



PRESCRIPTION

I think someone's trailing me. The boss said I should stay inconspicuous, so I guess the dark shades and the trench coat were a bad idea. It's too bad. Even though this person looks like a harmless individual who just likes to follow people around, I have to erase him. Besides, last week's seminar suggested that the adversaries, the notorious Zophre clan, would send anyone.

Here's what I remember. As I entered the mall, I looked towards the loitering benches. Among the many people, I noticed a skinny kid with short locks. I simply walked by and continued on my mission. I entered checkpoint one: Foot Locker. I picked up and inspected the twelfth shoe on the third rack from the left, which triggered the silent pager notifying my bosses of my progress. Now that my bosses knew I was here and everything so far was under control, special clearances would be made in order for this mission to conclude successfully.

Bzz, Bzz, Bzzzzz! — There it was! — My cell phone signaling that I had mail. I guess those special clearances have been made, and it was OK for me to continue the assignment.

All aspects of the plan were looking terrific until I left the Foot Locker. There he was again, the skinny kid with the short locks. This time, he was exiting the

Old Navy store across the hall with what seemed to be a pen and note pad in his hand. Next to him was a female who seemed to be talking to him, perhaps all about me and my secret agenda. They could either be secretly plotting to foil my plans or just shopping in the mall. Either way, I had a mission to complete.

I entered checkpoint two, this time being more conscious of my surroundings. One fault and the plan would be rendered unsuccessful. This was the key point in the whole mission. In essence, I had to reprogram all the mall surveillance cameras so that they would be able to detect the unknown color silver indigo, which is only visible to the naked eye under a black light. I entered the unisex restroom on Burdines' 2nd floor, unscrewed the toilet paper dispenser and retrieved the uploading device agent Double P brilliantly concealed inside the toilet paper roll. This mission was looking like a complete success when — there he was again! Mr. Short Locks, this time secretly recording all my actions while hiding behind a clothes rack with his female sidekick. Or, they could possibly be some regular kids shopping for clothes. Little did I know what they were really up to.

What most people don't know is this: Those little candy dispensers in the corner of the hallway are actually input devices. Early in the morning when the mall is being cleaned by the janitors, the head security manager plugs his computer wire into the Q-shaped keyhole (which is actually a special port) and uploads the program sequences he would like the security devices to follow for that particular day.

For instance, if he's looking for a suspected criminal wearing blue jeans and a black cap, all he would have to do is enter that into his computer, upload the information to the candy dispenser and boom! The cameras will target all individuals wearing blue jeans and a black cap for that entire day. My objective was clear: Find the "special" candy dispenser and upload the new surveillance program (silver indigo).

Why silver indigo? Silver indigo, when seen by a camera, appears as a white haze. Basically, when I program these

Jerome Bruce has refused to send us his bio. He believes the less we know about him, the better.

cameras — all I have to do is spray on my Ellis Revlis — Indigo cologne, then I will become the daytime ghost. To the naked eye I will appear as a regular civilian shopping in the mall. To the cameras, I will appear as some sort of thin fog floating through the mall. Once the mission is complete, no one — not even my clever adversaries, the Zophre clan — will be able to trace the evidence back to me. The surveillance cameras will prove worthless in the investigation necessary to determine the individual behind it all.

Now that I think about it, this mission is foolproof. How will they ever catch me?

I walked towards the food court hallway, found the candy dispenser machine by the Dairy Queen ice cream stall, and quickly inserted the uploading device I got from the Burdines unisex restroom into the Q-shaped keyhole. Objective two complete. This mission was running smoothly until ... There he was again.

This time I wasn't going to let him see me. I quickly shifted my position and hid

myself into the approaching crowd of pedestrians heading towards the public restrooms. It all played together like clockwork. The public restrooms were the perfect place to apply

the cologne, which would one, make me irresistible to the ladies and two, render me virtually invisible to the security cameras. Spray, spray, spray and voilà! In a puff of mist, I was ready for the final aspect of this mission. After this, I'll get that promotion which will render me one of the most prized positions in the world.

