



Originally published in *Trap Open! #1*

In the darkened theatre, several hundred people watched open-mouthed as a giant pink Jell-O mold over the Metropolitan Museum of Art broke apart and flew up into the air while the Statue of Liberty looked passively on. As the crowd in the cinematic Central Park began to cheer this unusual occurrence, the spectators in the theatre began the susurrent process of gathering their

belongings and filing out of the theatre, muttering under their breaths all the while about "quickie sequels," "Hollywood ripoffs," and "anything for a buck." A few brave souls admitted to liking what they'd just seen, while still others left the theatre in silence.

In his seat in the roped-off VIP area, Egon Spengler sat rubbing his chin in a thoughtful and troubled manner, oblivious to the varying critical reactions to the premiere of *Ghostbusters II*.

Egon's companions, his three fellow Ghostbusters, cellist Dana Barrett (once again "on" with Peter Venkman), and secretary Janine Melnitz, were halfway up the aisle and heading toward the EXIT sign when they realized they were short by one very tall, very blond Ghostbuster.

"Yo! Egon!" shouted Peter Venkman. "You die like that movie? We gonna have to bust *you*?"

"Peter!" admonished Dana with an elbow to his stomach.

"Hey, Slugger, watch it!" He drew himself up to his full height, attempting to look noble and failing, as usual, miserably. "I'm a hero, remember?" Dana responded by rolling her eyes heavenward and turning to talk to Janine.

"Gee, guys, maybe he fell asleep - he's been spending some long hours up in the lab these days," offered Ray Stantz.

"Yeah, and there sure wasn't anything on the screen to keep him awake," added Peter with a twinkle. Ray favored him with a chastising frown and turned to retrace his steps back down the theatre aisle. His compatriots shared a glance, a communal shrug, and together they turned to follow Ray.

"Yo, Egon, m'man — you growin' roots or what?" Winstson called out.

"Yeah, Egon — show's over," added Ray, reaching the VIP row again.

"Here, let me," Peter offered, pushing his way toward the front. He stood at the end of the row and called out, "Look! It's a patch of *fanzinicus fungi* and it's taking over the entire theatre! Aaaaagh!" Peter wrestled theatrically with the imaginary threat, and dropped writhing to the theatre floor. "Yu-u-uck! Who spilled their soda under the seat? It's disgusting down here!"

"There is no such thing as '*fanzinicus fungi*,' Peter," Spengler answered gravely, turning his head from the fading credits toward his friends and co-workers. He blinked mildly at the sight of the entire group collected together staring back at him with varying expressions on their faces.

"Yeah," Peter replied, popping up from under the seat and trying to disengage his hands from the goopy mess that had accumulated there. "I knew that. And I knew you'd know that I knew that. And knowing you'd know that I knew that, I knew you couldn't resist showing me what you knew and correcting me so that I'd know better next time. You know?" At the looks of consternation from his friends, he added defensively, "Well, it woke him up, didn't it?" He tried dusting his hands off, only to have them stick together.

"I was not asleep," Egon replied, unfolding himself from his seat. "Merely speculating."

Dana Barrett in turn glanced speculatively at Janine Melnitz, who arched an eyebrow and shrugged her shoulders in reply. With Egon, who knew?

"Well, some of us're going on to Danceteria to hit the dance floor — care to join us?" Peter invited jokingly. Dana rewarded him with another jab at his lower torso. "Ow! Man, I'm gonna have to start wearing goalie padding to go out with you!" Despite his complaint, Peter bestowed an adoring look on Dana, mostly in an attempt to be adorable.

Adjusting his glasses to rest on the bridge of his nose, where they immediately slid back down to the tip, Egon favored Peter with a withering look. "I think that's one impact I can afford to miss." With that, he moved past Peter and joined the others in the aisle.

"Did Egon just make a joke, or was it just gas?" Peter asked no one in particular. No one in particular paid him any attention.

"Y'know, the press'll be waiting for us out there," Winston pointed out.

"Yeah — ready to fry us if this crowd's any indication," Janine observed sourly.

"The film did seem to generate a rather mixed reaction," Egon agreed abstractedly.

"Oh, I don't know — I kind of liked it. Had some funny lines — I especially liked 'yuppie larvae'," Ray answered brightly.

"Yeah, and this time, I got to keep the girl!" Peter crowed, racing up the aisle and attempting a grab at Dana's waist. As she cocked her arm to deliver another blow, he danced backward, hands raised placatingly. "I know when I'm beaten — all hands on deck, ma'am!" he quipped, grinning. Dana couldn't resist his Boyish Look #3, and grinned in response. Shaking her head, she pulled a hankie out of her purse and handed it to him to clean off his hands. Once he'd transferred the offending goop from his hands onto the hankie, Peter arched an inquiring eyebrow at his on-again, off-again main squeeze. She shook her

head again, smiling all the while. Seeing his advantage, Peter moved in again, and this time Dana didn't push, poke or prod him. He shoved her hankie into a pocket and settled happily into walking with his arm draped around her shoulders. "Y'know, I could get to like this ..."

"Play your cards right ..."

"Promises, promises ..."

Janine glanced over at this affectionate exchange between Dana and Peter and sighed. When this naturally drew her attention toward Egon, she was startled to find him looking at her with a decidedly odd expression. She flashed an encouraging smile at him, but he looked away quickly, frowning distractedly. Shrugging a disappointed shrug, Janine turned her attention toward the lobby doors and the magnesium glare of the press photographers' flashes. "Here we go again ..." she muttered to herself.

* * *

"Cofee-e-e-e-e!"

The plaintive wail preceded the outstretched and shaking hand, which preceded the haggard — and hungover — visage of Doctor Peter Venkman. Not quite crawling into the kitchen, Peter groped his way through blind instinct toward the coffeepot, overcame his animal urge to simply pour the pot down his throat, and sloshed the restorative liquid into a cup which he greedily emptied. "Ooooooh, man, what hit me?" he demanded, pouring a second cup as he began to look a little less corpselike.

"About 120 proof, I'd say, m'man," observed Winston Zeddemore from around a mouthful of bagel and cream cheese.

"Uuugh, don't talk with your mouth full!" Peter complained as his pale skin began to fade to green. He screwed his eyes shut to avoid the offending sight. "Ow! Even my face hurts — don't say it!" he warned, cracking open one eye experimentally.

"Never crossed my mind," Zeddemore grinned. "You and Dana have a good time last night?"

"I dunno — you'll have to ask Dana. Maybe she remembers. I sure don't." He attempted opening the other eye again and found the world bearable — just.

"Let's hope it's a quiet day, huh?"

"Let's hope it's a quiet week. Better yet, let's hope for a quiet century — it'll take that long for my head to stop doin' the mambo. I'm goin' back to bed," Peter announced, shuffling his way out of the kitchen. He passed by Ray on his way out, muttering about hairs and dogs and retribution for past lives. Ray just shook his head affectionately and made his way to the coffeepot with a decided bounce to his step.

"Glad to see you're feeling perky — looks like Peter's down for the count," Winston commented.

"Yeah. And Egon's out cold in the lab — sure hope it's a slow day."

