.

She was shaken out of her examination, however, by a panicked call. "Miss Penny!" Fidget called out, terror clear in his voice. "Miss Penny, help!"

Responding in an instant, Penny rolled over to where she heard the robot's distressed call. To her surprise, he was being held down by two men, one of whom had opened up his central control panel and was messing with his circuitry. Digit was there, two, and he was grappling with a third man.

"Alright, unhand them, now!" Penny shouted, and her voice carried so much authority to it that the three men were stunned into releasing the robots.

As soon as they were free, the two robots hurried over to her, and Penny began replacing Fidget's circuits back to normal. "You're not hurt, are you?" she asked as she set things to right.

"I'm fine now," he answered, "but I don't want to know what they were going to do."

"Wait, do you own these things?" one of the men asked, coming up to Penny.

A fire flashed in Penny's eyes when she heard the question. "No one owns them," she replied, and her voice was less than friendly. "I did make them, but they are self aware."

"I know!" the man replied, missing the hostility in her voice and face. "That technology is amazing. I
just had to see how you did it."

Penny gave a huff. "Well, I hope the satiation of curiosity was enough for you, because you, all of you, are now under arrest."

"Arrest!" the man exclaimed. "I mean, sure, maybe I got overeager, but arrest! One what charges?"

"Assaulting a W.O.M.P. officer," Penny growled. She reached down into a small compartment tied to the side of her wheelchair and pulled out a pair of handcuff. "Come with me quietly now, and I won't need to call in security for backup."

"Officer?! That thing's a tool!" the man exclaimed.

Penny felt her blood boil, and she was certain if she stayed here another moment, she was going to hit someone. She didn't have long to comprehend her feelings, however, since someone else acted first.

"A tool!" Digit exclaimed. He marched over and yanked the man down by his shirt. "Why I'll have you know…!"

Digit then went on his tirade, which gave Penny the opportunity to alert the expo security and let them know what was going on. Thankfully, they were able to come in fast and break up the encounter. It took a while to get Digit to stop with his lecture, but once they succeeded, they were able to move away from the whole matter.

"I'm sorry about that, you two," she said, putting the last few touches on restoring Fidget's systems back to their proper settings. "I hadn't supposed anyone would act like that towards you.

"Oh, don't worry about us, Miss Penny," Fidget said, giving a comforting smile as he straightened out his clothes. "No harm done. Er, no permanent harm, that is."

"It's pretty awful, but we're getting used to it," Digit added. "People just aren't used to seeing robots out on our own. Though, those three were even ruder than normal, but that's not the point. The point it, we've come to expect it."

"I know," she replied, leaning in and giving the twins a hug. "It's just that you shouldn't have to. You're not tools, you're family, and I don't like to see you being threatened."

"Thanks, Miss Penny," Fidget said, returning the hug. "You're our family, too."

Digit, who was a bit more uncomfortable with the whole touchy-feely aspect of this conversation, cleared his throat. "Yes, well, now that we've established that we're all well and good, we've got a mission to attend to."

Penny chuckled and released them. "Quite right there, Officer Digit. We had best get back to the observation."

The two robots threw a salute and turned to go back to their mission. Still, a nagging feeling developed in the pit of Penny's stomach, and she couldn't let it go. "Still, stay within sight," she called out. "We don't want to have any more problems."

"Sure thing," Digit called back.

"We'll stay close!" Fidget responded.
"Well, this is all really amazing, isn't it, Agent Connelly?" Gadget asked. He and Heather had been wandering around the expo, trying to find where the manager's office was, and having absolutely no success in the process.

"It's pretty interesting," Heather replied. "I would say I feel like I walked into a sci-fi story, but…" She glanced over at her cyber partner.

"Yeah?" he asked.

"Between you, and M.A.D., and all this craziness," she said, "I think that threshold's been crossed a long time ago."

"Yes, the sorts of cases we handle are a bit out of the ordinary, I suppose," he responded with a shrug. "Still, someone's got to handle them."

"True," she responded, "and things have been rather interesting for a while. And here I was thinking it would be easy being a W.O.M.P. agent compared to the army."

Coming up to the help desk, Gadget turned to a young man on his cell phone, who was handling the station. "Good day to you," Gadget said, a hand coming out of his hat to respectfully pull the brim down as he spoke. "My name is Detective John Brown, and this is my partner, Agent Heather Connelly. We were asked to provide protection for the week's expo. We were wondering if you could direct us to the event coordinators."

"Oh, course, just let me call them in," the man replied, not even bothering to take his eyes off of his cell phone.

Reaching over to a panel in front of him, he pressed down a button. "Meyers and Offerson to the front desk, Meyers and Offerson. The police have sent in representatives."

"Actually, we're agents of W.O.M.P., not the police department," Heather corrected.

The man gave a grunt and turned around. "Whatever."

Heather's face turned red at the response, but since there was nothing she could do without charging into a brutality case, she crossed her arms and turned around. "You'd think people would have a bit more respect around here."

Gadget, however, had completely missed out on the exchange. While the call had been sent out for Meyers and Offerson, a display for an automated kitchen assistant caught his eye. It was about four feet tall and had eight limbs, which were all hard at work preparing some sort of omelet.

"Fascinating device," he said aloud, walking around to get a good look at it. "Where's the remote controls?"

"There are no remote controls in that one, Inspector," a voice from behind said. Gadget turned to see a heavyset man standing behind him. "That drone is 100% automated," the man went on, "with everything that entails. All you have to do is pre-program it with the recipe you want performed, and the Kitchen Aid X-25 will take it from there!"

"Really?" Gadget asked, looking over with interest. "I could use something like this. I'm often too busy to be able to prepare meals at home."
"We'll, just keep your eyes open," the men replied. "We're looking to get this model out on the market. Once we get the approval to-"

"Sorry to cut you off, but we really don't have the time," Heather said, coming in and grabbing Gadget's arm. "We're on the job here, so we don't have time to spare. We really ought to find those Meyers and Offerson so we can have a word with them."

"Oh, them, that's no problem," the man said, waving his hand. "My name's Milo Meyers. My twin Mia and her boyfriend and the event coordinators. They should be here at any moment. Until then, take a look at this feature…"

To Heather's frustration, Gadget allowed Milo to start going over just about every feature the Kitchen Aid X-25 had to offer. It was all quite boring to her, though she held her tongue since Gadget seemed interested in it.

After what felt like forever, though was probably only a few minutes, they were approached by a couple. "Hello, I'm Keven Offerson, and this is my girlfriend, Mia Meyers," the man said, holding out his hand to the agents. "I suppose you are Inspector Gadget and his partner?"

"Indeed," Gadget said, and the harm holding on to his badge popped out of his hat. "We were told that you needed our assistance here?"

"More than you could know," Mia replied. "You see, we've been setting up the tech displays since last week, even though we weren't supposed to open until today. Even though everything out here has been working fine, just a few days ago, something funny started happening with some of the devices, especially the ones with internet attachment."

"Funny?" Heather asked. "What do you mean by 'funny'?"

Mia and Keven cast worried glances at each other. "I…think it might be best if we show you," Keven said after a moment's pause.

"It would certainly be easier than trying to explain it," Mia agreed. "Come this way. We took all the infected tech and locked it up so it wouldn't affect the other stands."

"Lead on, my good folks!" Gadget exclaimed, and they hurried off to the vault. Unbeknownst to them, a security camera nearby sparked and then turned, following in their direction.

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

I've got a little bit of bad news. There's going to be a lot going on for me in my life. As such, I will now only update once a month, with a few exceptions. Don't worry, though, we will pick up again on the normal time on December 3rd. I hope to hear from you all!
Assignment 12.2: Frequency Born Pathogens

Saturday, August 16th, 2087

Seattle, Washington, United States of America

"So, here's where we put all the problem pieces," Mia said as she and her boyfriend guided the two detectives down into a smaller room attached to the main basement. "We couldn't just sent them back because every time an infected piece came in contact with another device, even if it was just in proximity to each other, something new would start acting up."

"Acting up?" Heather asked as she examined what looked like a high-tech bull riding rig. "What do you mean by 'acting up'? Would they not turn on or something?"

"It's worse than that," Keven stated. "The closest thing I could compare what they were doing to was a seizure."

"A seizure?" Gadget asked. "They were gaining warrants to take peoples' privet property? Why would they be doing that? And what judge would grant a seizure warrant to a machine?"

Mia and Keven laughed at the response, but Heather just rolled her eyes. "They mean the medical condition where a person's brain starts firing off too many impulses at once, Gadget Boy," she explained. "These machines probably just started jerking around wildly."

"Exactly," Mia replied with a nod. "Well, the machines that could move, that is. The ones that couldn't just started flickering madly, showing all sorts of text and info and warping it into incomprehensible gibberish."

"It started to get dangerous when these drones got infected," Keven said, motion over to several robots that looked as if they had been built to be waiters of some sort. "One of them tore off its arm and tried beating the senior electrician with it. We were forced to make a localized EMP just to shut everything down."

"Man, that's rough," Heather commented.

"It's more than rough," Mia replied. "By unleashing an EMP pulse, we pretty much had to fry all these devices! Can you imagine how ticked the venders were about all of this?"

"But it wasn't your fault that these all went crazy," Gadget stated, picking up a small metallic fuzzball. "Why would they blame you if you weren't at fault?"

"Because it was our Expo," Mia answered. "That's why we called W.O.M.P. once all this craziness went down."

"So, when did all this go down?" Heather asked, taking out a small device so she could take notes.

"It started on Thursday evening," Keven said. "We were starting up the tech for the first time, and everything just started going haywire! Robots flinging things, computer bases losing their information, even a speaker that wouldn't stop blaring 'It's a Small World' until we brought out the EMP. It was a madhouse!"

"And were there any other events like it that happened around the same time?" Heather asked, writing down everything she heard.
"No," Keven began, but Mia raised a finger.

"Actually," she said, stepping in to answer. "Now that you mention it, I think there was something similar that happened a few nights before."

"Really?" Gadget asked, setting the fuzz-ball down and looking over with interest. "What was it?"

"I was talking with a friend of mine who works as a nurse at one of those 24-hour immediate care places," Mia replied. "She said that on Tuesday night, the whole computer system just went on the fritz. It wasn't as drastic as what happened here, but someone got into the system and cleaned out all the information."

"Cleaned out?" Gadget asked. He gave a frown. "I didn't know there were viruses capable of reaching Windex. I thought they were only able to attack things over the internet."

Heather chose to ignore her partner's comment and continuing with the questioning. "What sort of information was missing?"

"Pretty much everything HIPPA covers," Mia replied. "Names, addresses, medical records, you name it. The insurance companies were in an uproar. As you could imagine, they had quite a bit of trouble on their hands."

"Did they ever find out who got in the system and where it went?" Heather asked, writing down everything she heard in her file as she listened.

"No, that's the weird thing," Mia answered as she took a seat. "Whenever they tried to access the machinery were that info was kept, thing went haywire. The machines still acted like they were possessed, and they started spitting out these new viruses that attacked whatever tech had been brought in to examine them. They're still in a tizzy over all the trouble this has caused and they've been forced to fall back to pen and paper on top of it all."

"Wait, more viruses were coming from the machines?" Heather looked up from her note taking and raised an eyebrow. "You mean to say these things are self-replicating?"

"And they do so even when powered off," Keven replied. "Why do you think we're keeping these things off? They're probably hotbeds of those viruses by now."

Before anything else could be said, there came uproar from the upper levels. People were crying out, and from the sounds of things, people were stampeding around. "What on earth is going on up there?" Gadget asked, and he bounded for the stairs, stretching out his legs to move faster.

"You two better wait down here," Heather instructed as she pulled out her magnetic gloves and prepared to follow. "It sounds pretty chaotic up there; you'll be safer here."

"Got it," Mia replied, giving a nod.

"Just let us know what's going on up there, please," Keven added.

Upper Levels

Just moments ago

"Other than that unpleasant encounter a few moments ago, things have been looking pretty alright
"Here," Fidget commented to his twin, who had been standing close by. "I wonder what it was that the owners were concerned about."

"We'll know soon enough," Digit responded. "After all, that's what the Inspector and Agent Connelly went to talk with the event organizers about."

"Yeah, but whatever it was, it looks like they've got things pretty much under control," Fidget said. He picked up a small, whisk like device. "Everything here's working great, and it's so interesting. I'll bet you could use this to make the best meringue."

"Robots can't eat meringue," Digit commented with a frown. "We don't have stomachs. Or mouths, for that matter."

"True," Fidget said with a shrug as he set the whisk down. "Still, it might be neat to try."

A man standing at the stand where the device was being displayed frowned. "That is a portable satellite receiver, not a whisk," he snapped.

"Oh, sorry about that," Fidget apologized.

"Stupid robots," the man muttered as he went over to attend to another viewer. "You'd think a machine would be able to know what machine is what."

"Hey, that's racist! Can you tell me every single difference between every single carbon-based organic life form? I don't think so!" Digit called back, but the man was not paying any attention. The blue 'bot frowned. "Really, you'd think people would have some manners."

"Oh, well," Fidget said with a shrug. "At least nothing bad has happened around here."

"Yep we've got everything under control right now," Digit replied, leaning against the stand.

"Indeed, it appears you do," Penny replied.

Her sudden approach startled the robots, who spun around to face her. "Miss Penny," Digit said, throwing a quick salute, "we were just making sure everything was secure and on the up-and-up."

"I saw," Penny replied with a nod. "You've both been doing well. Though, Digit, if there's no physical danger around, please try not to engage people when they are rude. It's going to happen, and it's best if we don't have a fight on our hands every time."

"But-," Digit started to argue, but the look of disapproval on Penny's face cut him off. "Yes, Miss Penny."

Penny sighed and reached out, giving the blue robot a hug. "I know it's hard to do, but sometimes you just need to turn the other cheek. If nothing other than your pride is in danger, than it is better to just let it roll off your back and move on to the next task at hand."

Before she could go one, there was a loud clattering sound as a small, robotic toy fell to the ground. It had rolled off of its stand and hit the ground, thrashing wildly as it did so.

In a moment, however, that one toy was the last of their concerns. All around, machines started to go haywire everywhere. Screens flickered, flashing between static and random videos and images. Just about everything with moving parts started moving erratically, flailing around and knocking into each other.
As soon as this started up, the crowd went into a panic. People started pushing and pulling at each other in a desperate attempt to get away from the machinery before they could get hurt.

When they saw what was happening, the trio went into action. "Come on," Digit called out as he seized one of the handles on Penny's wheelchair. "We've got to get out of here!"

"Already on it," Fidget replied, moving likewise.

They moved fast, doing their best to get Penny out without getting hurt. This was not an easy feat, considering everything going on around them. In an effort to help, Penny called up a force field around them, which succeeded at holding the flying debris at bay.

Unfortunately, it couldn't keep everything back, as it could only defend them from debris that was coming at them from the front and sides. As they fled, a small, hummingbird shaped drone flew at them from behind and struck Digit in the back of the neck. It didn't cause any physical damage, as he was made of sterner stuff than it was, but it has made contact, so damage was done all the same.

The moment the drone had hit him, Digit felt as if something had crawled into him. "What the-?" he exclaimed, releasing the wheelchair and reaching back to touch the back of his neck. "What's going-?"

Before he could figure out what had happened, his hands shifted into their sonic pulse cannons against his will. Unable to control himself, he started firing off randomly in all directions.

"Digit, what are you doing?!" Penny called back in a panic. "Stop!"

"I'd *bzztt* love to, *buuzzst* but I can't *zzzttss* stop!" he called back. The screen that acted as his face shorted out completely for a short time before coming back. "Something else is *bbsstzt* controlling me!"

"Digit, stop!" Fidget called out, and he raced over to his brother's side in an attempt to hold him down.

This proved to be a mistake, as whatever it was that had gotten into Digit now had gotten into him. The moment they were in contact, Fidget felt as if creatures were crawling into his head, and he couldn't fight them. He released Digit, but the damage had already been done. Soon, he, too, was thrashing around uncontrollably, with small throwing knives clattering around as they came out of his arms.

Despite a desire to get in and try to figure out what was happening, Penny was forced to back away from the scene as the situation got more dangerous. Pulling off to one side and gaining cover in an semi-opened safe that had been deactivated before the problems started, she activated her Computer Book. "What's going on here?" she asked herself as she dialed away.

Linking it up to the expo's wireless frequency, she went to work sorting out everything going on in the system. When she got into the frequency, she soon saw just what it was that was causing the problem. "What the-no! This can't be happening!"

"Penny!" Her head shot up the moment she heard her uncle calling out to her. Sure enough, he was out in the expo, shield extended, and he was looking around in a panic for her.

"Over here, Uncle Gadget!" she called out, waving her hand out of the safe for a brief moment, though she was forced to pull it back in as a mug whizzed past her arm.

Hearing her call, Gadget turned and raced towards her. When he reached over, he extended his
shield so that it covered her. He then scooped her up. "Come on, we've got to get you out of here."

"Wait, Fidget and Digit are still in there!" Penny exclaimed.

"We know, Charm," Heather commented, using her magnetic gloves to cover over one of the shield's blind spots. "Unfortunately, right now, they're part of the problem."

Penny wanted to protest further, but before she could, a dish came through the blind spot, grazed her cheek in the process, and shattered against the safe wall. "No arguments," Gadget stated, shielding her as best as he could with his body before hurrying away. "We'll get them out, but I need to get you to safety first."

Unable to get another word in on the subject, Penny just nodded, though she looked over with anxiety at the two robots. It was clear that something bad was happening to them, and she wanted to be able to stop it, but she realized there wasn't much she was going to be able to do at the moment. "I just don't understand," she muttered to herself.

Penny was the last of the humans to get clear of the malfunctioning tech. However, things were still a madhouse. Machines were sparking and flailing, throwing things to and fro.

Once he had gotten Penny clear of the chaos, Gadget came back and joined Heather, who had stayed as near as she dared to all the mayhem. "Alright, Gadget Boy, how are we going to get in there?" she asked.

"We're going to have to keep our defenses up," Gadget replied. "Something in there is taking over our tech. Did you apply Penny's firewall systems to your tech?"

"Yeah, but the Gadgetinis had those systems in them, too, and it didn't seem to do them any good," Heather pointed out. "I don't think we should go in there as long as we have tech active?"

"We have to," Gadget replied. "It's the only way to get this all to stop."

"No, it's not," Heather responded with a sigh. "Remember how these things were stopped earlier? Well, I think we're going to have to use that, too."

"An EMP blast?" Gadget asked, and he frowned in concern. "We can't let one of those off around the Gadgetinis. That could hurt them!"

"And they're not in danger of getting hurt right now?" Heather asked. As if to prove her point, at that moment, one of Digit's percussive blasts came dangerously close to them, as well as tossing him backwards into his brother.

Seeing the wisdom in what was said, Gadget nodded. "Alright, we'll stop them now. How can we get the pulse out there, though?"

"That's what I still need to figure out," Heather replied. She bit her lip in thought, before an idea finally hit her. "Hey, do you have an effects amplifier in all those gadgets?"

"I think so," Gadget answered with a nod. "Go-go Gadget Electronics Amplifier." In response, his left arm abruptly shifted, changing in form to a panel with an amplifier on the front and an adapter panel in on it.

"Perfect," Heather said, removing her left glove and placing it on the adapter panel. "If I start this abruptly enough, this should work to disrupt those machines enough to shut them down." Moving his arm so that it was directly angled at the malfunctioning machine, she made sure the settings were
Gadget did so, and a pulse wave of magnetic energy bathed the room. The first was enough to briefly halt the machines, though a second and third were required to shut them down all together. After the three blasts, there was calm as everything lay still.

Once it was deemed safe to go into the room, cleanup crews were sent in to move the malfunctioning machines out and down to the holding are with the other damaged tech. The only exceptions were the Gadgetinis, who would be moved to the makeshift W.O.M.P. base until it could be figured out what was wrong with them.

While all the compensations were happening within the expo, a crowd of people had started for form outside the building. Most of them were just curious onlookers who wanted to figure out what was going on. Of course when something happened like this, everyone wanted a piece of the information.

Only one person really had it, though. Ursula Caleb stayed towards the back of the crowd, trying not to be noticed. She had her phone on, with the Mech program downloaded on to it.

It was currently delivering the information, and she liked what she was seeing. Viral download was successful. The resulting reproductive rate has resulted in 14683 new Virals. Some of them are caught within their hosts, but the majority are still free.

Looking up from her phone, Ursula noted that everyone was still too busy with the expo to notice her, so she slipped her phone into her pocket and moved away. When she was far enough away that no one would hear her, she turned back to the phone. "Alright, Andy, what did I get this time?"

"Yeah, that's what I decided to call you," Ursula replied. "Kind of like 'handler' or 'handy.'"

"Ah, I see the connection now, the program replied. I will respond to the designation [Andy] now."

As for what you have achieved, the Virals who were able to make it back brought files for many of the tech from the expo, 3564 passwords for a variety of encryptions, and the data programming from two units, designated G-11 and G-12, he went on.

"G-11 and G-12, huh?" Ursula asked. "What makes them special enough to get separate mention."

G-11 and G-12 are also mechs, or living machines, Andy replied. Like me, they can communicate and have separate designation codes, [Digit] and [Fidget], respectively. Together, they are often referred to as [Gadgetinis].

"Wait a minute," Ursula said, and she broke into a grin. "Wait a single minute!" She was about to speak in a loud voice, but she quickly remembered she was in public and dropped her tone. "You mean to say we actually got into W.O.M.P. units, and Penny Gadget's W.O.M.P. units on top of it?"

Yes, that is exactly what happened, Andy answered.

Ursula beamed. "Man, do I love you guys."
As soon as the Gadgetinis had been brought into the temporary base, Penny started working hard with them. They had been left in a state of stasis, so they couldn't accidentally hurt anyone, which was similar to a medically induced coma. Once she made sure they were in such a state, she started getting hard at work going over the parts of their system she could access.

While she was doing this, Gadget and Heather could only watch her at her work. "So, Penny," Gadget asked after a period of uncomfortable silence. "What do you think happened to them?"

"I know exactly what it was that happened to them," Penny said, and her voice was heavy with emotion. "Something got into them, some sort of parasite or other. I could see them in the tech at the expo, too. Some sort of online pathogen got into them."

"Pathogen?" Gadget asked. "You mean, like a flu bug?"

"Exactly," Penny replied. "I don't know how, but they've been infected by...something electronic."

"So, they, and everything in that expo, were hacked," Heather stated. She gave a frown. "I guess we were expecting that for the tech, but what the Tin Men? Doesn't the firewall system you have defend them from those sorts of things?"

"Usually," Penny replied. "My firewall will defend from any normal malware program. Even Cybers like Malware wouldn't be able to get past because it requires them to actually work to try to get around the pattern, and by the time they come up with something, they've got a new pattern to break through."

"These things...well...they're...different," she continued. "And in a way I've never seen before. Like I said, they're electronic, but they don't look like ordinary programming. They're acting more like a virus, a biological virus, that is, than anything else I can think of."

"So they're acting like a germ?" Gadget asked. "Why can't we just come up with some sort of medicine, then?"

Penny sighed, though she was more frustrated with the situation than the question. "That's the problem, Uncle. We don't know how to cure biological viruses yet."

"We don't?" Gadget asked. He crossed his arms. "Then what did the Doctor give us when you were little?"

"Those were antibiotics," Penny explained. "They killed bacteria, but there's a difference between bacteria and viruses."

"You see," she went on, "when bacteria invade, they just go in and attack. They reproduce by splitting themselves up, so they are easier enough to get rid of. Kill the bacteria, they can't reproduce, the illness is over."

She gave a sigh, but continued at her work. "With viruses, it's different. Viruses aren't life the same way that bacteria are because viruses cannot reproduce on their own. Instead, to be able to reproduce, a virus will sort of 'hack' into a cell from a host and force the DNA in that cell to start producing new viruses. Unfortunately, we don't know how to make a medicine to stop viruses from doing this, so we usually just have to wait for the immune system to fix the problem on its own."

"So what do you mean when you say these are acting like real viruses?" Heather asked.

"What I mean is that these things, these 'virals,' are reproducing in the same manner as real-world viruses," Penny explained. "They've latched on to whatever programming they can, including my
firewall, and they're reproducing at an exponential rate. By now, there's an infestation of thousands of those things inside Fidget and Digit, which is why I can't turn them back on. If I did, the virals would get out an infect any and all tech in the surrounding area."

"So, we've got a problem, then," Gadget said with a frown. "We know there's some sort of artificial flu-bug going around, and we've lost two agents to it already. If we don't figure out some way to cure them of it, and soon, then we risk all of Seattle crumbling because of this."

"Not just Seattle, but potentially the whole world," Penny agreed. "Now, if only we knew where these bugs came from."

"I think I can tell you that," a man said, coming into the room to join them.

"Ah, Commissioner Vilmer," Gadget said, going over to greet the newcomer, "I hoped you would drop by soon."

"Wouldn't dream of missing it," Vilmer, a tall, heavyset man with greying red hair, responded. "As for your tech problems, I think I know exactly the angle you should look at. Ever heard of Anonymity?"

"Of course I've heard of anonymity," Gadget replied. "It's the concept of remaining anonymous, though I don't see how that ties into the case."

"Wait, are you referring to Anonymity, the supposed hacking group tied to 42n8?" Penny asked.

"That's the one," Vilmer responded. "We've been having a bit of trouble with them as of late. Nothing this big scale, of course, but there have been hacks. Mostly pranks and memes coming up on computers, especially in bureaucratic businesses. However, I wouldn't be surprised if this was their next step."

"This does lead into a problem, then," Heather said with a sigh. "Isn't the point of Anonymity that you remain anonymous? Even if we used their more legitimate handles on 42n8, there's no guarantee we'd get the right guys."

"Thankfully, we've got a bit of a lead for you there," Vilmer replied. "We've been tracking down someone who we think is an Anonymity member." He handed over a mug shot of a teenage girl with purple hair and multiple piercings on her nose and ears. "Her real name is Molly Collins, but her 42n8 handle is M4li, and we suspect her of being Anonymity member MaliciousME."

"You think she's pulling all this?" Gadget asked.

"Vilmer shook his head. "No, we pulled her in for vandalism when this all started, but if she has ties to Anonymity like we think she does, then she might be able to tell us what's going on.""

"I sense there's a 'but' coming up," Heather commented.

"And rather substantial one, I'm afraid," the commissioner said with a sigh. "Miss Collins is one of those teens who won't say anything to adults. We've already tried making deals with her, but she won't budge. The fact that she's already made bail for the vandalism doesn't help, either."

"So she's not going to talk to any police. Just wonderful." She gave a small smile. "I guess I know where this is going. You up to it, Charm?"

Penny shot a glance at Gadget, who made a face but sighed. "I suppose," he said, "provided we'll be near hand in case anything goes wrong."
"Wouldn't have it any other way," Vilmer said. "Now, we don't have a direct confirmation on where she'll be, but we have an idea. Have you ever heard of an Under-21?"

"You mean those clubs for people not old enough to drink yet?" Gadget asked.

The commissioner nodded. "There's a particular Under-21 around here called Gizmo's. It's particularly popular with kids who are into the Tech-punk scene, which Miss Collins is particularly engrained in. She and a few other known 42n8 members have already been spotted there a few times, so we suspect this is where you'll be most likely to get the info you need."

"Excuse me, tech-punk?" Gadget said, making confused face. "What on earth is that?"

"It's an interest movement," Penny replied. "Kind of like goths or sports nuts. People in that movement just like incorporating tech into everything they use and wear." She gave a small smile. "I suppose if I added a few accessories, you could consider me a tech-punk."

"Just as long as it's not something dangerous," Gadget replied.

Penny gave a mischievous smile. "You don't consider me dangerous, now do you?"

"Depends on what you're doing," he uncle replied, returning the smile.

"Glad to see you're all on board," Vilmer said. He then turned to Penny. "I appreciate you doing this. I understand it might be a little hard considering what happened recently."

Penny turned back to look at the still inert Gadgetinis, and her face fell. After a moment, however, she forced herself to smile. "I'm glad to help. After all, figuring out who did this is the fastest way to make sure they recover, and if you're right about your instinct, then M4li will be the fastest way to see that they recover."

"That's the spirit." Gadget placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "We'll find the cure, you'll see."

"I really hope so," Penny replied, casting back one more glance at the Gadgetinis before turning to go.

To be continued…
Assignment 12.3: Irritation of the Ego

Sunday, August 17th, 2087

Gizmo's Under-21 Club

Seattle, Washington, United States of America

Penny couldn't help but feel slightly uncomfortable but excited as she made her way up the wheelchair ramp at Gizmo's. To be able to fit in, she had changed into a two-toned tee-shirt, a leather jacket with a gear pattern along the pocket, jeans, and a pair of almost knee-high boots. She was also wearing more makeup than what she was used to, and her hair had been taken down from their usual pigtails and messed to match the current fashion, with the hologram tech used to add streaks of fire-engine red to it. It felt unusual to her, but not unpleasant. Just different.

That's kind of the point, she scolded herself. If it didn't feel different, then it wouldn't be going undercover.

Shaking off these feelings, she moved into the club, thanking her lucky stars the entrance was wheelchair friendly. Pushing the door open, she moved in to see if she couldn't find where M4li was.

When she made her way into the club, she was near instantly bombarded by lights and music. The lounge, which was huge, had the lights toned down, and the whole place was aglow with neon and black light. Throughout the whole area, techno-pop dance music was playing, and an area of the club was devoted to a dance floor. Around the dance floor were tables and booth dedicated to getting food and drink.

Penny scanned the room, but her search was in vain. The whole place was crowded with kids dressed similarly to her and, as she assumed, M4li, so it was going to take a bit more than just a look around to find her quarry.

Moving out into the party section, Penny pulled up to the drink bar. "Excuse me, sir," she called out to the tender. "Could you help me for a moment."

The tender, who looked to be a kid about seventeen, came over. "Evenin'," he said, pulling out a cup. "So what can I-no way!" He dropped the glass the moment he saw her and was fortunate that it did not shatter. "No way! You're Penny Gadget!"

"What?" Penny was startled by this turn of events, as while she was not trying to not be recognized, she had not expected it. "No, well, yes, I am, but really, I need-"

"Just wait here one moment!" the tender said, and he hurried off. Penny followed him with her eyes, and made a mental note to leave if he went out of sight.

Thankfully, he did not disappear. Instead, he had gone over to the DJ and whispered something in her ear. When she heard it, her expression brightened and she paused the music.

"Hey, hey, hey, Gizmo partiers!" she called out into the microphone. "DJ Crystal Circuit coming at you with some awesome news! It appears we've got a real techno-celeb in the house with us tonight! Everyone put your hands together for the one, the only, Miz Penny Gadget!"

To Penny's dismay, two spotlights came on, and after roaming about the room for a few seconds, came to rest on her. All eyes in the room were on her, and the familiar feeling of dread came into her
stomach. Instinctively, she looked around for her uncle to take over for her, but she then realized the awful truth. He was outside, only connected to her through a radio. She was on her own.

The crowd, however, did not seem to notice her discomfort. The moment the spotlight came to rest on her, a cheer broke out. It appeared as if the average party-goer was quite happy to see her.

In an instant, she was practically swarmed by admirers. In all of this, Penny's head swam like crazy as she struggled to figure out what was going on. Thankfully, several security agents for the club shooed most of the viewers away, leaving only a handful still around.

"Uh, uh," she stumbled to those who remained, trying to force words out. "How do you all know me?"

"How do we know about you?" the tender replied with a laugh. "Miz Gadget, you're practically the reason places like this function."

"I am?" she asked again, the confusion not clearing up in her head. "But I haven't been in the public eye for very long. Only a few months."

"True," the tender said, "and this place did exist before then, but you were the one who really made the Techno-Punk movement kick off. For the first time, an under-eighteen inventor was not only put on the spotlight, but has actually proven herself to be equal to if not better than her adult counterparts. The only way you'd be an even bigger celebrity would be if you did these marvels in elementary school."

Penny blushed as her mind went back to her elementary years, but she decided not to bring it up. "I'm not actually here to socialize," she finally said when the last of the celebrity chasers went away. "I'm on a mission right now, looking for someone who I've been told comes here a lot. You wouldn't mind helping me find her, would you?"

"It depends," the tender said. "Some of the visitors can be pretty secretive, but I'll see what I can do."

"Her name is Molly Collins," Penny said, pulling the picture out of her pocket, "but she might go by the name Mali?"

"Oh, her," the tender said, looking over the photo. "Yeah, I know Mali. It makes sense she'd be the one getting approached by authorities. I'm surprised it's W.O.M.P. who came first, though. I always thought it would be Homeland Security."

"She's not actually in trouble," Penny explained, "but I do have some questions for her."

"Mali's usually in the games room when she's here," the tender said, pointing Penny off to a side room that was only illuminated with black light. "I'm not sure she'll want to communicate, though. She's not one to communicate with cops, and with someone known like you, she might not talk at all."

Penny thanked him for the information, then turned and approached the game room. As she entered, she spotted her target near immediately. Mali was standing in a large VR chamber, similar to the one at W.O.M.P. but less developed, playing a fantasy game. A group of onlookers stood nearby, watching the video of her game, cheering her on as her score climbed higher.

Realizing there wasn't going to be much she was going to be able to do for a while, Penny rolled up to a nearby table and began watching. As she sat, a screen came up in front of her. On it, the words Please make a selection were written, along with a picture menu.
Penny hesitated for a moment, wondering if she should order, since she only planned to stay long enough to get some questions answered. However, another cheer went up from the observing crowd, signaling this was going to be a lengthy wait, so she leaned back, selected the picture of chicken tenders and fries, tapped on a blue raspberry soda, and pulled out a small card to make the payment. She just hoped this wouldn't take too long.

Outside the club, Gadget and Heather sat waiting in the Gadgetmobile. They were linked into what was happening with Penny through radio connections they had. However, this connection only ran one way, so while they could hear everything that happened with her, there wasn't anything they could do to communicate with her.

As time went on, Gadget started to get antsy. "It's been too long," he said, frowning down at his watch. "She should have gotten something by now."

"Relax, Gadget Boy, Penny's a mature kid," Heather responded, patting him comfortably on the shoulder. "She knows what she's doing."

"Then why haven't we heard anything from her yet," he asked. "She's been in there for almost two hours and all we've heard for ages is crowd sounds."

"It's only been over thirty minutes," she pointed out.

Gadget crossed his arms. "Well it feels like it's been over two hours. Maybe we should have found a way for me to go in instead, or at least send Brain."

Heather laughed a bit at the response. "Brain's at K9 training, remember? Gadget, you're a great uncle, but sometimes, you're a bit overprotective."

"Well, can you blame me?" He huffed and crossed his arms. "I've always done my best to try to make sure she'd be safe, and that nothing bad ever happens to her, but no matter what I try, it seems trouble finds her. I keep her at arm's length while on missions; she follows me anyway. I retire; she forms her own crime-fighting band." He gave a sigh and wiped his hand over his eyes. "I love her dearly, but sometimes I'm at my wits end with that girl."

"I'll admit. I don't have any experience with child-rearing," Heather said, "but if you want the opinion of someone who's been a teenage daughter, you can't treat her like she's seven or eight."

Here she paused, giving a small laugh. "Heck, from what I know, you couldn't treat her like she was seven or eight when she was seven or eight. Effects of having a teen prodigy, I suppose."

"Yeah, I suppose," Gadget sighed again, and he slumped down in his seat. "Sometimes I even wonder if I was the right sort of person to raise her."

"What do you mean?" Heather asked.

"Well...it's just...well...I don't know!" He groaned and tugged his hat down over his eyes. "It's just that she's so smart, and I'm so dumb. Maybe it would have been better for her to have someone who was closer to her intellect level."

