

# That Orange Feeling

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"...I feel fine..."

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Weinland Research Institute; Level 4, Lab Center 6

"'Specimen Delta-Alpha 8102.60.9', " Magnusson read aloud from the container label. He drew a sample from it and applied it to a glass disc.

"Specimen Delta-Alpha..." Samuels repeated, pausing to yawn, "... 8102.60.9." He took the glass and placed it under the microscope. A sigh wheezed from his lungs before he blinked through his drowsiness and peered into the eyepiece.

Magnusson stood aside quietly, arms crossed, holding his clipboard while he stared toward the floor. He too sighed while awaiting to record Samuels' remarks. It was more of a way to mask the grumbles from his tummy, the needy brays of hunger sounding like klaxons in the silent lab.

Samuels was motionless for an extended moment. Magnusson almost expected to hear his colleague start snoring at any moment, so it was no surprise that his heart jumped when his cell phone suddenly blare from his lab coat pocket.

"Jesus, wake the dead, why don't you?" Samuels exclaimed, looking up from his seat.

"Sorry," Magnusson apologized. He fumbled for his phone.

"R.E.M.?" Samuels asked, referring to the band playing the tune.

Magnusson nodded. He turned aside as he answered his phone, "Yes?"

Samuels returned to peering through the microscope, humming the song from the phone, then mumbling "...and I feel fine..."

“Tuna on whole wheat and a garden salad with oil and vinegar on the side,” Magnusson spoke over his phone, “and a green tea over ice, please and thanks.”

“Is that Phipps?” Samuels asked.

“Yeah, he's stopping to get lunch before he comes back. What do you want?”

With his eye steady at the lens, Samuels replied, “Double cheeseburger with battered fries.”

Magnusson smirked and spoke to Phipps, “Samuels wants high blood pressure with a side order of coronary disease. That would be a double cheeseburger and battered fries.”

“And a large orange soda,” Samuels added, not taking the bait.

“Really?” Magnusson asked with a crinkle in his nose. He shrugged and sighed, “And he wants an orange soda, large. Yes... really. Please and thanks. See you in twenty minutes.”

As Magnusson put away his phone, Samuels said, “Specimen Delta-Alpha 8102.60.9... positive response.”

“Check, ” Magnusson said, and ticked a box on his clipboard. “Observations and recommendations?”

“Clear as the sky is blue, ” Samuels remarked. He sat back, removed the glass plate and added, “Continue with the study.”

“Continue with the study. Check, ” Magnusson affirmed. He read aloud the label from another container, “Specimen Delta-Alpha 9102.60.9’.”

Samuels watched him as he applied another sample to an examination plate. As he took it and slid it under the microscope, he repeated, “Specimen Delta-Alpha 9102.60.9.”

“A double cheeseburger and battered fries,” Magnusson scoffed, still thinking about their lunch order. “Did you get a deal on an early grave?”

Samuels shrugged. “Live every day like your last.”

Magnusson spiked a brow. “ And an orange soda. What are you, twelve?”

"The colour makes me happy," Samuels replied with an unapologetic grin. "Something about that deep orange glow."

"It's unnatural."

"Well, you're not the one drinking it. So don't worry," Samuels said, turning back to the microscope, "it won't hurt you."

Magnusson rolled his eyes.

After a minute of silence as Samuels peered through the lens, he droned, "Specimen Delta-Alpha 9102.60.9... negative response."

Magnusson looked up from his clipboard, surprised. "Really? A failure?"

"Completely and utterly."

"But it showed promise earlier." Magnusson seemed unprepared for the result.

"See for yourself," Samuels said leaning away from the microscope.

Magnusson looked through the lens. "Wow. Fragmentation and dissolution rate is incredible. It's like the specimen is experiencing catastrophic degradation."

"Total collapse," Samuels concurred as he wiped his glasses.

"Recommendations?" Magnusson asked.

"Termination of study specimen." Samuels stood up, stretched his back, then picked up a lab bottle from the fridge unit and a syringe from a box. "Immediately."

Magnusson still appeared miffed. "So... it's unsalvageable?"

"Not a chance in hell." Samuels drew a fiery orange fluid from the lab bottle, filling the syringe. He regarded Magnusson and extended his hand. "Let's smite it."

Magnusson sighed, despondent, and handed over the failed specimen container.

Samuels inserted the syringe needle. As he administered the termination fluid, he continued to hum

the tune from Magnusson's phone now lodged in his brain.

"...and I feel fine..."

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"Yeah, I got everything," Phipps said into his earpiece as he emerged from the restaurant carrying a paper bag containing the lab's lunch in one hand while balancing a tray of drinks in the other.

"Including the large cup of orangey glucose?" asked Magnusson.

"Yeah. Ugh." He looked down at the large container of nuclear orange soda with mild disgust, sucking sourly upon his tongue, practically tasting the tingly, sickly sweetness on the tip of his tongue. He nearly gagged at the thought of Samuels drinking the entire thing.

Absorbed by his bemusement, he nearly walked into the back of a group of people standing in the middle of the sidewalk.

"Look out, " he exclaimed.

The group didn't move. No one even noticed him.

"Excuse me," he said, trying to make his way around them.

Then he realized they were all gazing up. Not only the group, but as Phipps glanced around the streets, he noticed everyone was stopped and looking upwards.

"What...?" Phipps remarked, frowning. He raised his eyes toward the sky.

From a single spot in the pristine blue canvas above, an ominous light spread across the noon sky. It glowed like the fiery blaze of a sunset, yet it seemed to cast a chill in the air. It continued to spill forth, oozing from a hole in the heavens, blanketing the world in blinding neon orange.

"Phipps? Still there?" Magnusson asked on the other end. "You okay?"

Phipps stood impotently gazing towards the gigantic orange shroud above, and felt the wrenchingly acidic tingle not only upon his tongue but creeping through his entire body.

"Yeah," he said, his voice sucked from his mouth, "I feel fine..."