"Egon? He's not experimenting on himself again, is he? Didn't he learn anything the last time we had his stomach pumped?"

Ray chuckled. "Boy, he hated that, didn't he?" He shook his head in fond memory. "And the experiment didn't even work! No, I think he just stayed up all night. Funny thing is, the phone was off the hook and the Columbia directory was open on his desk."

"Columbia? Who'd he be callin' at the university in the middle of the night?"

"Not the university — the *studio*."

"You don't think he's gonna sue, do you? I mean — Ramis wasn't all that bad, even if his hair is dark — not like that Murray dude — now Peter's got a case. And Janine's the one who's got the biggest reason to gripe —"

Winston's analysis was cut off by the sound of the ghostalert klaxon. With only a swift glance at each other, breakfast was immediately forgotten and the two Ghostbusters turned and ran for the reception area of the firehouse. Janine was standing there amidst piled newspaper and clipped out reviews, frantically trying to take down particulars of the call. Finally, she straightened, just as a bedraggled but hastily dressed Peter Venkman slid down the pole in a sort of slow-motion freefall drop.

"Okay, okay, I've had my punishment — turn off that damned alarm already!" he shouted, then immediately grabbed his head in painful regret. "Ooooh, remind me not to do that again!"

Ray and Winston just ignored this not atypical behavior as Janine read off the details. "Multiple sightings at the New York Staedtler Milton — mostly concentrated on the mezzanine level, some sightings throughout the ballroom complexes in the lower level and eighteenth floors. Elevators are out of control. Manifestations keep chanting 'Live Long and Prosper' and 'Photon torpedoes away!'. Sounds like a bunch of your friends, Ray," she commented over her

glasses. "See the manager in the main lobby, concierge's desk." With that, she tore off the job ticket and handed it, with the car keys, to Ray. "Where's Egon?" she asked suddenly.

They looked around them; Spengler was nowhere to be seen. "Hey-ey, if I have to go out in my delicate condition, ain't no way we're goin' on this bust without Egon!" Peter declared argumentatively.

"That won't be a problem, Peter," came a bass rumble from above them. As one, the Ghostbusters and secretary turned to watch Egon slide down the pole and deposit himself in front of them. "I am fully prepared to participate in this bust," he announced with a glint of determination in his bloodshot eyes. It was even money on which of them, Spengler or Venkman, looked worse.

"Good morning, Egon," Janine welcomed warmly. Egon colored slightly — making his pale face look almost normal for a human being — but he merely nodded a curt response and turned away quickly. Janine sniffed imperceptibly and squared her shoulders against yet another rejection. She really should start a collection.

"Uh, Egon — you sure you're up to it? I mean, you look like you had a heck of a night — " Ray began with concern.

"Hey, how come he gets the chicken soup treatment while I get —"

"I assure you, Raymond, I am in top condition. Better, I'm sure, than Peter here is," he added with a glance toward Venkman. "Shall we?" he gestured toward Ecto-1. "I believe we have some ghosts to bust, gentlemen?"

"Yeah! Let's roll!" Winston cried, using the distraction to grab the keys from Ray and vault into the driver's seat before Stantz could protest.

"Take care!" Janine called as the remaining three Ghostbusters raced — in a matter of speaking considering the physical condition of at least one of them — to join Zeddemore. Egon glanced over his shoulder at Janine, a strange look passing over his face once more. A chill went down Janine's back; just what was bothering him?

* * *

"The New York Staedtler Milton. Wow," Ray breathed as Ecto-1 cut around a corner and screamed to a halt in New York's morning rush hour gridlock.

"Oh yeah. Didn't know you were such a hotel buff, Ray," Peter commented wryly, twirling his finger next to his head.

"It's not that. It's well, ever since they tore down the Commodore, it's kinda been the Staedtler Milton, you know?"

"No, Ray, we don't know," Egon pointed out. "Why don't you explain?" He glanced out the window at the citywide parking lot. "I think we've got time."

Ray looked out into the sea of cars and nodded agreement. "Yeah. You know, we really gotta get Ecto-2 working right — this traffic's a killer."

"The Staedtler Milton, Ray?" Peter prompted.

"Oh, yeah. Well, the Commodore is, or rather, was, the site of the earliest *Star Trek* conventions in New York — a lot of fans call them the 'Committee cons.' And when the Commodore was torn down in the late '70s, a lot of memories went with it," he added with a wistful sigh.

"Yeah," Peter commented, starting to connect with his own memories. "I remember that — we were in college then — undergrads, remember, Egon?" The physicist nodded. "You were depressed for a week, Ray. It was a major bummer. I got stuck with the laundry all week."

"Yeah. Well, anyway, after the Commodore was gone, the *Trek* cons kinda moved to the Staedtler Milton — only they weren't ever as good — they were run for money, and eventually they just kinda died out all together at the Staedtler Milton. There've been some half—decent comic cons there — you know, where I picked up that first edition of the first issue of *Captain Steel*? But even they aren't loyal to the old place. I hear there're some fans who've done cons at the airport and out in Tarreytown — even Newark. Although why anyone'd wanna go to Newark for a con is beyond me —"

"It would seem that residual psychic energy left over from all those fans — many of whom were teenagers, and loaded with latent psychic energy —"

"Not to mention raging hormones," Peter put in.

"From all those conventions over all those years —" Egon continued, ignoring Peter.

"Comics, science fiction, you name it —" Ray clarified.

"Has focused on the Staedtler Milton, and localized into a manifestation of some kind. Fascinating," Egon observed.

"Yeah," Peter agreed. "Old fans never die, they just blow into Manhattan."

"Hey! There's an opening!" Winston exclaimed, easing Ecto into line to take advantage of it. "Boy, we could really use the *Enterprise's* transporter about now," he added under his breath.

"So what're we gonna do? Beam 'em up to the *Enterprise*? I got news for you, kids — and you aren't gonna like this — it's just a TV show. It's not real," Peter pointed out with exaggerated care.

"I know that!" Ray snapped irritably. Even now, he liked to have his illusions intact.

"You know, playing on the *Star Trek* connection might not be such a bad idea," Egon commented. "This is your area of interest, Ray — what do you think?"

"Well, that old railway hotel has seen a lot of strange stuff in its time: many-headed Hydras, Andorian belly dancers crashing Armenian wedding receptions, full-scale galactic empire blaster battles in the middle of evangelical meetings — even a stripper who got into her costume on stage one year!" He smiled fondly at the memory of that gem. "But I'll bet it's the disappointments, the things that went wrong — maybe even the fans who got turned away because the con oversold and violated fire code. Some of those promoters weren't real careful about that," he added sagely. Peter and Winston exchanged a knowing look between them, but said nothing.

"What kinds of things went wrong, Ray?" Egon prompted.

"Oh, you know, the usual kind of thing — autographs they missed because the programs were wrong, actors who didn't show up after all, speeches they missed because the refreshment line was too long, fanzines that sold out before they got through registration — gosh, I'm surprised this didn't happen earlier," he added with a sigh, shaking his head sadly in sympathy for the dashed dreams of fans over the years.