"Gadget, why would you say you're dumb?" Heather asked, but she had to figure out a way that would not be patronizing or a lie.

Gadget frowned. "Don't bother. I know everyone thinks I'm oblivious, but I know what you all think of me. There's John Brown, the dolt. The moron. The idiot. The guy who, despite only just barely
having an IQ high enough to not be considered mentally handicapped, somehow got his dream job as a detective and a brilliant young niece, despite not deserving either of them. I've already heard it all."

Heather froze when she heard this. Of course, when she had gotten to know her partner, there were times when she had questioned his observation abilities, but she also had no reason to doubt his abilities as an Inspector or his record of accomplishment. She had heard others gossiping about him, but because of his friendly nature and typically good attitude, she never thought he had any idea. "Gadget Boy..." she commented, putting her hand on his shoulder. He mind raced for something to say, but nothing sprang to mind.

Seeing her look, he sighed and forced a smile. "I guess most of it is true. I do my best, both to improve and to ignore the gossip, but it gets rough sometimes. Especially when my faults start putting people I care about in danger." He gave a laugh. "Guess I just needed to get that off my chest more than anything else."

Before anything else could be said, distinctive voices came over the radio. "Mali Collins?" Penny was saying.

"Who wants to know?" another girl responded with a gruff tone.

"Looks like we're back on duty," Heather said, snapping to attention and getting back to the task at hand.

Gadget gave a smile in response. "We're always on duty."

It took about forty minutes for Mali to finish her game. In the meanwhile, Penny had received her food (at a surprisingly fast rate on top of it) and was just about finished with it when the VR tube opened up.

"New High Score!" the gaming system announced, and there was a loud cheer as Mali Collins exited the tube. She was a girl about Penny's age with bright purple hair wearing a tee shirt with the emblem to the band Irony Maiden on it. When the cheers started up, she raised her arms as if signaling the sound to rise. The surrounding crowd complied eagerly.

Having taken her bows, Mali went over to one of the nearby tables and took her order as a number of admirers joined her. Seeing her opportunity, Penny left her own table and went to over.

"Mali Collins?" she called out, trying to get the other girl's attention.

The other girl looked over and gave a snort of derision. "Who wants to know?"

Before Penny could say anything, however, one of the sycophants spoke up. "No way! It's Penny Gadget! Here! Speaking to us!" In a moment, there was a flush of energy, and quite a few people hurried over, eager to see the famous teen inventor. Even Mali seemed interested in the newcomer, though not nearly as much as they others.

Penny felt the butterflies start up in her stomach again, and she swallowed in an attempt to calm them. "I really can't socialize right now," she said, trying and failing miserably to mimic the tone her uncle used with paparazzi. "I'm on a mission, so I must get right down to business."

The crowd raised an amount of protest, but Penny waved an (admittedly shaky) hand at them. "It can't be helped," she stated. "I'm in a hurry. We need to get down to business."
This only received a rise in protests and pleading for more time. Seeing that her imitation of Gadget didn't work, she decided to try out the one of Quimby. "I've told you already, I don't have the time," she said, still much softer than she intended. "Now, maybe later I can answer some questions, but if you don't leave right now, I will be forced to place you all under arrest for impeding and investigation!"

That finally seemed to do the trick. The group, thoroughly disappointed, veered off to find other areas of amusement. When they left, Mali gave a laugh. "Important investigation, huh?" she laughed as a waiter came up with her soda. "So, what major felony does W.O.M.P. think I'm up to now?"

Now finally able to breath since the cause of the anxiety had passed, Penny turned back to her mission. "It's not you, in specific. It's the fact that the police department, and by connection, W.O.M.P. seems to think you're a member of Anonymity."

Hearing the statement, Mali laughed. "You mean that hacker's group? What info would they have to think I'm a member?"

"Well, for one, we've found out your Anonymity handle, MaliciousMe," Penny stated.

"It's hearsay," Mali said with a shrug. "True, I'm a member of 42n8, but so are thousands, if not millions, of members all over the world. So either every member of 42n8 is a member or Anonymity, which if that's the case, why fight it, or there are select members and you have to go through every single one of those millions."

"Like I said before," Penny insisted, "I'm not accusing you of anything. We know you in specific couldn't have been the cause of the damage at the tech conventions, but-"

Hearing this, Mali looked up, and there was a change of expression in her face. "Wait, you guys think Anonymity is responsible for that mess with the tech convention?"

"You currently are our only lead on that front," Penny replied with a nod.

Mali looked down and swore under her breath. She chewed her lip in thought before looking up. "Look, I'm not usually supposed to say things like this," she said, lowering her voice so that it was impossible for anyone but Penny to hear her, "but this is one case where I can make an exception. In Anonymity, we might make moves to prank businesses who deserve it, but those are usually the megacorp sort of places, not individual run events. We had members participating I that expo, and some of them were depending on it to kickstart their careers." She scowled. "Whoever launched that attack hurt Anonymity, and we don't like being hurt."

"So you'll help me?" Penny asked.

Mali nodded. "I don't have info myself, but I know someone who does. Come on." She then got up and motioned for Penny to follow her. She then moved into a doorway that had been disguised into the wall decor.

Penny hesitated but then moved to follow. If this was going to be her primary lead, she'd have to go, but she still didn't want to get caught unawares. Adjusting her watch to the stun setting, she maneuvered to the hidden alcove.

Inside, Mali was working the controls of a computer at the far side of the room. "MaliciousMe to The Corporal. You there, Corporal?"

In a moment, the screen flashed on. A man appeared on screen, but his face was pixelated, so Penny couldn't make out any features. He also has a baseball cap on with the brim pulled down over his
face, further obscuring his features. "I'm here, MaliciousMe," the man said, and his voice was also modulated. "Since you've brought someone with you, I assume you've either found a new member or something bad has gone down."

"The second, I'm afraid," Mali replied. "Turns out, the people at the tech expo have Inspector Gadget on the case."

"Inspector Gadget? That's awesome!" the Corporal declared. In a moment, however, he cleared his throat, as if embarrassed by the outburst.

Mali smirked and turned to Penny. "The Corporal's a bit of a fan. That's how I knew he'd help."

"What I mean, is I fail to see how that is a bad thing," the Corporal said, trying to regain footing. "With Inspector Gadget on the case, whoever did this is bound to get caught."

"That would be true," Mali said with a nod, "except that the Seattle Police seem to think we're behind it and have sent them in our direction."

"That is troubling," the Corporal replied. "Who's there with you?"

"Penny Gadget," Mali replied.

The Corporal cleared his throat before turning to Penny. "Miss Gadget, I can give you one hundred percent assurance that Anonymity had nothing to do with the events that befell the expo."

"That's all well and good," Penny replied, "but unless you can point out who did, we have no other suspects."

"Good thing we do." The Corporal called up several files on to the screen. "Certainly, when you were there, you got a look into the programs that were causing all the trouble, right?"

"Right," Penny said. "They were these weird programs I've never seen before. They didn't even resemble anything I've ever seen before."

"Almost like the biological virus, right?" Corporal asked.

Penny frowned. "How did you know about that?"

"We've been watching them, too," he replied. "These little things have been popping up all around the Seattle area, and they've been nothing but trouble for us."

"For you in particular?" Penny asked. "How so?"

"Whoever made these things made them to hack into anything connected to the internet, steal information, and then return to the source," the Corporal replied. "Do you think these wouldn't get into Anonymity tech? We've lost more good systems than I care to mention because of those things."

Penny bit her lip as she thought. "So, you guys aren't behind these things, but then who is?" She then looked up. "Earlier you said you had a suspect. Who would that be?"

A new file appeared onscreen of a woman in her 20's. "This is Ursula Caleb. Graduated from MIT, master technological programmer, and currently unemployed."

"Funny," Penny said as she went over the file, "with a track record like this, I'd expect her to have started up some small business somewhere. At least, that's what I would have done if I hadn't joined W.O.M.P."
"Caleb's got an ego on her," Mali commented. "She'd find the idea of her name being attached to anything 'small' to be beneath her. It's go big or go home."

"And that attitude's cost her," Corporal said, jumping back in. "Still, she is one of the brightest minds alive, and the programs that started causing these problems all have her fingerprints on them."

Another file opened up on the screen. "This is a proposal she submitted to Deboir Enterprises as of late. They were posted to public viewing along with a couple thousand other submissions. Notice anything familiar?"

It only took Penny a moment to scan the file and recognize what was written within. "These are our viruses, alright. Looks like we'll need to pay Ms. Caleb a bit of a visit."

Moving over to the computer panel, Penny downloaded the information. "Thank you for your help, both of you. Don't worry, if Caleb is behind this, we'll stop her."

"Just know that if you ever need our help, Anonymity is here," the Corporal responded.

Penny looked up at the screen once she had what she needed. "If you don't mind me asking, why? It would seem like an anarchy group wouldn't be all that interested in helping an officer."

"Anonymity is less about anarchy as it is justice with entertainment," the Corporal responded. "If there's anyone who provides those both together, it's your uncle."

Penny internally bristled at the idea of her uncle being entertainment, but she swallowed the feeling. It was neither the time nor the place. "This should help with the investigation," she did say aloud as she turned to leave. "Thank you for your cooperation."

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Ursula Caleb's apartment

"Come on, Andy, you said we got W.O.M.P. tech info," Ursula said as she scanned through the available file. "Why can't I find them in here?"

I stated that the Virals were attempting to upload the files from W.O.M.P. units 11 and 12, Andy replied in his usual stoic manner. However, protective programming kept the information from being pulled out.

"The firewall. Of course." Ursula leaned her forehead into her hands. "The one program I never was able to get past." She then looked up. "Wait, if the firewall isn't allowing for information to be taken, what are the Virals doing in there?"

Reproducing, mostly, Andy answered. Even when the host is shut down, a Viral will be able to multiply itself many times over. I would imagine by now that even one of the units has approximately 11,452,342 Virals awaiting release.

"Huh, that's a lot." Caleb gave a grin. "How many of the little guys are there total now?"

36,454,654,635,345, came the reply.

"Good," Ursula responded with a smile. "I think it's time we let Deboir Enterprises know what they passed up on."

Pulling up her computer, she opened up the website for Deboir Enterprises. "Alright, Andy, I want you to go in there and clean out all information in the Seattle Branch's database. All of it, every last
design, profit tally, and report. I want it all in here and everything there cleaned out."

Do you wish to move on to other branches from there? Andy asked.

She thought for a minute. "You know what? Yes. Get into every branch you can. Chicago, New York, London, Tokyo. Especially Metro City. It was their policy that caused them to lose interest in me. They all deserve to pay."

Very well. With hardly a thought, Andy sent out the army of Virals to do their master's work. Within moments, every Deboir Enterprises building on the face of the Earth was going haywire.

For a moment, Ursula considered just going to bed and leaving her Virals to do their work, but curiosity in what she had recovered overcame her, and she decided to go over the new information instead.

She had to stick to the information from the English-speaking countries, since the rest were indecipherable to her. Still, that left a lot of information open for her viewing. Admittedly, most of it was boring statistics and number reports, but a few things caught her attention.

Most prominently was a script with the letters marking it. "M.A.D.?" she read aloud. "What would Deboir Enterprises have that would do with M.A.D."

That letter came from the personal computer of Richard Deboir, Andy stated.

Opening up the content, Ursula gave a Cheshire grin. "Well, Dick, it looks like you're not as clean as you like to purport. I wonder what you'll give me to get this back…?"

To be continued…
Monday, August 18th, 2087

The Corner Nook Apartments

Seattle, Washington, United States of America

"Well, this is the address Penny got," Heather said, looking down from the scrap of paper to the door they were standing in front of. "I don't know, though, it doesn't look like much."

She was completely right on that front. Despite the cozy sounding name, the Corner Nook was an older set of apartments, and it had clearly seen better days. The wallpaper was faded and had started to peel in certain areas, and the area had a feeling of abandonment to it.

"And that's exactly what makes it a perfect hideaway!" Gadget declared. "Unless someone had insider information, they'd never look here! After all, would we be looking here if it wasn't for the address Anonymity gave us?"

Heather sigh, though she smiled at her partner's simple logic. "No, I guess not."

"Exactly!" Gadget declared again. "Don't worry, Agent Connelly. I have a good feeling about this."

He then moved over to the door, and a hand came out of his hat and knocked on it. He had only knocked once, however, when the door opened and a young woman barreled out of it and into him.

"Watch where you're going, you-!" the woman started, but she cut herself off when she saw who it was she was talking to. "Inspector Gadget. You're Inspector Gadget?"

"In the flesh and bolts," Gadget replied. Another hand came out of his hat and offered itself to help her up. "Sorry for knocking you over, Miss Caleb."

"Wait, how do you know my name?" the woman asked, sounding somewhat suspicious.

"We came here to ask you a few questions," Heather said, moving in to the conversation. She held up her badge to show who she was. "My name is Agent Heather Connelly, and this is my partner, Detective John Brown. We were called in on a case involving some infected tech, and we were told you were one of the best computer programmers in the area."

"Oh, yeah, that," the woman, Ursula, stammered out. "I heard about that. All over the news, huh?"

"Yes, and rather personal, too," Gadget said. "You see, two of our team were infected, too, and they have yet to recover from that state. If you have any idea how that happened, or how we can cure them, it would be greatly appreciated."

Ursula paused for a moment. "Infected tech, huh? You wouldn't happen to mean the Gadgetinis, now would you?"

"As a matter of fact, yes," Heather replied, and she narrowed her eyes as she spoke. "The news reports never mentioned that, though. How do you know about that?"

"Oh, uh, lucky guess, I suppose," Ursula said quickly. "After all, you're investigating into damaged tech, and the Gadgetinis aren't currently with you."
"Neither is Penelope Dollar or her K9," Heather pointed out, but she was somewhat ignored.

"Now, ma'am, may we come in?" Gadget asked. "We have a few questions we'd like to ask you."

"I'm actually in a hurry," Ursula replied without waiting a moment. She moved to push past the two investigators. "If you don't mind-" 

"What's the rush?" Heather asked, stepping in her way. "It's just a few questions, and it won't take all that long."

"I have to get somewhere," the other woman responded, and she reached out to shove Heather away.

Heather stood her ground, even though she stood a head shorter than her opponent. "These questions are quite urgent," she replied. "If you'll just cooperate-"

"Brown! Connelly! Come in now!" Chief Quimby's voice came over Gadget's radio, the urgency in his voice was clear.

Pressing a button on his collar so that a screen came up, Gadget saluted the chief. "We're here, Chief. We're just questioning a suspect."

"Do questioning later, we've got something much more urgent right now," the chief replied.

Gadget turned to Ursula for a moment. "We'll have to discuss this later, ma'am. Just be ready for us next time."

"Sure thing, Inspector," Ursula replied as she moved out, and she smirked at an aggravated Heather. "See you later, Red."

Heather did her best to ignore the other woman, instead turning to the screen. "What's going on, Chief?"

"You know those programs Penny discovered inside the Gadgetinis?" Quimby started. "Well, something happened, and they're loose. Not only in Seattle, but across the world!"

"The world?" Heather asked. "That's an awfully wide spread. Is there any connections between incidents?"

The chief nodded. "Yes, there is. The attacks all originated around Deboir Enterprises buildings. From there, the infection spread to smaller buildings surrounding them, but they were contained."

"What would you like us to do?" Gadget asked.

"Is Penny there?" the Chief asked in response.

Gadget shook his head. "She undertook a rather exhausting portion of the mission, so she's back at the police station for now. She wanted to see if there was anything else she could do for the Gadgetinis."

"Well, go get her," Quimby said. "From what we can tell, the attack originated from the Seattle building, and we'd like her to analyze the point of origin."

"Oh, uh, of course, Chief," Gadget said, and there was a note of hesitation in his voice. "We'll go get her right away."

As they turned to go, Heather could see a flash of the same look that had been in Gadget's face when
he had discussed his concerns the night before. The moment, however, was fleeting, and in a second, it was gone, replaced by his typical, cheerful look.

"Come along, Agent Heather," he said, picking up his pace as they headed to the Gadgetmobile. "We must hurry."

"Right," Heather said with a nod. Still, the fact that the look had crept up at all concerned her, and she made a mental note to continue the conversation from before when they had the time.

Seattle Precinct One Police Station
Seattle, Washington, United States of America

Penny sat at a workbench that had been set up for her near the Gadgetinis. It had been hours since she arrived, and to her frustration, she had still yet to come up with something that would deal with their infestation. They remained offline for the time to keep them from harming themselves and to keep the Virals trapped, but using her tools Penny could still keep track of what was happening, and she could tell the infection was hurting them.

Unable to do anything for them directly at the moment, Penny threw herself into another project to try to calm herself: her Seraphim. She had one of the little winged-mice finished and in front of her already. It was quite beautiful, with a sleek, polished white body and six paneled wings, which seemed almost crystalline. She was finishing up with the second, which was had a silver body but matching wings, making sure that the back two wings were securely connected and wouldn't come off when activated.

Once she made sure the wings were secured, she turned both Seraphim over and activated them in their small container. It took a moment, but the little creatures shook themselves awake and began moving in straight lines. "Well, you work. That's good to know," she said, pleased that they were working but still unable to take as much enjoyment out of it as she typically would have.

"Penny! Are you here?"

Penny turned when she heard her uncle's call. "I'm in with the Gadgetinis. What's up?"

"Bad news, Charm," Heather said as they entered the room. "Those viral things somehow got into the Deboir Enterprises systems and launched a major attack. They've got it contained, but they want you to come in and do an examination."

"Me?" Penny asked. She turned and cast a saddened glance at the unconscious robot twins. "But we've already found out there's nothing I can do."

"Nothing you can do, yet," Gadget corrected. He placed a comforting hand on his niece's shoulder. "You'll figure something out, and they'll be fine. We just need to put out heads together and we'll figure this all out."

Penny glanced back, but turned back with a smile. "I guess you're right," she said. "Just let me gather my things and we'll head out."

"Here, let me," Gadget said, scooping up everything on the workbench and placing it in her bag. "Now, let's go and find some way to deal with this outbreak."
By the time the team made it to the Deboir Enterprises building, it was clear the area was a disaster field. The police and fire departments were already on hand, and any customers and most of the lower level employees had been sent home.

When they made their way in, they were approached by a young officer. "Inspector Gadget, good to see you're here," the officer said. "The commissioner said you'd be coming."

"I'm glad to see Seattle's finest is already on the case," Gadget responded with a smile.

"On it, but far from on top of it, I'm afraid," the officer admitted. "Come on; the person in charge of this place asked to see you guys when you got here."

He brought them to a back room, where they met a woman with close-cut grey hair. She was speaking to one of the firemen, but when she saw the team, she said her farewells to him and then gave them her attention.

"Detective Brown, Agent Dollar, Agent Connelly, good to hear from you," she said, holding out her hand. "I'm Malinda Davros, Vice President of the Seattle branch of Deboir Enterprises."

"Vice president, huh?" Gadget asked. "Nice to hear. I think I know your CEO. That would be Richard Deboir, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, indeed," Mrs. Davros said. "I hope his…outspokenness about your relationship won't influence this case."

"I make a point of always staying professional on a mission," Gadget responded. "Now, what exactly happened here?"

"That's kind of what we're already trying to figure out," Mrs. Davros answered. "We were having a slow evening last night, when some of the interns started complaining about technological problems. It started with computers, but soon the copying equipment, the communication devices, even the lights were going haywire. What's more, we started losing information, as if something was stealing it."

"That's because someone was stealing it," Penny said, taking out some gear from her bag. "At least, that's what was happening if my hunch is correct. Do you mind if I try to examine one of these computers myself?"

"Be my guest," Davros said, motioning to a table full of various laptops.

As Penny went to work, Davros turned back to Gadget and Heather. "We didn't know it at the time, but we were only the start. Whoever got in here used our connection to other Deboir Enterprises buildings to ship off their virus, which started to get into everything. We've gotten reports as far away as Moscow and Tokyo of problems with this…this…oh, I can't even think of what it is!"

"It's an infestation," Penny called back. "Just like I suspected."

"You found something, Charm?" Heather asked as the adults moved in to look at what the teen was working on.

Penny nodded, holding up a small, disposable hand held she had brought. "Yep, take a look here.
See these readings?

The three adults moved in to get a look at what she was talking about. "Alright, Charm," Heather said, "you're going to have to translate here."

"No, no, I think I see what she's saying," Mrs. Davros moved in to get a closer look. "My word, these things are alive!"

"Not in the same way Fidget and Digit are, but still true," Penny replied. "I've been interacting with them here, and using some of DElPHI's more latent connections, I've figured out these are alive. They're no more intelligent than if they were rats, but they are alive just as rats are alive."

"Well, this is a pickle," Gadget said with a frown. "How do you get several thousand electronic mouse traps?"

"That's the other problem," Penny continued. "There's not just several thousand. These things are reproducing rapidly. By now, there's probably several thousand-billion, and they are all roaming around unchecked."

"These are more like aphids than rats!" Mrs. Davros exclaimed.

All of a sudden, Penny spun around. "What was that?"

"What was what?" Gadget asked.

"I can hear a knocking or tapping," Penny replied. "It's coming from in here." She reached into her bag until she came up with the source of the noise. "My Seraphim? But I didn't mean to bring these."

"Oh, sorry about that," Gadget said, giving a small look of shame. "I guess in all the hurry to get out, I put those back there."

"No worries," Penny replied, "but they are acting funny. I didn't program them yet, but they're moving like they want to get out."

She laid a hand over the container and in a moment, DElPHI worked to allow her to know. "They're alive," she laughed. "Well, isn't this a wonder. They aren't human level intelligent, more like dogs, but they are alive none the less."

"That's been happening an awful lot lately," Gadget said with a frown.

"I don't know why," Penny said, shrugging but still smiling down at the little creatures. "Maybe we're on to a new Cambrian Explosion? There's not really time to discuss it now."

"Those little guys sure want out," Heather said, leaning in to get a closer look at the little winged bots. "I wonder what it is they want."

"Only one way to find out," Penny replied, and she took the lid off the container.

In an instant, the Seraphim took to the air, but it didn't take long for them to settle on the nearby computer modem. They immediately landed and began working their way up and down over the device in a way rather reminiscent of a catfish.

"What are they doing?" Mrs. Davros asked.

Penny grinned. "I'm not exactly sure, but I have an idea." Picking up her handheld, she started working with it, and in a moment, she paused and grinned. "I was right!"
"Right about what?" Gadget asked.

"What they're up to," Penny answered. "Mrs. Davros, when you said these virus things were like aphids, you were more on the money than you knew. You know how farmers get rid of aphids, right?"

"They would release ladybugs on the fields," Davros answered.

Penny nodded. "Exactly. The best way to naturally keep an animal life under control is to release a predator that will keep the population in check."

"Wait a minute," Heather said, leaning in. "You mean they're eating those Viral things?"

"Take a look," Penny replied, holding up her handheld monitor. Sure enough, the tally markers monitoring the Viral activities was shooting down at a rapid rate. Before long, the monitor reached zero, and the little bots backed up.

"Here," Penny said, approaching the computer. "This one's clean now."

"Amazing!" Davros said, going on the computer. "It's running like new! The information's still gone, but other than that, there's no signs that the Virals have ever been here."

"And it doesn't look like the Seraphim are anywhere near done," Penny said with a laugh. Sure enough, the little robots had moved onto another modem, which they were sucking Virals out of at a breakneck rate.

"It looks like we've found our solution!" Gadget said. "We'll just need to make some more of those, and they'll clean up these viruses in no time!"

"Uh, it looks they've got that taken care of, too," Heather said. Sure enough, the silver Seraph had paused for a moment. After giving a little shake it gave birth to three more Seraphim, two silver and a white, and all five then turned to cleaning out the modems.

"Did that thing just give birth?" Davros asked, stunned in silence.

"I didn't intend them to," Penny replied. "But I didn't intend them to come to life, either. And I guess if one was a male and one was a female, and they were left together on the drive out here…"

"That helps us all the more with our trouble," Gadget said quickly. "It means we actually now have a way of combating this attack."

"Right," Penny said. Holding up the box, she let out a whistle, and the two adult Seraphim returned. "I'll leave the younger ones here to finish cleanup," she said, turning to Davros, "but right now, I have some friends who need to see this right away."

Deboir Enterprises

Metro City

To call the state Richard Deboir was in panic would be a gross misrepresentation. Panic would have been a pleasant distraction from the state he was in. No, right after his business had been placed under attack from some sort of computerized attack, and important files stolen (including files related to M.A.D.), he was in a state of borderline insanity. He had not yet received any calls from M.A.D.,
which he chalked up to Claw likely being in a state of incoherent rage, and he wasn't looking
forwards to the coming confrontation.

Of course, even, if he hadn't had information related to a globally known terrorism threat, the fact
that every single one of his buildings on the face of the earth had come under attack from some sort
of virus entity would not have been a comforting knowledge. Millions of dollars' worth of
information was not missing, and all the backups had been wiped clean. He wasn't sure how this was
going to turn out alright.

He was pacing his office, which was bare bones on technology at the moment, when the land-line
phone that had been set up range. Suspecting the M.A.D. was on the other end and waiting for an
explanation, he picked it up, but gulped in the process. "Hello?"

"Is this Richard Deboir I'm speaking to?" a woman's voice said on the other end.

A part of Deboir wanted to snap out in frustration that he didn't have time for prank calls, but before
he snapped he remembered that Claw often had young women in his employ. Not wanting to risk
upsetting someone like Lana Lamour, he swallowed before answering. "Who may I ask is
speaking?"

"No one you know about," the woman replied.

"Well, if you don't have any business-" Deboir started, but the woman cut him off.

"It's not that I don't have any business," the woman said. "In fact, I have quite a bit of business with
you. I presume all your internet based tech is on the fritz right now? I mean, of course it is, why else
would you be talking on a rejected 1990's phone."

"Who is this?" Deboir snapped at the phone.

"Ah, ah, ah, I'm not giving that away." The woman's voice had a tone of coyness to it. "What I can
tell you is that I am the one responsible for the massive headache you're currently getting."

"You're the one!" Deboir stated, and he had to struggle to keep his voice from reaching a shout.
"Once I have this phone call tracked, missy, I'm going to make sure you're completely ruined!"

"You can't track this call," the woman said with a laugh. "Not, at least, on that ancient brick you're
using. As for ruining me, I have your company by the hair. There's nothing you can do to get at me.
Unless you mean utilizing your M.A.D. connections?"

"M-A.M.D. connections," Deboir stuttered out. "Madam, I assure you, I have no idea what you
mean. I am an honest businessman."

"Yes, and I'm certain you're quite 'umble, too," the woman mocked. "Don't try to deny it. While
going over your info, I've found correspondences that suggest you're currently in bed with Dr. Claw.
What's more, it doesn't look like you're one of his favorites, either."

"Once again, I don't know what you mean," Deboir said, trying to come up with any excuse that
might get him out of this trouble.

The woman laughed again. "Oh, really? Well, maybe this will jog your memory." She proceeded to
read down a list of profanity laden correspondences between Deboir and a number of high ranking
M.A.D. agents, all of whom were well known. A few were from Dr. Claw himself. "I trust I've
made my point," the woman stated when she finished reading.
Deboir gulped again. "Completely."

"Good, glad you've finally caught on," the woman said. "I was starting to get bored."

"What do you want?" Deboir asked, the pit in his stomach growing with every moment.

"What I want," the woman replied, "is ten million dollars. Transferred, by you, to an unmarked account. The one I sent to your cell over text. I trust you'll see it once you're a distance away."

"That's what this is about? Money?" Deboir hissed into the phone.

The woman laughed again. "No, Dicky-boy, this is about revenge. Your business embarrassed me. I wanted to make you pay, and between the work my Virals have done and the money, I'd say you'll have suffered enough in reparation."

"Listen here," Deboir snapped, trying to come up with some sort of footing against her. "If you think I can be intimidated, you've got another thing coming! If you don't turn yourself in, I can use my M.A.D. connections to have you hunted down and strung up!"

"Please, don't waste your breath on threats," the woman replied. "Those correspondences I brought up only proves you're just a tiny little guppy in a huge ocean. You may be of use to Claw, but you're also a mess up who's constantly walking on eggshells. It's not me who has to worry about those guards outside."

Deboir peeked out the door to see Almos and Heffernan standing outside. He was about to say something before the woman continued. "Besides, I've already considered that this little venture could get me on M.A.D.'s bad side, and while I have no fear of you, it would be insanity not to fear Claw."

"You've already struck a bargain with him, haven't you?" Deboir asked.

"Indeed," came the response. "I was going to need to disappear after this is all over, anyway, and few are better at that than M.A.D. All I have to do is make sure you're the only one humiliated and a cut of the funds go to M.A.D. That way, M.A.D.'s endeavors aren't threatened, you get to keep up your little mayoral campaign, and I have the satisfaction of making you heel. So, do we have a deal?"

Deboir chewed his lip, hating every minute of this. However, despite searching threw every avenue and possibility for escape, he couldn't see any way out of it. That said, he was still willing to work on some way to try to twist this to his favor.

After a few moments, however, the woman spoke up again. "I'm waiting, and I'm not a patient woman," she stated. "What'll it be? The loss of some money? Or have everyone know that Metro City's would-be golden boy is funding terrorists?"

"Alright, fine," Deboir finally said. "I'll give you the money. But on one condition: you have to get these things out of our tech. There's no way we can continue with everything so messed up."

"Easiest thing in the world," the woman answered. "Just make sure the money comes through, and don't try to bluff or bring in the police. I'll know."

This was just too much for the billionaire. "And just how would you expect to find out?"

"You can bet that tacky blue-striped tie I'll know," the woman stated. "Goodbye."
As the call hung up, Deboir looked down and realized that, indeed, his tie was blue striped. A sense of paranoia increased in him as he looked around for anything the woman might be watching him on.

This state, however, only lasted a couple of seconds, and then he laughed. "Really, Richard, you're getting the better of yourself," he muttered. "At least now I know what's going on." He laughed and tried to comfort himself. "At least it's only a blackmailer. Those can be appeased. Goodness know what would have happened if it was someone with some sort of honor code."

As he was trying to reassure himself, the phone rang again. Picking it up and assuming it would be the woman from before, he tried to sound more confident. "Yes, is there anything else you want?"

"Sir," the voice of the doorway secretary said, "Lana Lamour is here, and she seems in a hurry to have a word with you. Shall I send her up?"

Deboir silently gulped, realized this was probably the message from M.A.D. "Uh, yeah, send her in." Hanging up, he took a seat at his desk and pressed his hands to his head. "What did I do to deserve this?"

To be continued…
Monday, August 18, 2087

Seattle, Washington, United States of America

With the knowledge of a way to stop the Virals, Penny hurried as fast as he wheelchair would take her. She wanted to reach the Gadgetinis and remove their infestation as soon as possible. The need to rescue her friends fueled her on in an almost unprecedented way.

Behind her, Gadget and Heather were doing their best to keep up. They agreed with the girl's enthusiasm, but ended up also having to deal with the havoc her madcap rush left in its wake.

When the three of them had finally made it to the elevator that lead to the building's lower level, both adults were panting. "You know, Charm," Heather commented, "I can understand your enthusiasm, but you gotta keep in mind, a police station isn't the greatest place for a race."

"Sorry about that," Penny replied, and she could help but give an awkward grin to a secretary that was glaring at her. "I just need to get to them. Now that I know we have a way to cure them, I don't want to reach them too late."

Gadget smiled and placed a hand on his niece's shoulder. "We won't be too late. You'll see."

At that moment, the elevator gave a ding, signalling that they had reached their floor. Without a moment's hesitation, Penny took off, taking her uncle's hand with her. Seeing her rush, Gadget chuckled. "Come on, we'd better keep up with her," he said, motioning to Heather.

When they arrived, Penny was already at the Gadgetinis' side, working with establishing monitors. Once the screens were set up and she could keep tabs on their state, she then reached into her bag and pulled out the Seraphim.

In the time between Deboir Enterprises and then, the little creatures had reproduced again, meaning there were now six Seraphim in the container where there had once been two. As soon as the box was opened, the little robots took to the air, three each alighting on the unconscious forms of the Gadgetinis.

It was a matter of seconds before the monitors started to react, signaling a massive drop in the number of Virals. After a minute, the counter dropped from the hundred-thousands down to the hundreds, and it appeared the voracious appetites of the Seraphim did not let up. Soon, hundreds became tens became none, at which the little creatures took the air once more to search somewhere else.

The Seraphim now finished with their work, Penny set to restarting the Gadgetinis. It took a few minutes for their systems to reboot completely, but when the task was finally finished, they were greeted by the robots' faces appearing on their screens.

"Ugh," Fidget groaned as he pushed himself up. "I think I slept in too long."

"You couldn't have slept in," Digit responded in a tone similar to that of his brother. "We're robots, and robots don't sleep."

"You're alright!" Penny exclaimed in joy, and she hurried in, wrapping the two robots up in tight hugs. "I knew you were going to make it," she expressed, tears shining bright in her eyes. "I just
couldn't lose you."

"Oh, uh, thank you, Miss Penny," Fidget replied, returning the hug but somewhat confused by the outburst of emotion. "Why would you lose us?"

"You two don't remember?" Heather asked as she and Gadget came up to join Penny. "Back at that expo, you two were infected by these weird computer virus things."

"That's right, the expo!" Gadget exclaimed, slapping his head. "We'd better call Miss Meyers and Mr. Offerson to let them know we have a way of dealing with their Viral problem."

"I'm on it," Heather replied, pulling out her cell phone.

"Okay, slow down," Digit said, finally breaking out of Penny's vise-like grip. "I have so many questions right now. What happened at the expo? What are Virals? Where are we?"

"What are those and why did it just give birth?" Fidget added, pointing out now twelve strong swarm of Seraphim.

Penny laughed. "It's a long story, but an important one…"

Corner Nook Café
Seattle, Washington, United States of America

Ursula sat in the café, which was only a short distance away from the Deboir Enterprises building, surveying her handiwork. By now, the panic over the event had died down, and there were only a few police cars left surrounding the building. Even Gadget and his crew had headed off elsewhere. Still, the building hadn't gotten back up and running yet, so everything appeared to be going as planned.

Making sure no one was paying any real attention to her, Ursula put on a microphone headset so it wouldn't seem so odd for her to be talking. "So, Andy," she said in a hushed tone, "how's everything going? Has Richie carried up on his end of the deal?"

The money has been transferred into your specified account, the program replied. M.A.D. has also taken their cut of the funds, which turned out to be larger than expected, so there's not as much as you asked for.

"It's for the best," she said, half to herself and half to Andy. "We all know what happens to those who stiff M.A.D. There's no way I want to end up like that Noir guy in Vegas."

"Now, how about the actions within the buildings?" she asked. "Is our breeding program going well?"

The Virals are proliferating in almost every piece of tech that has been infected, Andy answered. Those that are still around have been succeeding greatly at their mission.

When she read these words, Ursula frowned. "Wait, 'almost every'? 'Those that are still around'? Andy, what is going on? Where are the missing ones?"

Well…uh…I do not know, ma'am. Despite his words coming over emotionless text, it still seemed that Andy was anxious. This morning, something happened, and Virals started disappearing rapidly.
What's more, any information those Virals were carrying failed to upload, and I can't figure out where they disappeared to.

"These things don't just disappear with the wind," Ursula murmured. "Something must have happened." She chewed her lip as she tried to think of any device that might be powerful enough to stop her Virals, but nothing came to mind. "Andy, where did the missing ones disappear from?"

The disappearances started this morning in the Deboir Enterprises building, just down the street, Andy was quick to answer. In the meanwhile, I have also lost contact with the G-units and some of the tech from the expo.

"It started at Deboir, huh?" Ursula slid Andy's tablet into her purse and got up. "I'd better go have a look see at what's going on over there."

