

Cable Station  
by Chris Zell

I can't blame the world anymore. This proves it is me.

I had to drop a tape of at a cable station in Boston last night. Seems a simple enough task now, don't it? This cable station is downtown on the third floor of the Transportation Building. Again, this seems pretty simple. I know where it is so I get there without a problem.

That should have been my first clue.

I open the ground level door and begin my ascent to the third floor. I pass this desk that was in front of the escalator and begin my final trek. I'm almost at the end of this adventure.

Nirvana.

Or, at least, a Heineken.

Until the guy at the desk had a fit.

'Halt!' He barked in an accent vaguely familiar to me. The problem now is that I am on an escalator. Which means even if I halt I'm really not halting. So, salmon-like, I struggle down stream and get to this guys desk. As I read his rent-a-cop arm patch (and notice the fact that he had no gun - I may be nuts but I still maintain a self protection gene) something about his genetic make-up seemed vaguely familiar to me. 'Where is your pass?' He demands. His eyes watching my hands, which holds, to his paranoid brain, a bomb. Or worse. Strudel.

That's it. I've got it.

He's German. He's pissed. Get used to it.

I stand by his desk and explain that, to all outward appearances, I am not nor have I ever been (without pay or a really bad mood) an armed terrorist. I'm just a lowly video tape delivery boy and you are beginning to cut into my pond of serenity (I had to pee).

'You need a pass after six Pee Emm.' He sits but doesn't relax. Ever vigilant, you see.

Doing my best Dana Carvey doing Johnny Carson I said, 'I did not know that.' No reaction. Must not be a fan. Probably too busy tinkering with his

key chain pipe gun trying to give it higher stopping power.

'Do you have a pass?' He inquires, sounding more like General Burkhalter from 'Hogan's Heroes' all the time. I look up to the top of the escalator then back down to my inquisitor. I wanted to say, 'If I had a pass, Schultz, we wouldn't be having this little talk now, would we?' But, he's only doing his job so I say, 'No, I'm sorry I didn't know about this magical piece of paper. I am so sorry to put you through this.'

He stares at me while fingering his walkie-talkie. Ready to call his SS brethren (and by SS I mean Store Security) at any sign of insurrection by me. A man without a pass. After about ten seconds of him not doing his job (which, to me, should be to call up to the station and have someone come down, snatch the tape from me and scurry back behind this curtain of security) I ask him if the station is open. He answers, after carefully checking the perimeter, (I'm assuming for unauthorized vagrants - unlike myself who, because of my envelope, is just a vagrant) in the affirmative.

Then I ask if he could call the station and ask if someone could come down and get this tape. 'It's real important. It's the new Pamela Sue Anderson/Yanni sex tape that's going to air tonight.' No reaction. Oh sure, if I'd said Hitler/Braun there would have been a reaction. I've got to remember to tailor to my audience. 'No, sorry, just a joke.' Oh oh. I catch myself and feel shame. 'Sorry. Didn't mean to joke in your presence.'

The guard glares at me for a few more moments until he picks up the walkie-talkie and growls commands into it. While he does this two uniformed Boston Police Department officers (both sergeants) start to walk by him. And he bolts up and tries to stop them. Now I should have apologized because, damn, this boy does know comedy. The officers verbally spank him, look at me like they feel sorry that I have to deal with this guy and walk past. Before the guard sees me I have to wipe the smirk off my face. There's a special place in his basement for people who smirk at him.

A few minutes later the walkie-talkie squawks to life. It is someone asking for my name. Now, this doesn't make sense to me because, I know for a fact that only one person at this station knows me and he is not working tonight. But, I play along.

'Chris. Zell.' The guard looks at me for a moment. A slight glaze of recognition passes. 'Like the River Zell.' A short, officious nod emits from his head. 'From the homeland.' His grip on the walkie-talkie softens as his mind whirls (well, maybe not whirl. More like sputter to a pen light) thinking, 'A guy named Zell. Shaved head. Gee, must be one of the good ones.'

'Zell.' He snaps into the walkie-talkie. 'Zell.' He says with urgency. 'Christian Zell.'

I lean forward slightly and address the guard. 'It's Christopher. Assimilation, you know.' He nods but I don't think he understood. Or much cared. The walkie-talkie goes silent. I stand at the desk awaiting. . .what? I don't know, actually, but I know that I am awaiting something.

Just then I hear the walkie-talkie burst into action. The guard speaks for a moment and then tells me that someone standing at the railing wants to look at me.

Now this is even stupider to me than getting my name. I mean, I am pretty sure that the guy who wants a visual ID of me wasn't going to say, 'Yes, that's him. That's the magnificent Chris Zell.' Nope, couldn't see that happening for two reasons. 1) the guy couldn't identify me even if I was wearing one of those stupid 'Hi, my name is. . .' stickers and 2) that phrase hasn't been uttered so far in my life so why would I think it would happen now?

So, I walk over to the railing, bellow across a vast expanse my meager task (for those of you who have never been to the Transportation Building in Boston let me explain that it is one of those mammoth buildings that is part shopping mall/part office complex and I am on the second floor, he is on the third, below us is a fairly packed food court. So the ID guy and I are doing a dinner theater production of 'Romeo and Juliet' for their dining and dancing pleasure). Now this guy, who has never seen me, nods and tells the guard that it's okay, I am allowed to pass the scared portal of the security desk. I guess the lesson we've learned today about penetrating the steel fortress of security is 1) have a name 2) have a face 3) have an envelope (a clip board would probably be just as effective).

And this, just when I have almost won, the completion of my task within reach, is when I know it's not the world, it's me and my ugly head. I call to the ID guy, 'Thanks. But I'm not going to be strip searched over there, am I?'

Wow. I really like the acoustics of laughter in a steel and glass building. I look at the crowd gathered below (notice a few people wiping food or beverage off their faces) then back at the guard who, to my glee, was not strapping on a rubber glove. Because, as much as I like the producers of this show, I don't think I'd go through a full body cavity search for them.

Well, at least not by Hans.

Get me a Gretel and we'll talk about it.