"Yo, Ray — ground control to Major Tom!" Peter chided. "Okay, we got a hotel full of pointed-eared geeks to bust — sorry, poor choice of words," he amended over Ray's squawks and Egon's glare. Winston chuckled and fell silent. "Anyway, you know their schtick better than anybody. What's the drill?"

Ray paused to consider the problem as Winston guided Ecto-1 through another serpentine in the traffic pattern. So far, they'd covered approximately four blocks, and they were still across the city from the Staedtler Milton. Ray looked out at the street signs and grinned suddenly.

"I think I've got an idea that just might work — it couldn't hurt, anyway. There's a shop near here where we can pick up some stuff that'll help attract the spirits ..." He turned a 100-watt grin on his friends. "Since traffic's moving so slow, why

don't you and I get the supplies, and we'll meet Winston and Egon at the hotel. Whaddya say, Pete?"

As Ecto shuddered to a halt again, Peter nodded briskly. "I say I like this idea. I say let's go for it. Okay by you guys, Egon, Winston?"

"We're gonna be stuck here for a while yet, Pete," Winston answered. "Somebody might as well be accomplishing something positive."

"We'll rendezvous in the hotel lobby and meet the manager together," Egon agreed.

"Right!" Ray replied enthusiastically as he opened the door and oozed out into the frozen traffic stream. "See you guys later!" he called and trotted out toward a crosswalk.

"Hey, Ray!" Peter yelled, panting after him.

"You know, I wonder why they didn't leave their packs in the car," Winston commented, watching Peter sag under the weight of his accelerator.

* * *

As Ecto-1 inched along in the sluggish morning traffic, Winston tried to alleviate the silence that had fallen over its interior since Stantz and Venkman had exited down near the Village. "So, Egon — what'd you think of the flick last night?"

"Hhnh."

"Liked it that much, huh, Egon? Well, I still think you shoulda made Ramis wear a blond wig at least, make him look a little bit like you —"

"The film was adequate, Winston," Egon opined. He fell back into silence for a long moment, then asked abruptly, "Did you have script approval on all the scenes containing your 'character'?"

Winston paused to consider this question. "Well, sure. Yeah. We all did. Although I approved a lot more scenes than were in the final cut. Some damn fine stuff, too." Another gap opened up ahead and Winston addressed himself to guiding the ex-ambulance toward it. "At this rate, it'll be sundown by the time we get there. Good thing for the client we don't charge travelling time." As Winston moved the car into the new lane, the gridlock began to break up, and traffic began to flow more easily. "At last!" Winston breathed with a grin, taking the ambulance out of neutral and putting it in first. "Now, where was I?"

"Never mind," Egon replied, sinking down into his seat. "It wasn't important."

Winston was too busy trying to keep up with impending threats from fellow New York drivers to notice Egon's withdrawal.

* * *

"Geeze, Ray, why couldn't we take a cab, just this once? This stuff ain't light, y'know!" Peter Venkman was complaining as he and Ray Stantz exited from the subway into the lower level of the Penn Station/Madison Square Garden complex.

"Aw, Pete, quit complaining — we're almost there!" They took the escalator up to 38th Street and came out facing the Staedtler Milton. The Victorian railway hotel appeared normal, pedestrian traffic moving briskly past its revolving doors. Jogging across the street with their booty, they came up to the main doors just as Ecto-1 pulled up. "See?" Ray asked, triumphant.

"I hate it when you're right," Venkman grumbled.

The doorman came forward to collect the car keys, but Winston waved him off. "Sorry, m'man, but we may need some of the equipment in here. Just keep an eye on it, okay?" he added, pressing a \$10 bill into the man's hand. With a sullen shrug (\$10 doesn't buy much in New York), the doorman accepted the tip and retreated back to his position to settle back into a statue-like immobility, ignoring the honks, epithets, and gesticulations of a New York cabbie denied a spot in front of the hotel by Ecto. After venting his spleen, the cabbie moved on, but not without one last, venomous glance at the old ambulance.

Inside the lobby, the four Ghostbusters reconvened and Ray quickly outlined his plan of attack. Egon listened, frowning intently throughout the monologue, and finally nodded once.

"All right. We each have a role to play, and I think we should take our cues from Ray — he's the expert here. We'd better meet with the manager now and tell him what we'll need. We'll want civilians as far away as possible when we try to trap those ghosts."

"I love it when he's butch," Peter commented to no one in particular as they moved off toward the concierge's desk. As usual, no one in particular paid him any attention.

* * *

According to the Staedtler Milton's daytime manager, the manifestations had been appearing off and on in the Staedtler Milton for years, since the late-'70s. It was only recently that their numbers had grown and the incidents increased in frequency enough to call for drastic measures. Many of the long-term staff had

become rather fond of the peculiar apparitions, even going so far as to tag a few with affectionate nicknames. But when the passenger elevators were unusable for the concentrated ghosts riding up to the top level and down repeatedly (and noisily), hotel guests had become sufficiently alarmed that a frantic call was put in to the Ghostbusters.

Now the Ghostbusters found themselves in the darkened mezzanine level, Egon's PKE meter silent as he swept it in wide arcs in all directions. Frowning over his glasses, he pronounced the area "Clean. Not even a residual vapor."

Ray, who was staring around him with an air of child who's just discovered Santa Claus is really a well—defined marketing scheme, stopped and cocked an ear toward the smaller conference room to the back of the complex.

"What is it, Ray?" Winston whispered.

"I ... omigosh!" Ray breathed, eyes widening.

"What? What is it?" demanded Peter, taking his proton thrower in hand.

"They're playing 'Banned from Argo' at the filksing!" Ray called out as he too unholstered his thrower and took off toward the rising sound.

"'Banned from Argo'?" Peter asked.

"I dunno. What's a 'filksing'?" Winston asked.

At that moment, the PKE meter flared into life, the twin antennae rocketing upward and a demanding beep emanating from its tiny speaker. "Whatever it is, it's manifesting!" Egon cried out, and as one, the three Ghostbusters hared off after Ray.

In the sunlight filtering through the high windows, they saw the silouettes of spectral guitars, strings twanging with no apparant fingers to pluck them. All around them was the sound of music — and the room was definitely alive.

"Several entities," Egon said quietly. "All around us. I — look out, Ray!" Spengler cried as one of the apparitions manifested and swung its guitar at Ray, El-Kabong style.

Ray ducked swiftly, flattening himself on the carpeted floor. Suddenly, off-key voices joined the ghostly strumming, singing the chorus, "And we're banned from Argo ..."

"Geeze, old folksongs never die, do they!" he breathed, scuttling toward the meager cover of a post on the next level. Another entity manifested and swooped down on Peter, sending the psychologist sprawling.

"Ow! That hurt!" he cried, rubbing his elbow.

The entity, amorphously female in appearance, spun, ephemeral hair whipping. "Ooooh!" it cooed delightedly. Then it launched toward him again. Suddenly Peter found himself being pummelled by ghostly fists, his efforts to shield himself from the onslaught ineffectual. He threw his arms up over his face, and the fists hit his stomach; he tried to curl into a fetal position, and the fists beat upon his head; consciousness was rapidly slipping away.