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She made her way over to the Deboir Enterprises building and found that the area was swarmed. Not with humans, though there were many people there, but by strange flying mouse-like robots.

"What's going on over here?" she asked a security guard who had come over.

"There was a bit of a breach here, earlier," the guard responded. "It was pretty bad. This weird malware popped up. But then Inspector Gadget and Penny Gadget arrived, and Penny brought some strange malware prevention device with her."

"And what are those things?" she asked, pointing to one of the little robots.

The guards shrugged. "Not really sure. Only thing I know is that they're the malware prevention devices, and they reproduce like nobody's business." He gave a laugh. "Ya know, some people say they're alive. I don't know if that's true, but if they are, they've got a pretty sweet life. Nothing to do but fly around, eat up malware, and pop out a few more."

"What did you say your name was again?" he asked, turning towards Ursula, but he saw that she was gone. "Huh," he said, "didn't hear her go. Oh, well."

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The moment she heard that those mouse-bots were invented by Penny Gadget, Ursula just about blew a fuse. When it was added that they also ate Virals, that was just the last straw. However, she couldn't say anything out loud lest her secret be given away. Thus, she stormed off back to her apartment, slammed the door shut, and turned to Andy. "Andy, did you get a scan on those things? What are they?"

I was able to get visual on them, he replied, by there isn't any preexisting literature on them.

"I don't care about the literature!" she snapped. "What are they doing?"

They are living machines, though not very intelligent, came the response. They somehow have the capacity to pull malware type programing off of machines and run the programming through and internal processing system that converts the programming into energy.

"So, in other words, they can eat Virals," Ursula restated.

Indeed, Andy wrote. Unfortunately, I do not know how to slow such a creature down, and it appears that the only advantage Virals have is their faster reproduction rate. However, this new creature also
has a rapid reproduction rate, though in minutes rather than nanoseconds, and one is capable of devouring thousands of Virals a minute. I doubt that rate will last long, but even when it slows down, there will be thousands born.

"It's just not fair!" Ursula put Andy's tablet down so she wouldn't damage him, before beginning to toss items in anger. "It's not fair! It's not fair! It's not fair! That ditzy, bottle blonde tramp gets all the attention that I should have! How many degrees has she gotten! I'll tell you: none! She hasn't even graduated high school yet! Yet everyone loves Miss Penny Perfect!"

"Now, I finally find something that trumps anything and everything she's every done!" she vented. "I'm the getting the power and information, and what does she do? She goes and develops something specifically designed to destroy my invention! Well, I'll show her."

Having sufficiently burned off enough steam, she snatched up the tablet again. "Andy, I want you to recall all the Virals sent to the Deboir buildings."

Right away, ma'am, he replied. What would you like me to do with them?

"Bring them here and target everything you have at W.O.M.P. I don't care where, just all of them if you can. Make sure it infects anything of Penny Gadget's design and destroy it all!"

Ma'am, I am not sure if that is possible, Andy wrote. Remember, she wrote the one code that we couldn't get past. Even with the G-units, we were not able to infiltrate completely.

"I don't care," she replied. "There probably just wasn't enough Virals. I want all of them brought here and attack anything and everything with her hand to its development! Those G-Units, her book, her watch! Heck, even the little crip's wheelchair, if that has any tech! Infect everything!"

Ma'am, I must protest, Andy stated. This venture is unlikely to change anything. It will cause some small amount of annoyance to W.O.M.P., but is far more likely to cause undue stress on the Virals, not to mention gathering them in one area will make them more susceptible to predation.

Ursula was tempted to just snap that she didn't care again, but she had to admit the logic made sense. As much as she might despise Penny Gadget and everything to do with her, making her own Virals susceptible was not the way to get around with that. "Well, what do you suggest I do?"

I'm so glad you asked, the program replied.

"...and that's how we came to here," Penny finished. She gave a small laugh as she thought back on everything that had already happened. "I was so concerned with trying to figure out how to fix everything that I had nearly forgotten the Seraphim until I needed to calm down. At least they figured it out on their own."

"Funny little creatures, though," Fidget said, allowing a silver Seraph to land on his hand. "So they're alive, but not in the same way Digit and I are?"

"Exactly," Penny replied. "I don't know how this is happening, but I'm relieved it did."

Heather examined a white Seraph for a while, and an idea suddenly struck her. "Maybe it's a second Cambrian Explosion."

"To my knowledge," Gadget commented, "there haven't been any exploding colleges anywhere around, and even if there were, that would be a tragedy and unrelated to these robots."
Heather sighed and gave a small smile. "Not Cambridge, Cambrian. As in, the period in time where a lot of different creatures entered into the fossil records without any ancestor."

"That's right," Penny said. "All sorts of new life started to appear, and there are no signs of any evolutionary ancestor." She wrapped the end of her pigtail around her finger as she thought. "That might explain why so many living robots have appeared, both of the sapient and sentient variety. We always assumed the next major step for life would be in relation to man, but instead it is the development of non-organic lifeforms."

"Considering robots like us aren't the only things coming to life, that does seem to be a viable theory," Fidget commented. "And since both Virals and Seraphim have shown the ability to reproduce, that does me we might even fall into the scientific definition of life."

"Not that this isn't interesting and all," Digit cut in, "shouldn't we try to figure out who started this Viral problem in the first place? I mean, yeah, whoopee, we figured out a solution, but we've got to find out the source of the problem, don't we?"

"Quite right, Officer Digit," Gadget replied with a nod. "Now, earlier we were going to investigate into that Ursula Caleb woman. We had best start again with her."

They agreed and started to head out, but as they were leaving they ran into Commissioner Vilmer. "You're not going out to try to investigate that Caleb woman, are you?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact, yes, we are," Gadget replied. "Why? Do you wish to come along with us?"

"There's no need," Vilmer responded. "She just came and turned herself in as the maker of the viruses, which she calls Virals. However, she claims she didn't unleash them."

"That's sounds awfully fishy," Heather said with a frown. "I'm going to want a word with Ms. Caleb for myself."

The commissioner nodded. "Feel free. She's currently in the questioning room. If you can find something out for yourselves, feel free."

They were guided down to the questioning room, which was a small, barely lit with padding lined walls. Caleb was already seated at a table in the room, and she appeared to be rather bored.

"Inspector, do you want us to come in with you?" Fidget asked.

Gadget touched his chin for a moment as he pondered the answer. "You know what? Yes, I would like you both to come. The more of us in there at once, the better."

"You could also keep track of things like her temperature, blood pressure, and heart rate," Penny added. "Those all tend to be telltale signs for a liar."

The twins nodded at the suggestion and switched their sensors to match. They, more than anyone else, were eager to find out the source of the infestation.

As they were going in, an idea struck Penny, and she turned to the twins. "Actually, there's something else I want you to scan for..."
The five of them entered the room in single file. Gadget and Heather took the seats in front of the table so that they were facing Caleb directly. Penny maneuvered her wheelchair so she was sitting near, but not taking as much notice as the adults, and the Gadgetinis stood against the back wall, their severe watch giving them an unintended air of creepiness.

At first, when they came in, Ursula did not change expression. She had been expecting Gadget and Heather to play a role in the questioning, and was ready to deal with them. The moment she saw Penny however, this changed. "What is she doing in here?" she asked in a flat tone.

"Agent Connelly is my partner," Gadget explained as he sat down. "I've already introduced her."

"Not her," Caleb corrected. "The kid."

"Oh, her," Gadget responded. "This is my niece, Penny Dollar. She's a Junior Agent, and she knows far more about tech than either Agent Connelly or me, so she's valuable addition in this sort of case."

"I see," Ursula said, and she just crossed her arms and glared at Penny. Penny was still getting used to getting that kind of look, so she just smirked back, hoping she looked confident.

"Actually," Gadget said, "since you're so knowledgeable about this topic, Penny, why don't you start?"

Penny nodded. "So," she started out, turning to Ursula, "you claim that you invented the Virals, but that you didn't unleash them, is that it?"

Caleb scowled. "Yes," she replied.

"That seems rather odd," Penny continued. "Uncle Gadget and Agent Connelly updated me on your background. It's rather impressive. Plenty of knowledge over programing and technology. You are certainly more than capable of inventing such a program."

As much as she loathed Penny, Ursula did seem to enjoy the statement, and straightened up a bit in her seat. "So you believe me?"

"Only in so far that I believe you made the Virals," Penny replied. "However, I'm not sure how well the second part of your story holds water. You claim to have made these creatures, yet you were not the one to unleash them?"

"I told the last cops everything," Ursula replied. "Someone broke into my apartment several days ago and stole all my tech. My laptop and my tablet were both taken, and the only reason my cell phone wasn't taken was that it was with me while I was out."

"Really?" Heather asked. She was holding a set of files from the office, and she had been scanning them while Penny had been speaking. "Because there's no record of any robbery reported in here. Seems to me that would be something odd not to report, especially if your whole life was in there."

Caleb bit her lip. "Look, those Virals are…special. I didn't want anyone to know about them before. With all that went on in the last few days, I've come to accept there's no keeping them secret anymore."

"So let me get this right," Gadget said. "Your tech was stolen on the tenth, which means that whoever was really behind the attacks already had taken your tech."

Caleb bit her lip to stop the snarky remark that was coming to mind. "Right, that's what happened."
"And you never told anyone because you believed they might attract the wrong sort of attention?" He asked.

She nodded again. "I'm sorry that whoever it is started unleashing them. I had no idea they would respond that way."

"In some ways, I believe you," Penny said. "But in other ways, I still have questions. You said you knew your Virals were special. Did you know they are alive?"

Ursula nodded, and then pretended to pause. "Wait, are you suggesting they might have gotten out on their own?"

"Maybe." Penny gave a shrug. "It seems that a lot of their attacks do seem to be in a search for food and refuge, just as an attack from a wild animal might be. It would make some amount of sense if some of the attacks, like the attacks at the expo, were merely hunting trips."

"Well, now you have your story," Caleb said, getting up.

Penny, however, raised her hand. "I'm not done quite yet. That might describe the early attacks, and the attack on the expo, but that would be incredibly odd for the attack on Deboir Enterprises. The other attacks were localized, which was what made them seem like wild animal attacks. They latched on to something or someone in the immediate area and stayed there, with the offspring moving on to find hosts for themselves. However, the Deboir attack was another story entirely. It was systematized, with an amount of preparation ahead of time. I do not believe that attack could have been done by accident."

"Hey, maybe they went in and discovered the internet," Ursula suggested. "A major corporation like that would have thousands of international connections."

"And your common cell phone wouldn't?" Penny asked. "It seems off that they'd ignore internet connections in every attack place but a single one, and that one happened to be the place that only just recently refused you a job."

Ursula paused. "What?"

Penny gave a smile. "You don't remember? On the fifteenth, you approached Deboir Enterprises and offered your services, using a recently invented program as a part of your interview. You came in and seemed rather eager to show off your new program, and had to be told to put your laptop away."

"Funny," Heather said, joining in on the conversation. "Didn't you previously say that your laptop had been stolen?"

"Y-you must be mistaken," Ursula started.

"I'm not," Heather replied. She pulled out a paper-thin tablet. "When we found out about your connections with Deboir Enterprises, I emailed them asking for the security footage from that day. They were more than willing to comply." She tapped the screen, and the image of Ursula Caleb carrying a laptop case. "Unless, of course, that's the thief who happens to look exactly like you."

"So I had a compute case," Caleb responded, crossing her arms. "Last I checked, that wasn't a crime."

"No, but Cyber-terrorism is!" Fidget spoke up.

Ursula glared at him. "So now you're making accusations without proof," she said with a sneer.
"Good to see W.O.M.P.'s finest at work."

"If we didn't have proof, that would be true," Digit said, but these last few minutes, we've been following the Viral's trail?"

"The Viral's what?" Gadget asked.

"You see," Penny explained, "no matter how well designed, every program is going to leave an information trail behind them. They're often pretty hard to find, but if you know what to look for, they can take you right back to the source."

"Since Fidget and I were infected with the things," Digit explained, "we have access to the Virals' trail. We just spent the last few minutes tracking the things back to where they came from. Once we reached the source, we were able to then track it out to every attack made from that source. And guess what? Every attack came from the same place: a laptop registered to a Miss Ursula Caleb, starting on the 12th of August, with the most concentrated attacks starting on the fifteenth."

"The day Deboir Enterprises turned you down!" Gadget exclaimed, catching on.

Realizing she'd been caught, Ursula scowled. "You don't have enough to charge me."

"No, but we do have enough to get a warrant for your electronics," Gadget replied. "One I just sent away for. We can just wait here while we wait for it."

Caleb scowled and crossed her arms, but the game was up. She had been caught.

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Tuesday, August 19, 2087

Metro City Suburbs

"So, what did you find?" Gadget asked as he watched Penny going over Ursula Caleb's laptop. They had returned

"It's like we thought," Penny replied. "There's everything on here. The Viral's programming system, the history of commands, everything. Ms. Caleb's looking at a good amount of prison time."

"Then we've got that problem solved," Gadget said with an approving nod. "So how is the clear out for all the Virals going?"

"There are thousands of Seraphs on it now," Penny replied. "They seem to have slowed down in reproduction, though. I guess that was just a booster to get the numbers up. There are still a few incidences involving Virals, but they are cleared up nearly as soon as they start."

"You did well, Penny," Gadget said, embracing his niece. "I couldn't be prouder of you."

"Thanks, Uncle Gadget," Penny replied, returning the hug.

They then paused for a moment, when a strange scent wafted over to them. "Uh, Uncle Gadget?" Penny asked. "Are you cooking anything?"

"No," Gadget replied, "but that does smell like someone is, or rather, burning something."

They hurried over to the kitchen to find Fidget and Digit dousing the oven in flame-retardant. "Oh, uh, hello, Inspector, Miss Penny," Fidget greeted. "How are you today?"
"Fidget, what happened here?" Penny asked.

Fidget just grinned awkwardly, but Digit answered for him. "Julio Childs here decided he was going to make a soufflé. You can see how well that ended."

"Sorry?" Fidget said, his expression becoming more awkward and embarrassed.

Penny paused for a moment and then laughed. "Oh, well, I suppose we're having pizza for dinner tonight. At least Brain'll be happy when he gets back from K-9 training camp."

"I'll call the place," Gadget said. "I swear; they're going to owe us a free pizza soon."

To be continued…
Assignment 13.1: School Daze

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Assignment 13.1: School Daze

Monday, September 1st, 2087

El Sueño Imposible, Metro City

"Well, here we all are once more. Summer is over and its back to the daily grind," Rheeci leaning back in the booth with a look of despair on her face.

She, Penny, Linc, and Eli were all dressed in the blue and gold Riverside Prep uniforms with their bags at their sides. Kayla, Bridgette, and Will were there as well, though school uniforms were notably absent. Most of them were seated at a booth eating their breakfast, except for Will, who was busy bussing tables and only paused occasionally to talk.

"Oh, its not that bad," Penny replied.

"Said the girl who got to spend her summer jumping from city to city taking on exciting missions," Kayla replied.

Penny laughed. "It was just Las Vegas and Seattle."

"Exactly!" Kayla threw up her arms in dismay. "The rest of us were stuck here in dullsville with nothing to do, and now we have to go back to school!" She leaned back in dismay and cast her glance over at Will. "Why don't you have to go again?"

Will came over and snatched up several empty glasses as he answered. "Mama signed me and my sisters up for an online K-12. It's kind of like homeschooling; we take lessons online and turn in assignments online. Since it's all online, we're pretty much allowed to do our work when we want, just as long as we get it in on time."

"Man, you are lucky," Linc commented. "I would kill to not have to go in for school. How do you sign up for that sort of thing?"

"It's not as easy as you think," Will replied. "You pretty much have to have an extenuating circumstance to qualify."

There was an awkward pause as the others tried to decide if it was appropriate or not to ask what the extenuating circumstance for the Cortes family was. However, they decided against it, as they knew the answer likely involved Claw or Talon.

Instead, Eli got up and slung his backpack over his shoulder. "We'd better be getting on if we don't want to be late," he said. "See ya!"

"By, guys!" Bridgette called out as she and Kayla took a different direction.

"Adiós," Will called back as he continued clearing the tables.

Almost as soon as the others had gone, Bianca came out from the back room. "Entonces, ¿a dónde se fueron tus amigos?" she asked, noticing that her grandson was alone.
"Tenían que ir a la escuela, abuela," Will replied. "Sus clases comenzará pronto."

"Sí, sí, sí, sí, está bien," Bianca replied, giving a nod. "Luego me olvidé el verano había terminado." She then turned and went back into her office.

The conversation over, Will turned back to clearing the table and wiping it down once the dishes were gone. He was in the midst of this work when a group of young women came into the restaurant. "I'll be with you in a minute," he called back, thinking they were here to get a table.

Instead, they rushed over. "Oh my gosh, it is him!" one of them, a tall, curly haired blonde squealed. "Here! Here, take a picture of us!" Will could hardly respond as the girl pulled him next to her. Her friend, a shorter redhead, squeezed in next to them, the third girl, who was pudgy and had strawberry blonde hair, snapped the photo.

"Uh, what's going on?" he asked, trying to regain his understanding.

"Wait, so you mean you're not William Scolex?" the first girl asked.

Will shuddered when he heard his birth name. "No! I mean, yes. I mean, it's complicated." He shook his head. "Wait, why do you know about me?"

"Have't you seen the latest issue of Teen Scene?" the strawberry blonde asked. She pulled out her phone to show him. "You guys are all over it!"

To Will's dread, he saw she was right. Pictures, not only on him, but of Penny, Bridgette, Link, Eli, Kayla, and Rheeci were plastered on page after page of the gossip rag. He had no idea how this had happened, and he had the sinking suspicion that this was only just the start. "Oh, boy," he muttered under his breath.

It wasn't long before the others started to notice their newfound attention, too. Kayla and Bridgette had only just arrived back on campus when the craziness started. They had been chatting by the lockers when they were approached by a Freshman girl. The girl had been walking the hall with her cell phone in hand, and she was quick to glance between it and the two older girls, who had yet to take notice.

Letting out a squeal, she rushed of. "Hey, you're some of Penny's friends! What are you doing here?"

When they heard the question, Kayla and Bridgette gave the girl a confused look before exchanging similar glances. "Uh, going to school," Kayla replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Only because you're totally superheroes!" the freshman said, speaking louder this time, which attracted more attention. "You guys totally saved that amusement park! I read all about it in Teen Scene!"

"What?!" Bridgette asked. "Let me take a look."

The Freshman handed over her phone, which was already opened to a picture. It was of the two of them, along with Penny, Eli, Linc, Rheeci, and Will, standing at the fountain in Adventure Kingdom. Underneath read the caption Team Penny Gadget entering the park on the day of the incident.

"I don't remember this picture being taken," Bridgette commented, and she had a sinking suspicion this wasn't the only problem.
She handed back over the phone, but by that point, the interaction had already attracted attention. They were swarmed on all sides by various classmates who had read the article, or at least heard of it, and were eager to meet two of Team Penny Gadget.

"Oh, dear," Kayla muttered as the two of them were surrounded on all sides.

Penny and the others hadn't even boarded their train by the time trouble found them. They had just gotten their tickets and were headed to the trained when a man approached them. When he spotted Penny, he froze. "Hey! It's Penny Gadget and her team!" he exclaimed. "Penny! Hey! Over here!"

His words echoed out through the stations, and a large number of fans swarmed in to join him. Thankfully, not everyone in the station joined in. Not even the majority did. However, there was still a large number of people who came in the rush, making it difficult for the four teens to make it to the platform.

"I understand you are excited," Penny tried to call out, "but we really are in a hurry, so if you could just please-?"

Her plea was cut off by a sudden cry of a dozen different voices. This clearly wasn't going to work. Thankfully, however, they were soon approached by security. The suddenly forming crowd had blocked more people than just the four from reaching their train, a more than a few complaints had been called in. The security guards were able to scatter the gathered crowd, and the four teens hurried as fast as they could, only just barely making it to their train before it left.

"Geez," Linc, muttered once he had taken his seat. "What was that all about?"

"Uh, I think it's this," Rheeci said. She held up her phone to let the others see.

It was a top ten trending news story list that mentioned all the different topics that were currently popular. At the top was a link to the Teen Scene website, highlighting bolded words the read Teen Scene's own Jessie Harbain gives tell-all exposé on Metro City's own Penny Gadget. Learn about Penny's adventures, friends, and Latino bad-boy heart-throb.

"What!" Penny said, calling up the link her own phone. "How did she get this information? And what does that mean, bad-boy heart-throb? They don't think I'm with…Talon, do they?!" She looked like she was about to be sick.

"I don't know," Rheeci admitted. "Teen Scene is selling the article, so the link only goes to a place to buy it."

"All I know is that I didn't say anything," Linc said.

"Me either," Eli agreed.

"But there are pictures of us in here," Penny murmured as she went over the add. "As much as I hate to give money to a company like that, we have to find out what they wrote about us." With some amount of hesitation, she downloaded the article and started to read it.

Like most of the stories sold by such publications, is was primarily sensationalist drivel. However, there was just enough truth to be disconcerting. They had correctly identified all seven of the kids, as well as supplying pictures of them, to fill out the article. That said, there were still some major inaccuracies.
"Wait, Will is supposed to be the bad boy?" Rheeci asked, giving a look. "Did they actually look at him?"

"Ugh, not again," Linc groaned. "They have it marked down that we made the Gadgetmobile, bro."

"Why is that one annoying?" Rheeci asked. "Sure, it's not true, but it can't be embarrassing."

"It's not," Eli replied, "until you get a thousand questions about how it runs, what its made of, requests to do something similar. These people can be nuts."

"I can't believe this!" Penny exclaimed. "How on Earth could someone get all this information on us. I never spoke to anyone at Teen Scene."

"Me neither," Rheeci chimed in.

"A few people came to the house, but Mom chased them off," Linc commented.

"Kayla, Bridgette, and Will aren't here," Penny said, "but I don't think it was them. This would have hurt them just as much."

"And the author marked their source at anonymous," Eli said with a sigh, "so there's no telling who it was."

Penny sat for a few moments in silence, playing with the end of her pig tail. "There's nothing we can do for now," she said after a moment. "We'll just have to put up with it while we're at school. After school, we should be able to go to W.O.M.P., and they'll be able to help us find the answers."

At that moment, the train pulled to a halt, and the people started to unload off of the train. As they kids left and headed towards that school, it soon became clear that even more people had read the article here than had at the train station, and they were soon swamped once more.

"Remember!" Penny called out as they were forced to separate to get to their classes. "Not one word until we can get to W.O.M.P.!"

"If we live that long," Linc muttered under his breath.

W.O.M.P. HQ, Metro City

"Another boring day at the office," Fidget muttered as he slumped on the ground next to Brain. The dog, since he now had official K9 licensing, was allowed to stay in the office, and had opted to do so while Penny was at school. This was a relief Fidget, who would have been left completely without companionship otherwise.

Since the discovery of their abilities, Digit had taken over the duties of most of the smaller paperwork items, and Gadget, as usual, was busy finishing up the longer reports. As a result, neither of them had the time to carry on conversation, and Fidget, who had finished the small amount of work he was given, was bored.

"You know what, Brain?" he said, reaching over and stroking the dog's head. "I know it's good there's no attack anywhere and no danger, but I wish there was something we could do. Something to spend some time on."

Brain, who had been trying to take a nap, peeped open one eye to glance at Fidget before going back
to sleep. If he was just going to be a sounding board for letting off steam, he didn't have to be awake for it all.

Fidget didn't seem to notice that he was speaking to himself. "Just something simple, you know," he said. "Like a protection gig somewhere. That would be pretty neat."

"You know, if you have time to sit around and complain, you could do something to help," an annoyed Digit called over from the table where he was working.

Fidget leaned up and turned to look at his twin. "You told me you didn't want me anywhere near your work."

"I don't want you anywhere near my unfinished work," Digit qualified. He then pushed over a stack of finished papers. "If you want something to do, take these down the hall to the transporter. They'll be wanted down in C.I.A. pretty soon."

Fidget sprang to his feet at the recommendation. "I'm on it! Is there anything you need me to do, Inspector?"

"Hhmm?" Gadget looked up from his computer screen, a little dazed from the trance-like state report writing usually put him in. "Oh, uh, no, Officer Fidget, I'm fine. Thanks for asking." He then turned back to his work.

Now that he had something to do, Fidget snatched up the pile of papers and hurried out to the main desk. He had to extend his legs out a bit to be seen over the edge of the desk, but that didn't bother him. "Good morning, Cheryl," he called out in a chipper voice.

Cheyrl looked up and frowned. "Morning," she returned, though her tone didn't match her voice. "What do you want?"

"I'm here to have these sent off to the C.I.A. station," he replied, laying down the stack of papers. "I hope it isn't too much trouble."

"It's a living," Cheryl said, and she picked up the papers to go fulfill the order.

When she had left, Fidget stayed around, waiting for her to come back, when the elevator door opened. Out of it came Hymie, who had a rolled-up magazine in one hand. He scanned the waiting room area, and when he spotted Fidget, he hurried over. "Fidget Gadgetini," he called out. "Can I speak with you for a moment?"

Fidget gave a small start when he heard the call, but he smiled when he saw who it was. "Oh, good morning, Hymie. I didn't see you there. Sure, I can talk."

"Good. I have just read something that has left me greatly concerned," Hymie replied as he came over. When he arrived, he unrolled the magazine on the desk. "Have you seen this week's edition of Teen Scene magazine?"

"No," Fidget replied, giving an odd look. "Hymie, you are aware that is a magazine for teenage girls, right?"

"I am aware that is the primary demographic, yes," Hymie replied.

"OK, so then why do you have a subscription to it?" Fidget asked, pointing out the address printed on the back of the magazine.
"A young woman came to my apartment and told me that I was not living unless I had a subscription," Hymie replied. "She seemed quite in earnest, and I do like to live, so I signed up." He gave a small frown. "The people of your time need many subscriptions to live. I have also had to sign up for Fisherman's Weekly, Bowling Today, The Single Mother's Helper, and All About Cats. It is a very complicated world now."

"Hymie, that was just hyperbole," Fidget stated. "You don't need to—wait, is that Penny on the cover?"

Hymie nodded. "Indeed. I was concerned when I saw her on this morning's cover as well. That was why I came here. I wanted to verify with the Inspector if the things this periodical is saying are true."

Fidget wasted no time and started flipping through the pages of the magazine. "Some of them are, most of them aren't," he stated. "That's the way it is with rags like this. However, a lot of people believe these papers, so this could mean trouble." He rolled up the magazine again. "We had better go see the Inspector."

They hurried down the hall to Gadget's office, where inside Gadget and Digit were finishing up on the day's work. "Officer Fidget, you're back, good," Gadget greeted. "We're just about finished with today's paperwork and are getting ready to send the rest in."

It was then that he noticed the other visitor. "Oh, good day, Agent Hymie. How are you?"

"Rather concerned, to tell you the truth," Hymie replied. "Has Penny ever spoken to a Teen Scene magazine?"

Gadget screwed his face up as he thought back on the answer. "Well, no, not in the interview sense. I do believe a reporter from that magazine did come in and try to interview Penny, but we told her we weren't interested. There's no need for her to show up in a gossip rag like that."

"Inspector, I don't think they respected your wishes," Fidget said, and he spread the magazine on the desk for all to see.

"What do you mean?" Gadget asked, and he turned to look at the evidence. In a moment, his expression changed from confusion to mild anger. "What."

"I became aware of the topic of the magazine this morning," Hymie said as Gadget picked the magazine up and started scanning it. "If what they write in this is true, then Penny and her friends have been getting into far more trouble that previously supposed."

"These are most certainly not true," Gadget stated, and his voice had gone unnervingly level. "Penny knows very well she's not allowed to date until she's eighteen."

"I was more concerned about the rumors of her crime-related activities," Hymie stated. "Though, I do suppose a fourteen-year-old who had had at least seven boyfriends would be troubling."

In a moment, a hand popped out of Gadget's hat, and it scrunched up the magazine before pulling it in. "The only thing I know is that I'm going down to that office right now to have a word with the person in charge!"

"What about the paperwork we just finished?" Digit asked.

"Alright," Gadget amended. "First I'll quickly turn in that paperwork, and then I'll go down to that office to have a word with the person in charge!"
Teens Scene HQ, Metro City

"Harbain, I swear, you struck gold with that Penny Gadget story!" Thomas Thompson, the chief editor of Teens Scene declared. "We haven't sold this many copies of an issue since Tina Malone flipped her lid on live television!"

"It was really no problem, sir," Harbain replied with a smile. "I just got an anonymous tip with a pic about those teens and it went off from there."

"Well, keep it up!" Thompson said with an approving nod. "At this rate, we may even break the million-copy limit!"

At that moment, the buzzer rang, and the voice of Suzy, Thompson's secretary, came through the line. "Sir, there's a group of people here to meet you."

"I don't have any appointments today," Thompson replied.

"They don't have an appointment," Suzy replied. "However, one of them is a cop."

"A cop!" That did startle Thompson. "Why would a cop be here? We haven't done anything illegal...that they know of."

"He says he's Inspector Gadget, sir," Suzy replied.

At that moment, the voice on the other end changed. "Now listen here, sir," Gadget stated firmly. "I and these good folks want a word with you. Now, you could either cooperate and let us in there now, or I'll go down to HQ and get a warrant and come in here myself, with or without your approval!" It was clear from the tone this was not a bluff.

"Alright, Suzy, let them in," Thompson called back.

In a moment, the office room was swarmed with people. Along with Gadget, Ella Washington, Alyssa Tran, Mary Gellanchen, Maybelle Tomblin, and Margarita Cortes-Scolex all stormed in. Most of them were talking at once, so it was kind of hard to hear what they were all saying. What was not hard to understand, however, was the emotion behind the words.

"Alright, alright!" Thompson called out, trying to get them to quiet down. "Now what this all about?"

"Who the heck do you think you are?!" Ella said first, stepping up to act as spokesman. She slammed a copy of the magazine down on Thompson's desk. "You've got some nerve, publishing a story about our children without getting our consent!" The others immediately joined in her outrage.

Thinking he caught on to what the outrage was, Thompson raised his hands. "Alright, alright, I think I see what the problem is. Well, I'm sorry, but a story's a story, and this one is bigger than anything we ever could have found. These kids are amazing!"

"But it wasn't your business to call attention to them!" Margarita snapped. "My poor son had to leave work early today because he kept getting swamped by people!"

"And my daughter and her friend needed to be placed in a separate class so as not to be a distraction!" Mary added.

"Where did you even get these pictures?" Mrs. Tomblin asked. "Some of these are downright
There was another mass of mingled outrage. Thompson was starting to become concerned for his own safety, especially when an arm snaked its way out of Gadget's hat to hand him his copy of the magazine. The editor did not want to think of anything else that might come out.

"Now, now, everyone," he said, raising his hands in a defensive posture, "we haven't done anything wrong. All photos were taken in public, not private, and the stories posted came from trustworthy but anonymous sources. Isn't that right, Jessie?"

Harbain had been watching the whole situation with some amount of fascination, and when her name was pointed out, she gave a grin and stepped forward. "I can verify this myself. I received the tip shortly after the whole Adventure Kingdom fiasco, and I've done my homework before posting everything. I can guarantee everything I wrote is the truth."

"It was not, and what truth was there was truth you had no place in revealing," Gadget responded. "Didn't you wonder why on earth W.O.M.P. wasn't allowing any interviews? It's because we didn't want all this to come out! Penny's already getting far too much attention from the public as is! She didn't need any more."

"And you had to draw connections between Will and M.A.D.!” Margarita added. "He's done nothing of what you are implying, and he's already suffered enough bullying because of his family ties."

Jessie gave a contempting sniff. "I don't see what your problem is. So your kids are famous now? Every kid dreams of that! And as for the ties to M.A.D., well, if his brother already went, then it's only a matter of time. Maybe I just gave the public an early warning for the inevitable. You really should be thanking me."

There was a shaky moment of silence as Margarita Cortes-Scolex's face went a deep shade of red. She then lunged at Harbain, forcing Gadget to hold her back. "Te doy una hostia que te visto de torero!" she snarled.

"Alright, alright, we've already settled everything we're going to settle," Thompson said. "Now how about you all get out of here before I have you arrested for trespassing."

The adults left, but they weren't happy. They were just going to have to think of some other way around this.

M.A.D. Castle, ?

Talon was in a very good mood at the moment. He had recently been recruiting for new members of M.A.D., and things had gone off very well. Most of the new recruits had been brought back and were in the midst of training, so that meant he had a short time off.

He entered into the fair sized common room the teen Cybers often lounged in. "Hey," he said as he dropped down onto the couch. "Anything new happen while I was gone?"

"Our little tip to Teen Scene finally paid off," Joltwave answered. She was sitting by the computer, and had pulled up the online version of the article.

Seeing the contents, Talon gave a smirk. "It's about time. We gave Harbain that tip ages ago. I was starting to wonder if she forgot about it."
"Nope, she remembered alright," Syreen responded. She then gave a snort. "I don't know where she got a lot of this stuff from, though. Some of this stuff is pretty wacky."

"Like what?" Talon asked, his curiosity peaked.

Drillbit smirked. "Like the idea your pansy brother would ever be a ex-member of M.A.D."

Talon stayed silent, as he was too busy scanning the magazine. "Huh, this article is very thorough," he commented when he came near the end. "Reveals where they live, work, go to school." He gave a small laugh. "Nothing we didn't already know, of course, but if people thought that this was protected information…"

His eyes opened wide, and a large, cruel grin spread across his face. "You know, this just gave me an idea." He then straightened up and hurried off.

"Where are you off to?" Wildfire asked.

"I'm going to get Dr. Claw's approval to carry out an idea of mine," Talon responded. "Shouldn't be too hard, though. It's got everything he prefers in a mission."

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

I am not a native Spanish speaker, and what knowledge I have is pretty weak. I used a site called Reverse Contexto, but if someone who does speak Spanish wants to correct my writing, I would be pleased to hear from you.
Monday, September 1st, 2087

Gadget Household, Metro City Suburbs

"Well, this stinks," Eli commented as he leaned back against the couch. It was now the evening, having received no reprieve from the onslaught of people who absolutely had to get a look at the newly revealed heroes, he and the others were absolutely exhausted. They had pulled back to the Gadget Household, as this was on of the few places where they would receive any relief.

"You're telling us," Bridgette replied. "You know, when I was little, I used to think it'd be cool to be famous. I never imagined it would involve people seeking you out at all hours and never getting a moment of rest."

"Come on, guys," Penny stated, "it'll get better. Sure, we're in the eye of a certain group of people, but it can't be everyone. Here, maybe some TV will help."

She picked up the remote and flicked the television on. However, to their dismay, station after station seemed to be focused on one thing: them. It appeared that some people had spread the article on social media, and what had once been a sensational article for one city had spread across the nation. The only channels that did not have a primary focus on the suddenly arisen teen sensation were the cartoon channels and the oldies channel. "Okay, maybe it is pretty much everyone," Penny sighed as she settled on one of the cartoon channels.

"I don't understand how this could have happened," Rheeci stated sadly. "People should respect privacy better than this."

"Oh, sweetie," Kayla said, patting Rheeci's back. "You're not very familiar with social media, are you?"

"Well, what are we going to do?" Linc asked. He raised his arms as he asked the question. "I mean, we can't just stay in here forever and wait until they leave. We have lives of our own, for Pete's sake!"

"And we will get back to them," Penny stated. "We'll just wait until things blow over. They'll go back to normal, you'll see."

"I hope you're right," Will said with a sigh.

"I am," Penny replied, giving his shoulder a comforting pat. "You'll see."

There then came a knock at the door. "That's must be the pizza," Penny said, and she hurried over to answer the door.

Standing outside was a young man who appeared to be in his 20's. "One extra large-hey! You're Penny Gadget!"

