

Schrödinger's mousetrap

Part 5: Refracted glory.

Remco Zegers

Despite the fact that she was going to be interviewed by the police, Petra Pruszczyński couldn't resist a little smile as Lister entered the room. She had just caught him practising her name in the hallway and he now entered with a blush. "Miss ... Professor Prus-zinki, please sit down," he said. Obviously, the practice hadn't helped.

"Pleaz. Call me Petra," she said, and could see the relief on Lister's face. This was not going to be as difficult as she had feared it would be.

"Well then ... Petra. I have some important questions for you concerning the death of Rufus Jaeger, so let me get straight to the point. How would you describe the relationship between you and Professor Jaeger?"

Pruszczyński smiled again. "Iz no zecret that I not like him. He doez ... did bad physics and made bad image of uz all."

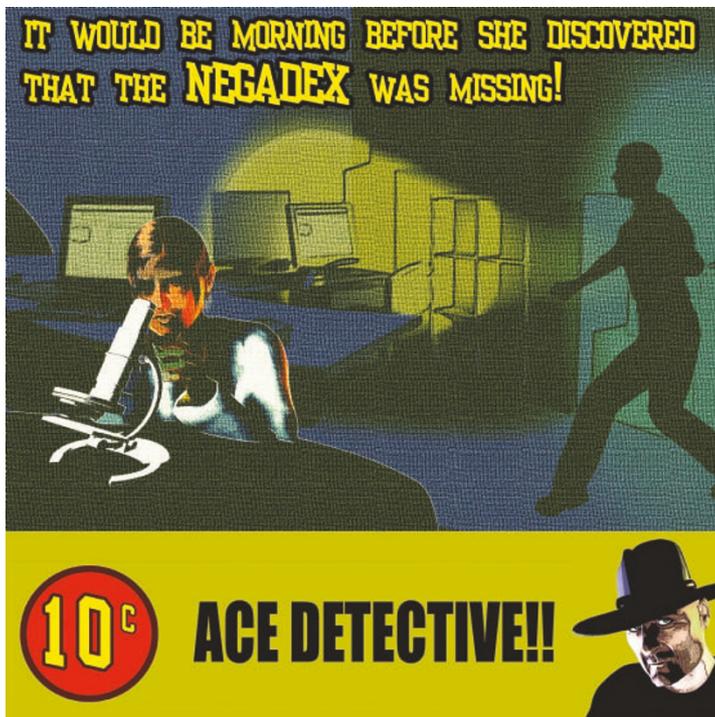
"Wouldn't you say it goes a bit further than that? I don't know about etiquette between physicists, but to accuse a person of stupidity during a major presentation is a bit harsh, isn't it?" Lister stared her straight in the eyes, and she took a moment before replying.

"Ze truth iz not always kind, az I am sure you know. I told Rufus before hiz methods unprofzessional. He never listen. I don't understand why Fenton ask him to give lecture. When I visit Fenton a few months ago he agreed with me that Rufus iz no good."

"If the truth is what you are interested in ... Petra," stressing her name, "why would you hire a person like Mr Feng, who has a rather questionable record in terms of truthfulness and was trained by this 'bad physicist'?"

Pruszczyński was somewhat surprised that the police had already figured this out, but this thought was overwhelmed by the irritation she felt at the use of her first name in this manner. "Jirong iz exzellent researcher and cannot be blamed for Rufus's fail-urez. I zee talent, I get it," and she stared back at Lister with a look that could only be interpreted as seeing a lack of talent right there.

Lister didn't seem to care and, after thinking for



a moment, asked in a much milder tone: "What are you and Mr Feng working on now?"

Pruszczyński raised her eyebrows. "We study material with very zpecial optical properties. Iz rather technical."

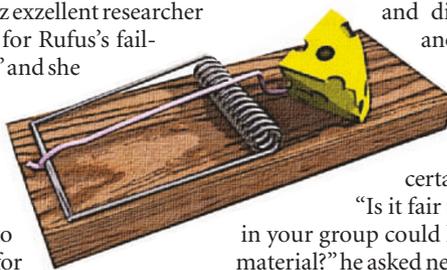
"Are you referring to ... er ... negadex, which has a negative index of ... um ... refraction?" Lister asked, trying to act nonchalantly while reading the technical terms from his notes.

Suddenly, Pruszczyński was alarmed. How could this person know about her discovery? Someone must have had difficulty keeping his mouth shut. *Psiakość!* "Yes," she answered, trying rather unsuccessfully to hide her emotions.

"Interesting, interesting..." Lister said, seemingly pretending to know what he was talking about. "Could you make this negadex look just like an ordinary prism?"

Pruszczyński very much felt like asking what an ordinary prism looks like to put Lister in his place, but she suddenly understood what he was getting at and didn't get further than another "Yes". She wished that Lister would stop staring at her. He might be stupid, but his piercing gaze was certainly discomfiting.

"Is it fair to say that only people in your group could have had access to this material?" he asked next.



"Yes, that iz correct," she answered quickly before realizing that he had led her into a trap. How could she have been so stupid? Then she remembered the break-in at the lab a few months ago. Some pieces of negadex had been stolen along with computers and expensive optical equipment. It was certainly good to mention the break-in to keep the heat off her group. "But we had break-in lazt zummer. Zome negadex got stolen also." She wasn't sure whether Lister would recognize her hesitation. But he just responded with another "interesting, interesting".

"No one was ever caught?" he asked.

"No, waz mystery."

"Coming back to today," Lister said. "Where were you during the coffee break?"

"I discuzzed with Veronique Dubois our collaboration on a project," Pruszczyński responded.

"So, she can confirm this?" he asked.

Pruszczyński couldn't help rolling her eyes upward before stating: "One cannot zay physicists are known for lack of memory ... offizer," and felt she was back in control.

Lister didn't react though, and let his eyes drift away from Pruszczyński for a moment. He then focused his gaze back on her and said: "I think we are almost finished, but what I really don't understand, Petra, is why you are here today. You say the presentation is a farce, you obviously didn't like Rufus Jaeger and yet ... I can't believe you came here just to insult him in front of the rest of the physics community."

Pruszczyński stared right back at him. "Well, offizer, we all have to do thingz we don't want to do." And she simply couldn't resist saying: "And right now, I really don't want to be here any more. I hope we finized." She didn't even wait for Lister's nod, and left the room. All she wanted to do was to get back to her laboratory and continue her research.

To be continued...

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