"Peter!" Ray cried, ducking under another manifesting entity. Suddenly he found himself being herded toward Peter, a chill, insistent and ghostly hand pressing hard against the small of his back. With a rough push, the ghost shoved him on top of Peter and into the hail of invisible fists. He grabbed Peter and hooked his arm over in a lifeguard's carry and tried to inch away from the maelstrom. Suddenly the fists stopped, the entity burbling with pleasure. "What the hell?" Ray breathed, eyes wide as he scabbled backward with Peter gripped tightly.

In the meantime, Egon and Winston were facing off against another ghost which was flinging ectoplasmic buttons at them. Caught in a torrent of "May the Force Be With You" and "Beam Me Up, Scotty," Winston crouched low, freeing the trap from his belt, grimacing at the thick coating of slime that was accumulating from the incorporeal buttons. Seeing Winston's move, Egon fell back, bringing his barrel up slowly. Sliding the trap into position, Winston somersaulted out of range as Egon fired up his particle thrower; landing on his feet, Winston ignited his beam, and together they trapped the ghost in a nimbus of crackling light. Stamping on the pedal, Winston opened the trap and the ghost was sucked in, buttons popping like firecrackers as they disincorporated. "Yuck," Winston commented, shaking slime from his hands.

As one, they turned their fire on the ghosts attacking Ray and Peter, Egon unhooking his trap and sending it across the carpet. Twin streams of proton energy snaked across the room, encircling one furious ghost, its ectoplasmic hair rising in a halo of sickly light. It screeched, writhing in the streams as the fists shimmered into view, still pummeling Ray and Peter and leaving slimey fistprints all over their jumpsuits. Quickly, Egon and Winston moved in, shortening the streams and dragging the protesting ghost over the trap. Decisively, Egon jumped on the pedal and the ghost was caught in the cone of white light, drawn inexorably downward to the trap. Then the pair swung their beams in the direction of the fists, yelling their intention to Ray and Peter. Together, the two Ghostbusters flattened themselves on the floor, while Egon and Winston snared the second ghost. As one, they lifted their confining streams, giving Ray a chance to help Peter to a crouch so they could escape the angry ghost. Another

trap skittered across the floor, stopping just beneath the sparkling proton streams. With a whoosh, the trap opened, the ghost was pulled in, and the trap clicked shut with a definitive click.

Suddenly the room was silent. Egon bent over to pick up the three traps while Winston went over to Ray and Peter. "You guys okay?" he asked.

Peter was moaning softly at the damage done to his already tender head. "Oh, geeze ... what hit me?"

"I think it was a pair of hurt-comfort fans," Ray replied, helping Peter sit up straight. "You were the one who got hurt, and I was meant to comfort you."

Shrugging, and regretting it immediately, Peter winced. "Thanks. But I think I'd rather find comfort in the arms of my favorite cellist." Struggling to his feet, Peter wobbled slightly, but remained standing.

Now that the hubbub had quieted down, all eyes turned toward Egon, who was frowning with great concentration at his PKE meter.

"Lay it on me, m'man — how much badder could it get?" Winston asked wearily.

"We got three, but we didn't get all." To illustrate, he brandished his PKE meter, which blipped insistently.

Winston shook his head. "Peter really should see a doctor — he's probably got a concussion, and Ray's not lookin' much better — we gotta sit the next inning out — this is bigger than you 'n' me can handle alone, Egon —"

"I know that, Winston. Let's get Peter and Ray out of here before the others come at us — we'll have to tell the manager we'll be back when we're better prepared —"

"Look out!" cried Ray as the filksinger entity coalesced above Egon, brandishing its guitar like a club. Egon flattened himself on the floor, his proton rifle sliding out of his reach. A ghostly, jangling sound like guitar strings popping surrounded Egon as the ghost bashed him over the head with its ectoplasmic 12-string. Peter lost the battle to stay upright, and sat down on the floor looking dazed.

Ray fumbled with his trap, tossing it out toward Egon as Winston ignited his particle beam once more. He glanced quickly at Ray, who was doing the same. Together, they trained their beams on the fast-moving specter, Ray's beam shooting too high and taking out the overhead lighting. The ghost pirouetted out of range and dove for Egon again, guitar ready to strike.

"Shit!" Ray swore into the semi-darkness, the only light now coming from the dancing beams. Egon was crawling slowly across the carpet, hands interlaced

over the back of his head to protect it from the ghost's ministrations. Ray pulled back his beam, his teeth gritted tight as he concentrated on centering the beam on the ghost; Winston's face was grimly set as he too focused on trapping the ghost in his particle beam. As if in slow motion, their streams moved to encase the entity in flaring, sparkling light. Suddenly, it was trapped, writhing and screeching, and Egon leapt for the trap pedal, slamming it down with his fist. The trap opened, its conical light beautiful in its deadly brilliance, and drew the ghost in. The ectoguitar hung suspended over Egon for a moment, then dissolved with a pop, drenching Spengler with a spray of golden slime. The trap snapped shut with a sigh, and silence fell over the convention center again. Liberally doused with ectoplasm, Egon slumped face down on the carpet, muttering curses.

Winston grabbed the fourth trap, hooking it on his belt as Ray scuttled over to Egon to check on his partner's condition. Egon raised his head, waving Ray's concern away. "That was close, but I'm all right. Let's get Peter out of here and to the hospital — we've got some research to do before we tackle this haunting again."

Ray nodded silently, helping Egon to his feet. Darting glances over his shoulder, he and Winston helped Peter to his feet again, and they made their way quickly down the escalator to the lobby level.

There they found the concierge and the manager waiting, each of their faces pinched with worry. At the sight of the sagging, slime-encrusted Ghostbuster draped between Zeddemore's and Stantz' equally slimed shoulders, the concierge took a faltering step forward, deftly whipping a hankie from his pocket. Pressing the hankie to his nose to avoid the worst of the slime smell, he requested a status report.

"Gentlemen, we managed to contain four entities, but I believe there are many more," Egon announced. "But as you can see, our partner has sustained injuries."

"But — what about the ghosts?" stammered the concierge. "If they'd hurt you, what about our guests?"

Egon drew a deep breath. "We need to learn more about the ghosts, discover what their weaknesses are. We need more equipment, and we need ... reinforcements."

"Egon, who're we gonna call —" Ray started. Then he nodded. Janine. She was the only other person who could wield a particle thrower, despite the inaccuracies of the movie they'd given their names to. The situation was grave indeed if Egon was willing to bring her in on the bust.

"You're not giving up, Doctor Spengler ... are you?" the manager asked nervously.

"No, sir. We're regrouping. We'll see our friend safely to the hospital, ensure that he is not permanently damaged," this earned him a sour glare from Venkman, "and we'll return to our headquarters to re-arm ourselves. We will be back."

"Yeah, I didn't even get a chance to use my plan," Ray lamented.

"After makin' me haul that crap over here, Ray, you damn well better," Peter put in.

"I would suggest that you evacuate the hotel, if at all possible —" Egon interrupted forcefully.