Inwardly, she gave a groan, but Penny smothered the urge to show it outwardly. "Yes, I am. How much do I owe?"

"Oh, I'll cover you," the delivery man said. "My mom and little brother were in the park when you guys saved it; it's the least I can do."
Penny tried to argue against it, but the delivery man wouldn't hear of it. In the end, she just gave up and retreated into the house with the food.

"Well, at least there are some benefits," Linc stated as he took a slice.

"Presuming no one accuses us of taking bribes," Kayla responded.

As if sensing that food had come into the house, Brain trotted into the room at that moment.
"Remember, Brain: no pizza," Penny called out in a scolding tone when she heard the dog come.
"You're on a strict diet now that you're a K9."

The dog glanced back, gave a snort, and grabbed a piece before running off. It was clear that he, and only he, would decide what was going to be in his diet.

"Was that the pizza man?" Gadget asked, coming down the stairs just as the dog rushed back up.

"Yep, we've got it right here," Penny answered.

Gadget grinned. "Great. I'm starving." He then stretched out his arm to grab a slice.

Before he could finish, there came a knock at the door. "Oh, I'll get it," Gadget said, though he kept the one arm busy at its food gathering task.

Outside, much to their surprise, stood General Sir, along with two other agents. "General!" Gadget exclaimed, and an arm popped out of his hat to give a salute. "To what do we owe the honor?"

"I'm afraid this isn't good news, Gadget," the general replied. "Is Penelope home?"

"I'm right here," Penny said, and she wheeled up alongside her uncle.

"We all are," Kayla added.

The general looked grave, but gave a nod. "Good. This involves you all."

"What do you mean?" Will asked.

Sir gave a nod before continuing. "Kayla Connors, William Cortes, Penelope Dollar, Bridgette Gellanchan, Therese Tran, Elijah Washington, Lincoln Washington, you are all being placed into protective W.O.M.P. custody."

"What!" came the unanimous cry.

Gadget then stepped in front of the children. "With all due respect, sir, what do you mean, protective W.O.M.P. custody?" he asked, and his tone was uncharacteristically low. "They haven't done anything wrong."

"No, perhaps not," the general replied. "But after the debacle that happened with the Teen Scene article, it was decided by the council that they would be brought in for their own safety."

"Why was I not brought in on this decision?" Gadget asked, and he still refused to move from where he was.

"Gadget, I'm sorry." General Sir did seem genuine on the apology. "This was a highest of the high level decision; even I wasn't asked on my opinion. I was just sent in because they supposed I would be the best to hear it from."
"I'm not going to let you take her," Gadget said, and Brain moved alongside him, bearing his teeth in a sign that he was in agreement.

Penny, however, intervened. "It's alright, Uncle Gadget," she said, placing a hand on his arm.

She then turned to General Sir. "Where are we going to?"

"There's a facility about an hour out of here," Sir replied. "It's under heavy lock down, but other than the restriction of mobility, there won't be any other ties to incarceration."

"Alright, then," she said, and her voice was level. "I'll go."

There seemed to be a level of shock in the room once she had said these words. "Penny, what are you thinking?!!" Kayla asked.

"You can't go!" Gadget argued.

Penny raised her hand. "This is somewhat my fault. I shouldn't have started this all those years ago. I am willing to pay the consequences for my actions, and I don't want there to be a fuss or trouble because of me. As such, I will go."

There was a brief pause before someone else spoke. "I'll go, too," Will said. He gave a small smile. "Maybe if I cooperate as much as possible, it will finally convince people I have no ties to M.A.D."

"I suppose, if it will lessen the trouble," Rheeci stated.

"If it will make things easier to resolve," Eli said after a moment.

"I guess there's really no other option," Bridgette said with a sigh.

"If that's where everyone else is headed," Linc chimed in with a small laugh.

Kayla crossed her arms. "I suppose, but I'm not happy about it."

Hearing their response, the General got a rather relieved look on his face. "I appreciate your maturity about this, kids," he said.

He then turned to Gadget. "I really am sorry about this, Gadget. I assure you, we'll have this worked out as fast as we can, and they will be released as soon as possible."

Gadget looked for a moment like he was still going to fight, but his resolve crumbled, especially when he turned and looked Penny in the face. "Alright," he said eventually, "but I want to stay in contact for everything. Nothing related to this will be hidden from me."

"Agreed," the general replied with a nod.

"And one more thing," Gadget added. "Take Brain with you. It would give me peace of mind to know someone's there protecting her." Brain gave a wuff of agreement and stood alongside Penny, as if to emphasize the statement.

"There will be no problem with that," Sir said. He then motioned for the teens to go along with him.

They did so, without saying a word. It was clear no one liked what was happening, but right now, they had no idea how to fix it. They just had to cooperate and hope everything would be fixed in time.
Teen Scene HQ, Downtown Metro City

There was no question that the day had been an unmitigated success for Jessie Harbain. The magazine had sold like hotcakes from the moment it hit the shelves. There had even been some national attention, and more than one agency had offered to interview the writer who had made such a substantial story.

Images of future Pulitzers were playing out in the writer's mind when there came a ping on her computer. She looked up at the message, expecting it to be more accolades for her highly successful story. Instead, it was a chat request from zillafan875.

Recognizing the handle in an instant, she answered immediately. It was only a chat, not a video chat, so an image of a bird of prey swooping down from the sky with its talons outstretched filled the screen. "Well, look who it is," Harbain said when she was certain the speakers were on. "My favorite anonymous tip!"

"I got to see the results of that tip today," zillafan875 responded. The voice was the husky and clearly computerized, as if the speaker were hiding his identity. "Well done. I knew telling you was the right thing."

"You can bet your life on it!" Harbain exclaimed. "This story's so big, it's bound to take me place."

"So," she then said, "to what do I owe the honor of this call? You don't have another tip for me, do you?"

The speaker on the other end laughed. "A woman who likes to get straight to the point I see. Well, good, I was hoping to do so myself."

"To answer your question," he continued, "yes and no. I don't have anymore current information for a new article, but I do have a tip, and one that relates to Penny and her friends."

"What's you're price?" Jessie asked as she hurried to set up her tablet to take the information.

"Nothing this time," zillafan875 replied. "I'll give you this tip for free: keep a watch on the schools that Miss Dollar and her friend attend. In fact, keep a close watch on all the areas you wrote about. Something big is going to happen there, and very soon."

Jessie was quick to write the words down. "Alright, I'll be sure to follow your advice," she said. "Are you sure you don't want any reward for this? It seems rather odd that you'd want payment last time and nothing this time."

"Jessie, please," the voice on the other end said. "You wound me. Can't a guy just want to help out now and again?"

It still seemed off to Harbain, but she decided not to look a gift horse in the mouth. "Alright then. Is there anything else?"

"No, just that tip," zillafan875 replied. "And don't you worry. I promise you, what is coming will be even more explosive than the last one."

After that statement, the anonymous informant hung up without another word. Harbain couldn't help but wonder what he had meant by "explosive," but she had decided not to dwell on it. After all, there was no doubt it would make for another great story.
Tuesday, September 2nd, 2087

Jen & Michael's Place, Crystal Waters Mall, Metro City

"How are you holding up, Gadget Boy?" Heather asked. She was currently sitting across from Gadget in the small coffee shop he liked to frequent, waiting for their orders to come up. It was plain to see that he wasn't in a good mood, but she supposed she might be able to work things through with him.

He leaned against the table with his head nested in his arms. "I'm just worried about the kids, I guess," he said. He took a breath and gave a sigh. "This should never have happened."

"We're in agreement there," she replied, reaching over to pat him on the shoulder, "but there's not a lot we can do now, especially if we try to go against the council."

"How could they make a unilateral decision like that?" Gadget asked, giving a huff. "These are kids! Good kids, too. The whole reason they are in trouble now is because they saved lives! How is it fair that they're locked up because they helped to save lives when adults weren't in the position to do so?"

"It's not," Heather stated. She gave a small frown. "I've just come to grips with the fact that the world is not fair and never will be."

There was a moment of silence, and he looked away from her, leaning his head further into his arms. After an uncomfortable moment, she cleared her throat as she thought about something else to say.

"So," she asked after a moment of thought, "how did the other families take it?"

"Same way I did," Gadget replied. He got up off the table and tried to straighten out, but his shoulders remained somewhat slumped. "There were calls. Questioning, reasoning, shouting. Even a bit of swearing, but it didn't do any good. Turns out, it's in the W.O.M.P. guides that should anyone who is not supposed to be know get revealed like that, holding them for up to six months is perfectly legal."

"Six months?!" Heather exclaimed. She hadn't been expecting anything like that. "But these are kids!"

"They don't care," Gadget replied, and he seemed to slump a little slower.

It was at this time that Fidget and Digit approached the table, carrying over the orders. "Alright, we've got one caramel mocha frappe for the lady," Fidget said, handing over the coffee drink to Heather, "and a coffee roll and milk for you, Inspector."

"Thank you for your help, Officers," Gadget said as he took the bag from Digit, and he still had a rather depressed tone to his voice.

"Still no word on Miss Penny, huh?" Digit asked as he pulled up a seat.

Gadget tried to force a smile before responding. "It's only been a night. I'm just being impatient; don't mind me."

"Oh, I'm with you, Inspector," Digit replied, pulling out one of the chairs so he could join in. "If it weren't for all the red tape surrounding this case, we'd be in there in a volt-wave."
"I'm sorry we weren't there last night to help," Fidget added.

Gadget gave a sad smile. "Oh, it wasn't your fault. It's just out of our hands right now. I feel so useless." He tugged his hat down over his eyes. "I suppose that's my default setting, though. Useless."

When she heard that comment, Heather straightened out. "Fidget, Digit, would you mind picking something up an order for me at Books and Beyond?" She then made a gesture with her hand that made it clear she wanted a few minutes alone with Gadget.

"Books and Beyond?" Digit asked, completely missing out on the subtext. "That's on the other side of the mall. It'll take us forever to get through there."

Fidget, thankfully, caught on to what his brother had missed. "Oh, of course, Agent Connelly. We'll go right now." He then leapt up and took his twin by the arm as he left. "Call us when your ready."

"But we don't even know what her order is!" Digit protested.

Fidget gave a sigh but continued to drag his brother out. "I'll explain on the way."

Once they were alone, Heather cleared her throat. "Gadget, you pretty much said that same comment once before, and I didn't know how to handle it then. Well, I'm ready now, and I will say my piece."

Gadget peered at her, as he was a little confused as to what she meant. "What do you mean?"

"That whole diatribe about you being stupid and useless!" she exclaimed. "You told me about that when we were in Seattle, and it caught me off guard back then. Gadget, I will tell you this: don't take what most people say to heart."

Realization came to Gadget's face and he gave a weak laugh. "Oh, that. Heather, like I said before, you don't need to mince words. I know it's true."

"And I like I said before, I will say my piece," Heather replied, and the firmness of her tone startled him a bit. "Gadget, I know there's a kernel of truth to what is said. You're not as bright as Penny is. And maybe you are clumsy and sometimes break things, but that doesn't change anything about you. You are still one of the best officers W.O.M.P. has, with a higher record of success against M.A.D. than anyone else. If that's due to unrecognized skill, then great! If it's due to dumb luck, then who cares, it's still success. Either way, lives are saved, and crime is stopped, which is what is important, anyway."

"As for your work with Penny," she continued, "I'll admit, I've only known the both of you for a few months, but from what I've seen, no one else could have done it better. Penny's developed into the type of teen a lot of parents would die to have. She's not only bright, but polite, mature, and respectful; these are all traits she picked up from you. No one can say what she would have been like had you given her up for adoption, but I doubt it could have been better than how she turned out now."

"So, in the long and short of it," Heather finished up, "cut yourself some slack. Sure, people are going to talk, but they've always done that, and it's often nothing but nonsense. You've done a great job, both as a detective and as an uncle. Don't pay the naysayers any more attention than they deserve."

Gadget stayed silent for a moment, then gave a short chuckle. "Thanks, Heather," he said, relaxing a bit and opening up his milk. "I guess I needed to hear that."
"Any time, Gadget Boy," Heather replied. She leaned back to take a drink from her coffee, but when she saw the TV screen, her expression changed. "Gadget, you have to see this."

"What?" Gadget asked. He glanced over his shoulder, but what he saw startled him so much that his head shot off his shoulders, and his neck elongated to allow him a clearer picture of the screen. The television had been tuned to a news station where a reporter was standing outside Riverside Prep alongside the police. Others had taken notice of the report as well, and when Gadget had responded, one of the baristas started to turn up the volume.

"...was the scene today when numerous teen agents belonging to the terrorist organization M.A.D. invaded the school. They insisted the handing over of local teen heroine Penny "Gadget" Dollar, but found that she was not in attendance. The band has currently taken the school and its inhabitants hostage in exchange for Miss Dollar and her companions. I am Mia Farrel reporting live from Riverside Preparatory High School. Back to you Steve."

"I'm afraid the bad news doesn't stop there," the main anchor stated. "It appears we have another M.A.D. related hostage crisis at the P.S. 246 Metro City High School, and there was some sort of M.A.D related disturbance at the local Mexican restaurant, El Sueño Imposible, that ended with seven hospitalized. All these locations are connected by their ties to the small group of friends Penelope Dollar had assisting her the day of the Adventure Kingdom hostage crisis."

"Well," Heather said, slinging her purse over her shoulder, "looks like we're on duty."

Gadget grinned and gave a nod. "Always."

Riverside Preparatory High School, Metro City

An hour ago

As Talon wandered through the halls of Riverside Prep, he had to resist the urge to gag. Everything was just so pure and clean and orderly, as if it were some sort of upstanding place of learning. Not that he was against learning, quite the contrary; he just preferred to be in control of his own education. To Talon, however, school had been one the greatest sources of creativity stifling he'd ever experienced.

Still, it was convenient for him that Penny went to a place like this. It made it easier for him to track her down, and easier for him to take control. After all, where better to get a whole building schools worth of hostages in a place where almost everyone was already held hostage.

He had come in this morning, along with Syreen and about twenty hand-chosen teen agents. They had smuggled in their weapons disguised as innocuous devices such as phones, tablets, and toys, and all were wearing the uniform of the school. Each and every agent was on the line, waiting for a direct order from Talon to take the place over.

As for him, Talon was waiting until he had Penny Gadget in his sights. He didn't want to start up the chaos until he was certain she was in his grasps. There was no need for her to sneak off and arrange some sort of rebellion. No, this would be between his group and hers, one on one, and he didn't want it turning into some covert operation like the Adventure Kingdom debacle. If this was to work, everyone was going to need to see it.

Which is why he was growing more and more annoyed when he didn't see her around anywhere. "Come on, Pretty Penny," he whispered in an angry tone. "Where are you?"
He was seated in the classroom where Penny should have been, keeping an eye out for when she'd come and take her seat. Talon had somewhat expected her to be there by the time he arrived, which is why he was surprised that the handicapped section at the front of the class was completely empty.

His mood didn't improve as time went on, either. One by one, the other teens entered the classroom, but Penny was not one of them. When class time came, the teacher, a balding man in his late fifties, entered in and sounded off the roll call. Talon waited with interest as the teacher came to the D's, certain that he'd find Penny when it came to her turn.

Dollar, however, was skipped over entirely. In frustration, Talon raised his hand to get the teacher's attention. "Sir, I think you missed Penny Dollar."

The man looked up, a little surprised by the interruption, but not enough to be concerned. "No, we have just received word that Miss Dollar will not be attending class for the time being," he replied. "Now, D'Quenso?"

That was just enough for Talon. It was time to change the plan. "Alright," he whispered into the communicator on his lapel, "change of plans. We're starting now. Follow my lead."

He then stood up. "Alright, everyone, listen here," he called out.

"Young man, you are being disruptive," the teacher replied. "Please sit down this instant, or I'll be forced to send you to the principal's office."

When he heard the threat, Talon laughed. "That's cute. Now, as I was saying-"

"I mean it, young man," the teacher said again, "you need to sit and pay attention. You don't want me to call your parents, do you?"

In response to the question, Talon laughed. "You don't know who I am, do you?" He motioned out to the class. "I'm pretty sure they do."

By this point, the class had gone silent. Despite their teacher's lack of recognition, a few of the students recognized who it was that had invaded their classroom. They had fallen silent, hoping their teacher would catch on before things got ugly.

The teacher, however, didn't catch the threat. "Look, mister, I don't care how much 'street cred' you have, when you're in my classroom, you-"

"Hijo de una hiena, you talk too much," Talon said with a sigh. Pulling out what looked like a cellphone, he touched a hidden panel. Two electrical darts came out of it, striking in the teacher in the chest and delivering a hard enough volt to knock him unconscious.

In an instant, there was chaos. The students farther away from Talon got up and attempted to make it out of the room. They were stopped in their tracks when they made it to the door and found it blocked off by two armed M.A.D. agents.

"Alright, everyone, back to your seats," Talon called out. There was a muddled murmuring among the crowd over if they should listen. He let out a sharp whistle in response. "I said get back now!" This time, no one questioned what should be done.

"There, now was that so hard?" Talon asked. As he spoke, eight M.A.D. agents came in and began to wander around the isles. "Now, as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted…" He here paused to give the teacher's unconscious form a kick, "this is what you might call a takeover. I want everyone to turn in all computers and cellphones to me, right now. If I or one of my companions
finds out you hid something from us, well…let's just say you wouldn't have long to regret it."

There was a moment of pause, and one by one, each of the students handed in their tech to the circulating agents. No one wanted to be the one to find out what happened if you refused.

Seeing the success he had achieved, Talon gave a grin. "Good," he stated, "now everyone stay here and stay very quiet. Listen to the babysitters here, and everyone will get to go home like normal." He made a motion to the agents, who raised their weapons in warning. There was no question of how dissension would be handled.

Having said his piece, Talon stepped out into the hallway, where he met Syreen. "Well?" he asked as he started to undo the uniform tie.

"Everything is under our control," she replied. "We've got classrooms, with both the faculty and students, under lockdown."

"And security?" he asked.

"One or two of them were shot to make a point," she answered. She then gave a smirk before tossing her hair over one shoulder. "After that, no one felt like being a hero."

"Excellent," he said with a grin. "Howe are things at the other school?"

"The do-gooders were absent there, too," Syreen stated with a shrug. "Looked like W.O.M.P. has them stashed away."

"That is a setback, but not a permanent one," Talon said with a shrug. "We'll just send out the plan B message and everything will be up to W.O.M.P. They'll send us Penny and her band, and everything will go according to plan."

"And if they refuse?" Syreen asked.

Talon gave a cruel grin. "Then we find out who here will want to join us, who can work for us with some 'persuasion,' and blow the rest to kingdom come." Talon let out a dark laugh. "It will be all up to Pretty Penny."

To be continued…
Tuesday, September 2nd, 2087
Hidden W.O.M.P. bunker

"This stinks!" Linc declared for the world to hear. Not that most of the world could hear him, as the only other people who were in the containment room were Will and Eli.

It had been just over half a day since the kids had been brought to a secure holding facility. They had been given a brief rundown of what was going to happen and where they were, which amounted to, "we're somewhere outside the city, you should just sit tight." They were then sent to the holding rooms, one for the boys and one for the girls.

As they had previously been assured, the holding rooms were rather comfortable, if a bit plain. It had three sub-rooms and a bathroom, each painted the same shade of beige and lacking any wall decoration, including windows. One room had five cots, another a small kitchen, and the third a basic television that had prerecorded programs set up for viewing. If it weren't for the lack of any contact with the outside world, it might have passed for a comfortable hotel room.

"I hear you," Eli said with a sigh. He leaned back on the couch, "but what can we do? No one's talking to us or letting us know what's going on."

"You don't think they've just locked us up and are throwing away the key, do you?" Will asked as he went through a small tool drawer that was set out for small repairs, and he turned pale at the prospect.

"Probably," Linc said, crossing his arms and sinking into one of the kitchen chairs. "I mean, why lock us up in here otherwise?"

"They did say they were trying to protect us," Eli pointed out, trying to keep up the spirits of the other two. "I'm sure they've got some sort of plan in action."

"A plan that involves us having no connection to the outside?" Linc asked. He waved a dismissive hand at the television. "I mean, what good is that? Sure, it's a TV, but it's pre-programed with *I Love Lucy* reruns. We can't even switch it to the news to find out what's going on, or even contact the girls for that matter. Can't imagine they've got it much better than we do."

Hearing the comment, Will moved away from the drawer and studied the TV hard. He looked around at it and the region around it, and he never said a word while he examined.

The Washington brothers stayed silent as they watched him work, but after about five minutes of this odd action, curiosity got to them. "Ok, man," Eli said, "what's with the Sherlock-mode?"

"It's what you mentioned about the girls being in the same situation as us," Will replied. "It got me thinking. The DVR system here," he said, motioning to the small box underneath the television, "is the Visioncast version. You know what that means."

"Of course we do," Linc said, but his tone lacked confidence. "But, just to make sure we're all on the same page, what do you think it means?"

"Visioncast makes a point in its advertisement that all of their products, when purchased together will connect to each other," Will replied. All anxiety was now gone, and he was fully into examining the system. "If that's the case here, then we might be able to contact the girls through their system. All I'll
need to do is play around with the box here, just a bit…” He immediately sprang to his feet to grab some of the tools.

"I see where you're going with this," Eli said with a smile. "At the very least, we can keep up with the girls and make sure we're on the same page."

"Precisamente!" Will exclaimed as he came back carrying a few screwdrivers and two sets of pliers. "On top of that, since Visioncast is meant to be in contact with each other, we aren't damaging the system or doing a major readjustment, just unlocking a natural function. Now if only there was a way to actually speak with the girls…"

"Don't these things come with voice recognition software?" Linc asked. "We could just work with that once we've connected up to the girl's device, and then set it up to transmit voices instead of commands. We won't be able to see them without a camera, but at least we can communicate."

"That's brilliant," Will replied. He gave a grin before pulling the system box out for easier access. He then touched a few buttons on the side, calling up the systems menu. "Linc, I'll need you to keep a watch on the TV screen to make sure I'm doing the adjustments correctly. When I'm finished, there should be a prompt to connect to the other system."

"Got it," Linc responded, jumping back on the couch for an easier view.

Setting to work, the boys began adjusting the television system to their purpose. It was going to take a while to get done properly, but it wasn't like they were going to have anywhere to go. Reaching the girls would be worth the time spent.

El Sueño Imposible, Metro City

Bianca was at her wits end on what to do with all the loiterers at the restaurant. Ever since that blasted article had come out, there was a raised interest in seeing the place run by Talon Scolex's family. Not eat at it, just see it. Sight-seers now crammed the outside of the building, with a few of the bolder ones attempting to make it in.

To make matters worse, since Will had been taken, they were one hand short for the waiting shift. Margarita had offered to take her son's place until he could return, but her mother wouldn't hear of it.

"You're already busy enough with the clinic, mija," Bianca had replied. "Don't worry; I can handle my own restaurant for the time being." She was now somewhat starting to regret those words.

She had been busy setting out the "restrooms are for customers only" signs when someone came into the restaurant. It was a large group of teenagers, around fifteen to twenty led by a large, brutish-looking young man. Most of them stood outside while a handful, including the hulking youth, came in.

"Can I help you?" Bianca asked, though she doubted these were customers by the look of them.

"Actually, you can," the head boy replied. "Where is Billy Scolex?"

Bianca winced at the question. "My grandson is not here at the moment. Now, if you are not here to order something, than I suggest that you-"

"I wasn't asking if he was here," the boy replied. "I said, where is Billy? We have some…business to conduct with him."
It didn't take much for Bianca to realize these weren't ordinary sight-seers. Without hesitation, she reached under her podium and pressed the silent alarm.

Outwardly, however, she showed no fear. "Where he has gone is of no concern to you, young man."

The boy gave a cruel smirk. "You don't seem to understand, granny. We're going to get that information, one way or another. Now, you can just tell me now, or," and here he shifted his hand into a drill and cut down on the podium, "we can do this the fun way."

When he pulled out the drill, everyone in the restaurant responded, customer and curious tourist alike. Immediately, everyone who was in the restaurant attempted to hurry out, but they were stopped by the hulking youth's companions. They blocked off the front entryway, threatening to shoot anyone who attempted to get out by that path. Those who had come in with the boy moved to the back as well, threatening any of the staff who tried to escape or let others escape by the back entrance. Everyone was going to be in this for the long haul.

Once a modicum of tyrannical order had been restored, the boy, Drillbit, turned back to Bianca. "Now, I'm going to ask nicely one more time. Where. Is. Billy?"

"Get out," Bianca replied through gritted teeth.

For a moment, there was a quiet as no one moved. Then, with a quick motion, Drillbit grabbed her and tossed her across the room. She hit the far wall hard and crumpled to the ground.

"Alright, guys," Drillbit called out to the other M.A.D. agents. "You know Talon's orders. Tear this place up until you find Billy."

In that moment, chaos broke loose. The M.A.D. agents went to work with a fierce energy, turning over tables and ripping through the building. At the same time, the trapped customers decided they had no desire to be in the same building as these maniacs and decided to make a break for it. A number of them were successful, but most were recaptured. Six of them were injured in the attempted flight, and after that, the rest were forced to bunker down.

While the search was going on, Drillbit's communicator went off. "Yeah?" he asked when he answered it.

"Bad news," Syreen said. "Looks like Penny's crew here are a no show."

"Same at this dump," After-Shock commented when he came into the discussion.

"Talon's wimp brother's missing, too," Drillbit replied. He gave a snicker. "Who woulda thought we'd actually scare them into hiding?"

"Talon's shifting over to plan B," Syreen stated. "Drillbit, we'll need you to join us over here as soon as you can. After-Shock, you and Joltwave know what to do."

"Got it," After-Shock said as he hung up.

"Meet you there," Drillbit replied.

When he had hung up, the M.A.D. cyber turned to his troops. "Alright, guys, Talon's calling us back to that nerd school. We'd better hurry before the cops get here. There were comments to the affirmative, and the group moved out, leaving the destroyed restaurant in their wake.
Penny had hardly said two words since they had arrived at the bunker, and her friends were starting to worry. Ever since they were put in the comfortable bunker room that mirrored the one the boys were in, she had fallen silent, apparently focusing her energy into some unknown task. She moved around the room, stopping at areas of that had higher concentrations of tech and focusing in one them. She'd then sit there for a few moments in silence before moving on to the next stop. The only other sign she had was to occasionally turn and say something to Brain, who had been faithfully following his girl at every turn.

The other girls were concerned about what she might be doing, but initially tried to keep quiet and allow her to do her work. Eventually, however, they couldn't take the suspense anymore.

"Penny, are you alright?" Kayla eventually asked, calling over from the sofa.

When she had said this, Penny turned to look at her friend. She had been at the TV again, and she paused to answer the question. "Hmm? Oh, yeah, I'm fine. Why do you ask?"

"You've been moving around like a zombie for fifteen minutes," Bridgette replied. "Mind letting us in on what you're doing?"

"I'm looking over these devices to see if there's any connection I could exploit," Penny stated, running her hand over the control box for the television. "If I can hook up to a device that has access to the internet using DElPHI, then I could keep tabs on what's happening outside this place."

"Then maybe we could also contact our families!" Kayla exclaimed. "That's great thinking, Penn."

"Too bad it's for nothing," Penny replied with a sigh. She put her hand down and rolled over to where the others were sitting. "None of these devices have internet access. The closest thing would be the TV, and that's limited to a very small area inside the bunker. There's nothing DElPHI can do."

"Well, at least you tried," Rheeci said, placing her hand on Penny's shoulder in an attempt to comfort her. "And besides, it's not all lost. We'll find some way out of here."

As they were speaking, a voice came in through the TV's speakers. "Hello?" someone who sounded like Will asked. "Can you girls hear me?"

"In the flesh! Err, voice, I guess," he replied. "We figured out the TV boxes were connected to each other and decided to see if we couldn't contact you."

"Great idea," Penny complimented. "Where are you guys right now?"

"Some apartment room that looks like a sitcom from the 1990's," Linc replied. "They haven't really had anything to do with us since they put us here."

"Same over here," Kayla stated. She chewed her lip a bit before continuing. "When do you think they're going to come get us."

"Hopefully when this who business blows over," Eli replied.

"So in other words, never," Bridgette said with a groan. She leaned back so she was lying on the couch. "Just super."
"Hey, don't give us up for lost just yet," Penny replied. "We'll figure something out." She was more doubtful internally than she wanted to give away, but for the sake of her friends, she put on a smile. "You guys will see."

P.S. 246, Metro City

Joltwave and After-Shock were horribly, horribly bored. They had not set foot in an ordinary school for ages, and the twins soon got a sharp reminder for why they preferred the education offered by M.A.D. as they waited in the public high school to trap two of their enemies.

Like at Riverside, the two agents had snuck into the school disguised as students, along with a good two dozen teen M.A.D. grunts. All they had to do was wait for Bridgette and Kayla to show themselves, then they could get to work.

However, the two girls never showed themselves. It appeared that no one knew where they were, either, so the M.A.D. troops had been caught in a limbo, waiting for their prey to appear.

After what felt like an eternity, After-Shock felt his communicator up. Getting up as quietly as he could, he snuck out of the classroom and answered the call.

"Bad news," Syreen said. "Looks like Penny's crew here are a no show."

"Same at this dump," After-Shock commented, staring in disgust at the school building around him.

"Talon's wimp brother's missing, too," Drillbit replied. "Who woulda thought we'd actually scare them into hiding?"

"Talon's shifting over to plan B," Syreen stated. "Drillbit, we'll need you to join us over here as soon as you can. After-Shock, you and Joltwave know what to do."

"Got it," After-Shock said as he hung up.

He didn't return to the class, instead heading out to find his sister, who was waiting in a separate room. When he found it, he gave her the signal, and she gave a smirk as she got up to join him. "So, shall we begin?" she asked.

He gave a nod. "Ladies first."

Finding an electrical outlet, Joltwave reached out and began drawing the energy out into herself. There wasn't a visible effect at first, but soon the amount she was taking started to overtax the system. Within a few minutes, the lights started to flicker and struggle with the sudden loss, and after a few more, the school was blacked out.

It wasn't long before people started responding to the blackout. Audible sounds of groans and complaining broke out among the individuals left in the dark, which soon gave way to terrified screams. In near every room, the hidden M.A.D. agents revealed themselves, wielding weaponry to keep the captives at bay.

"The cops should be here soon. You ready to have some fun?" After Shock asked, turning to his sister.

She gave a wide grin in response. "Oh, yeah."
Gadget and Heather arrived at the school within a half hour of seeing the television report. They had received a blue ball, but already having a clue of what they were doing, Heather had been quick to state that they were already on it before hanging up. There wasn't any time for small talk.

When they pulled up outside the school, the car was immediately approached by the police detective, a stocky Native American man in his late forties. "Inspector Gadget, Agent Connelly, good to see you here," the chief stated. "We're going to need your help."

"We came as soon as we found out," Gadget replied. "Now, Detective Tsosie, what exactly is going on in there?"

"It looks like M.A.D. infiltrated and took out the school," Tsosie replied. "It has been confirmed that Talon Scolex is inside, and was the one to trigger the invasion."

"No surprise there," Heather stated. "Has he made any demands yet, or is this just some aggression thing?"

"We think we're looking at the latte," the detective replied. "They haven't made any demands yet, but there have been attacks that happened."

"I see," Gadget replied. A hand popped out of his hat as he thought. "Hmm, this isn't like M.A.D. Claw's a lunatic, but a pragmatic one. He doesn't do something for no purpose."

The hand retracted back into the hat after a moment. "Fidget, you can understand animals, right?"

The twins had been standing nearby, working on a small computer to try to hack into the school's systems. "Uh, Brain, at the very least," Fidget replied, looking up from his work for a moment. "Why?"

"The animals on the inside might have a better idea about what's going on here," Gadget answered. "If you could get one of them to explain what's happening, then we might be able to design some response."

Digit got a look of disbelief in his face, and even Fidget looked rather awkward. "Uh, Inspector, that's not really how it works," Fidget said. "I can understand what they mean, but like I said, Brain's the only animal I can understand with any amount of clarity. All the rest are vague or fuzzy."

"Ah, I see," Gadget said with a frown. "Well, that is disappointing. We're right back to root one then."

At the moment, the machine the Gadgetinis had been working started to spark and shudder, startling the twin robots back. "Inspector, something's happening!" Digit called out.

Sure enough, as soon as the twin robots backed away from the device, the screen came to life. "Well, it looks like our little excursion hasn't gone unnoticed," Talon commented, his voice preceding his image by a few seconds.

"We knew it was you," Gadget replied, stepping to the forefront. "If you and all your men come out now with your hands up, we'll go easy on you."

Hearing the statement, Talon gave a snort. "That's a bit insensitive of you, Gadget," the boy replied.
sarcastically. "You know there are ladies here, too."

"Cut with the snark, kid," Heather said, coming up to join Gadget as she spoke. "What do you want here?"

"Really, agent," Talon said, shaking his head in response. "I mean, I'd expect Inspector Clueless over there to not understand what's going on, but I really thought you'd have a better handle on things. Since you can't guess, though, I'll give a hint: who usually is here that I might want to make contact with."

There was a moment's pause, and a look of horror came into Gadget's face. "Penny," he said in a hushed voice.

"Ding, ding, ding!" Talon replied, moving his hand as if ringing a bell. "It appears we have a winner! Huh, guess you've got a bit more of a clue than I supposed."

"What do you want with Miss Penny?" Digit asked, leaning in to glower at the screen.

"Simple," Talon replied. "I like our little tête-à-têtes, and when that magazine revealed where she went to school, why, how could I just ignore that?"

"If you hurt a-!" Gadget started, but he was cut off.

"Oh, chill out, old man," Talon replied. "I couldn't do anything to her now if I wanted. She's not here, as I'm sure you very well know. She's probably stashed away somewhere until this magazine business blows over, isn't she?"

Gadget was fuming, and might have attack the screen at that moment, but Heather caught him by his arm. "We don't have time for this nonsense," she scowled at the screen. "Just tell us what you want?"

"But I thought I had made it clear," Talon commented. He clicked his tongue and shook his head in disapproval. "You all are so thick, aren't you? What I want is for little Miss Penny and her disciples to come out here, in one hour's time."

"She will not be allowed anywhere near here!" Gadget bellowed.

"Oh, I see," Talon stated. He sighed and gave a shrug. "Alright, guys, bring her here."

Several M.A.D. agents came up, dragging one of the younger students behind them. The girl was weep and struggling to get away, but she couldn't escape.

Turning to Gadget, who had frozen in shock, Talon gave a shrug. "We'll just have to amuse ourselves, then. Starting with this one." He unsheathed a long blade and made his way over to the helpless captive.

Before he could strike, Heather called out. "Wait!" she cried.

Talon paused and then turned around. "Yes?"

"You said we have an hour to respond," she replied, trying to keep a level tone. "An hour hasn't passed yet."

"True," Talon replied, giving a shrug and a hand motion for the captive to be taken away. "I did say that, and I'm more interested in Penny anyways. But no longer; I am not a patient man." With that, the screen flickered off.
"An hour?" Gadget stated somewhat at a loss. "What can we do in an hour? We can't, won't hand Penny over, but we've got to figure something out."

"Well come up with something," Heather said, reaching over and patting his shoulder. *I hope,* she couldn't help but add internally.

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Gadget Household

Metro City Suburb

In the small neighborhood that housed the Gadget clan house, it was almost as if nothing was going on in the city at all. While many of the inhabitants were glued to their televisions and radios to find out what would happen with the attacks, others wandered around going about their daily businesses.

The only house that was completely quiet was the Gadget house itself, though no one had any questions as to why. It was common knowledge over who the owner of the house was, and that he was often off on important police work happened.