I exited the restrooms and headed for the parking garage. I passed the Footlocker and Old Navy stores, went past the many jewelry stalls, which were posted in the middle of the extensive hallway and re-entered Burdines.

This time, I went toward the customer service center and exited the store through the glass doors, which led to the parking

garage. Upon exiting the store, I noticed a reflection in the glass door. It was the silhouette of what seemed to be ... NO! The skinny kid with the short locks!

Nevertheless, I played it off as if I didn't notice and continued through the garage. I found the garage stairs and headed to the top floor when I realized how detrimental to this mission that foolish kid could actually be. Is that kid actually following me around? Why the hell did he have a note pad in his hand? And who was that girl with him?

So many questions, so little time! As I reached the top floor, ding! The elevator door on the other side of the garage opened and out came the girl followed by the kid with the short dread locks.

"Mr. Finklestein, we are only here to help!" shouted the girl. "There is no need for these silly antics!"

"No, I will never let you capture me" I quickly ran back down the stairs and ... Thumpadumpadump!

* * *

My eyes opened.

"Where am I?"

"Everything will be all right sir," said a nurse. "You're in the hospital. You fell down the garage staircase in the mall and suffered a minor concussion. You're lucky those kids were there to help you."

"What kids? Who were they?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, I think they intern here," the nurse replied. "In this hospital's Ward 21."

"Ward 21?" I said.

The nurse looked through a folder full of papers.

"Interesting," she said, "It seems you suffered a little more than a concussion ..."

She held up a sheet. "Very interesting. Mr. Finklestein. Do you remember why you were running down the stairs?"

"No," I quickly replied. The boss

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specified that no one should know about the covert mission — the one that I just screwed up.

“Well, everything will be all right sir,” said the nurse. “It’s best you get some more sleep.”

I lay down in the firm hospital bed and shut my eyes, waiting for the nurse to leave.

After the nurse left the room, I rose and headed for the door. All that was on my mind was the mission; how could I be so careless as to let two kids cause me to mess up like that? The boss will not be very pleased when he finds out about this. As I approached the hospital room door, I could hear what seemed to be the nurse’s voice. Yes, it was the nurse’s voice, talking to (I guessed) the doctor.

“Dr. Jenkins, the patient seems to have regained full consciousness. He still seems weary but looks as if he’ll be all right”

“Is this the same patient who fell down at the mall a couple of hours ago?” Dr. Jenkins asked.

“Yes,” the nurse replied, “The two interns from Ward 21 brought him in. Doctor, the thing is, our patient’s file states that he suffers from a chronic case of schizophrenia. He was admitted two weeks ago, and according to this file, he’s still supposed to be in the ‘special’ institute ...”

“Wait! You said that two interns from Ward 21 brought him in?” The doctor asked.

“Yeah,” the nurse replied, a question in her voice.

“Hmmm, it all seems to make sense now,” Dr. Jenkins said. “Those two interns were supposed to keep an eye on Rupert Finklestein. He was under observation in Ward 21, but the interns went on their lunch break and when they returned, Finklestein was gone.”

“Is that so?” Asked the nurse. “Then those kids went looking for him and found him in the mall?”

“It would appear that way,” the doctor replied.

Oh shit! The door handle started to

move and in the blink of an eye, I was back in the hospital bed pretending to sleep. I couldn’t believe it; they were all working for the adversaries. How could our opposing forces be so formidable as to take over the whole hospital? The seminars suggested that the Zophre clan was powerful, but I didn’t expect this. It looked like there was only one thing left for me to do.

I reached down in my pocket and pulled out what those training seminars referred to as “the last measure”: two capsules that would prevent me from leaking any information. These capsules are the latest thing from our labs. Solid material specially engineered by the boss to make all information concerning him, his clan, his base, and all their operations “disappear.”

I opened my eyes to see if anyone was in the room with me. It all seemed clear, so I popped the two capsules in my mouth, went to the sink, turned on the faucet and scooped up some water in my hands. I brought the water into my mouth and swallowed, saying goodbye to the boss, agent Double P, the rest of the agency and all the secret information they had trusted me with.

I lay back into my firm hospital bed and fell asleep, knowing that when I woke back up, it would be as if this secret agency never existed. 🖐️