"Evacuate!" sputtered the manager. "There are hundreds of people in this hotel, Doctor Spengler —"

"Hundreds of people who could get hurt. Surely you have agreements with other hotels to take overflow — move them all out for the night and let us work unencumbered. We don't want to risk the safety of any innocents. These ghosts are surprisingly solid, and their aim is very good indeed," he added, massaging the lump that the ectoguitar had left him. "We'll also need to see the building's blueprints, and if you could provide someone with knowledge of the physical plant, that would also be helpful."

The implacable tone of Egon's voice convinced the manager. "It'll take a few hours, quite a lot of calls, favors pulled in ... but we can do it. When do you think you'll be back?"

Egon looked at Ray, Peter, and Winston, their grim faces mirroring his own. "Six hours should be sufficient."

The manager took a deep, determined breath. "Right. We'll be ready."

* * *

Winston dropped Ray and Peter off at the emergency room so that Peter could be examined, and then he and Egon made their way to the firehouse. Pulling in to the garage, they got out and found a fierce-looking Janine, already in her Ghostbuster jumpsuit, and a worried-looking Dana waiting for them. They each greeted the women, Winston with his usual warmth, Egon with his usual distraction.

"Dana's gonna look after Peter. Where's Ray?" demanded Janine.

"With Peter," Winston replied, kissing Dana on the cheek. She accepted the kiss from Winston — who reeked of dried slime — with good grace. He grinned sheepishly as he realized just how odious he looked and smelled. "Sorry, Dana. Pete and Ray'll join us here when they're done. Any calls yet from the hotel, Janine?"

"Yeah. They're sending over a guy with the blueprints. He's also in charge of night maintenance, so they said he'll be working with you. Name's Mike Stevens."

Egon nodded. "Bring him up to the lab when he gets here," he commanded, and left the reception area.

"Hello to you, too, Egon," Janine grimaced.

Winston patted her on the arm. "Go easy on 'im, Janine — he's worried."

"Is it that bad, Winston?" Dana asked, her husky voice full of concern.

"We'll handle it. We just gotta figure out how," he answered with an encouraging grin.

* * *

"Ray, a two-buck tip is way over the national average," Peter was complaining as he and Stantz entered the garage an hour later.

"Hey, he got us here in one piece — and in New York, y'gotta admit that's an achievement, especially in a cab," Ray replied gleefully.

"Still doesn't justify ..." He caught sight of Dana sitting at the reception desk, grinned at Ray, and slipped into his "wounded hero" act. Clutching his head and moaning, he staggered with a decided limp toward Dana. "Dana ... how good of you to join me here at the end," he breathed dramatically.

"Peter," she chided, "if you were really sick, you wouldn't have the energy for such a ridiculous display." She turned to Ray and asked, "What did the doctor have to say?"

"Bruises," Ray shrugged. "And he should lay off the booze for at least a week. Maybe think about a detox program ..." he jumped out of the way of Venkman's uncoordinated flail. "He's fine, Dana. Just needs a little rest is all. Doctor even said he could go back on the bust with us."

"Hmm," Dana replied, eyeing Venkman, who, having failed to get her sympathy by feigning near death, was now trying to appeal to her maternal instincts by looking agreeably boyish. "Humph. Everybody's waiting for you up in the lab. I told Janine I'd watch the phones for her."

Crestfallen, Peter's shoulders slumped and he turned toward the stairs. "And Peter?" Dana called. He pivoted toward her, face blank. "If you manage to get yourself seriously hurt ... I'll kill you," she finished, smiling.

Peter beamed. "Aye, aye, cap'n!" he crowed, giving her a mock salute. With that, he bounded up the stairs.

"Recovers fast, doesn't he?" Dana asked Ray.

"You know Peter," he replied.

"Yes," she chuckled. "I know Peter."

* * *

"The worst part of the disturbance has been the elevators. All 12 have been erratic over the years, but just recently, the ones at the end have been more and more difficult. And now we can't use them at all," Mike Stevens explained, indicating the position of the elevator banks on the floor plan of the lobby level.

"Hmm," Egon murmured, rubbing his chin. "I wonder ... Ray, take a look at these schematics," he said, handing the elevator diagrams over to his partner.

Ray studied them a moment, then turned a brilliant smile on his physicist friend. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Since you interrupted that last experiment of mine, I have no hope of knowing what you're thinking, Raymond. But if you're thinking that we might be able to turn the elevators into a giant ghost trap, then yes, I'm thinking what you're thinking."

Ray nodded. "We'll have to do some rewiring ..."

"Will it damage the elevators?" Mike asked worriedly.

"Not permanently. I'm sure you'd be able to replace the power couplings —"

"I don't think that's under warranty, Doctor Spengler," Mike interrupted.

"Neither are ghosts, Mr. Stevens," Egon sniffed.

His protests squelched, Stevens swallowed and nodded. "Y'know, it's a shame, really. We've all gotten kind of used to them. I even have a collection of cartoons one of the ghosts draws on napkins from the bar. Some of 'em are pretty good. It's just that lately, they're everywhere, and some of 'em have scared some of the guests."

"Yeah. Once it starts to affect business, management takes an interest," Winston observed.

"I wonder what it was that set them off. Has there been any change in the hotel recently, something that might have altered the environment the ghosts exist in?" Ray asked, puzzled.

"Well, they're talking about putting the hotel up for sale again ... there's been a lot of clean up going on, especially in the sub-basement areas — you know, shifting supplies and stuff. No major renovation, though."

Ray considered a moment. "I'd like to take a look at those sub-basement areas. There may be something there to link with the ghosts."

"You two do that while Winston and I modify the elevators," Egon replied.

"What about us?" Janine and Peter demanded in unison.

After a brief moment's thought, Egon replied, "I think you two should carry out Ray's original idea and see how many of the stray entities you can capture."

"Aw, come on, Egon — it's a silly idea, selling pictures of William Shatner to ghosts!"

"I thought you thought it was a good one!" Ray protested, hurt.

"That's when you were gonna do the selling," Peter grumped.

"Oh, I'll do it, Doctor Venkman. You can man the traps," Janine conceded. "In a manner of speaking, of course," she added with a twinkle.

"Okay," Peter agreed gracelessly. Then he arched an eyebrow at Janine, wondering just what she'd meant by that last remark, but her deceptively innocent expression defeated him.

"Well," Mike began.

"Sounds like a plan to me!" Ray concluded. "Let's go bust us some ghosts!"

"Is he always like that?" Mike asked Winston, sotto voce.

"Always, m'man. Always," Winston answered with a grin.

* * *

On the top floor of the hotel, in the maintenance area for the elevator banks, Egon and Winston worked to modify the motor generators feeding power to the elevators. The six left-hand elevators were already linked to two nuclear accelerators, and Egon was putting the finishing touches on the setup. The work was precarious and painstaking; a single slip could send one or both of them plummeting down more than 18 floors to the base of the elevator well. Safety ropes clipped on their belts gave them some measure of confidence; Egon's single-mindedness did the rest.

So far, they had been undisturbed by any of the hotel's haunts, but Winston was beginning to get nervous, convinced they were pushing their luck remaining in so dangerous a position while hostile ghosts ran free.

"Hey, Egon, whaddya say we go on down and see how Janine and Peter are doin'?"