However, since it was owned by the closest thing that the neighborhood would ever see to a celebrity, it wasn't uncommon for people to stop and get a good look around the house. As such, no one took notice of the young man who appeared to be staking the place out.

Wildfire was thankful for this lucky streak. As he wandered around the property, no one paid any attention to him, assuming he was just curious about the celebrity house. He did everything he could to appear that way, and when no one was looking, he jumped the fence into the backyard.

Once there, he got close, he shed the jacket, revealing the mechanization and fuel tubes of his flamethrowers. With a quick move, he lashed out, spreading flames all across the yard. As soon as they were licking the wooden fence, he turned to the house,

Aiming right at the back door, he shot a wave of flame, heating the glass in an instant. It exploded into a thousand shards, but because of his shields the cyber was not concerned about that.

As soon as the door was open, he stepped inside. Looking around the comfortable little dwelling, he opened a slot in his wrist, and small black balls started to pour into his hand. He scattered them here and there, traveling all through the house on his mission.

By the time he finished, he grabbed Gadget's training jacket and pulled it on to make his escape.

Outside, people had already gathered around the blazing backyard, murmuring to themselves about the fire department and what they could do.

Wildfire gave a grin, and pressed down on his thumb. As he did so, he activated the black balls: hundreds of little lucidi-soli bombs. They ignited, causing a brief explosion followed by an implosion that pulled everything in a five-foot radius into itself. All the damage took its toll, and the house crumbled, leaving a pile of crushed debris where it once stood.

To be continued…
"Alright, one thing's for certain," Kayla said, pulling her legs up onto the couch with her as she spoke. "We're not going to be able to do anything to help anyone as long as we're completely cut off. Penny, didn't you bring your watch and book with you? Do you think you could use them to get in contact with someone on the outside?"

"I do have them, but I doubt they'll be of any use," Penny replied. "We're completely shut off down here, and unless I could find a way to boost the signal, there wouldn't be any help."

"Well, there's got to be-" Linc started, but he was cut off as the situation in the room changed.

At that moment, the door came whooshing open and General Sir came in along with another man that the girls didn't recognize. "Ladies, I presume you are doing alright?" General sir said. He then gestured to the television. "Gentlemen, too, apparently."

"I'm sorry! Ow!" Will said quickly. "What was that for?!

"For giving us away!" Linc replied.

"Do you think we didn't already know?" General Sir asked, and he seemed more amused by the incident than angered. "There is such a thing as a security camera."

"I presume that's not what you're here to talk with us about," Penny stated.

The general's expression changed, becoming sadder and graver. "No, it's not. We have trouble, and it is trouble that you have the right to know about. Follow me to the briefing room. Don't worry, gentlemen, you'll be brought along, too."

"Alright," Penny nodded, and she motioned for Brain to walk alongside her.

As they walked along the halls of the base, the girls couldn't help but marvel at the intricate passages and high tech that was housed in the facility. Sir seemed to notice this, and trying to lighten the atmosphere, gave comment. "This bunker and others like it house much of the important tech developments W.O.M.P. has come up with over the decades. That way, if infiltration of one base should occur, the rest would be held safe and out of enemy hands."

Along the way to the debriefing room, the boys and girls were reunited, and were more than happy to be in one group again. Once they had met up, they were brought into the room where everything was explained to them.

"Almost two and a half hours ago, there were three attacks launched simultaneously by M.A.D. agents. These attacks were against the Riverside Preparatory school, P.S. 246, and a Mexican restaurant. We suspect these attacks likely had to do with that magazine article revealing your connections to those places."

Immediately, the kids were sent into a flurry of questions.

"Is everyone alright?"
"They attacked our school?"

"Is my family alright? Please, tell me my family is alright!"

"What's going on?"

"I knew that dumb magazine was bad news!"

General Sir raised his hands, trying to quiet the flurry of questions. "Please, please, one at a time!"

"Have they stated what they want?" Penny asked. "M.A.D. is evil, but highly pragmatic. They don't waste their own supplies without having some endgame."

"And they do," the general replied with a nod. "Unfortunately, that endgame is you. All of you."

"I say we go!" Linc declared, and there was a murmur of agreement among the other teens. "We've taken these creeps before and we can do it again!"

"Unfortunately, that is not an option," Sir replied. "W.O.M.P. guidelines do not allow for junior agents, none the less junior agents who are minors, to be sent into missions where battle is likely, and in this case, it's not only likely, it is certain. We could bring you along in an armored vehicle to offer advice, since you have experience, but that's all we can do. There is no ethical way to send you in there."

Penny chewed on her lip as she thought for a moment. That's when the idea struck her. "Hey, Will, Rheeci?" she said, turning to face her friends. "Do you know where your watch and headband are?"

"At home, in my drawer," Will replied.

"My headband is on my nightstand," Rheeci replied. "Why?"

Penny gave a fox's grin. "I think I might have the solution to our problem. We'll just need to pick up a few things."

Outside the school, things were looking bleak. A half hour since the last discussion had gone by, and despite their best efforts, no plan had been developed to take M.A.D. out. A few attempts at getting in had been made, but each one ended with the hostages getting threatened and the attempted rescuers being forced to back down.

That was when Gadget spotted it. "Hey, look up there!" he exclaimed, though he kept his voice low and out of sight, lest the enemy see him and spot what he was doing. He motioned to the tallest spire that was sticking out right in the middle of the school yard. "How about that?"

"What is it?" Heather asked. She then followed his gaze. "The bell tower? Well, I suppose that would be a point we'd have to keep a watch on."

"No, that's our way in," Gadget replied, and he gave a grin.

Heather just gave him a deadpan look. "What?"

"No really, that's how I'm going to get in! Go-go Gadget Electric Camouflage!" In an instant a hologram spread out across his body, mirroring what was front and behind him so that he was nearly
invisible.

Once the disguise was set up, he hurried out to the far side of the wall. It would have been hard to follow him had one not known where to look, but for those who had been watching him, a faint outline of a man could still be tracked.

Having made it close to the wall of the school, he summoned his next gadget in a whisper. "Go-go Gadget Pedal-Powered Zipline!" A grappling hook popped out of the top of his hat and shot out through the air. It struck into the side of the bell tower, embedding in the side.

"Come on," he said, and he shot out one arm to a startled Heather. As soon as they were in contact with one another, she was covered over by the holographic camouflage. She was then quick to get onto his back.

"Inspector, what do you want us to do?" Digit called over before they could leave.

"Stay here and keep an eye on the tech," Gadget replied. "Oh, yeah, and tell Detective Tsosie where we went."

Having left his instructions, Gadget began maneuvering the peddles so that he and Heather were inching their way over the wall. The who trip was painfully slow, and Heather rather wished they could have used his copter or jet pack. Of course, she also knew that would have been foolish, since both of those gadgets would have made them lose the element of surprise, and the zipline was surprisingly quiet. Still, she wished it didn't take five minutes to get half-way.

When they finally made it to the side of the bell tower, Gadget gave her a boost to let her up into the structure. Just as suspected, there were two guards stationed there, but they had been facing the other direction from where the duo had entered, so two quick shots with some stun pellets were enough to knock them out.

"So, we're in. Now what?" She asked, turning to Gadget, who was pulling himself up after her.

"Now we find Talon," Gadget replied. "We'll have the advantage, as we have the element of surprise. He'll never see us coming!" He then paused for a moment. "First, we'd better figure out where he'll never see us coming."

While he was talking, Heather waked around the perimeter of the tower, keeping a look out on the grounds below. "We'll there's one job done," she said. "I think I found him. You're not going to like where, though."

"Huh? Where?" Gadget asked, and when he saw what she saw, he blanched.

Talon, along with a number of the M.A.D. agents, was striding across the main school grounds headed towards the main gate. That, however, was not what had made Gadget so anxious. No, that had less to do with what Talon was doing than with who he was headed towards.

Penny was standing in the main gate, alone. She was utilizing her standing wheelchair, and she had her watch and charm bracelet at the ready, but she was still standing there, alone, facing down all of her enemies.

In a moment, a mixture of terror, confusion, and rage filled Gadget, and without commenting a word to Heather, he responded on pure instinct. "Go-go Gadget Jetpack!" In an instant, a polished chrome pack emerged from his back, along with two bars from his shoulders for steering, and he shot off the tower like a bullet.
Seeing what happened, Heather just shook her head, reached into a long pocket at her calf, and attached a sniper's barrel to the end of her gun. She'd do best providing her partner with cover fire while he did whatever it was he was about to do.

...

A few minutes earlier

Talon was far past getting impatient for a response when one finally came. The monitor flicked on, and who else was on screen but Miss Gadget herself. "Hello, Talon," she said, and her tone conveyed her displeasure.

"Ah, Pretty Penny," Talon responded with a smirk. "Glad to see I finally warrant your attention."

"Let's cut with the small talk," Penny stated, her blue-green eyes growing hard. "You and I both know what you want. Well, I'm here. Come out and meet me."

"You have come here alone?" he asked.

"As alone as I can be," she replied. "It's not something I have total say in. However, when you see me, no one will hinder your approach."

"Fair enough," Talon said with a shrug. He then got up and headed for the door. Before leaving, he cast a glance back to the screen. "This had better not be a trap."

She gave a sly smirk at that response, and he couldn't help but think he liked that expression on her. "Really, Talon, do you think I'd ever try to pull a trick on you?"

He gave a snort. "You never know. You never know."

...

Sure enough, when he went out to meet her, she was standing right at the gate, just like she said she would be. The W.O.M.P. support around her had pulled back, allowing for her to be seen clear in the gateway. This was the moment of truth.

That is, however, before a roar of jet propulsion could be heard. It was fairly obvious and could be heard full seconds before it's source arrived. As such, it didn't take much for Talon and his cronies to take a step back, causing Gadget to plow headlong into the ground.

"Stop where you are, fiend!" Gadget called out as he attempted to push himself to his feet after that disgraceful landing. "You have the right to remain silent!"

"Uncle Gadget, no!" Penny called out when she realized her uncle was there. "I have this under control."

"No, Penny, I will not permit you to do this," Gadget stated once he got up. He went over and attempted to place his hands on her shoulders...before falling right through her holographic form.

"So, it was a trick," Talon said, though his face remained blank. "Warned you what would happen."

"No!" Penny cried out once more. The hologram faded away, and Penny, the real girl, appeared from the back of a W.O.M.P. vehicle. She was utilizing her standing wheelchair, and Will, Bridgette, and Rheeci struggled to keep up with her. "I'm right here."

"Finally," he said, a wide grin spreading out across his face.
"No!" Gadget called out, but before he could move to stop Talon, Drillbit came out of hiding and plowed into the inspector, knocking him to the ground.

"Ah-ah," the thug said. "Talon wants them for himself. You're dealing with me."

A fight near instantly broke out, with the police doing their best to deal with the M.A.D. grunts. Gadgetinis rushed in to try to help Gadget with Drillbit, but were forced to deal with Syreen instead when she revealed herself.

Penny took note of what was happening, but that didn't mean she was sticking around while she thought things through. "Guys, over here!" she called out as she activated a button on her wheelchair. A platform popped out of the base, allowing for more room for riders. "Hop on!"

Without hesitation, Will, and Rheeci got onto the platform and held on for dear life. It was clear this was their only way out.

Before she left, she turned to Brain, who had been standing guard. "Brain, I want you to stay here and help Uncle Gadget."

The dog looked up at her pleadingly and let out a low whine. She gave a sad smile in response and patted his head. "I know, but we've got this handled. Now go!"

The dog nodded, then rushed in to assist Gadget in his fight with Drillbit, who despite being younger, had a good amount of weight on the detective. He rushed in and grabbed the villain by the arm, keeping the drill at the end of said arm from reaching its target.

Without even watching to make sure he went on his goal, Penny took off with her friends clinging on to her for dear life. The wheelchair dashed off at an unheard-of speed, as Penny was eager to lure her foe away from this battle area.

Talon smirked when he saw the flight. "Do you really think that will save you, Pretty Penny?" he asked as he touched a button on his arm, summoning his motorcycle.

Bridgette stayed behind while the others fled, holding back a half-dozen M.A.D grunt, who had tried to chase after them. Utilizing a flash-bomb top, she set up a screen to keep anyone from following their prey. Even with many of the combatants now gone, it was still a fight to the finish here.

P.S. 246

"Alright, you kids will be connected by radio," the W.O.M.P. officer stated, "but remember, you're just here to give advice, not jump into the fray." He was speaking with Linc, Kayla, and Eli, who had tagged along with the W.O.M.P. patrol sent too deal with Joltwave and After-Shock. They were seated in an armored vehicle, waiting for any sign of the villains showing themselves.

Eli and Kayla, who were used to being active in the fight, looked annoyed, but Linc leaned back in his seat. "No prob," he said. "This is what I'm good at." He adjusted his sunglasses so the visual from G-5 was streaming directly back to him.

Outside, the police, along with a few W.O.M.P. agents, were preparing to go into the school to confront the Cybers. Despite knowing what the M.A.D. agents were capable of, they weren't quite certain how this was going to turn out. After all, a full-on charge is best avoided when civilians are involved.
It didn't take long for a reaction to occur. Unlike their counterparts at Riverside, Joltwave and After-Shock were eager and rearing for a fight, and they didn't care who their opponent was. Thus, as soon as the first wave of W.O.M.P. agents came close, they were ready.

Joltwave came out first, confronting the troop of agents who were waiting outside. Immediately, weapons were trained and the head W.O.M.P. officer came forwards. "Put your hands in the air and keep them where we can see them!" he called out.

"Gladly," Joltwave responded with a smirk. She raised her hands, and as soon as she did so, let off a rain of sparks.

The agents responded as fast as they could, ducking down to avoid the shower of electricity. They were soon tossed onto the ground as the very earth began to shake, with only a handful of the most skilled capable of preparing their defense.

"Well, bro?" Joltwave said, turning to After-Shock, who had come out from behind her. "Looks like we're outnumbered. What do you think?"

He gave a wide grin and cracked his knuckles. "Looks about right to me."

"Then let's go," she said, giving a smirk. Before they left, she turned to a M.A.D. captain who was standing nearby. "We're going to handle things out here. Make sure the prisoners don't escape."

"Of course, ma'am," the guard replied, giving a hasty salute.

Without a moment's hesitation, the duo flung themselves out on the still-stunned police outside. While this was not the first time the police had to deal with M.A.D. threats, but the technological developments inside the Cybers' tech was too much for the comparatively simple weaponry the police were wielding. It was only the fact that they had sturdy armor on that there wasn't a complete massacre, though that is not to say there were no casualties.

Inside the armored van, Kayla and Eli were becoming more and more frantic with the sounds of the fight outside. "Bro, going on out there?" Eli asked, turning to Linc, who was still using G-4 as a way to monitor the situation.

"Not good," Linc replied, half to his brother and half to himself. "Oh, this is so not good."

"What's going on?!" both of the van's other occupants shouted when they failed to get a coherent response out of him.

"No need to yell," Link said with a sulk, before readjusting his glasses. "It's Joltwave and After-Shock, like we expected, but the tech the police have aren't a match. It'd be an understatement to say things are one sided."

"Maybe we should go even out the odds," Eli said, sliding his gauntlets on.

Kayla nodded in response. "Better not let these upgrades go to waste."

"I'll try to get ahold of other G-units to help, if I can," Linc stated.

"Good idea," Eli responded with a nod. "Now, to figure out a way out of here that doesn't involve W.O.M.P. blowing a fuse with us."

Linc looked as if he was about to say something, but then he blanked. He then pointed to the wall behind his two companions. "Uh, I think she's got you covered there."
The unpleasantly familiar sight of Joltwave's electrified knife cutting through the side of the van had appeared in the back wall and was making short work even of the vehicle's armoring. "I don't remember her being that powerful," Kayla muttered.

"Maybe they got an upgrade?" Linc hazarded to guess.

"Well, so did we," Eli stated, and a smirk spread across his face. "We can take 'em."

The two were quick to power up their gauntlets, and just in time, too. As soon as they were ready, there was a gaping opening in the side of the vehicle, and Joltwave was peeing in at them from it.

She smirked, and prepared to charge in at them, but Kayla was faster. Leaping in, she grabbed ahold of the Cyber's enhanced arms, and with a swift movement, depowered her, causing her blue glow to fade away.

With a scowl, Joltwave tossed her back. "Doesn't matter. I'm still stronger than you!" She then shifted her hands into knives and charged at the other girl.

Kayla responded in a heartbeat. "Wanna bet?" She raised both her hands, and in an instant, a net of solid plasma appeared in front of her, shielding her from her enemy's attacks. "I'd say we're on a pretty even playing field."

While the girls were starting their fight, Eli hurried out, well aware that when one of the M.A.D. twins was present, the other wasn't likely to be far behind. He was right, of course, and nearly as soon as he had set foot outside the safety of the van, he was knocked to one side by Aftershock. "You've had this coming for a while," the villain hissed as he attempted to slam down and crush Eli's head.

Eli reacted before the blow could land, however, and was able to grab the piledrives. This clearly surprised the both of them, but Eli wasn't about to lose a suddenly gained advantage to shock. He slammed the piledrivers together, causing a crash of near shockwave proportions. The sound stunned his enemy enough that Eli was able to shove him off and get back onto his feet. Looking down at the gauntlets, the teen grinned. "Thank you, Miss Penny."

Aftershock, however, was not down just yet. "You think one little crash is enough to take me down?" he snarled as he pushed himself back up.

"Maybe not," Eli replied. "But maybe this will!" He clenched his fist and pulled back before launching a punch at After-Shock. The cyber only had a moment to react, raising his arms to defend himself from the blow. The strategy worked, but he was still tossed back from the punch, and to everyone's surprise, ended up denting the piledrivers out of shape.

"Looks like the shake up's over around here," Eli said, coming into to face his enemies once more.

"I don't need these to kick your butt," After-Shock responded. He shifted the piledrivers back into arms before springing back on the larger teen.

While the two sets of teens were fighting, the majority of the police took their opportunity to make it into the school. A few stayed out in an attempt to find an opening and opportunity to jump in and help Kayla and Eli, but while they were defended enough by their armor to not be harmed, they were offensively outmatched, both by the M.A.D. developed cyber technology and the tech developed by Penny Gadget. They did, however, help much more by getting those hostages they could reach out of the building to safety.

While the battle waged on, Linc was still in the remains of the van, doing his best to follow up on his
potential mod of assistance. He knew well that his brother and Kayla would be evenly matched against their opponents, but that was also where the problem lay. They would be able to defend themselves well enough, but that was not going to be enough if they hoped to take the enemy in to prison. They were going to need an ace in the hole if they were going to win, and your typical, average police officer just wasn't going to be that ace.

However, he knew what could be. Using the G-4 unit, he set up a connection to Penny's older lab, which housed the remaining G-units. Selecting G-9, the dog, and G-10, the bear, he took control and hurried to direct them back to the battle field.

At the same time, the duels wages. Using the hard plasma net, Kayla was able to keep Joltwave's knives at bay, but a new flaw with this strategy became apparent. The plasma was close enough to electricity that when the M.A.D. Cyber's knife was entangled in it for long enough, she was able to charge back up. The charge wasn't anywhere near as dangerous as it would have been had she charged it on pure electricity, but it still meant that Kayla would be at a disadvantage.

When she realized the error, Kayla withdrew the net and attempted to activate the depowering function of her gauntlets. However, Joltwave caught on to what she was doing and made sure to keep to distance attacks. "Ah-ah-ah," she taunted as she fired off electrical blasts at Kayla. "Don't think I'm going to let you do that again."

Kayla scowled. The only distance offensive weapon she had was the mini-taser, which wasn't going to be much of an option. The distance blasts they had were only for minor shocks, with anything major requiring her to be up close. To make matters worse, while her shield was protecting her from the electrical blasts, it was also draining her gauntlets' batteries. She'd need to find a way to fight on her own, and fast. Without any other option, she jumped to an unconscious cop and snatched up his gun in an effort to have something to defend herself with.

Seeing the move, Joltwave laughed. "That didn't do them any good," she pointed out. "What makes you think it'll do you any better?"

Kayla didn't answer, but she knew well why it was going to help her. She didn't plan on using it as a gun.

Instead, she bent down, and grabbing a handful of dirt, clogged the barrel as much as she could, packing the soil in tight. She then pulled the trigger, starting up a reaction in the gun, before tossing it at Joltwave's feet. In a moment, the weapon exploded, knocking the M.A.D. Cyber back and stunning her for a moment.

It was just that moment that Kayla needed. She grabbed a set of handcuff from one of the officers and hurried over to her enemy. In a moment, she depowered Joltwave once more and slapped the cuffs on her. "If you know what's good for you, stay down," she soundly warned.

"What make you think you can-?" Joltwave started, but she paused when a metal paw came down on her.

"I might not be able to," Kayla responded with a shrug, "but something tells me G-9 can." She patted the robot dog as if to emphasize her words, and Joltwave had to admit that she was beat.

While the girls were having their fight, the struggle between Eli and After-Shock was still at its peak. Physically, the two of them were on ever more equal footing now than the girls had been. After-Shock had the advantage that he was a Cyber and Eli was not, but at the same time, he was also a full foot shorter than Eli. Without any weapons to speak of, the fight had no sign of a victor coming out on top.
Realizing his disadvantage in height, After-Shock turned his attention to his opponent's legs. He rationalized that if he could injure Eli's legs, then the size advantage would be as nothing, and the fight would be over in an instant.

Eli realized this, too, and he was forced to pull back in an attempt to keep his enemy from achieving that end. Unfortunately, it also meant that his own attacks were crippled, as he had no long-range offense abilities to speak of. To make matters worse, he knew well that his gauntlets were going to run out of power before After-Shock's enhancements would, and everything would be finished if that happened. He was going to have to figure out a way to end this fight, and soon.

Glancing at the area around him, he noticed the piece of the van that Joltwave had previously cut away. Grabbing it, he hefted it up, holding it up as one much hold a shield.

Seeing this maneuver, After-Shock smirked. "Do you really think that little sliver will protect you from me forever?"

"No," Eli replied. "But it is good for this." He then charged at After-Shock, hitting the other teen full force with the metal plate. It was enough of a shock to the M.A.D. agent that he sat stunned for a moment.

During that moment, Eli went to work, bending the metal around his enemy, trapping his legs in place. Unfortunately, he did not succeed in locking his arms in as well, so as soon as After-Shock realized what was happening, he was able to respond by dealing a blow across Eli's face, sending the bigger boy staggering back.

After-Shock then set to trying to free himself from the metal, but he froze when he was approached by a huge metal bear, which Linc was standing alongside. "I wouldn't try that, if I were you," he cautioned as he approached. "G-10 here is not as forgiving as I am." The bear let out a whirring growl, as if to emphasize the warning. Seeing that his chances of success were nil, the M.A.D. agent was forced to concede.

With the M.A.D. agents trapped and turned over to the police, three teens were able to reconvene. "That's two down, but four still to go," Kayla stated.

"Exactly," Eli replied. "We'd better get back with the others at Riverside as soon as possible."

"Uh, bad news on that," Linc said, adjusting his sunglasses so that he had a visual from G-4 as he spoke. "Looks like things are going bad over there."

"What's going on?" Kayla asked.

"Penny's on the run with Will and Rheeci," Linc replied. "Talon's chasing them, and Bridgette and Inspector G. are handling Syreen and Drillbit."

"All the more reason to get there, and fast," Eli stated. He motioned to one of the police cars, which was already prepared to hurry out. "Come on!" The other two nodded and followed after him, preparing themselves for what was to come as they did.

To be continued…
As she raced along the streets that lead away from the school, Penny was immensely grateful for the fact that Riverside was on one of the edges of Metro City. It meant that getting away from a lot of people would be a lot easier.

At the moment, she, along with Will and Rheeci, were moving as fast as they could down the highway. They were cloaked at the moment, due to Will providing them with cover, but Penny knew it wouldn't provide them with protection for long. Even if Talon couldn't see them, he'd have his ways of locating them.

Of course, she was right. Behind them, Talon kept up this pursuit. The windshield on the front of his motorcycle had a heat sensor, and utilizing that, he was able to keep them in his sights.

For the time, there was no fighting. It was too densely crowded a region, and Penny wanted to keep as many people out of the crosshairs as she could. She'd need somewhere wide open and somewhat empty if she was going to confront her enemy head on.

It took a while for the chase, but she eventually found what she was looking for. About twenty-five minutes outside the Metro City boarder, there was a rock quarry that had been set up. It was still in use, but the work was done primarily by machines (none of which had come to life, to Penny's knowledge), and it was wide and cavernous, which would afford them an area where they could also gain cover.

She was considering her options for how to get down into the quarry when a warning system attached to her chair let out a sight alarm. She knew exactly what the sound meant. Talon was sick of the chase and had made his move. If she didn't make a choice now, the missile locked on to them would end their lives.

"Hold on!" Penny called out. "I'm going to do something, and it's imperative you don't let go!"

Will and Rheeci were confused by what was going on, but they trusted Penny. They leaned in closer and gripped as hard as they could.

Once she was confident, Penny swerved off the road in the direction of the quarry. Without slowing down, she headed right towards the edge, and even sped up the close they got. They had only one attempt at this, and it was their only chance at survival.

Reaching around so she was gripping her riders as well, she gave the command to take the wheelchair into a leap. The platform portion raised into the air, to the shock of her companions. The lower portion tumbled over the edge and plummeted into the quarry, with the hovering platform following its direction, though not its descent. Despite this, Will and Rheeci cried out in shock as they moved at lightning speed towards the center of the quarry. They moved just in time, as well, as the missile zipped right through gap beneath them and smashed into the rock wall ahead of them, sending shards of stone everywhere.

Penny was just as anxious as her companions as well, but she remained silent. She was going to need to focus on their descent in they were going to make it out alright, and she couldn't give way to her fears. Keeping her eyes shut, she used DElPHI to keep watch over where the lower portion of her
chair had landed and slowly lower them to it.

Upon hitting the bottom of the quarry, the lower portion of the chair righted itself and zipped out, allowing the platform to alight on it. "We should be safe here, at least for the moment," Penny said once they were at the bottom of the quarry. "You can let go now."

It took Will and Rheeci a moment to process what she had said, and when they did, they released their grips and took steady steps down. "What…what…?" Rheeci started to ask, falling to her knees as she spoke. "What the heck did we just do?!!"

"An electro-magnetic jump," Penny answered. In truth, she was catching her breath just as they others were, but she had to keep up some appearance that she knew what she was doing. "There are powerful magnets in the wheelchair. When I activate they, it trigger's the chair's Genie Tail mode and allows me to hover."

"Great design," Will said, giving her a weak grin. "Just give us a bit of warning next time. I think I left my stomach up on that ledge."

"That's not the only thing," Penny said, and she peered up at the ledge. Talon had paused for the moment, and he was peering over the edge at them. "He won't be able to get down here as fast as we did, so that should buy us some time."

"I'd think about restating that!" Rheeci exclaimed, and she pointed up at their enemy.

Once he had looked over the edge, Talon had stepped back for a moment, as if he was going to leave. However, a second later, he took a running leap into the quarry. As he fell, his feet split open, revealing hover jets in the bottom.

Penny reacted in a minute, scanning a charm on her watch to summon up a shield. "Quick, get to cover!" she cried out. "I'll hold him off."

"We can help!" Will started, and he attempted to run to Penny.

Rheeci, however, caught his arm before he could go. "Yes, we can help her," she stated, "but we will help the best from a distance, providing her with AV cover."

Will still didn't like leaving Penny to face Talon, but he had to agree with Rheeci's plan. They pulled back into the maze-like walls of the quarry to find cover and a place to start their work.

Talon did not take his time in the descent. As he came down, his hand opened up, revealing a plasma blaster. Letting of several shots, which crashed into Penny's shield, he gave her a cat-like grin. "Neat trick there, Pretty Penny."

"You have some tricks of your own, I see," she replied, glaring at him.

He laughed, returning his blaster and pulling out his staff as he did so. "Now, now, I can't keep you updated on all my upgrades, especially since you have some of your own. Nice wheels, by the way," he added, throwing in a gesture to her wheelchair.

Penny frowned, and though she kept her gaze locked on Talon, she kept a watch in her peripheries. Will and Rheeci were working on something to help her, and she'd need to buy them time to establish their set up before any fights broke out. She'd need to keep Talon talking.

"I know this will be worthless," she stated, "but you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you."
"Now, would that be by the law, or by you in specific?" Talon asked, giving a cheeky grin.

Penny shuddered and tried not to feel too soiled by the way he was looking at her. "Give up now, and I will go easy on you. You're plan has already failed. There's no need for this to go on any farther."

Hearing this comment, Talon laughed. He moved closer to Penny, though he didn't make any aggressive moves. "Really? You think my plan failed?" He gave a smirk. "What plan would that be?"

"You know what I'm talking about," Penny replied as she lifted her shield into a defensive position.

Talon still didn't make any aggressive moves, though he had the body language of a cat on the prowl. "Come now, Penny. We all know communication is the key to every relationship. Maybe I do know, but just humor me to make sure we're all on the same page here."

Penny was anxious to begin the fight, but out of the corner of her eye, she could see Will and Rheeci still struggling to get their plan underway. They needed more time, so she'd buy them more time.

"Your plan to take over the areas relevant to me," Penny stated. "To us. That's why you attacked our schools, and why you attacked your own family." She gave a scowl. "That was low, even for you, but you've been stopped." She smiled as she went over the info on her watch, and saw that it gave her good news. "The public school has been freed, our school is on the way there, and your troops are in custody. Your total defeat is only a matter of time now."

Hearing her comment, Talon gave a snort. "Is that what you really thought, Pretty Penny? You're thinking far too broadly. Yes, we started with those areas because we wanted to attract your attention, but the end game was far simpler than all that. You. I wanted you, right here and all alone."

He moved up closer, so that her shield was the only thing between them. "And I have that now, don't I?"

Before the conversation could go on, however, a rumbling started. Both combatants looked up to see what was making the sound, and to their shock, something had triggered a rock slide right above them. Without hesitation, they took off to avoid being hit by the falling debris.

As she was hurrying away, Penny spotted Will, sitting still and manipulating something in his hand. One of the tumbling rocks started rolling in his direction, and it appeared that he was oblivious to the danger he was in. He just stated in the same position, hunched over and working with the device as the boulder came closer.

Penny, however, saw, and with a sharp turn, she dodged in his direction and swept in his direction. "Will, jump on!" she called out, reaching out to him as she came in close.

"Huh, what?" Will replied, somewhat surprised when Penny reached him. Thus, she was able to pull him back just moments before the boulder hit him.

"You need to be more observant," she scolded, pulling him onto the platform with a swift movement. "You could've been killed!" Having said that, she dashed around a rock wall to bring them to cover until it was safe.

Will blinked in confusion before the meaning of her words hit him. "What? Oh, you mean the rocks." He gave a small laugh. "Actually, I would have been just fine."

"What do you mean?" Penny asked, the stress of the almost-battle and the near-death situation still bearing hard on her.
"What I mean is that those weren’t rocks," Will explained, though he kept his voice down. "Talon was getting too close, so Rheeci and I provided a means for you to get away and regroup. Those were holograms, and Rheeci provided the sound and vibration."

Penny stared at him for a moment before giving a laugh, though one more of stress then of humor. "Only a hologram. I should have known. You two did your job well."

"Unfortunately, we can't keep up a rock slide forever," he stated.

"Right," she responded, setting him down and tapping a few controls on her shield, which would allow her to detach the hard-light construct and fight with it. "I'd appreciate if you could keep up the light show. I'd rather not have to fight anymore than I have to."

"Got it," he said with a nod. "Aguas!" With that, he hurried off to start up the next hologram.

By that period, the "rock slide" had slowed down, and Talon was now poking around the area looking for his prey. Penny knew she'd only have a brief window of time to prepare before he found her.

Deciding that a long sneaking mission was not going to do her any good, Penny chose an are of relative seclusion and moved in to preform a sneak attack. Utilizing the magnets again, she leapt out of her cover and struck down on her enemy with her shield, trying to stun him enough to take him in without too much of a fight.

The blow struck home, causing Talon to stumble forwards a few steps before falling to his knees. In an instant, Penny lunged again, attempting to reach him with a EMP disabler, which would disable his cybernetics enough to allow her to bring him in.

When she was close, however, it became clear this was all a ruse. Talon responded almost automatically with his staff, moving swiftly and knocking Penny's magnetic base away with it, causing her to tumble to the ground with her feet facing the base.

"Tricky, tricky, tricky," he said with a laugh as she scrambled to recover herself. "You almost had me there. You just don't give up, do you?"

"When you give me all the reasons in the word too?" Penny asked as she made it upright. She then moved her shield into position. "Guess I'm too stubborn."

"I like a girl who doesn't know when to quit," he stated, and then he responded to the fight. Raising his staff, he lunged at her, taking long sweeps at her so as to keep a distance away.

With this fighting style, Penny was at a disadvantage. She needed him to be closer to land a blow with her shield, but his staff meant that he was going to be keeping his distance. She'd need to find a way to close the gap if she was going to get the upper hand.

Maneuvering around the staff, she worked to get up close to her opponent and strike at this body. She could only hope the blow would land well, as she wasn't sure where the mechanics started, but she was desperate and needed to take the chance. The blow landed home, striking on Talon's relatively unguarded waste. She pressed in hard, determined to wind him so as to allow herself an advantage.

The blow struck well, but not well enough to give her the upper hand she needed. Talon let out a cry and stumbled back a few paces, gripping his side. However, he had moved fast enough that Penny was not able to compensate for the suddenness of it, and she was toppled over.
"That…hurt," Talon said, and for once he didn't have his typical smirk. He then lunged at Penny, prepared to strike her down while she was vulnerable.

Before that could happen, however, a hideous goblin appeared out of thin air, letting a fierce shriek as it did so. Talon had not been expecting such an appearance and started back. He was moving too fast to stop totally, but he was forced to slow his attack.

When he reached the creature, however, he went completely through it. The answer to the situation came to him in a minute. "A hologram," he said through gritted teeth. "That's tramp used a hologram. Now how did she…?"

He trailed off when he saw Penny, having recovered and rushing at him. He was forced to prepare himself for the attack once more, and with little time before her attack struck.

He raised up an arm in response and activated a defense mechanism insider it. The moment Penny's shield made contact, there was a flash of energy and the shield was dissipated. This left her helpless for the moment it would take to select a charm.

Talon took this opportunity to lunge at her and grab her by the throat. He motioned his hand, and a long syringe slid itself out of his wrist. This he raised and was prepared to strike down on her.

"It's been fun, Pretty Penny," he stated as he prepared to move in for the finishing blow.

Riverside Prep

At the school, chaos reigned. With Talon's departure, the police were able to make their way in to try to reach the civilian hostages, but they still had a struggle to get through the army of highly armed M.A.D. agents to do so. Bridgette did her best to aid them, utilizing her tops and, when things got hotter, her sling-shot, to keep the pathway clear, but it was an upward struggle considering none of her allies had the same technological advantage she did.

While this was going on, Gadget still struggled in his match with Drillbit. Though he was older, more diversely armed, and had more experience than his opponent, Gadget was also smaller, weaker, and his tech not as focused on brutal melee combat. This came as a major disadvantage, especially when his opponent was able to get ahold of him.

"Go-go Gadget Hammer!" he cried out when he was trapped in a hold, and his hat opened to reveal the mallet. He struck out with it at his opponent's back, hoping that the attack would get him free.

He had no such luck. The blow deflected from its hit, any damage blocked by a combination of the Cyber's metal and the force field that naturally protected him. "Nice try there, old timer," Drillbit taunted. He tightened his grip, preparing to crush Gadget slowly. "Got any other tricks you want to try?"

Gadget gritted his teeth, his mind racing for anything he could use to save himself. "Go-go Gadget Laser!" he called out, and he held out his thumb in preparation for the arrival of the weapon.