"In a minute, Winston," Egon replied from inside the generator set.

To buck up his failing spirits, Winston began to whistle a tune as he tidied up the tools they'd brought with them. He picked up Egon's PKE meter and was about to stow it away when it gave off a warning beep. "Egon ..."

"I said, in a minute, Winston," Egon called back.

"Egon, m'man, I'm not sure you have a minute —"

Just then, a heavysset, t-shirted ghost boiled up through the generator platform next to the one where Egon worked. In its insubstantial hand it brandished what looked like a red pen; it erupted into the air and swooped down at Egon, screeching "Out of character! Grammatically incorrect!" Egon, his attention wrested from the connection to the generator, ducked and rolled as far as the platform would allow him, scrabbling for purchase on the edge of the deck as Winston lunged for his thrower.

"Out of the way!" yelled Winston to Egon; the scientist scuttled toward the ladder set in the wall, scrambling toward the floor below and safety. Arm wrapped around the ladder, Egon stopped and unhooked the trap from his belt, tossing it onto the generator platform, holding the pedal in his hand.

The ghost was following him, its pen sketching arcane symbols in the air, and ectoplasmic ink spattering in all directions. "Delete! Plottus interruptus! Reformat!"

"This is weird," Winston breathed as he aimed his particle thrower and thumbed the "on" switch. Sizzling energy shot forth, knocking him backward against the wall. He wrestled with the beam as the ghost weaved in and out of range, calling out editorial abuse at both Ghostbusters. "Shit!" Winston swore as the ghost dodged out of sight, only to burst into sight right in front of him. Startled, he lost his footing on a puddle of ectoplasmic ink and slipped off the narrow catwalk.

"Winston!" Egon bellowed over the sounds of the enraged ghost.

The rope holding Winston uncoiled, stretched, and held, leaving him dangling ten feet below the generator platform with a clear view of an uprushing elevator car. The thrower had fallen from his hands, and frantically he hauled it back up, looping the cable around his forearm before he twisted around to grab hold of the rope and haul himself upward.

"M'okay — get that sucker!" Winston yelled.

Egon had left his perch on the maintenance ladder, and had regained his own accelerator. With the barrel pointed at the cackling ghost, he now unleashed its energy right into the face of the entity. It squawked surprise and dismay, calling "SASE me! SASE me!" as Egon nudged the trap closer. His foot found where he'd dropped the pedal, and he came down on it hard. The editorial ghost was sucked in over the sounds of its plaintive wails, and the trap clicked shut.

Just then, Winston scrambled up onto the platform, mere seconds before the elevator car thudded into place against the final limit switch, a few feet above where Winston had been hanging.

"Whew!" Winston exclaimed. "I don't want to do that again!"

"You're right, Winston — it's time to see how the others are faring."

"Got that right, Egon!"

* * *

"Step right up and get your *Star Trek* photos here!" Janine called out in her best carney voice. "We got William Shatner as Captain Kirk. We got William Shatner as T. J. Hooker. We got William Shatner as 911. We got William Shatner before his hair weave. We got 'em all, folks, so come on down!"

"Dontcha think you're layin' it on a little thick, Janine?" Peter asked quietly.

"If you'd like to do this, just say so, Doctor Venkman," she snarled back. "We got your *Star Trek* photos right here, folks!" she resumed when Peter had graced her with a silent grimace. "What's that?" she asked suddenly, indicating a swirling mass in the middle of the cavernous room.

"Beats me — hey!"

From out of the mass evolved the shapes of teenagers, male, female, graceful, gawky, all t-shirted, all brandishing fistfuls of ectoplasmic money. One entity resolved itself into a petite but busty young woman, who eyed Peter suggestively before plunking her money down on the table before Janine. "One of each," she demanded.

Quirking an eyebrow at Peter, Janine set about assembling one of each of the photos Ray had bought earlier in the day. While she was doing that, additional shapes, defined now, pressed against the table, pushing money at her and joining their voices to a crescendoing babble. Janine was starting to get flustered as more and more of the ghosts solidified, and the tenor of the crowd began to grow uglier by the second.

"Um, Doctor Venkman — aren't you going to do something?" she queried as the busty ghost snatched the stack of photos, plus all the money she'd put down, and flounced away to stand at a table that materialized out of thin air.

"Get your o-fficial, authorized *Star Trek* photos here!" hawked the busty ghost, grinning evilly at Janine. "One of a kind, best prices, guaranteed authentic!"

"Hey, that ghost stole my photos!" Janine swore, slapping away the hands that pushed and prodded at her.

"Where's *Alexander the Great*?" whined one ghost, shoving his fist in her face.

"Where's *Kingdom of the Spiders*?" rasped another.

"I want *Nightmare at 40,000 Feet*!" bawled another.

"Hey, there's no *Devil's Rain* here!" complained yet another.

"O-ficial, one of a kind, totally legitimate photos right here, folks! No waiting!" cajoled the bootlegger.

"Hey!" Janine protested as the ghosts surged in a body toward the bootlegger's ectotable. "Peter," she ordered ominously.

Venkman grinned cockily and casually unslung his thrower. Around the perimeter of the room stood a circuit of traps, 30 in all, each linked to the master pedal at his feet. Miming a tap dance, Peter jauntily danced around the pedal, bringing his foot down in finale. As the traps opened in unison, ghosts were pulled outward into the ring of traps, their struggles ineffectual in the deadly suction of the traps. Even the bootlegging ghost was drawn in, followed by its counterfeit photos, and finally by the table. A concerted click, and the traps shut, leaving only blissful silence.

"About time," Janine complained.

Peter shrugged. "I didn't even get a chance to shoot, Tex."

"Don't call me Tex. And don't get too cocky — here comes more!" she exclaimed, pointing at the onrushing phalanx of ghostly fans.

"Christ — how many of them are there?" Peter demanded, bringing his thrower to bear.

Janine ducked under the table and came up wearing her pack, unshipping the proton thrower as she straightened. "I don't know — how many conventions were held here?"

"I don't think I want to know the answer to that," Peter replied, powering up his accelerator.

"So, Doctor Venkman — what're you planning to use for traps *now*?"

"Didn't you bring anymore?"

She shook her head.

"Oh, shit —"

"Mary Sue! Mary Sue!" the ghosts chanted as they advanced on the trapless Ghostbusters.

* * *

"All the stuff that was found in the old receiving office was moved in here," Mike was saying as he led Ray through a labyrinth of service corridors beneath the Staedtler Milton.

"Let's take a look — you never know what we might find," Ray answered, picking his way around the accumulated debris of several decades.

Mike opened the door to the storage room, and Ray came up behind him as he flicked on the lights. Floor to ceiling boxes lined the room, some looking like they dated back to the earliest days of the hotel.

"Wow. Did anybody ever *get* anything in this hotel?"

Mike bristled at the slur on his place of employment, but Ray's chuckle and friendly pat on the shoulder dispelled his displeasure. "We've had some employees over the years who didn't care too much, I guess. Happens in any big organization."

"Yeah. That's why we keep the Ghostbusters small. Quality is job one and all that. Well, we might as well start looking."