It never came, as the gadgetry glitched at that moment. Instead, a hand snaked its way out of Gadget's hat, with a lemon meringue pie in its grip. The arm moved with all its strength to smash the pie directly in Drillbit's face.

This "attack" was startling for both parties, to say the least. Drillbit immediately let go of Gadget and started to stumble backwards as he tried to clear the pie off of his face.
While he was trying to figure out what to do next, Gadget heard a voice coming from his communicator. "Gadget, come in!" Heather called out.

Switching in his communicator, Gadget responded. "I'm here, Agent Connelly," he replied.

"Gadget, work your way back to the clock tower," Heather instructed. "Lure tall, dim, and stupid with you. When you're in range, I should be able to help you out."

"I'll do my best," Gadget replied.

By that point, Drillbit had recovered from the pie to the face, and he was infuriated. "I'm going to kill you, old man!"

Without waiting a moment, Gadget retreated back towards the clock tower. "Go-go Gadget Skates!" he called out, summoning the gadget he believed gave him the best avenue of escape. He hated the idea of fleeing before the enemy, but he also knew that this might be the best opportunity he had of overcoming his more physically powerful opponent.

"Come back here!" Drillbit called out, taking up the chase. Changing his hands into their drill form, he raced after Gadget, running as hard as he could.

In this chase, the tables were at once turned. Though Drillbit had been the stronger of the two fighters, Gadget was faster. Especially utilizing his skates, he was able to pull ahead of his foe and keep out of reach. All of the younger Cyber's tech hindered in the chase, since they also meant that he was heavier and more weighed down. As a result, Gadget was able to make it far out of his reach by the time he had actually built up enough momentum to actually call it a chase.

"Alright, Agent Connelly, I've got the perp in pursuit," Gadget stated over the intercom. "What do I do-?" Before he could finish his sentence, he ran smack into the brick wall of the clock tower, laying him out flat.

"I've got you now, old timer!" Drillbit rushed over to where the prone Gadget lay, raising his drill and preparing to impale the Inspector. Before he could, however, a green pellet flew out of nowhere, striking him on the side of the neck. The pellet then went off, letting out an electrical current that both shocked him into a prone state and disrupted his circuitry, laying him out flat. This was followed by a hail of blue pellets, which then expanded out into a trapping goo and covered him over, leaving only his head uncovered.

In the meanwhile, Gadget recovered from his crash and looked up. "Did anyone get the license number of that clock tower?"

"We got him, Gadget Boy," Heather called out over the communicator. "That's one down, and it looks like the police are handling the grunts just fine. I'll be down to join you in a few minutes."

Gadget extended his neck, trying to look around for what Heather was talking about. "What-oh, I see. Yes, we've done well. We'll just need to-"

"Incoming!" Gadget was forced to dodge immediately to the right as Fidget was tossed right at him. The orange Gadgetini slammed into the clock tower, leaving some cracks where the impact was made.

Gadget rushed over to help his stunned teammate. "Office Fidget, are you alright?"

"Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do…" Fidget sang. Clearly the blow had hit him harder than the Inspector had thought.
Gadget turned to see what it was that had propelled the robot and was just in time to see Digit sent airborne as well. This time, however, he was able to react in time, catching the blue Gadgetini before he could have the same percussive landing his brother had taken. "Gotcha!"

Digit was clearly shaken by the flight, though still very much himself. "Thank you for the save there, Inspector." He then straightened his coat. "I'm afraid we might need a bit more help with her than we supposed.

"Her?" Gadget was somewhat confused by the statement.

"He means the redhead with the metal arms, Gadget Boy!" Heather called out. She was already running down the clock tower stairs to join them. "I'll be with you as soon as I can be, but it might take a while. There are a lot of stairs here, and the genius who designed this place didn't put in an elevator."

Gadget turned and was just in time to see Syreen rushing right at him. He backed up, only missing a blow from the knife she had turned her hand into. "Now, miss, I'm going to need you to cease and desist right now!" Gadget extended his own arms out, grabbing his attacker by her wrists. Seeing the move the Inspector was making. The Gadgetinis sprang up to try to stop him. "No, Inspector, don't let her touch you!" Digit called out in panic.

They were too late. The moment that contact had been made, Syreen sent a subtle jolt down his arms. It was so subtle as to be painless, but once it went through, Gadget's arms had locked up, and he couldn't move them an inch. He struggled for a few minutes when he realized this, but nothing he did helped. "What's going on?"

Syreen gave a smirk. "Now you see the paralyzing effect I have on some people." She then bent his hand backwards at the wrist, causing Gadget to cry out in pain.

Immediately, the Gadgetinis sprang forwards to try to help, Digit unleashing his sonic pulse canon and Fidget utilizing the throwing knives he had up his sleeves. Their attempts, though valiant, were futile. They could not unleash their strongest attacks, for fear they'd hit Gadget instead of the enemy, and thus they were forced to attempt to stall the villainess with weaker attempts.

These seemed to amuse Syreen more than anything else. Turning to the onrushing robots, she let out a sonic scream, one loud and strong enough to send them flying backwards. Those pests out of the way, she then turned her attention back to Gadget.

Or, at the very least, she attempted to. At that moment, a small object shot around her, trailing a glowing thread after it. It wrapped around Syreen several times, entwining her in the string. "What the-!" the villainess exclaimed.

"Hah! Not so cocky, now, huh?" Bridgette asked. She had the yo-yo baton in one hand and she was keeping her distance, which means that the M.A.D. Cyber couldn't use any of her long-range attacks. Syreen gritted her teeth in rage, struggling to escape the yo-yo's string. However, it was made out of a material that she had never seen before, and try as she might, she couldn't break it. "Get this off me now!"

Bridgette gave a snort. "And have you skewer me? No thank you."

"Get it off me now!" Syreen turned and charged at Bridgette, and there was fire in her eyes. It was clear that she would murder her opponent if she got a chance.
This fact was clear to Bridgette, at the very least. Pulling back, she dodged away from the range of attack. At the same time, she swung again, this time with the top baton. A small projectile shot out of it. None of the aggressive elements activated, but those weren't needed. The small object tripped the Cyber up, causing her to fall flat on her back.

Without hesitation, Bridgette race up to her fallen adversary and clamped a hand over her mouth. "Anyone got an inhibitor chip?" she called out. "I'm not going to be able to hold her for very long!" Her prediction proved correct, for she was only able to hold on for a few moments before she was shaken off and forced to dive for cover before being nailed by a sonic screech.

Nearly as soon as she let go, however, Brian sprang in, landing heavily on the Cyber to hold her down. "So, you haven't learned your-" she started, but she froze when she felt something hit her in the neck.

"Yes, as a matter of face, we did." Gadget stepped out from behind one of the police vans, along with the officer who had given him the chip. "Alright, men, take them in!"

Once the two Cybers had been captured, it was a matter of minutes before the remainder of M.A.D. were caught. They had been on the ropes during the fight, anyway, and the defeat of their leaders was enough to get them to stop.

It was after the fight when Heather finally caught up with the rest of the group, and she was panting from the work. "Man, there are a lot of stairs in there."

"Linc says there's several thousand," Bridgette commented. "I can't imagine why this didn't install an elevator."

Heather slumped down against the far wall. "You and me both, kid."

Suddenly, Brain's collar came to life, a screen and a small antenna coming out. The Gadgetinis' communicators sprang on, too, signaling a transmission.

"Miss Penny?" Digit asked, but it was not Penny's face that came into view on Fidget's monitor-face.

"Sorry there, Team Gadget," Talon replied with a smirk. "I'm afraid Miss Penny can't come to the phone right now."

"You!" Gadget practically bellowed. He sprang forward, and gripped Fidget by the shoulders. He was unaware of the little robot, as he thought only of his niece. "What have you done with Penny?!!"

"Oh, don't you worry your head; they're all right here." Talon moved out of the way, allowing the group to see behind him. There, Penny, Will, and Rheeci all lay, captured and with their hands tied behind their backs. They disappeared once more as Talon came back on the screen. "They put up a good fight, mind you but once Penny took the fall, it was all over."

"I took the liberty of relieving her of her computer book," he added with a wave of his hand. "Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to need to get a move on things. Chow." Without another word, the transmission ended.

"No!" Gadget gave an anguished cry. Without hesitation, he released Fidget. "Go-go Gadget Jet Pack!" For the second time that day, the jet pack worked its way out, and he went skyward in an attempt to find his niece. He was soon followed by the Gadgetinis, who did their best to follow with their copter attachments.

A moment later, another van pulled up, and Kayla, Linc, and Eli peered out of it. "Alright, we're
here," Linc stated. "What's going on?"

"What's going on is that Penny and a few of your friends are in trouble," Heather replied. She was already on her way to the Gadgetmobile with Brain at her heels. "We're following the signal from her watch."

"Alright, let's go!" Kayla clenched her fists as she and the Washington brothers hurried to follow Heather. They were quickly joined by Bridgette.

Before they could get far, however, they were stopped by Heather. "No, stay here," she ordered."

All of the kids started to protest, but they were cut off by the agent. "No, this just isn't safe. Three of you have already been caught; we don't want to make this a full seven."

Unable to protest against her, they backed off, and could only watch as the Gadgetmobile disappeared, headed off to find their captive friends.

To be continued…
Tuesday, September 2, 2087

Rock quarry outside Metro City

Once the call was finished, Talon casually closed up the computer book and deposited it in a small bag on the side of his motorcycle. "Well, that was handy. I should have thought of getting one of these for myself ages ago."

He then turned to look over at the captives. Penny was still unconscious and would be for hours from the amount of sedatives she had been given. Will and Rheeci, on the other hand, were both well awake, and were glaring at their captor, though they were helpless to do anything to stop him.

When they had seen Penny fall due to the sedatives, they had been quick to try to rush to her aid. However, their lack of experience or technology meant they didn't stand a chance. They had been swiftly defeated and now lay, handcuffed to each other as they could only wait to discover their fate.

Seeing their helplessness, Talon grinned. "What? You as eager to go as I am? Don't worry, our ride we'll be here soon. Then it'll be just like old times, won't it, Billy?"

In response, Will tried to stare back, but he hesitated and then let his gaze fall. He felt shame for his lack of a response, but couldn't muster up the strength to go on.

"Leave him alone!" Rheeci exclaimed. "He's not your partner anymore."

Hearing this comment, Talon started laughing uproariously. "Really? My partner, this chavala? That's a hoot!"

"I saw the videos; I know what happened, and he's my friend. I know what he's like now." Rheeci was determined to stick up for Will. "He's not going to work with you anymore."

Talon shook his head, and he smirked at Will. "You never told them what really happened, did you?"

Will stayed quiet, but he shifted over, tucking his legs against his body. He kept his eyes lowered so as to avoid contact with either of the others present.

This seemed to amuse Talon all the more. "No, you didn't tell them, did you? Just let them know how it started, but not where it ended up? Imagine that, quiet little Billy never shared his deepest, darkest secret."

"Doesn't know?" Rheeci turned to Will, confusion in her eyes. "Will, what is he talking about?"

"It's nothing," Will responded, but he kept his eyes low and his voice down.

"Nothing?" Talon gave a smirk. "I don't exactly remember it being nothing." He strode over until he was towering over his twin. "Go ahead. Show her. Maybe if you're lucky, Penny will be awake enough to see it, too."

Will hunched over even more, and he kept his eyes shut tight in a vain attempt to keep tears from leaking out. "No," he said, though his voice was so low it was barely audible.

"Come on, now, Billy." Talon leaned, touching Will's shoulder in a way that would have seemed
comforting if it wasn't for the predatory smile. "Show them your grand history." With a swift movement, he grabbed Will by the collar and tossed him away from the quarry wall. Will skidded on his back and was left stunned by the sudden movement. Talon wasn't finished, however, and he sprang on his twin again, this time using a large knife to cut open his shirt, revealing his chest and torso to open air.

When Rheeci saw, she was startled by what was there. Will's chest had massive amounts of scarring, as if there had been some sort of surgery. It was clear that reconstruction had been done, but his natural skin was not exactly the same color as the area that had been repaired, and scars outlined the shape of some sort of device that had once been implanted there.

The job done, Talon tossed him down before lifting his own shirt. There, an implant sat, embedded in the flesh, in the same shape as the scar on Will. "The first effects of M.A.D.'s attempts to make a new line of cyborgs. You put in the pieces slowly, one at a time, rather than all at once. Didn't want to risk another Inspector Gadget. It took a while, but after all the training, and the occasional mission, we got used to it. Isn't that right, Billy?"

"Will, is that true?" Rheeci asked as she looked on him with horror. "You worked for M.A.D.?"

Shame filled Will's eyes. "I didn't know at the time."

"No, I suppose we didn't." Talon let his shirt drop into place. "We were just told were going to see our uncle, and he was going to help us do the amazing, things our man and dad never dream of. And we were right!" He then glowered down at his brother. "Well, for one of us, anyway. The little cobarde here chickened out as soon as he saw the aftermath and ran home to mommy. He even had to be saved by a little girl to get there." Here he motioned to the unconscious Penny.

Rheeci wasn't quite sure how to process what she was hearing. She turned to Will to try to gauge some sort of reaction from him, but it was a dead end there. He was slumped over in depression, and it didn't appear as if it was going to be easy to shake him out of it. Penny was still unconscious, so she wasn't going to be able to help, either. They were in severe trouble, and she couldn't see a way out.

The sound of engine rumbling soon came up the in distance, as if signaling the trouble that was at hand. Talon gave a grin when he heard them. "It seems our ride is here."

Gadget was moving at a speed he had never even imagined possible before. He had to; if he didn't make it, M.A.D. would get ahold of Penny and her friends, and he didn't even want to consider what would happen from there. He just had to make it there in time. The alternative was too horrible to even consider.

As he zipped through the air, he was followed by the Gadgetinis as near as they could. Unfortunately for the duo, Penny had not outfitted them with the same sort of jet pack that her uncle had, so they were forced to attempt to keep pace with their copters, a feat far easier said than done.

The uncomfortable silence weighed heavily on the duo, who had no way of matching their superior's speed, even though they matched him in anxiety. "Fidget," Digit called over through the intercom, "do you have any idea where we're headed?"

"In a cavern/in a canyon-" Fidget started to sing.

"You know what, never mind telling me," Digit interrupted. "I forgot your vocal circuits were on the
fritz." He shook his head in irritation. "Just send the info from the transmission. To the Inspector, too. I'm not sure if he's paying attention to where he's going."

Fidget nodded and, without a word, sent the info to his brother and Gadget. The details appeared on a screen for the Inspector and right into Digit's line of sight. "Alright, we need to get the quarry." Digit gave a nod as he dismissed the info. "That's not too far. Come on!"

That sudden deliverance of information was never verbally noted by Gadget, but he responded to it all the same. Turning, he headed in the direction of the quarry, keeping watch ahead of himself in case any signs of trouble indicated themselves.

As they came to the quarry, one such sign showed itself. A small ship had risen from the quarry and was taking off away from the city. Upon spotting it, Gadget increased the power on the already strained jetpack to catch up.

In response to the inspector's sudden increase in speed, Fidget shot out an arm to catch him before he was too far away, and Digit followed suit by grabbing Fidget's hand. He succeeded, but the sudden jolt then caused the twins to lose control of their flight. The immense thrust forced them to put away their copters and cling on for dear life.

Gadget hardly seemed to notice as his team, as his mind was only focused on catching up to the ship and saving his niece. It was moving fast, but the raw determination allowed him to gain momentum. Inch by inch, he was catching up. In five minutes he could see the vehicle in great detail. In two more, he extended out his arm and caught the side. With a little struggle, he'd be able to pull himself into the vehicle to stop the kidnappers.

Before he could make this move, however, the back of the ship opened up. Talon was there, and he was gripping Rheeci by one arm. "Hey, Old timer," he said. With a swift movement, he tossed Rheeci out of the ship and sent her plummeting to the ground below.

Without any other choice, Gadget released the vehicle and shot down to catch her. It was easy to do, and within a matter of seconds, he had caught her and lowered her to the ground. Unfortunately, that meant a rough landing for the Gadgetinis as well, one that left them rather in a daze. "Stay here," Gadget ordered the three before taking off to try to take up the chase again.

By then, the shuttle was far out of sight, but that fact didn't deter the inspector. He took to the skies once more, desperate to catch up before it was too late.

That was when trouble struck. With a sputtering sound, the jet pack started to give out. It had been pushed so much and so far that it couldn't take the strain of the chase any more. Giving a sputter, it died.

"Go-go Gadget Copter!" Gadget called out, not wanting to give up the chase. However, even with the helicopter attachment, the pursuit had become hopeless. The ship was already out of sight, taking the two children along with it.

Gadget, physically spent, psychologically dazed, and emotionally beaten, settled down on the side of the road once he realized he had no idea where he was going. The signal from Penny's watch and book ended in this area, and following the electrical pattern only took him to the remains of torn out circuitry. He had failed, and she was gone.

He sat there for a while in catatonic state, just fidgeting with the damaged circuits. After a while, Heather and Brain pulled up in the Gadgetmobile. They had picked up Rheeci and the Gadgetinis as well, and they were fully ready to help Gadget with whatever enemy they were dealing with.
They had not been expecting the display they saw in front of them. Heather recognized the display in a moment, and her heart sank. "Stay in here," she ordered the others before heading out herself.

She settled down next to Gadget as quietly as she could and touched his shoulder. "Gadget Boy? You alright?" she asked, and she was careful to keep her voice soft.

Gadget's face was blank as he answered. "I failed." The words were barely audible, but the pain carried in them were plain to hear. "They took her, and I couldn't stop them."

"I'll be alright," Heather said, trying to sound comforting. "We'll get her back. You'll see."

Gadget gave a nod, but he still just stared numbly ahead. After a moment, Heather helped him to his feet and guided him back to the car. It was clear this was going to take a while to deal with.

W.O.M.P. HQ

"This was a disaster," Quimby groaned as he entered his office. Inside were all the parents and guardians for the seven teens who had been involved. They had been waiting to hear what the chief had to say.

"Start with the bad news, Dad," Elle Washington suggested. "It'll soften things a bit."

Quimby sighed. "Well, for most of you, the worst is that no school is going to be willing to take the kids ever again. We tried to give an explanation, but it doesn't matter. None of the schools are willing to have anyone even remotely related to W.O.M.P. again."

There was an amount of outcry from almost all of the parents, with the exception of Gadget and Margarita Cortez, who both just sat without saying a word.

The chief, in the meanwhile, tried to get some form of order again. "There is a bit of good news. Neither Riverside or the public-school systems will be pushing a lawsuit against the kids, since it was their interference that saved everything. That's more than Teen Scene magazine is getting, considering it was their fault the information got leaked in the first place."

"At least there is some amount of justice," Alyssa Tran commented, crossing her arms.

Quimby couldn't resist giving a small smile. "They'll be losing a lot of money over that."

His face then became serious once more. "We have a few ideas about how to amend the children's situations, but we'll have to discuss that now. Now, I'd like to be able to speak with Mrs. Cortes-Scolex and Detective Brown alone."

The other families nodded and got up to leave, though before they left, Matthew and Alyssa Tran went up to Gadget.

"We just wanted to thank you for saving our daughter's life," Matthew stated. "If it hadn't been for you, we would have lost her."

"If you need anything," Alyssa added, "just ask."

"Alright," Gadget responded, and he tried to smile, though it was a half-hearted expression.

Once everyone else had gone, Quimby turned to the two remaining parents. "Now, as to Penelope and William..."
"You'll be able to find them, right?" Margarita asked.

"We'll do everything that we can," Quimby replied.

Gadget nodded. "Of course, we will. I know I'll be on this case the moment I leave here."

"About that, John-" Quimby started, but he was cut off.

"I'll head out to start the investigation right away," Gadget continued. "They won't be able to slip get away again."

"John, I-" the chief tried again, though he was brushed off once more.

"I'll make sure I find them," Gadget vowed, "and when I-"

Quimby now was short on patience. "Detective Brown, will you kindly shut up!?"

Gadget froze the moment that was uttered. Both he and Margarita stared at the chief, somewhat shocked by the outburst.

"Hm, yes, now," Quimby said, trying to take a hold of the situation. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. You're not being set on this case."

"I'm not?" The look on Gadget's face was akin to that of a kicked puppy.

Quimby shook his head, trying to mitigate himself of the guilt for what he had to say. "No, you're not. It's been decided that it would be best to assign another agent."

"Another agent?" Gadget gaped in shock. "But, chief, Penny needs me!"

"Penny being in this is exactly why you can't be the one to take this mission." Quimby's mind raced to find a delicate way to broach this subject. "It makes you too close to it, too emotional. It would best if the agent who was tied to this was not as tied to the victims as you are."

"But I can't just sit back!" Gadget exclaimed.

"Please, isn't there anything he can do?" Margarita piped in.

Quimby sighed. He realized telling two terrified parents that the best officer was not going to be able to search for their children would be hard. "I'm sorry, no. John, you're just too close to the case."

Despite the comment being directed to Gadget, it was Margarita who responded. "He's your best detective," she argued, rising from her seat as she did so. Her voice steadily rose in tone as she spoke. "You can't leave him off! The children's lives depend on it!"

"Mrs. Scolex-Cortes," Quimby said, raising his hands to try to calm the panicking mother. "I understand you are afraid for your son, especially after what happened with Talon. However, I can't-"

"I won't lose my William to Claw! I can't sit back and let that dog hurt my son again!" The tone in her voice was wild as she uttered this statement, and tears were streaming down her face. "We have to get them away from him now!"

There was a moment's pause as the two men turned and looked at the near-hysterical woman. Finally, Gadget turned and placed a hand on Margarita's shoulder. He didn't say anything, and he didn't need to. At that moment, the anxiety and concern of two parents with lost children was enough
to establish a connection. She sat back down, and there was a look of despair in her eyes. "I lost my husband and one of my sons to that monster already. My mother is injured and may die because of his orders. Please, I don't want to think of what he is doing to my poor William."

"We're doing everything we can, I assure you," Quimby stated. Internally, he marked down that she had used the term "again" to describe what was happening to her son, but he decided now was not a good time to probe the issue. "John Brown cannot take this mission, but the agent selected is one of the best we have. Rest assured, the kids' case is in good hands."

The good intentions of the assurance were received and appreciated, but in the mind of those parents, it was too little, too late. Their children were gone, and likely hurt, and there was nothing they could do about it.

"I'm sorry," Margarita said, and she got up weakly from her chair. "I need to go now if I'm going to catch the bus home…"

"Here, I'll drive you," Gadget offered.

She, however, smiled and shook her head. She had heard too much of the Good Inspector's driving skills to accept the offer. "Thank you, but I'm fine. I have some credits soon that will expire if I don't use them."

"Oh, well, we don't want that." He got up and opened the door as she pulled her coat on. "Good evening, Ma'am," he said, politely tipping his cap to her as she left.

She patted his arm. "Thank you, Inspector."

Gadget turned to leave once she had gone, but he was stopped by a ringing in his hand. Looking up, he turned to the chief. "I'm right here, sir, you don't need to call me."

"It's not me," Quimby replied with a shrug.

Confused as to what was going on, Gadget activated the phone in his hand to see what was happening. "Hello?"

On the other end of the line, the Gadgetinis were trying desperately to contact him. "Inspector, something happened at the house!" Digit exclaimed in a panicked voice.

"What?" Gadget sprang to the alert when he heard the comment. "Officer, calm down. What happened?"

"We didn't start the fire!" Fidget sang out. "It was always burning/since the-!"

"We don't have time right now!" Digit snapped before cutting in. "Inspector, it's the house! It's burned down, and parts on it imploded!"

"There was an explosion?" Gadget asked, and he picked up speed to find out just what was going on.

"Not explosion, implosion!" Digit answered. "Just come, quick!"

"I'm on my way," Gadget called out. As he rushed out, a sense of dread filled him, and he braced himself for the worst.

The bracing was a very good choice, as when he arrived, it became clear that the worst had occurred.
The fire department had already come and put out the flames, but the damage had been done. The back yard and what little of the house was left standing was left in charred ruins. The major portions of the house, however, had been pulled down, as if crushed under some immense weight. The place was completely destroyed, and nothing that was inside it was recovered.

"What happened here!" Gadget exclaimed. He had been forced to leave the Gadgetmobile behind a police barricade, so he was forced to move his way through the crowd by elongating his legs.

"Inspector, there you are," the police chief, a man named Philip Cameron, stated. "We got the call earlier in the afternoon. A blaze started up in the backyard, and while the firemen were attempting to put that out, the main house just…collapsed!"

Gadget could only stair slack jawed at the ruins of his home. The world faded out of focus for him, and he was only partially aware when Brain and the Gadgetinis approached him. Only one thought was playing over and over in his head. In one day, his happy world had evaporated.

Friday, September 5, 2087
M.A.D. Castle, ?

Penny sat in her room, befuddled by the way she was being treated. Since she had been drugged, she had not been aware when she was abducted. However, she knew either captivity or death would be her fate when she passed out, so she fully expected to wake up in some dungeon somewhere.

She had not expected to wake up in a rather lavish bedroom. True, the door was locked and the windows had been barred shut, so she was far from free, but the very layout of the room seemed more for an honored guest than a captive. There was a bed, a dresser with a computer (albeit one without an internet connection), a television set, a closet with an amount of clothes, and a bathroom. She couldn't even find a security camera anywhere when she searched with DElPHI, so why she was being treated this way escaped her.

Eventually, several M.A.D. scientists approached her, and she assumed she had been taken to be an experiment, which made more sense. However, she was not harmed, and instead had her standing wheelchair returned to her. This only caused her to become more and more confused.

What made her more anxious was the fact that she had not seen anyone she knew during her whole captivity. She had expected that she'd be separated from Will and Rheeci, so their disappearance, while concerning, was not unexpected. However, she had expected Talon to show up at least once, so his marked lack of interest did not seem typical. Penny worried it meant something worse was on the horizon.

It was the third day of her captivity when a change finally happened. A guard had come to the door without announcement. "Claw wants to see you." The statement didn't hold mockery or threat in it. It was just a statement.

Penny followed but kept her eyes open for a chance of escape. There had to be a chink in the fortress, something she could utilize to make it to freedom. She'd need to find out where Will and Rheeci were first, of course, but once she found them, they'd need a way out.

She was brought to a dining chamber, where a table of food had been laid out. Claw was sitting at the head of the table, and when Penny was brought in, he turned his gaze to her. "Ms. Dollar, welcome," he said, his voice betraying no emotion. "I trust the accommodations are to your liking?"
The sight of the M.A.D. boss filled her with disgust and fear, but she struggled not to show it. "So, you're trying to interrogate me at some sort of dinner feast?" Penny raised an eyebrow at him. "I didn't know you were so clichéd."

"Some clichés are so for a reason." Claw spoke as if this were a casual meeting between friends, which made everything all the more unnerving for Penny. "Come, eat. I assure you, nothing is poisoned."

Deciding not to risk any harm, Penny stayed where she was. "Were is Will and Rheeci?" she insisted.

"Ms. Tran was of no use to us, so she was released." Claw took a drink of wine before continuing. "Billy will be here with us in a short while, do not worry yourself there."

The way he said this caused Penny to fear more for her friends' safety, not less, but she held that emotion back. She couldn't risk enraging the tyrant.

Strangely, it didn't seem as if Claw was going to get angry. He just kept casually eating and talking. "I am sure you are wondering why you are being kept here."

"I can't say the question hasn't crossed my mind." She moved over, trying to pretend to be more comfortable than she was.

"The answer is fairly simple," he replied. "You are insurance. Your uncle will not take any risks if there is a threat to his beloved niece. I will hold onto you until the time you can be used against him."

"But then there is the issue of your own track record." Claw paused and took a few more bites before continuing. "When you were younger, I never took notice of how much of an aid to your uncle you actually were. I dismissed you because I could not imagine a child being of such use. That was my mistake, but it is now amended, and with Talon's help, I have found a way to turn that pattern to my advantage."

Penny bit her lip as she thought back on the atrocities committed by the young cyber. Still, she was determined to not allow any emotion to shine through and give her captor satisfaction. "So that's why you had me brought here? So you could brag about your business strategy?"

Claw laughed. "You are one to get right to the point, aren't you?"

"I don't like wasting time." Her frown deepened. "Now, what exactly do you want from me, as in, right now? Why am I in this dining room?"

"Very well." Claw picked up a crystal goblet, admiring the wine inside. "I wanted to let you know that I plan to keep you busy while you are captive here. Idle hands do many unwise things."

A flare of angry rushed to Penny's cheeks. "If you think I'm going to work for you, then you-!"

"Oh, Miss Dollar, no." Claw raised a hand, cutting her tirade off. "I am well aware you would not willingly work for M.A.D. Even if you did, somehow, agree to manufacture devices for my men, I would never be able to trust that you didn't sabotage them in some way. No, I have another project, and one you will be quite willing to work on. It holds quite a bit of incentive for you to stay."

Here he paused and turned to a M.A.D. agent who had been standing by the door during the dinner. "Go get Billy and bring him here. I'm sure he's eager to be reunited with Penelope." The agent smirked and hurried out to do his master's bidding.
Penny was concerned about the tone Claw had used, but she was far from ready for what she saw. Will was soon wheeled into the room in a wheelchair by a doctor she vaguely recognized, and what a state he was in! He was utterly mangled! His head and torso were wrapped in bandages, arranged so that one eye and the entirety of his chest were covered. What's more, he had one arm and both legs missing, and the stumps were bandage wrapped.

Horror filled Penny, and she rushed to his side the moment she saw him. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no! Will! Will!"

Will's uncovered eye flickered open. His expression was confused and clouded, as if he was coming out of a drugged state. "Penny? Whe-?" He winced when he attempted to move and fell back in the wheelchair. It was then that he looked down at himself. "What? What's happening to me?!"

"Two legs, one arm, one eye." Claw never even bothered to look at the teens as he spoke. "Those are what you will be allowed to work on. You will be given the supplies, and when each component is completed, Dr. Kramer will attach them to Billy. I suppose that will keep you sufficiently busy."

"You monster!" In an instant, a flash of white hot anger ignited in Penny. Spinning around, she grabbed a platter off the table and flung it at Claw. The throw was clumsy but impressive, considering it was almost half as long as she was tall.

Still, Claw seemed to have expected the throw, as he casually raised a hand and blocked the projectile. "Miss Dollar, you don't live in and get as successful in such a career as this without embracing the title of monster."

"You…! You…!" Penny could hardly speak for the horror she was experiencing.

"There is one other thing," Claw added, ignoring her enraged expression. "There was one other adjustment done. I'm afraid Billy doesn't have a heart now."

Both teens gaped in horror. Will, in an instant, scrambled with his remaining hand to try to find a heartbeat, and Penny did the same to find a pulse. They felt nothing.

Claw gave a laugh at their distress. "If you're wondering how he'd still alive, it's simple. A pump has been established in its place. No pulse, as it's constantly running, but it'll do the job. On one condition. It requires the signal of two chips to stay functioning." He raised a hand. "The first was installed somewhere in the castle. The other, Miss Dollar, is in your wheelchair. He must be within a mile's range of both chips for his new heart to function. Should you leave without him, or should you escape with him, the results will be the same."

Tears of rage were now streaming down Penny's face. She could say nothing else for the fire burning in her heart. She did the only thing she could do, which was put her hand on Will's shoulder in an attempt to comfort him.

"Take them back to their rooms. This meeting has served its purpose." His command made, Claw casually began eating again, as if nothing had happened.

As they left, Penny turned once more and glared at Claw. If he had been dealing with a pest before, once she was out of here, he'd learn what it was to have your empire utterly destroyed.

That was when she glanced over at Will, who was staring down at his lap with a look of shame. She'd play along with Claw's plan, at least for Will's sake. Once she found a way to set them free, however, the fire locked within her would be unleashed.

To be continued…
Assignment 14.1: The Happiest Place on Earth

The Happiest Place on Earth

Saturday, September 13th, 2087

Herb Malory World, Orlando, Florida

United States of America

It was a seemingly peaceful evening when Herb Malory World opened up its newest attraction. Emblazoned with lights, the amusement park had signs everywhere advertising the newly opened Tomorrow World 3055. Futuristic buildings covered the Florida landscape, whisking the occupants away into a marvelous vision of tomorrow. State of the art animatronics designed to look like aliens roamed the streets, manned the stores, and ran the attractions, giving an air of magnificent amazement and wonder to everything around them.

Most of the rides were family friendly, as this was a park meant for families, but that hadn't kept one attraction for older audiences from creeping in. Close Encounters of the Third Degree, a dark thrill ride housed in a dingy looking conference building, was a clear odd man out among the gleaming, idealistic structures of the area. It had a foreboding air about it, with images of ancient pagan gods glaring down in mockery at the men who formed the pillars below. What's more, warnings about the terrifying nature of the ride were plastered everywhere in an attempt to keep families with smaller children from entering. All put together, it gave the ride a particular ominous feeling to it.

That feeling, unfortunately, was not enough to keep families from coming on along with the targeted teenagers. More than one set of under-fives were brought on (to the dismay of the workers), no doubt to be forever scarred by the sight to play out in front of them.

The plot of Close Encounters was simple enough. The riders would come on as guests at a science convention for the intergalactic company Sir-PLUS, which will have come to Earth to advertise their new wormhole maker. The aliens, who pretty much resembled your traditional "grey, bigheaded aliens" except with antennae, would start up the portal with the intention of opening a gateway to their home world. Instead, a savage jungle planet would cross into the wormhole, and a vicious bug-like alien monster would come through. The aliens would run, but the monster would grab one of them, drag him behind a curtain, and gruesome screams and growls would play, implying the alien worker's messy fate.

In the maiden voyage of the ride, everything was going well, with only one primary problem. A number of parents had brought their small children into the ride, and as soon as the monster appeared, with the long, segmented body of a centipede, the face of a spiders, and a set of wasp wings on each body segment, the tears began to flow.

All of a sudden, the "monster," really an animatronic designed for the ride, turned, as if noticing the distress among the crowd. "No, wait, it's just a show!" he exclaimed all of a sudden. "I didn't eat him, really! See!" He turned and pulled back the curtain, revealing the unharmed and now rather annoyed looking alien robot.

"Buzz, you're supposed to stay in character!" the little grey alien scolded.

"But they got scared, Lloyd," the bigger bot, Buzz, replied.

"That's the point!" Lloyd raised his arms in exasperation. "This is a horror ride!"
Buzz paused for a moment. "Oh."

There had been a brief interval where most everyone (except the still wailing tots) had just frozen in surprise at the detour. However, the sudden realization that this was real, and not just a part of the show, came and all went to chaos.

Guests hurried up and out of the ride theaters as soon as the employees raised the restraints. There was a massive crash as people pushed and shoved their way out, trying to avoid the talking robots. With in a few moments, everyone human had pushed their way out of the theater.

Once everyone was gone, Buzz stared forlornly at the empty theater. "Was it something I said?"

Monday, September 15th, 2087

Blue Roof Hotel, Metro City

Gadget was sleeping at the hotel room's desk again. This came as a surprise to no one, as ever since the tragedy that had struck the little family, he had almost no use for a bed. Even though he was not on the case to search for Penny and Will, that didn't stop him from staying up at night, searching through news sources and social media for any sign of the missing teens. This was a formidable task, made even more difficult by the house hunting he was doing during the daylight hours, so every night around 1:30 am, he'd drift off to sleep against his best efforts.

Brain and the Gadgetinis soon became used to this pattern and had ceased to try to stop him. What they did do was make sure that when he got to sleep so late, they'd make sure he slept at least until eight and had some of the hotel's complimentary breakfast at hand.

As this tradition had been going on since the kidnapping, everyone had their places. Fidget was busy getting their few remaining possessions in order for the day while Digit handled the house hunting info. Brain, with little else to do at the moment, stretched out on the bed, which had pretty much become his domain due to the Inspector's lack of interest.

None of them were ready when a knock came at the door. "I got it!" Fidget sprang up from where he had been sitting and folding clothes.

He opened the door to see a young man carrying a blue ball in one hand. "Yeah, this thing came in, and I think its for Inspector Gadget." He tossed the ball o Fidget. "You have a good day."

"Thanks!" Fidget called out. He clicked the button on the ball, and in a moment, a screen opened up. "Good morning chief. Got a mission for the Inspector?"

"Officer Fidget, good to see you answered." The chief cleared his throat. "Actually, the mission I have today is for you and your brother."

Hearing the last part of the conversation, Digit perked up and hurried over. "There's a mission? For us? On our own?" He beamed in delight. "You can count on us, Chief!"

"Actually, it's not entirely on your own," the chief stated, "but I'll get to that in a moment. Have either of you heard of Herb Malory World?"

"The amusement park resort?" Fidget asked. "Yeah, we heard of it. Miss Penny said the Inspector took her there when she was little."
There was a moment of awkward silence before the chief continued. "Yes, I supposed that might have been the case. All the better that Inspector Gadget isn't on this mission."

"So, what's happening at Malory World?" Digit asked, eager to moving things back to the important matter at hand.

Quimby nodded, pleased to have a segway back to less awkward topics. "You two are well aware the appearance of self-aware robots like yourselves. It's happening in strange spurts, all over the globe, and no one can seem to get a grasp on why it's happening."

Digit frowned. "Let me guess. One of the animatronics there came to life and the bigwigs there think we'll be able to figure out why it happened, just because we're robots." He crossed his arms and sighed. "Figures."

The chief laughed. "Close. It wasn't just one of the animatronics, but every animatronic in the new Tomorrow World 3055 area. Rides, shopkeepers, entertainers, it doesn't matter. They've all become self-aware, and the owners of Malory World want to find out why it's happening."

"You might as well ask why humans are self-aware, for all the good we'll do," Fidget stated. "Philosophers and theologians have been discussing that for ages; I doubt two robots will answer the question right away."

"True, but the heads of both Malory World and W.O.M.P. want it investigated anyway." Quimby cleared his throat before going on. "Oh, and one other thing. It won't be just you two who will be investigating."

"But I thought you said the Inspector wasn't on this mission." Fidget tilted his head. "Who else would tag along? Agent Connelly?"

"No, Agent Connelly will be staying back here to make sure Detective Brown doesn't drive himself mad investigating a case that's not his." Quimby laughed and shook his head. "Good luck to her on that. No, you'll be accompanied by Agent Hymie. He's been specifically chosen to handle this mission, along with the two of you. HQ believes that this would be a good mission to see how having three mech agents handle on their own."

"Don't worry about it, Chief," Fidget stated, throwing a salute. "You can count on us!"

Quimby gave a nod. "I know. Just meet Agent Hymie at the W.O.M.P. airfield, and the rest of your mission will be given to you there."

"We'll be right over." Digit was careful to close the screen first as he shut off the communicator ball.

The communication now done, Fidget turned to his brother and grinned. "Can you believe it? We've got our own mission where we're not being supervised!"

"You are?" Gadget's voice came from behind the twins.

In an instant they spun around. "Inspector! You're up!"

"We were just...uh...talking about..."

"There's nothing we've got to...uh..."

Before the twins could continue their stumbling explanations, Gadget raised his hands. "I heard everything, and I understand." He gave a smile. "So, first mission on your own, huh? That's a big
"Well, not entirely on our own," Fidget pointed out. He still hoped Gadget wasn't feeling hurt about being left out. "Agent Hymie will be one it, too."

"Agent Hymie's taking a mission? Good for him." Gadget turned and started to dig into some of the food that had been left out for him. "It'll be good that you two will have the opportunity to help him learn how to work in the modern world."

"We'll do our best, Inspector," Fidget replied. "Are you sure you'll be alright?"

Gadget paused for a moment with a bagel halfway to his mouth, and a somber look crossed his face. However, it was gone in a second. "Oh, don't you worry about me, Officers. I'll do just fine."

Metro City Airfield, fifteen minutes outside the city

It felt odd for the Gadgetinis to be coming into the airfield by themselves. Gadget and Heather had dropped them off before heading off to go house hunting, so they were on their own to figure out where they needed to go to start off their mission.

"So, we need to go to landing port C," Digit commented. He crossed his arms as he looked around. "Where are you?"

"C?" Fidget asked. "Are you sure it was landing port C? I could have sworn it was D."

"It's not D, why would it be D?" Digit frowned at his twin. "I'm certain it was C."

"Alright, if you're so sure," Fidget conceded.

They wandered around for a few moments to find landing port C, and found that it was filled with barnyard animals. Horses, cows, ducks, chickens, and sheep in cages and trailers as far as they eye could see. Spying the cargo, Fidget couldn't help but give a small grin. "Certain it was C?"

Digit scowled at his brother. "Not one word."

"Officer Fidget, Officer Digit, good to see you arrived." The twins turned around in time to see Hymie approaching them. "I was on my way to landing port D when I noticed you were here. Did they move the landing pad?"

"No, we just got a little lost." Fidget casted another glance at his brother before continuing. "We're headed there, too. I assume the Chief updated you on the mission?"

Hymie nodded. "Indeed. It appears to be one of the largest collections of self-aware robotics in the world as of yet. This will be quite an important meeting."

"Incredibly." Digit's walk gained a bit of a strut as he moved along. "They'd need only the best to work in this case."

"I thought it was because we're the only mechs that work for W.O.M.P.," Fidget stated.

Digit gave a snort. "No, Data and Scooter work for W.O.M.P. as well."

"True, but they'd need to be flown out from London," Fidget stated.
"And there's Marvin," Digit added.

Fidget shuddered. "I don't want to think of Marvin on a diplomatic mission. It would probably end in a declaration of war."

"At least from his end, anyway." Digit rolled his eyes.

Through this conversation, Hymie had been listening wordlessly. At the mention of the other mechs, he cocked his head. "Who are Data, Scooter, and Marvin?"

"Oh, that's right, you haven't met them." Fidget slapped his forehead in self-scolding.

"Data and Scooter are our…cousins, of sorts," Digit explained. "They're Gadgetinis, too, though Miss Penny didn't make them directly. They work with the British W.O.M.P. Inspector Prince. As for Marvin, well, let's just say you don't want to meet him."

"He works for the C.I.A. unit, but he doesn't like anyone." Fidget shuddered at the memory of their first meeting. "Let's just say he doesn't take to kindly to humans or anyone who works well with humans."

"But, as I said before, we're the best and most experienced." Digit's confidence soon returned. "That's why they're sending us out."

They soon arrived at the air field, where they met up with their pilot. He was a thin man in a letterman jacket that had the name "Gary" embroidered on the front. Spotting him standing near the plane, Fidget hurried over to meet with him. "Good morning, you must be our pilot. We're the W.O.M.P. agents who are heading out to Orlando. Pleased to meet you, Gary."

The man looked at him for a moment, before ignoring him completely. "Plane's there," he stated, turning instead to Hymie. "Just get in and we'll be headed out." Without another word, he turned to the plane.

Digit gave a huff. "Well, that was rude."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about it." Fidget gave an awkward grin before making his way over to the plane. "I'm sure he was just in a hurry to get going."

"Why did he talk to me instead of you then?" Hymie asked as he followed the twins into the plane. "You were the one to address him and it would seem to me to be more efficient to talk to the one who had addressed him."

"My guess?" Digit frowned but simply took his place on the plane. "It's because you're the one who can pass the most as human. He didn't want to talk to bots who look like bots."

"But that doesn't make any sense." Hymie looked a bit confused. "I am as much a robot as you are. The skin is a synthetic construct."

"I'm afraid I have to agree with Digit on this." Fidget gave a bittersweet smile. "Some humans aren't ready to share the Earth with living robots."

"They can hardly share it with themselves," Digit muttered quietly.

Fidget placed a hand on his brother's shoulder and gave a weak smile. "Well," he said, eager to change the subject. "I'm going to get a little shuteye. I always get airsick on long plane rides."
Hymie looked over at Fidget with no small amount of confusion. "How can you get airsick? Robots do
not have stomachs."

"That's what I've been trying to tell him!" Digit exclaimed.

El Sueño Imposible, Metro City

"So," Heather stated as she and Gadget sat in one of the restaurant's booths, "what have you found.
Anything interest you?"

"Well, I have found out quite a bit." Two arms extended out of his hat, one spreading out a map of
the world and the other with a marker. "If we just calculate the direction that the jet took off in, then
we may have a way to track down the exact location that--"

"Gadget, that's not what I meant." Heather placed a hand on the hand with a marker, stopping it from
finishing its task.

"Oh, right, the house hunting." Gadget replaced the map with an almost machine-like movement.
"Nothing's caught me. Everything's either too expensive or doesn't want us there."

Heather bit her lip. It hadn't been a surprise that after the disaster that had occurred at the previous
Dollar-Brown residence that no one wanted to risk a repeat happening in their neighborhood. Thus,
while no one had openly told him he wasn't welcome, the signs had been plain enough. The few
places who were so star-struck by having such as known name tied to them also tended to be either
ridiculously run down or far too expensive for a W.O.M.P. detective to afford.

"Maybe you should consider coming into the city." Heather suggested. "After all, you'll be closer to
HQ, and there'll be more opportunities open if you look at apartments as well."

"Apartments really aren't on the table right now." Gadget leaned back. "I haven't found a single
apartment that'll take Brain. Besides, he wouldn't be happy in a cramped apartment, and things
would be really tight between me, him, the Gadgetinis, and Penny, once we find her."

Heather sighed. "Come on, there's bound to be some place that you're willing to look."

"Hmmm." An arm popped out of Gadget's hat, and he stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Well, now that
you mention it, there is that one Oakwood Grove area we haven't seen yet. Perhaps there's something
there."

The moment an opportunity arose, Heather brightened up. "Great! We can run there after lunch. If
you'll excuse me for a moment, I'm just going to the restroom. I'll be right back."

While she was gone, Gadget sat back. He was going over areas where Claw might have hidden the
kidnapped teenagers, so he hadn't noticed when the woman came up to him. "Inspector Gadget?"

Gadget looked up when he heard the person talking to me. "Oh, Mrs. Cortes-Scolex! Imagine
meeting you here!"

Margarita smiled and sat down. "I've taken some leave from the clinic, so I can handle things here
while Mama recovers in the hospital." Her face grew grave, and as she spoke the next words, her
voice grew quiet. "I did not mean to eavesdrop, but did I hear correctly when you said you think you
might know where the children are?"

Gadget gave a quick nod. He glanced around to make sure Heather was not coming back, and when
he was confident she was not, the arm with the map slid out again. "I cannot say for certain but judging by the speed and trajectory they were going, along with the more likely areas of hiding, that they've been taken to some hideout in Eurasia." He frowned at the map once the lines were drawn up. "I know that's kind of a wide area to go by, so it doesn't help all that much. I'm sorry I can't tell you more."

She gave another smile and took his hand. "I understand," she said. Tears were welling in her eyes, but she took a deep breath to calm herself. "I can't help but worry for Guillermo, but it is good to know that he is being searched for. I just ask that you keep me in the know."

Gadget gave her hand a comforting squeeze. "Don't worry. We'll find William, and Penny. The monsters who took them won't know what hit them."

In that moment, Gadget heard a shuffling. Looking up, he soon caught a glimpse of Heather, who was coming towards them. "She's coming back. Don't worry; if I find anything else, you'll be the first to know."

"Thank you, Inspector. I know you'll find them." She then got back up to head back to the greeter's stand. Before she left, however, she handed him a slip of paper. "Here's the bill. Just in case she wonders why I was over here. I know you're not officially supposed to be looking for them."

"And I'm not." Gadget's give a crooked grin. "No one said anything about unofficially."

Margarita gave a laugh, the first real one she'd had since the kidnapping. "True."

In a moment, Heather was back at the booth. "We'd better head out. Oakwood Grove is about a half-hour away. Is that the check?"

Gadget gave a nod. "Yes indeed. We can get this paid first thing and then head out. No use in wasting more time."

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Herb Malory World, Enchanted Kingdom park

Orlando, Florida, United States of America

"Here we are, Malory World!" Fidget practically beamed as their transport car dropped them off at the gate. "I've been wanting to come here practically my whole life!"

"Which was seven months." Digit rolled his eyes. "Remember, Fij, we're here for a mission, not to play tourist."

"Maybe, but that doesn't mean we can't take in the sights." Making his way through a stream of tourists, Fidget ran up to the topiary at the front gate with a camera sticking out of his hat. Once he made sure he had a clear shot, he snapped a picture.

As they made their way in, Digit couldn't help but feel uncomfortable as the hundreds of people that were only a fraction of the Enchanted Kingdom's daily attendees looked on at him and his brother with some interest and confusion. "I don't get it," he muttered to Hymie.

"Don't get it?" Hymie returned the look. "Don't get what?"

Digit answered as the trio approached the main gate and showed their badges as proof of their positions. "If there's some big event going on, one that is big enough to require the intervention of
"W.O.M.P. agents, then why are there so many guests here? Wouldn't they just get in the way?"

"Maybe it's not as bad as we supposed." Fidget shrugged. "Closing down a whole park would mean loss of revenue, workers who'd lose pay, plans that would become behind schedule…"

Digit gave a sharp buzz. "So they're money grubbers."

"Now, I didn't say that." Fidget crossed his arms and frowned at the comment.

"You might as well." Digit motioned around the park. "Things should have been cleared out. If they had any care for what goes on around their company, this place would be empty."

At that moment, there was a louder buzz as they were admitted into the park. When they made their way in, they were greeted by a short, rotund man in a business suit. "Ah, welcome, welcome. I'm Kelsey Rathbone, the current CEO. You must be the W.O.M.P. agents. I hope you didn't wait too long."

Hymie gave a dismissing wave. "No, we were just having a conversation about the company. It wasn't unpleasant at all."

"Only about good things, I hope," Rathbone replied, half in jest.

"Oh, Officer Digit was just saying how you're money grubbers." Hymie didn't notice Digit desperately motioning for him to stop talking, nor did he see the facepalm that came in quick succession.

Rathbone, however, seemed to take it as a joke. He laughed heartily and slapped Hymie on the back. "That's a good one. Wouldn't be the first time someone's mentioned that."

"We were also wondering why park attendance is still open when there was a W.O.M.P. level event going on." Fidget struggled to ask the question and keep up with the longer legged party members. "Is there any reason for that."

Rathbone did answer the question, though he kept his focus on Hymie. "Well, Agent Smart, there hasn't been any actual dangers just yet. Sure, a couple of people got shaken up when a few AAs turned out to be talking, but no one got hurt, so I saw no problem in keeping the park open, though not the Tomorrow World 3055 section."

They soon came up to the aforementioned section. Sure enough, the entrance was roped off, and it seemed to be a ghost town. Every store, theater, and restaurant's doors were flung wide open, and there was no one in any of the buildings. "They've all been gathered in the theater housing the 'Wonders of Space' show," Rathbone explained. "They thought it'd be easier to explain their half if they were all in one place."

"Makes it easier on us." Digit gave a shrug. "Lead on."

M.A.D. Castle, ?

"Careful, don't hurt him!" Penny ordered as Kramer attached the now finished cybernetic arm to Will. It had been decided the arm would be first, to provide him with some amount of autonomy, while the remaining prosthetics were constructed. She wasn't quite happy with the turn out, but at the very least, it was something.
Kramer cringed slightly under the girl's fierce stare. "It's almost finished. I just, uh, need a few other parts."

Penny's glare darkened. "I thought you had grabbed everything you needed."

"I thought I had, too," the doctor was quick to stumble out, "but the pieces that connect the neural wiring to his neural system won't match up to what's already in his system. I'll need to go back to the supply room to find the needed wiring systems."

She pursed her lips before speaking again. "Just...go."

He didn't wait to be told twice. Soon, Penny was alone with the anesthetized Will.

Now that they were alone, she let her anger turn to grief. "I'm so sorry." She slumped over his prone body. "This is all my fault. If I hadn't have dragged you into this, you'd still be safe."

"That's not true." Will's words were said hushed and weak. Penny almost didn't hear them. "I've been here before."

"What?" Penny's head shot up and she turned to him.

Will was awake, though only semi-lucid. His single eye was somewhat clouded, though was attempting to focus on her, despite the restraints holding his head down.

Penny moved closer to his face to make things easier. "You've been here before? I don't understand."

He stayed silent for a moment before speaking. "When I tell you this, please don't hate me."

She looked over him, and a mix of sorrow, guilt, affection, pity, and protectiveness washed over her. "I could never hate you."

The look in his eye stated he didn't believe that, though he found the reassurance comforting all the same. "When I was little, like nine or so, Talon and I were brought into M.A.D."

Penny froze. "What?"

Will sighed. "It was before Dad's death. We had been picked up after school by a man who said he knew our uncle. He claimed that after our parents wanted us to visit our uncle to give them some time to settle some affairs. We didn't know what that meant, but we believed him none the less. That was our first mistake."

"Mistake? Quite the contrary." Penny spun around when she heard the voice, and Will cringed back in his restraints. Sure enough, Talon had entered the room. He then gave a smirk. "The way I remember it, we both were excited to make the journey."

Instinctively, Penny moved to position herself between William and Talon. "Funny that it takes this long to finally get an audience with you," she stated with a sneer.

Talon gave a shrug. "Hey, I had a mission of my own to complete. It took some time, but here I am now."

"What do you want?" The question was direct and pointed. Penny did not mean to trade useless words.

"Only to make sure you get the true version of the story." He cast a Cheshire grin over at Will. "Gonna give her the sob story version, huh?"
Nearly as soon as Talon entered the room, Will just shut himself up. It was clear he was afraid, and in his state, he was in no condition for a physical confrontation. Still, he didn't want to seem like a coward in front of Penny, so he made an attempt to stand up for himself, even if he knew it was futile. "Please leave, Talon."

"Leave? But I just got here." He cast a wide grin. "Don't you want to tell her about the time we assisted in that rockslide that trapped her uncle in that cave?"

"Stop." Will's voice was weak and trembling, and his face had gone pale. "We didn't-

"Or how about that fire we helped to start at that museum?" Talon was taking a perverse amount of pleasure in his twin's discomfort. Or that-?

"Enough!" Penny's cry was sharp and loud enough to give both boys a jolt. She turned on Talon, a fire in her eyes. "He's already in enough pain as is! Just get out of here!"

Talon smirked at his brother. "Still hiding behind her skirts, huh? Well, if that's how it's going to be. Just don't try fooling her, or yourself. We're M.A.D. by blood. You're just as bad as I am."

Before he left, he turned to Penny. "This isn't over, Pretty Penny. We'll finish our talk later."

Once he was gone, Penny turned back to Will. "Hey, don't listen to him. I don't believe anything he said."

Her words, however, availed to nothing. Will had already fallen to a state of depression, and he looked about twenty years older. "You should. He's right."

"Will, he's just trying to get to you, to make you give in." She stroked his hair back. "Don't let him win."

"It is true." Will's voice was monotone, and his eye had gone dull. "I am like him. I'd tried not to be, but I'll never escape. It's in the blood."

Penny wanted to say something that would snap him out of this horrible state of mind, something that would bring him back around, but her mouth went dry. The incidents that Talon mentioned came back to her, and a determination to investigate those claims arose in her.

Still, she couldn't allow Will to slip away. It was her fault he'd lost his freedom and a high proportion of his body. She wouldn't let him lose his mind to these monsters, too.

"You're not ruled by fate." She kissed his forehead, hoping that somehow got through to him. "And you're not ruled by past. Only you decide who you are in the here and now."

He glanced up at her, and while he hadn't completely snapped out of the depression, it was clear her words had been a comfort. "I hope you're right."

"I know I am." She looked up as the door opened, announcing Kramer's return. She went back to her supervising position, but she was already planning for what she was going to do next.

To be continued…
When the duo came back to the office, Heather had a haggard looked that her partner did not match. It was blatantly obvious that the house hunting trip had not gone over well.

Gadget, on the other hand, seemed rather oblivious to his partner's frustration. "So that one area didn't work out, that doesn't matter." He gave a dismissive hand gesture. "Things will work out eventually."

"In the meantime," he continued, "there are other matters to attend to." He headed to his office door, pausing only when he realized that he was alone. "Are you coming, Agent Connelly?"

"You go on without me," Heather replied with a groan. She slumped down in one of the leather armchairs in the waiting lounge, knowing well it would be more comfortable than anything in Gadget's sparsely furnished office. "I'll be in after a short break."

Gadget gave a shrug before going in. "Suit yourself. Brain! Pull out your calculator, I'm going to need your help."

Heather perked her head up at the last phrase, wondering if it was worth seeing if that was really happening, before deciding against it and just leaning back in the armchair once more. It wasn't worth it.

The receptionist, Cheryl, looked up from her desk. "Long day?"

"Yep." Heather leaned a head in her hand, fighting back the feeling of a coming headache. "Kind of tired right now."

Cheryl laughed. "A day with Gadget'll do that to ya."

Heather glared for a moment but said nothing, considering that the reason for her exhaustion. As she felt herself drift off, she didn't notice the figure approaching her. Thus, she was startled into full wakefulness by a cheerful greeting. "Good afternoon, Agent Connelly. Just the lady I was looking for!"

Heather snapped completely awake and turned to see who it was that was speaking to her. "Mr. Gailson! Oh, hi! What can I do for you today?"

Sure enough, Rodger Gailson was standing by the chair. "I beg your pardon," he stated, "but I happened to hear that Inspector Gadget has currently found himself to be in need of a house."

Realizing that he was offering his help, Heather shot up. She needed all the help she could get. "Yeah, unfortunately." She gave a sigh. "His was destroyed by a M.A.D. agent, and everywhere we look is either too expensive or the neighbors…uh…well…"

"Do not wish to risk their own property in the event of a re-occurrence, correct?" Gailson suggested.

Heather smiled, glad that there was a nice way to put it. "Yeah."

Gailson nodded. "Well, I was hoping to have a word with Detective Brown. I have an offer for him, and one that may have come at a most opportune time. Would you mind showing me where his
"Of course. Just follow me." Heather pushed herself up and out of the chair before hurrying down to the end of the hallway.

When she came up to the door, she knocked lightly to let Gadget know she was coming before she opened the door. "Hey, Gadget Boy, we've got a guest."

"Oh, good, come in!" Gadget sounded more cheerful than he had been in weeks.

Heather wasn't sure what to make of the sudden attitude turn around, but she was happy that she wouldn't need to give any pep talks while Gailson was around. She pushed open the door and headed in.

Inside, it looked as if everything had just been cleaned. Gadget's hat was on the verge of closing after one or more arms had retracted back in, and Brain was in the midst of rolling up a map, which was then tucked into his collar through the use of a mechanical appendage. It had the air of a place where a lot of work had just recently been done, and also recently put away.

Gadget turned to them and smiled in greeting as soon as they came in. "Hello there, Mr. Gailson! To what do I owe the honor?"

"I have happened to hear of your recent housing troubles, detective," Gailson replied.

Gadget shook his head dismissively. "That? Oh, that was nothing too bad, just a bit of damage. Comes with the job description."

Gailson gave an approving nod. "I'm glad to hear things are going well for you, Detective Brown."

"Well, all except for Penny." Gadget glanced over at a picture of his niece that was stilling on the desktop. She was eight years old in the picture, and as Gadget gazed at it, a look of mingled sadness and determination came clear in his eyes. "But that won't be a problem for long. She'll be found."

"I have no doubt about that," Gailson replied, "but that leads into your other little problem."

"My other problem?" Gadget stared quizzically at the businessman. "What other problem?"

"The matter of your homelessness." Gailson gave a laugh. "Don't tell me you've forgotten about that."

"Oh, that." Gadget shrugged. "Not much to do about that right now. Heather and I are going house hunting, but things haven't been that successful."

Gailson nodded. "That's what I might have supposed. You see, I have an offer to give you." He pulled a small tablet out of his pocket and started it up. "My company has been working on a smart house for a while, one that is both elegant and functional. One of the highest primary concerns is that the house is safe, ready for any emergence, and is accessible to people with disabilities."

Gadget and Heather went over the picture of the smart house. Truth be told, it was really more of a mansion than a house, with a Victorian style design. The rooms were elegantly furnished, and there was even a pool in the back.

Gadget frowned. "It's very nice, but it appears to be a bit out of my price range."

"I thought you might say that." Gailson gave a nod. "That's why I intend to give you the house!"
That came as a shock to all parties present. "This has to be worth several million!" Heather exclaimed.

"Oh, it is," Gailson assured, "but that's only a drop in the bucket compared to the amount Penny helped me to save by setting up the computer security system for Gailson Incorporated. Not only did that system uproot the M.A.D. infiltration that had set root, it also revealed several unknown embezzlers. I owe your family quite a lot, and a won't take no for an answer."

He smiled as he continued. "Just to make sure this couldn't be considered bribery, I looked at the W.O.M.P. bylaws. As that system was Penny's personal development, and not W.O.M.P. tech, this would be a legal exchange of goods."

Gadget was torn. On the one hand, it was an ideal circumstance. It was near the city, but off on its own so as not to be a danger to any potential neighbors. There was a large area, so as to all everyone their own space. Most importantly, it was also wheelchair accessible, so when Penny was found, she would be able to maneuver around with ease. Still, it was rather opulent, and he wasn't sure how comfortable he felt living in a mansion. After a moment of thought, he came up with a response. "I hope this doesn't sound rude, but would you mind if we saw the place before making any final decisions?"

"Of course, wouldn't imagine it any other way." Gailson took back the device and started punching in numbers. "I can see you're busy now, so when would you like to arrange for a visit?"

"Now's fine." Gadget straightened the few tools around his office. "I was working on something more personal. Do you want to come, Brain?" The dog let out a wuff before padding over to join by his girl's uncle.

"Wonderful!" Gailson nodded and motioned for them to follow him.

Herb Malory World, Enchanted Kingdom park

Orlando, Florida, United States of America

The Tomorrow World 3055 section of the part was a sight to behold, even when it was empty. Here and there were signs of the previous Tomorrow World, but all around, the area was built like an exotic space port. Holograms of space ships whizzed by on screens above stores and attractions. Posters up on the buildings advertised meetings between humans and extraterrestrials, and every now and then a large model rocket at the entrance of the sections would "blast off," sending out a stream of dry ice fog along with a prerecorded takeoff roar.

The amazement of it was cut by the fact that the park was empty, save for the four travelers. "Wow, this place must be packed when it's open for business." Fidget found it impossible to keep his eye off the varying attraction. "This place is amazing!"

"It was meant to be the park's new crown jewel." Rathbone was clearly proud of the huge surroundings. "Designed the whole place myself!"

Digit gave a shrug. "It's okay."

"It is very well designed." Hymie gave a nod. "Combines aspects of the modern futuristic mind set, though I do see some designs inspired by 1950's zeerust."

"You have a good eye." Rathbone motioned to the pointed, Flash Gordon-type rockets coming off
one building. "That was a purposeful effort to avoid the Tomorrow World problem. If it's already a little bit outdated when you open it up, it's less likely to become massively outdated, or worse, real."

They soon came up to a massive theater located in the middle of the place. "Alright, this is the stadium. They all should be inside waiting for your arrival. I'll be in my office if you need help."

"We thank you for your assistance." Hymie turned to follow the Gagdetinis, who had already gone to enter the building.

The theater was massive, and more than accommodated the waiting area of the sapient robots. Still, most of the seats were filled up back mechs of every shape and size. Male, female, humanoid, animalistic, and downright alien mechs were sitting, standing, chatting, a few were even shouting. The largest of the mechs, which appeared to be modeled as a giant space bug, was standing anxiously at one side of the theater as a much smaller mech, which looked like a purple alien rabbit, was lecturing him on something.

As they entered, Digit approached a girl mech made to look like a grey skinned, pointy eared alien with pink hair and a bored expression. "Excuse me, miss. I'm Officer Digit, and these are my partners, Officer Fidget and Agent Hymie. We're from W.O.M.P." His badge popped out of his hat as proof. "We'll need to speak to the one in charge here."

"That would be Benvolio." The girl still sounded bored as she gave a response, and she pointed over at the purple alien rabbit bot. "He's the one who called us all here."

Digit tipped his hat. "Thank you for your cooperation, ma'am."

She rolled her eyes before leaning back in her seat. "Whatever."

Digit, however, hadn't heard the comment. Instead, he had hurried over to where the rabbit thing was still speaking with the giant bug bot. "Now, listen here, Buzz, my boy," the rabbit was saying. "You need to make sure you remember everything. We can't have scant detail for the officers now, wot!"

"I know, sir," the huge bot, Buzz, replied. "It's just...oh...I get so nervous about this sort of thing. What if they get scared and run away?"

The rabbit tapped his foot. "Now, why on this green Earth would an officer of the law become scared and run? It would look jolly bad on the old report!"

"They ran away last time." The bug looked downright bashful.

"That's because you broke character during a horror show!" The rabbit extended his arms out in a dramatic fashion. "You see, my boy, that's why you keep in character, no matter how many..."

"Excuse me." Digit, followed closely by Fidget and Hymie, approached the two. "Are you Benvolio?"

The rabbit gave an odd, old fashioned bow. "Indeed I am, sah. The name's Benvolio Withers-Thropp Devenworth the Third. This is my compatriot and star of the Close Encounters of the Third Degree ride, Buzz."

Buzz waved one of his forelimbs. "Hi."

"So, Buzz and Benvolio Withers-Thropp Devenworth the Third." Digit tilted his head as he looked down at the markings on the form. "That's kind of a long name for a mech who just came online."
Far from insulted, Benvolio gave Digit a grin and a wink. "That's a name for a thespian, my boy. Even before they knew were going to be coming online I was going to be the Master of Ceremonies for this great Wonders of the Universe show, wot wot! Now, when we came online, I realized that my other coworkers just didn't have such a grasp on the theatre, so of course I had to step in to make sure everyone knew what they were doing."

"So, now, I am afraid you have me at a disadvantage." Benvolio made a motion towards the newcomer. "You know our names, but we haven't the foggiest on who you are. Pray tell, who might we have the honor of addressing?"

"This is Officer Digit Gadgetini," Fidget stated as he came up to join them. "I'm Officer Fidget Gadgetini. This is our companion, Agent Hymie…um…"

"Smart," Hymie stated.

Fidget gave him a look before shrugging. "Sure. Hymie Smart. We're the W.O.M.P. agents sent in to discuss the little uh, incident that happened a while back."

Benvolio gave a grave nod. "Oh, yes, I know well about that matter. One of our actors breaking character mid-show. Bad form, wot. Isn't that right, Buzz?" He turned and cast a look at the huge bug bot.

Buzz looked down awkwardly. "A little girl started crying," he said bashfully. "I don't want to scare people."

"Buzz, you are the star of a horror show!" Benvolio twitched his ears in annoyance. "Scaring people is the purpose of your role!"

"Yeah, not that this isn't interesting," Digit cut in, "but can we actually get a report of what happened?"

"Oh, of course." Benvolio gave a solemn nod. "Buzz, give these chaps an explanation of what went down that night."

"Well, we were running through the show." Buzz twiddled two miniscule forearms as he explained. "It was one of the first times we were running the show for the public. It wasn't the first time over all, of course, we had rehearsals both before and after waking up, but it was one of the first shows people were in attendance for. There was this little girl in the front row of the stadium, and right in the middle of the scene, she started crying. That made me feel bad, so I stopped the show to let her know it was ok."

Hymie looked up from the pad he had been righting on. "Alright. What happened after that?"

"Well, Lloyd told me I should get back to the show, but everyone was screaming and running around by then." Buzz looked downright bashful, or at least as much as a giant robot space bug could. "I don't know what went wrong."

Hearing the story, Digit shook his head. "Sounds like an open and shut case to me. Why were we brought in?"

"That's where I pick up, sah," Benvolio put in. "Well, after Buzz here unintentionally revealed our true intellect to the outside world, can you imagine what that blighter Rathbone wanted to happen? We were to be sent back, and replicas sent in to take our places! Of all the rotten ideas, wot!"

"He did offer us other jobs, though," Buzz stated in a quiet voice.
This did not seem to pacify Benvolio. "In deed he did! Warehouse work, construction and
demolition, janitorial services. Indeed! A thespian of my caliber walking around the park and picking
up ice cream wrappers? I think not!"

"So you all went here and asked that we be sent in?" Fidget asked.

Benvolio nodded. "Indeed. Seemed the wisest course of action. After all, you're not only the first
mechs to come online, you're also living, functioning proof that mechs can hold positions just the
same as humans can. Lucky the lady who built you was a reasonable sort, wot."

"She was the greatest." A cloud of sadness crossed Digit's face.

Noticing his brother's mood, Fidget clapped his back. "Is the greatest. We'll find her soon."

"I say," Benvolio commented. "Did I strike a nerve there, chaps?"

"Nothing important, for now." Fidget pulled out a small device. "Now, on to the other questions…"

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Forest Lanes Harbor

45 minutes outside of Metro City

"This drive is beautiful." Heather looked out at the passing trees as she maneuvered the
Gadgetmobile through the forest road. "I didn't know there was a forest manor out here."

"It was an ancient thing, owned by the McGilmore family for generations, at least until Albert
McGilmore died without leaving an heir." Gailson motioned to the woods outside, where the bright
flash of a fox's tail could be seen retreating into the bushes. "It was a task figuring out how to
remodel the old place without disturbing the native wildlife, but I do think it was worth it. What do
you think, Inspector?"

Through the whole ride, Gadget had been uncharacteristically silent. He was invested in a tablet,
entering in information on it with both hands as a hand from his hat held it steady. Of course, he was
still trying to figure out where Penny had been taken and was having a rather difficult time of it.

When the conversation was directed to him, his head popped up. "What?"

"The forest, Gadget Boy," Heather explained. "Isn't it gorgeous."

Gadget glanced out the window before turning back to the tablet. "Yeah, nice."

Heather looked back at Gailson and gave a shrug. "Don't think take it to heart. He hasn't recovered
from what happened to Penny just yet."

"Of course." Gailson gave a sympathetic nod.

At that moment, Gadget's mind was working a mile a minute, trying to put the pieces together. He
now had an idea of where the teens had been taken, though a vague vicinity was not going to be
much of a help. He needed to find out the specific areas where a base might be feasible.

Of course, that was assuming Penny and Will were being held in a base and not just some M.A.D.
gulag somewhere. A base would require a lot of area and set up that some hole-in-the-wall prison
wouldn't, so it might be more accurate if they were tossed in some dungeon.
That was assuming they were holding the teens at all and hadn't pawned them off to some human trafficker somewhere. The very idea made Gadget's stomach churn and he didn't like thinking about it, but he couldn't wave that as a possibility unless there was proof positive evidence to the contrary.

Gadget paused and held his head. This all made his head hurt, his heart hurt, and his stomach hurt. He felt so helpless in all of it, like no matter what he didn't there was nothing he could do to remedy the situation. He wanted to help, but Andrea, Heather, and Penny were always the ones to think up what to do. Heather was under orders not to help him in this mission, and he wouldn't ask her to break those orders. After all, look where helping him had gotten Andrea and Penny...

He was shaken from his morose thoughts when the Gadgetmobile came to a stop. "We are here!" Gailson called out as he stepped out of the vehicle.

As Gadget left the car, he had to marvel at the new place. The photo had not done the size of the building justice. It was massive! At least three stories tall, with a tower jutting off at one side. There was both a shed and garage to the right of the house, and a walkway went up to the door, which Gadget noticed was slightly taller and wider than most doors.

Gailson grinned as he motioned to the house. "So, what do you think?"