"For what?"

"Anything that *Star Trek* fans might want, I guess." He nodded toward a pile of paper boxes, bearing the names "Weyerhaeuser," "Nashua," "Carter Rice" and other famous paper manufacturers. "That looks like as good a place to start as any."

The first box proved to be wedding invitations for a wedding held in 1968, the summer of love. Fitting the lid back on, they pushed it out of the way, and hauled down two more boxes to look through. Party supplies, office copy paper, *Watchtower* magazines from 1972, and a secret cache of *Playboys* were revealed as they worked their way down the pile. Then Ray lifted the cover from a particularly dusty box, whistling low as he scanned the contents.

"Mint condition *Interphases*. Wow. These are worth a fortune in fannish circles." He lifted up a copy, admiring the fine multi-color silk screening on the cover. He shook himself. "This could be it, but let's check a couple more boxes, okay?"

Mike nodded and proceeded to haul out more of the boxes. As they sifted through the contents, they found more evidence of fannish shipments: rare stills from *The Day The Earth Stood Still* and *War of the Worlds*, first edition *Spockanalias*, a decaying costume Ray guessed to be the Nightingale Woman from "Where No Man Has Gone Before," and tucked in the back behind the stack, original artwork by a fannish artist who'd gone pro some 10 years earlier.

"Wow. And none of it looks like it was insured," he commented, studying the box lids for stickers and markings from the shipping companies. "Let's get this stuff upstairs — I think we found our link."

Mike hurried off to get a dolly, while Ray reverantly replaced the lid on the last box of fannish treasures they'd found. "Boy, talk about the mother lode," he

whispered, shaking his head. He'd been right about fannish disappointments; this room was full of them.

* * *

"Doctor Venkman, do something!" Janine wailed as ghostly tomatoes popped into existence a foot above her head, only to drop down on her, spraying her with gooey ectoplasm. She was beginning to look as grotty as the guys by now. The "Mary Sue" chant had risen in volume as more and more ghosts materialized. "What the hell's a Mary Sue anyway?"

Peter, who had raced out to Ecto-1 to grab more traps, was kicking them out as fast as he could. "Gimme a sec, will ya, Janine. Geeze, I hate bossy women."

"I'll give you bossy, *Doctor Venkman* — you just wait!" Janine promised as she ducked under her dealer's table to cut off the build-up of proto-spagetti sauce in her hair. "Gak! I'll never eat ketchup again!"

"Okay, traps're set — I'm gonna need your help, Janine," Peter carolled at her.

Cursing under her breath, she crawled out from under the table and shook the slime off her thrower. "Lemme at 'em!" Under her breath, she added, "Then it's *your* turn, Doctor Venkman!"

Twin beams of particle energy laced around the mob of ghostly fans as Peter and Janine nudged traps in their direction. One by one, the ghosts were caught in the telltale cones of light. They were still trapping ghosts and fending off new attacks when Egon and Winston arrived on the scene.

"Hey — what is this — a convention?" Winston quipped gamely.

Egon favored him with a withering look and Winston shrugged apologetically. Between them, they still had two unused traps, and these they added to the traps littering the room. It still wasn't enough.

A ghost swooped down on Janine, sending her off-balance; she dropped to the floor, swearing anew. Another ghost aimed head-first at Winston's mid-section, knocking the wind out of him and forcing him down on his knees. Yet another ghost picked Egon up and carried him across the room, stripping his clothes off and throwing his proton pack against the wall as it tossed him at Peter. A fourth ghost caught Peter in a mini-tornado, and the psychologist found himself equally unclothed and unarmed. The two Ghostbusters glanced blushinglly at each other, and then studiously ignored each other.

At that point, Ray and Mike wheeled in the dolly full of boxes. "Hey, guys, look what we found — omigosh! Slash ghosts!"

"Throw the traps, Ray!" Janine ordered, rolling over and coming up in a crouch, thrower at the ready. Ray tossed two traps out onto the crowded floor, and quickly brought his own thrower up to bear.

"Duck!" Ray commanded, and as one, Egon and Peter dropped to the floor. Janine's and Ray's beams were joined by Winston's, and the threesome caught the four rampaging ghosts in a sparkling web of light. Mike, being a secret fan of the Ghostbusters and having watched many a bust on the 6 o'clock news, made a beeline for the traps and jumped on the pedals, one right after the other. Suddenly, the ghosts were contained and the room went quiet again.

"Nobody's gonna slash anybody on *my* team!" Janine vowed, kicking a blinking trap.

"Uh, Janine," Ray began, fingering his collar as his face flushed red. "It's not that kind of slash."

"No?"

"Uh, no. It's —" he whispered in her ear, and her face turned pinker than her jumpsuit.

"Oh. Not that, either," she said in a small voice.

Egon and Peter exchanged glances. "I don't think I wanna know," Venkman said. "Can somebody find our clothes?"

Winston tossed Peter's jumpsuit at him, chuckling all the while, as Mike lobbed Egon's at him. Janine turned decorously away, still blushing.

"I believe you said you found something, Raymond?" Egon asked with an attempt at dignity.

"You bet!" He gestured toward the stack of boxes on the dolly. "These were all lost in receiving over the years — classic fanzines, costumes, stills, original art — a fortune in fannish memorabilia!"

"So what do we do with it?" Peter queried, running fingers through his hair to comb it back in place. With an effort, he extracted his fingers from the crusty mess slime had made of his coif.

Ray thought a moment. "Gee, I don't know. Return it to the original owners, I guess. Or donate it to the Fan Fund or the Welcommittee. Mike here's gonna talk to the management to make sure they go through everything in the sub-basements. There're probably other triggers down there waiting to go."

Egon's PKE meter, lying on the floor where the ghost had knocked it from his hand, beeped plaintively. "Looks like we're not done yet, gentlemen. And Janine," he added, blushing anew. "We'd better get on with the next stage of the plan."

"We've got people standing by on all floors," Mike announced. He unclipped the walkie-talkie on his belt. "You ready to give the word?"

Egon looked around for his remote control to the device he and Winston had installed in the elevator shaft. It had fallen in a corner of the room, and now its electronic components were scattered across the floor.

"Not quite yet," Egon replied sadly, picking up the broken device. "Give me one of the those," he indicated the walkie-talkie, "and I'll activate it manually from the elevator service area."

"Not by yourself, you don't," Winston amended. "It could be dangerous."

"We'll split into two teams — Peter, Janine and Mike, you take the lobby and Winston, Ray and I will take the service area."

"And maybe you can get housekeeping to collect these traps and put 'em in Ecto-1," Peter added with a wave of his hand.

* * *

This time, both Winston and Egon secured themselves with two safety lines each, while Ray stood guard with his proton pack and a spare trap. He'd lost count of how many traps they'd used this day; they'd probably set a record. If they'd had time, they should have taken the full traps back to the firehouse and flushed them into the containment unit. If they'd had an extra pair of hands, they could have done just that. He'd have to talk to the guys about the possibility of bringing on an assistant to be on-call for jobs like this one. Dana might be willing to help out once they got back to the firehouse, but he was sure that Peter would have something to say about it.