"It certainly is…big." Truth be told, Gadget had no idea what to think. He certainly would have never thought about even investigating such a place before, none the less living in one. It was far too ornate for his taste, but he did not want to offend Gailson by refusing.

Gailson laughed at the response. "No one can say that McGilmore family didn't strive to leave an impression. Still, it was all the better for us, since it meant we had plenty of area to place in the security tech.

"Security tech?" Heather gazed around the area with an amount of confusion. "I don't see any security around here."

"Certainly you of all people would know that security tech isn't supposed to be seen." Gailson gave a smirk.

Gailson laughed at the response. "This is one where I own Penny a bit of inspiration. After that… disaster at the museum, we took the opportunity to design some security camera systems that would be harder to hack into."

"We, of course, use the anti-malware system that she designed," he went on, "but we thought we'd go further than that. Since the firewalls system regularly self-corrects and readjusts to provide better protection, we thought 'why can't our regular security systems do that, too?'"

"So that means…?" Heather asked as she glanced around her.

Gailson motioned all around. "We designed several hyper small security sensors all around. Some are in the trees, some are disguised as animals, but all of them are constantly on the patrol. They are programmed to recognize when someone is welcome and when someone is trespassing, and they will respond in turn."

While the humans were talking, Brain had started to get a patrol around the area. Admittedly, this was really a new experience for the dog. Sure, he had been in jungles and forests before, but he had become a city dog from the moment the Dollar-Brown clan had adopted him. Having this much
forest land as his own territory was a new idea, and one he liked quite a bit.

As he was sniffing around, he came upon a raccoon that wasn't a raccoon. It looked like a raccoon, and moved like a raccoon, but it didn't smell like one. It smelled like one of those damned robots.

"Ah, see, Brain's found one right here." The dog jumped back as Gailson snatched up the raccoon and showed it to the humans. He started talking on and on about robotics and other such things. Due to who his girl was, Brain knew about those sorts of things, but they didn't interest him all that much.

Something else caught his attention instead. Rabbits. There was a warren nearby, he could smell it.

He looked back at the humans. Heather was listening to Gailson's pitch with some amount of interest while Gadget had the same semi-glazed expression he always wore when he was interested but confused. Brain could easily run out for a hunt and get back before the humans were finished.

"Looks like Brain's liking it here." Heather motied to where the yellow tip of a tail was vanishing into the greenery.

"Makes sense." Gailson gave a shrug. "There are trees everywhere. Dogs tend to like that environment. It can't hurt if he goes off and does his business."

"So, Gadget," he then said, turning to this inspector. "What do you think?"

Gadget looked up. He still wasn't sure about the sheer size of the place, but there were a lot of details in its favor. It was wheelchair friendly, which meant that when Penny was found, it would make things easier for her to get around. Its security system also would mean they wouldn't need to be worried about a repeat of the last house, and it was a distance away from the city and any neighbors, which would protect the innocent if anyone did try to attack.

"I'm impressed," he said after a minute's thought, "but I still don't like taking it for free. It's so lavish..."

"Alright, then I have one final offer." Gailson held up a hand. "We've been looking for people to report back on the technology in our smart devices. Get an idea where the bugs are and how they can be worked out, how to improve on the existing features, etc., etc. How about you take the house, and in exchange, at the end of the month you send us a report on how everything is working. That way, you would be beta testing it for us."

Gadget looked up at the house. That did seem like a reasonable exchange. Tech did need to be tested. "Alright, you've convinced me." He shook Gailson's hand. "You've got yourself a deal."

Herb Malory World, Enchanted Kingdom park
Orlando, Florida, United States of America

"Alright, it appears we have all the information we need." Fidget slid his small recording device back into his head. "We'll go over what you've told us back in the Tampa H.Q., and we'll contact you all again to work out negotiations. Like I said before, it seems pretty open and shut."

"I do appreciate your help, chaps." Benvolio strode forward and shook each of the mechs' hands. "Here's to hoping we can actually get somewhere on robotics rights advocacy."

"Here's hoping." Digit gave a nod. "We'll have to see Rathbone again before we leave to let him
know what we're doing. Do any of you know where his office is?"

"Oh! I do! I do! Pick me!" The cry came from a hyperactive little robot girl shaped like some sort of cat creature. "I can take you there!"

"This is Chitti," Benvolio introduced. "She was meant to be a tour guide and advice bot. She knows this place like the back of her servo."

Fidget motioned for her to guide them out. "Alright, then, Chitti. Lead the way."

As they wandered through the park towards Rathbone's office, Chitti chattered on about park trivia. Fidget was fascinated by such a topic, and listened with wrapped interest as she went on and on about history, visitor demographics, and even infrastructure.

Hymie and Digit, who were not as interested in the conversation, lagged behind. As they moved along, Digit gave a sigh. "Well, that was easy."

"You sound disappointed by that." Hymie's voice held a slight tone of confusion. "Isn't it good for cases to be easy?"

"Yeah, I suppose." Digit still seemed frustrated. "I just wish there was something we could have done to prove out position! Something real, something meaningful!"

"This is meaningful," Hymie assured. "Why, we're assisting in the development of a new race: ours. Even if it's not the most exciting of jobs, it'll still help future generations of mechs yet to come."

"I guess you're right." Digit gave a sigh. "I guess it's just nice for you to have other robots around."

Hymie nodded eagerly. "Yes, it is nice to have other robots who I can really talk with. I mean, I wasn't alone at C.O.N.T.R.O.L., but most of the humans who weren't the Smarts weren't really interested in talking, and the appliances weren't quite at the level where they could respond, though they were great listeners." He gave a smile. "We've hit a new age-what is it that W.O.M.P.'s calling it?"

"The second Cambrian." Digit gave a bittersweet smile as he recalled the term. "Miss Penny came up with it. It's in reference to the Cambrian Explosion, when all sorts of organic life started appearing out of nowhere."

"And now mechanical life has started appearing." Hymie leaned back. "I have to wonder how long this is going to last."

"Well, the Cambrian Explosion lasted 20 to 25 million years," Digit commented. He gave a laugh. "I doubt things will last that long, but it's still an interesting thought."

They soon came up to a set of stairs leading down into the pavement. "Mr. Rathbone's office is down this way." Chitti motioned down the stairs and flashed a grin. "Have a wonderful day!"

"And you too," Fidget said, taking her hand and giving a slight bow. Afterwards, the trio headed down into the tunnel.

As they walked, Digit gave Fidget a half-grin. "So, you like her, huh?"

Figit's screen-face gained a slight orange tint to it, his equivalent of a blush. "What do you mean?"

"I saw the way you were listening to her, the way you kept up, that bow you made at the end." The
smug look on Digit's face only intensified. "You've got a crush."

Fidget's blush intensified. "Well, maybe. But we're on the job now. It wouldn't matter anyhow."

"Glad to hear it." Digit clapped his brother on the back. "Now, let's go wrap things up."

As the trio went down to the office, things soon became clear that something was wrong. A small crowd was gathered around Rathbone's office, and from the sounds of things, something intense was going on.

"Excuse me, ma'am," Hymie said, tapping one woman on the shoulder. "What exactly is going on here?"

"Haven't you heard?" She spun around, and a look of shock was on her face. "Kelsey Rathbone was murdered by one of those mechs!"

M.A.D. Castle, ?

Penny kept her eyes straight ahead as she moved through the halls. A few people saw here, but paid her no attention. No one really cared where she went, provided it was allowed by the inhibitor installed in her chair.

Her eye twitched at the thought of the inhibitor; her own technology destroyed and repurposed. It made her blood boil to think of how her own invention had been changed, and to restrict her on top of it!

She took a breath and shook her head. Focus, Penny, she thought to herself. She had to find something out, and she knew where she could find it.

Making her way into a computer library, where older technology was stashed away in case it became useful later. It was an out of the way area, but that was all the more to her advantage.

Once she was inside, she shut the door behind her as quietly as possible. Selecting a large laptop that appeared to be in good shape and still had a charger cable, she moved it over to a more comfortable area and booted it up.

It came online, showing that much of its data had been erased, but that didn't stop Penny. Working, she dug deeper into the computer, searching to see if there wasn't any sign or key to the past information that might be useful to her.

She had luck. Stored in the hard drive of the computer was a link file for M.A.D.'s previous missions. All she had to do was remember the date, and she'd have all the information about what happened then.

As she typed, her mind went back to the two specific events Talon had mentioned: a fire and a rockslide. The fire would be too generic; her uncle had been through many of those. The rockslide, however, would be easier to generate. It had been one of her uncle's last missions before all this craziness went down.

She was quick to enter 5-22-2083 into the date search bar. Once she typed in enter, a stream of about twenty different logs came onscreen. To her dismay, it appeared that M.A.D. had been working on quite a few goals at that time, and thus it would take ages to dig through everything. While she had some time to spare, it wouldn't be enough to go over everything before someone noticed she was
That's when she heard the door open and shut. Shooting up, he closed the lap top shut just in time to see a woman in the M.A.D. uniform enter in. She had dark red hair and a pinched look in her face. "Penelope Gadget?"

Penny gave a scowl. "What do you want?"

The woman looked both ways before stepping in. She locked the door behind her and laid out a device. A pulse of energy came out, and Penny could sense the few security devices in the room, including the one in her chair, shut down.

"There," the woman said, giving a small sigh. "Now we can talk."

"What do you mean?" Penny cast a confused look at the newcomer. "Who are you?"

The woman paused for a moment, before reaching over and touching her earring. In a moment, red hair changed to brown highlighted by purple, and her face became fuller and rounder. While the uniform remained the same, the woman had become someone else entirely, someone Penny vaguely recognized.

"I believe we've met before," the woman started. "My name is Inspector Prince, from W.O.M.P.'s UK division. I've been sent in to try to locate you and William Scolex-Cortes."

"I remember you now." Penny let out a small laugh of relief. "You helped Uncle Gadget in that mission in Mexico."

"That's the one." Prince gave a smile at the memory. "I wish I could say I had the honor of working with him since then, but that hasn't quite yet. That said, his assistance has helped in locating this castle."

"So you know where we are?" Penny brightened at the news.

Prince nodded. "We're in one of M.A.D.'s castle fortresses. This one is located in the Carpathian Mountains in Romania."

"One of M.A.D.'s castle fortresses?" Penny looked nervous.

"M.A.D.'s a major crime empire. Claw has more hiding holes than this." Prince gave an eye roll. "This is the most sumptuous, though. I suspect it's Claw's favorite, which is how we guessed you were brought here."

"Now," the inspector went on, "down to business. I've just arrived. Is William here as well?"

"Yes, but he's in no state to be moved." Penny's tone turned grim. "They mangled him as a way to keep me here, and we currently can't leave the castle without risking his life."

"I see." Prince bit her lip as she thought. "That makes our job more difficult then."

"I'm currently working on prosthetics for him," Penny continued. "The arm has already been attached, though there's more I'd like to do for it, and the other pieces are coming along."

"Good job on that," Prince replied with a nod. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Actually, yes." Penny tucked the laptop in her bag, intending to go over it later. "There's a transmitter chip somewhere in this castle. It's one of the two chips keeping Will alive, with the other
in my wheelchair. If we're going to have any chance of escape, we'll need it too." Penny reached into her pocket and pulled out a small analyzer she had constructed. "This is the frequency it is transmitting at. I would search for it myself, but the guards would get suspicious."

"Find that chip. Got it." Prince smiled as she pulled out a communication device of her own to download the frequency. "I've got some help, too. They should be able to locate the chip without too much difficulty."

"I will need to finish those prosthetics first, so we can't go too fast." Penny replaced the analyzer once Prince was finished with it. "Still, I am grateful for the help."

"Don't you worry," Prince assured as she pulled her disguise back up. "We'll have the two of you out of here in no time."

To be continued…
Assignment 14.3: Trouble in the Happiest Place on Earth

Monday, September 15th, 2087

Orlando, Florida, USA

"Excuse us, coming through!" Digit shoved his way through the crowds around the room. "We are W.O.M.P. agents, let us in!"

People hurried to move aside, allowing the three officers to make their way into the room. Sure enough, just as described, Rathbone was slumped over his desk, dead. There was a burn injury in the back of his head, and in front of him was a sign reading "So to all who resist the next stage of evolution" along with a symbol of a gear.

Hymie walked around the body, studying intently. "It appears as if he was murdered by a mech," he said finally after a few moments of silent deliberation.

"You think, Sherlock?" Digit gave a hefty sigh. "Well, there goes our easy case."

Fidget got in close, studying the injury close at hand. "Whatever killed him, they worked fast," he stated, never once looking up from his analysis job. "The laser used here was small, but powerful. One slice was used to essentially cut half of the brainstem from the rest of his body, so at least it was a fast death. The burns cauterized the injury, which is why there's no blood, but he was dead pretty fast."

At that moment, two men entered the room. They were wearing police uniforms. "Agent Hymie, Officer Gadgetinis, good to see you're here." The older of the two men offered his hand out to Hymie. "My name is Detective Jacob Wynford of the Orlando police. This is my partner, Officer Nick Hartmen. We'll be taking over much of the case, but we could your help."

"We're happy to help in any way." Hymie took the hand and shook. "Officer Fidget has already determined cause of death. There was a burn cut to the brain stem. The injury was cauterized, so no blood, but death was instant."

"We'll take that into account when we go to the forensics lab," Detective Winford stated. "We'll be handling the investigation side of things, but we'll need you help on the rather...um...uncomfortable side of things."

"Uncomfortable?" Fidget gave a look of confusion. "Well, murder is horrible when it happens, but I don't see why this would be more uncomfortable than any other homicide."

"It's the race relations side of things," Officer Hartman pointed out. "This murder was done by a mech, after all."

"Not necessarily," Digit called out. "It could be a false flag operation. After all, if someone wanted us to think a mech committed it, it would be all too easy to fake."

"True, but either way we're on shaky grounds." Detective Winford gave a sigh. "A man running a business famous for its use of animatronics suddenly turns up dead right on the heels of an mech rights organization formation, and all clues point to a mech as the killer. That doesn't make things easy for us."

"No, no it doesn't." Hymie frowned as he searched his memory for anything that might help. "You
have our guarantee we'll work to find the culprit."

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that." Hartford gave a rather condescending smile. "Like he said, we'll be doing the investigation here. We'll just need your help in crowd control."

At that comment, Digit's face started to take on a deeper shade of blue. Fidget, however, noticed his brother's rapid loss of patience, so he was quick to intervene. "Of course, but you'll also need information from the mechs here, too. It would probably be best if we gathered that information."

Winford gave an approving nod. "Good idea. Contact us if you find out anything important. Until then, I have to ask that you leave the crime scene."

"I'll tell you what we'll-" Digit started, but Fidget cut him off.

"We'll be sure to do so. Good luck!" He then hurried out, pulling a mumbling Digit behind him. They were followed close by Hymie.

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Forest Lanes Harbor

45 minutes outside of Metro City

The deal being finished, Gadget returned from the hotel after retrieving the few possessions he still had with the intent of moving them into the house. When he returned, he did so alone, with the exception of Brain, as Heather had other work to deal with.

Truth be told, he still thought the house was a bit too large, and with only him and the dog around to occupy it, that sense was only increased. The clothes he had took up only a fraction of the closet, and since all the furniture and the few decorations he had approved of had been destroyed in the explosion, the place had kind of a barren feel to it.

_Penny would know what to do with this place_, he couldn't help but think. A wave of grief hit him again, and as he was alone this time, he didn't bother restraining the tears that came with it.

After a moment, however, he regained his composure and turned to figuring out what to do next. Him sitting alone in his room would get nothing done. He had to figure out where the kids were, after all, and that could take time.

Heading down stairs, wracked his brain, trying to come up with anything that might help him to find the place where the kids had been stashed. Nothing came to mind, especially since he technically wasn't supposed to be on this case. Anything that might help was back at W.O.M.P. HQ.

Or was it? Gadget's head shot up when he came to a realization. Penny had her own gear, built in her own lab out of parts she bought for herself. Of course, her royalties were locked up, especially now that she had been kidnapped, but if he could find her old lab, then there might be something on those computers that could help her.

Without hesitation, he tried to think of where her private lab might be. It wasn't in their old house, that was for sure. Also, when she had started working more openly for W.O.M.P., she worked primarily from the lab there. She had never told anyone where that other lab was.

Then it hit him. She hadn't told any _adult_ where her other lab was, but Chief Quimby's grandsons and those two friends of hers had helped her in her fight. They might know where the lab was and how it could be used to reach her.
Waiting not a single moment, he raced over, and finding the number for the Morning Glory Girls' Home. Once he had it, he extended the antenna in his pinkie to call as quickly as he could.

"Hello?" Maybelle asked. "Who is this?"

"This is Inspector Gadget," he answered, haste clear in his voice. "Where is Kayla Connors? I need to speak with her right away!"

"Oh, dear," the elderly woman replied. "Is she in some sort of trouble?"

"No trouble at all, ma'am," Gadget replied, sounding happier than he had in ages. "In fact, she might just be the key to cracking a case I'm working on."

"Oh, if that's the case, then she'll be more than happy to help. I'll go get her right away." Maybelle set the phone down, but Gadget could still hear her hurrying off to go find Kayla. He could hardly contain the level of excitement within him, as he was now close to finding Penny.

Orlando, Florida, USA

Inside the stadium, chaos reigned. The once fairly settled room was now erupting, as mechs everywhere turned to each other, questioning over the current turn of events. Some were yelling, some were crying, a few were trying to talk reasonably (though they were quickly drowned out), but all were trying to make sense of what they had just learned.

"Are you quite certain of what you saw?" Benvolio asked, anxiety clear in his voice.

"We saw what we saw," Digit responded. "Rathbone was dead, and some sort of laser cutter was used to do the deed. What's more, it appears that whoever did the deed was some sort of robot supremacist."

"Well, I can guarantee that none of us did the deed." Benvolio gave a huff. "We were all here, along with you. None of us would have had the opportunity to make a move in such a wretched direction."

"All the same, we'll need to question you individually," Fidget pointed out. "Even if none of you committed the deed, there's a chance you might know something that could lead us to the killer. If that's the case, then we'll need to know it."

The rabbit-mech gave a shrug. "I suppose that's true. So, how shall we do this?"

The crowd was separated into three groups, with each of the agents working at interrogating each member of the groups one at a time. It wasn't easy, and it took a long time. Most of the group were cooperative, but that didn't instantly mean they were helpful. Some were too talkative and went on and on about little details that ultimately lead to dead ends, some were too laconic and hardly got two words out in an answer. Some never seemed to understand what question was being asked, and others always assumed there was some underlying message other than the face value question. One of Fidget's questioned mechs only spoke Esperanto for some reason, and it's took him ages to translate the questions, gain the answer, and then translate it back so he could understand what was being said.

It was late afternoon, almost evening, by the time they had finished, and almost nothing they had was of any use at face value. Still, they would need to go over the notes, and they still had a case to work on.
"We'll need to head out now," Digit said to Benvolio once they had gathered all the information. "We're going to examine all of what you told us today, and if there's no problems, we'll process the info and send it to the Orlando P.D. You all will just need to stay put so we can get in contact with you if we need more information."

"We shall do just that, sah." The rabbit mech gave kind of a leggy bow. "So tragic that this happened. I do hope none of us here were involved with such a grisly scheme."

"That's what we hope, too," Fidget replied. "You all have a good evening."

The trio headed out, and soon they were in a taxi on their way to a motel a short distance from the park. There, they'd be able to rest, recharge, and double-check notes.

"I don't get it," Fidget said, crossing his arms once they were in their small motel room. "Don't get what?" Hymie asked. "I was not aware we were able to pick anything up."

"No, what he means is that he doesn't understand," Digit explained. "Probably something to do with the case."

"Exactly. It's just not adding up," Fidget ran the notes he and his partners had taken through his system over and over again until he couldn't take the stream of information anymore. "It's clear a mech had something to do with all of this, but all of the mechs that were born in Mallory World were present and accounted for! There's no way one of them could have done the killing."

Fidget sat up quickly. "Mallory World has construction bots," he exclaimed with a bright smile. "And none of them came to life, so it couldn't have been any of the mechs!"

"That's true." Digit leaned in. "Have they discounted the possibility of a Mech killing yet?"

"Unfortunately, no," Hymie replied. "It appears that while only a few select individuals had access to the robots, last week, one of the keys was stolen. It was returned several days later, but that's plenty of time for a copy to made."

"So we're back to square one," Digit slumped back. "And we don't have any idea of where to go next."

There was a moment of silence, with the only sound being Hymie typing up the information they had to be sent in. However, after a moment of typing, he paused. "I might have found something." "What is it?" Fidget asked as he and Digit went over to join their companion.

"Didn't you arrest an Ursula Caleb about a month ago?" he asked, not looking up from the computer. "I remember. She had us infected with some weird robotic parasite."

"Well," Hymie said, turning the keyboard around, "it looks like she did some freelance programming work for Mallory World several months beforehand."
"That would have given her access to the robotic drones," Fidget said, "but she's in prison right now. Besides, why would she want to kill Rathbone?"

"Because he stiffed her." Digit's comment came out of nowhere.

"What do you mean?" Fidget asked, going over to look at what his brother was reading.

Digit grinned and highlighted a section. "Take a look at this section of the contract. It says that the programmer party will gain acknowledgement for the work done while full rights and uses would belong to the Mallory Cooperation. It's looks like it was worded in a way so that while Ms. Caleb would have gotten recognition for her work, aside from the initially payment, she wouldn't receive anything else. What's more, the very pattern of data used would belong to the company, not to her, because of the way the contract was set up. She wouldn't be able to do this work for anyone else."

"That doesn't seem quite fair," Hymie commented.

Digit gave a shrug. "It's not, really, but that's business for you. Well, apparently, she tried to sell similar tech to Daydream Studios, only to have the plug pulled on that deal."

"I can't imagine Caleb was happy with that." Fidget made a face. "What happened after that?"

"Nothing." Digit pushed the computer aside. "She was one freelance programmer against one of the largest company conglomerates in the world. There was no way it could have ended in her favor. She moved on to develop a new idea, one that I'm guessing would eventually become the Virals."

The twins shuddered at the memory of the malware.

"That's all quite interesting," Hymie commented, "but I fail to see how it connects with the murder were trying to solve now."

Digit motioned to the laptop. "Guess which specific bigwig pulled the plug on the Daydreams deal."

"Rathbone." Fidget made a face as he thought. "That gives us a motive, but she's currently in prison for what happened in Seattle. How could she enact a murder in Orlando while sitting in a Washington State prison?"

"You're really asking how an expert computer programmer, infamous for creating one of the most far reaching malware programs in existence, could reach a robot and order it to commit a hit while not physically present?" Digit cocked his head. "And I thought I was the skeptical one."

Hymie and Fidget thought for a minute before the answer came. "You think she's gotten ahold of more Virals, don't you?" Hymie hazarded to guess.

Digit snapped his fingers. "Bingo. She gets more Virals, sends those out, they take care of Rathbone, and here we all are."

"There still is one problem with that theory, though," Fidget pointed out. "How did she do all that from prison?"

"And that's what we'll need to look into," Digit replied. "Tomorrow, we'll need to call up the prison and see if there is any possibility for her to get her hands on any sort of tech. Until then, there's not much else we can do."

"True." Hymie closed up the computer. "I'll make sure to use the W.O.M.P. phone so that we don't put a long distance call on the hotel phone."
The twins looked at their companion and each other repeatedly, trying to work out what he just said. "Uh, you do know that calls inside the US are free, right?"

"Free?" Hymie tilted his head. "How does the operator get paid then?"

"You haven't made any long-distance calls since waking up, have you?" Digit asked in a deadpan voice.

"I have no one to call." Hymie's response was not sad, or wistful, or even slightly melancholy. He was just making a statement.

Fidget gave a yawn and stretched out. "We'll have to explain that to you in the morning. I'm hitting the hay. G'night."

Digit sighed. "Fidget, robots don't sleep."

Tuesday, September 16th, 2087

Riverside Prep, Metro City

"We'll have to stay quiet," Kayla stated as she, Rheeci, and the Washington brothers led Gadget through the old bunker tunnels. "Penny set up this place back when we went to school here. I'm not sure school officials would be happy if they knew it was still here."

"W.O.M.P. will come back and confiscate everything once they've been alerted that we're here," Gadget replied, stroking Brain's head while he spoke. The dog's company had become quite the comfort as of late. "First, I need to know if she was working on anything in relation to her computer book. I know the original was destroyed, but did she have any backups or anything?"

"If she did, she never talked too much about it," Eli replied, leaning against one of the lab's dingy counters. "She never talked too much about her projects unless you asked."

Gadget smiled in fond memory of his niece. "She was modest like that."

"That said, Penny was pretty practical," Rheeci replied. "She must have kept a backup of her computer book's memory somewhere."

As they dug through the bits and pieces of tech, looking for anything that might give a clue, Gadget found something unexpected in the pile. It was a picture of their family, back when it was whole. New born Penny was laying in her mother, Andrea's arms, while Daniel, her father, and Gadget were standing on either side. **Never Forget** had been scrawled on the bottom of the page in Penny's neat hand.

For a moment, a wave of grief came over the cyborg. He missed his niece, and he missed his sister, and his brother-in-law, and heck, he missed his folks, too. So much had been taken away, and the weight of those losses took their toll, no matter how one tried to ignore it. The pain was very real.

Taking the picture up in one hand, he was about to tuck it into his pocket to take back, but as he did, he heard a rattle in the frame. Pulling it out, he turned it over in his hands. On second look, it was too deep to be an ordinary picture frame. On the side, there was also a slot, hidden in the paneling but easy to see if you were looking for it.

Without hesitating, he slid it open and gave the frame a slight shake. In a moment, four tiny USB
sticks tumbled out, each marked with a different color. Excitement filled him when he realized what it was he found. "Hey, I found something over here!" he called out.

"What is it?" Rheeci asked, hurrying over. Upon laying eyes on the memory sticks, she beamed. "Those must be what we're looking for!"

"Only one way to tell." Eli pulled out his laptop and started it up. "Let's take a look and see what there."

It took a few minutes to boot up the sticks. Each one, despite its size, held quite a bit of memory. It was all above Gadget's head, and to his distress, it appeared to be above Penny's friends' heads as well. Still, it was the only lead they currently had, so they were willing to find it.

After a moment, however, Kayla gave a cheer. "Now we've got something!"

"What is it?" The four voices spoke out in near unison, along with a wuff from Brain.

Kayla grinned and took a breath before starting. "Well, it looks like this one," here she pointed at the purple marked stick, which was the one being examined, "is where she backed up all her important information after something major happened. Take a look here." Working fast, she hit a few keys, calling up a file that was hidden in a folder on the chip. It was the M.A.D. files.

"I know these," Gadget stated. "These were pulled out of Penny's head back in March. But I thought these were all kept locked up at W.O.M.P."

"It makes sense she'd keep some copies for herself." Eli gave a shrug. "Penny's one of the good guys, but she likes to take things at her own speed and come up with her own plans."

"Is this what you were looking for, Mr. Gadget?" Rheeci asked.

Gadget nodded and tucked the USB stick into his coat pocket. "Alright, kids, thank you for your help. W.O.M.P. officials will be here to take care of the rest of the equipment soon."

He then turned to leave. As he left, however, he kept his hand low as he typed in the digits to a telephone number. It was time to bring others into this.

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M.A.D. Castle, ?

"How's the arm feeling?" Penny was currently hard at work developing the circuitry that would go into the prosthetic eye, but the question still nagged at her. Nearby, Will was sorting some of the components for his legs, which had yet to be assembled. He was looking better than he had been when they had been connecting the leg, but he still had a somewhat dejected expression.

He must have been aware of how down he looked, because as soon as she asked the question, a forced smile came on his face. "Pretty good." He gave a chuckle. "It's kinda weird, to tell you the truth, but it is preferable to not having an arm."

Penny gave a smile. "Uncle Gadget said the same thing. I guess its just something about how the neural interfacing works."

Every inch of her was screaming to tell him about Inspector Prince, to give him some amount of hope for escape. However, caution overrode eagerness. If M.A.D. discovered the plan, then not only would the mission be lost, but Inspector Prince's life would be in danger.
Instead, she decided to broach another topic, one she had wanted to speak about since she had found the videos. "Now that it's just us, can you explain what happened with you and Talon back then?"

Will visibly stiffened, then drooped. "You already know," he replied, even the forced happiness gone from his voice.

"No, I know what Talon told me and what I found on some old archive videos," she replied.

He looked over, somewhat surprised by that news. "Archive videos?"

Penny nodded. "You'd be surprised how far back M.A.D. records go. But they can only give so much information, and I think we both know Talon is a pathological liar." She gave him a small smile. "I want to hear your side of the story. Know what happened from your point of view. You're the only one who can explain that."

He set down some of the screws he was sorting before giving a sigh. "I guess there's nothing to lose."

Taking a deep breath, he leaned back in his wheelchair. "We were about eleven when it happened. I don't remember if it was before or after our birthday, but we were in fifth or sixth grade at the time it happened."

Penny chewed her lip while she listened. This meant that Will and Talon were roped in to things back even when she had been acting as he uncle's shadow. Of course, she already knew that detail from the video, but it still had a chilling effect to hear it from the victim.

"We really didn't know what was happening at the time," Will continued, "but a man came up to us after school. We weren't that popular, as I'm sure you remember why, so we were by ourselves when he came up. He said he worked for our Uncle Irving, and that we needed to come to see him right away."

He gave a dry laugh. "What can I say? We were stupid kids at the time, and the opportunity to meet some long-lost relative seemed like a great opportunity. Not to mention, the car the emissary came in looked expensive and exotic, so we bit. We went in. The next thing I remember was some sort of mist being sprayed in our faces, and then we were brought to some M.A.D. lair. I don't know if it was here or somewhere else; most M.A.D. bases look the same."

"Anyway, at first, it was all fun and games. New toys, access to cool tech, huge vehicles, etc. The sort of thing you attract eleven-year-old boys with." His face started to lose expression and his voice grew hollow as he spoke. "Then things got harder. We started to be sent on missions. We didn't know it, but we were being trained to be M.A.D. captains."

Noting the change in her friend's affects, Penny took his organic hand. "Hey, it's okay, you don't need to say anything else if it makes you uncomfortable."

Her action seemed to shake him out of the trance, and he gave a smile. "No, it's good that I tell someone," he replied. He then gave a sigh. "Just...give me a good shake if I get like that again."

Taking a deep breath, he started again. "I started to get uncomfortable with what was happening around the first time we were sent out on a mission. I would have tried to go home, but Talon had gotten fully invested in what we were doing. Even if he hadn't, I don't think we would have just been allowed to leave."

"I'd imagine not," Penny replied. "Claw doesn't exactly take no for an answer."
"I usually just gave in." Shame clouded his face. "I was afraid of what happen if I didn't. There wasn't much I could think to do that would stop anything, and what was happening, usually didn't hurt anyone too bad, mostly theft. There was…other things, but I wasn't aware they happened until later. I guess Claw suspected I didn't have the stomach for killing and put Talon on those endeavors."

"Then came the day of the landslide." He closed his eyes tight and trembled slightly, though he still kept talking. "It was just supposed to be a routine theft. Once more, Talon was placed in the head, and I was kept back for support. Then, something happened, something that wasn't supposed to occur."

Penny nodded. "Uncle Gadget showed up."

Will's face fell. "Then you know what happened."

"I know what the video showed me and I remember what I saw that day," she replied, placing a hand on his shoulder, "but I don't know what happened to you, or what happened afterwards."

Will glanced at her, and the smile she gave him seemed to bolster him for the last stretch. "It was the first time I had witnessed an attempted killing and something just…snapped. It all happened in kind of a blur. I'm not sure if I tried to run or if I attacked someone, but either way, I ended up bungling the whole thing. Not that I regretted it."

"It was after that Claw decided that Talon and I needed to be…upgraded." Almost unconsciously, he raised his organic arm to his chest. "It would be the last straw for me-"

"And the first step down my path." Talon smirked as he came into the room.

Upon hearing their enemy's entrance, Penny took a step nearer to Will and placed a hand on his shoulder. She hoped that it would be enough to bolster him against the torment that was doubtlessly coming.

"So, you actually told her," Talon stated. He gave a shrug. "You've got more of a backbone than I expected."

"What do you want?" Penny hissed through clenched teeth.

"What? Not happy to see me, Pretty Penny?" Talon gave a smirk and sidled up to her. "And here I was wanting to spend more time with you."

"I'm warning you, if you've come here to hurt him, I will not stand by it." Penny's voice was low and dangerous.

This, however, only seemed to amuse Talon. "Him? Why would I be interested in my milksop twin? No, it's you I'm here to see."

He moved forward, pushing between Penny and Will. "Funny how it turns out." He gave a smirk. "The three of us all here. If I remember correctly, it was like this several months ago."

"Get back!" Penny lashed out at him, striking him once.

He responded by grabbing her by the wrist first, then the neck. "We've had a talk that's been a long time coming, Miss Penny," he sneered, pulling her closer as she fought back. "And now we're going to-"

"No!" In a sudden movement, Penny was released. Her chair reacted automatically, pulling her back
and away from the sudden chaos. In all the movement, Penny could not tell what was going on, and she needed a moment to take in what had happened.

It appeared that when Talon had threatened her, something inside Will had snapped. He had somehow thrown himself out of his wheelchair and was gripping onto Talon’s back, punching madly with both hands. He was shouting something in Spanish that Penny couldn’t understand, but from his tone she caught the meaning of it well enough.

She had never seen calm, meek Will in such a frenzy before, and from the way Talon reacted, neither had he. Talon was initially too shocked to respond, which had been enough to give Will the opening he needed to get a good hold on the attack. Eventually, however, Talon was able to recover and return the blows, resulting in a full-on fight.

While the brothers fought, Penny looked around the room for anything that might allow her to give Will a hand. Unfortunately, all her weapons had been taken from her wheelchair, and of course nothing in the way of a weapon would be in reach at the moment.

Penny, however, was nothing if not resourceful. Snatching up a screwdriver that had been lying nearby she prepared to join into the fight.

Before she could make her move, though, her wrist was caught. She spun around and saw Inspector Prince, still in her M.A.D. disguise. She gave a shake of the head, as if to communicate not now.

"Ah-hem!" Prince cleared her throat, glancing over her shoulder at several guards who were standing outside. It took the men a moment to realize they were being summoned, but once they got it, they raced in to break up the fight.

In a moment, the twins were separated. As could be expected, Will got the worst of it, his face and torso covered in bruising. However, unexpectedly, Talon came out of things rather badly, too, with a blackened eye and several missing teeth.

"Claw has more work for you," Prince said, disguising her voice with a nasally New York-style accent.

"Now isn't a good time," Talon replied. He glared darkly at Will who, despite his injuries, returned the look full force.

"You gotta tell that to Claw, not to me." Prince gave a smirk that stated she knew what she was doing.

Talon didn’t look pleased with the development, but after a moment, he gave in. Spitting some blood on the ground, he gave a noncommittal shrug. "Fine." He then turned his glare back on Will. "This isn't over, yet."

"Get him to the medibay," Prince ordered, motioning to the injured Will. "He's no use to M.A.D. dead."

The men moved fast, moving Will back to the wheelchair and hurrying him out of the room. Still, Penny was able to catch a glimpse of him as they left, and there seemed to be a spark in his eye, despite the injuries.

When Penny was left alone with Prince, the Inspector locked the door. Quickly activating the device to jam the security cameras, she then turned to Penny. "How are things coming along?"

"I've finished the programming for the eye and will have it done in a couple of days," Penny replied.
"How about you?"

Prince pursed her lips and looked pensive. "I've found something you need to see..."

To be continued…

End Notes

I hope you enjoyed it, and I'd like to hear what you think!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!