Egon checked to make sure that all the connections were still secure. Luckily, without their presence, nothing had drawn the ghosts up to this level of the hotel. The super-trap was ready to activate.

* * *

In the lobby of the hotel, Mike was just finishing disabling the unconverted elevator cars. The doors to the converted elevators were locked, and would only

open when he keyed them to. He stuffed the keys into his pocket and stood back to wait with Peter and Janine for Egon's signal.

* * *

On every floor of the hotel, courageous (or merely curious) hotel staff waited by the elevator call panel to request one of the modified elevator cars. Each held a walkie-talkie, and each waited tensely for the signal to hit the button.

* * *

With a flourish, Egon switched on the super-traps. He nodded to Ray, who passed the signal on to Mike and the awaiting hotel staff. The converted elevators began their descent.

* * *

"I'm just a sweet transvestite! From Transylvani-a-ha-hah!" crooned a ghost in outrageous makeup and torn fishnet stockings, swaggering toward the nervous hotel staffer on the 18th floor. Boggling (he'd never worked a Creation Con), he hit the call button and scurried into the maintenance closet, cracking the door open to watch what happened next.

What happened next was the elevator chimed to a halt and opened its doors. A brilliant white light erupted out of the doors, and suddenly the air was alive with the screeches of ghosts caught in the trap funnel. Ectoentities were sucked out of closets, function rooms, the stairwell, and the ventilator shafts. Then suddenly, the doors closed with a soft click, and the elevator continued downward.

For the first time since he'd come to work at the Staedtler Milton, the staffer felt at ease. He grinned and slipped out of the closet. He was definitely alone.

* * *

The scene on the other floors was monotonously similar. Even though the ghosts captured on earlier floors were still in the elevators as they reached new floors, the energy feeding the super-trap held the captives in place as new occupants were drawn into the trap field.

* * *

By the time the elevators all reached the lobby, Mike was reenabling the other bank of elevators so the hotel staffpeople and the Ghostbusters could reach the lobby level. They didn't have long to wait.

"Wow," breathed one staffer as she exited the elevator. "That was pretty amazing — you guys do this all the time?"

Peter puffed up with his best "on-camera" look. "Not all the time, ma'am. Just when the situation demands it." He struck a heroic pose, turning a gigawatt smile on her, and basked in the beam of her admiration until Janine elbowed him in the ribs.

"Ow! That's Dana's job, Janine!"

"I'm lookin' out for her interests, Doctor Venkman. Although why I bother — she deserves better than you —"

"Remind me to fire you, Janine," Peter replied through gritted teeth.

"Don't do me any favors," Janine retorted.

Egon, Ray, and Winston were the last to debark the elevators. Egon immediately went over to the opposite elevator bank and whipped out his PKE meter to take readings. "Contained." He did a quick sweep of the lobby, and boosted the gain so he could get a reading on the hotel as a whole. "Clean. We got 'em all." He favored them with a rare smile, and the woman who had been admiring Peter just about fainted.

"Okay!" Ray exulted.

"Hey, guys," Peter interjected suddenly. "Have you given any thought as to how we're gonna get six elevators to headquarters?"

Egon and Ray exchanged glances, and Egon coughed with embarrassment. "Uh, no, actually we hadn't."

"I don't think the manager's gonna like this ..." Mike put in, grinning at Egon's discomfiture.

* * *

In the end, they'd had to call the elevator company to bring in another elevator car, which they linked to accelerators to make a bleed-off trap. Six trips by truck and a lot of manhandling later, the Staedtler Milton's ghosts were safely transported to Ghostbuster Central, where Dana volunteered to help flush the ghosts into the main containment unit. After Dana had assured him that she really didn't mind (although privately to Janine she vowed that her next boyfriend would be in the high-ticket perfume business), Peter settled down to contemplate a hefty bill for the hotel. Ray had promised to provide current addresses for many of the owners of the lost packages, and the hotel management had

promised to go through each and every box and make every possible effort to return them to their proper owners.

Once the ghosts had been contained, Janine claimed dibs on the shower, and while the guys were arguing over this, she slipped upstairs to remove the red gook encrusting her hair, face, and exposed extremities. By the time the men had settled the argument, Janine had returned to the reception area, head swathed in a towel, and body wrapped in one of Egon's robes. The robe threatened to trip her as she picked her way back down the stairs.

Dana, who had faithfully stood by the phones while the others had been battling the Staedtler Milton ghosts, and had done more than her fair share of trap-flushing, announced that Peter was taking her out to dinner as payment for her work.

"Now? Tonight?" Peter lamented.

"Now. Tonight. And no Burger King, either. I want to be waited on, Doctor Venkman, and I want a really good meal. So go get cleaned up and then you can tell me where you're taking me."

Grumbling, but nonetheless pleased, Peter trudged up the stairs to the living area to make himself human. Or as close as he could get it.

Just then, the phone rang. "I'll get it — you go freshen up," Janine said, shooing Dana away from her temporary post. "Ghostbusters!"

Exhausted and grubby, the three remaining Ghostbusters nevertheless leaned in to hear what the call was about. Janine made a face, shaking her head. "Oh. Hello, Louis," she said flatly. She listened a moment, her expression growing more and more disgusted. "Louis, it was just a movie. You shouldn't believe everything you see in the movies." She opened and closed her mouth a few times, eyes widening as her fist clenched. "Louis!" she shouted into the mouthpiece. "It's ... just ... a ... movie. It's Hollywood. It's fiction. Do you understand me?" A pause while something the guys couldn't hear was said on the other end of the phone. "No. I do not want you to come back to New York. You stay in Florida with your mother. Trust me, Louis — she needs you a whole lot more than I do." Another pause. "No, I'm not being selfless, Louis. Watch it, or I'll be honest. Now don't call me again!" With that, she slammed down the phone, her eyes stormy.

"Louis?" Ray asked, barely containing a grin. Janine shot daggers at him with her eyes.

"He wants to come back? I thought he was happy looking after his mother's retirement home finances," Winston added, the corners of his mouth quirking into a smile that wouldn't be suppressed.

"You don't want him to come back?" Egon put in suddenly, and the catch in his voice made Janine's head snap up so that she was looking directly in his eyes.

Her expression softened. A faint smile touched her lips, the smile she always had on hand for Egon. "No, Egon. I don't want him to come back."

"Then the movie —"

"That was my idea," Dana told them, returning from her toilet. "The studio promised Mel Gibson. Or Kevin Costner. We got Rick Moranis." She shook her head over the vagaries of dealing with reality, Hollywood-style.

"Why —" Ray began, only to be silenced by the elbow strategically placed above his floating rib. Winston glared at him, nodding toward Egon, whose face betrayed an emotion for which he probably didn't even know the name.

Janine shrugged. "I think I'll go get dressed now," she said, and turned away before her blush could betray her.

"I'll ... um, I'll take you home," Egon offered falteringly. When Janine turned back to look at him wonderingly, he added, "You shouldn't take the subway at this time of night."

"No, I shouldn't," she answered enthusiastically. "I won't be a minute!" With that, she raced off, the hem of Egon's robe snapping around her ankles.

End