

# Chapter 1

## Boston

\*WOOOOOSH!\* \*WOOOOOSH!\*

"It's out, Hauler!" a four-armed, four eyed wolf yelled back, holding a fire extinguisher. "And I wouldn't start this one up again if I were you!"

A horse stepped over to the back of the bus, and inspected the engine. "Yeah, she's a gonner. Served us well."

A cabbit, a cat-rabbit hybrid sporting four arms, four eyes, two tails, and a grumpy face also came over. Shi placed two hands against the side of the bus, leaned over, and asked "We're stuck?"

"We are. No way we're getting back on the road to Metroburg."

"Great." The cabbit took out a cell phone and dialed an all-TOO-familiar number. Once it picked up, the cabbit talked. "Elder? This is Killer. We're stuck in Boston. The ol' tour bus gave up the ghost... no, Hauler didn't shoot it."

The horse pointed two fingers at the engine, and said "**BANG!**"

"Okay, he just symbolically did. Looks like we gotta cancel our next few gigs... I don't know, this just happened. We'll figure something out... Will do. Tah."

"Hmmmm...." the wolf muttered. "I wonder if it's too late..."

"What 'cha thinking, Lights?" Killer said.

"I got a friend who's putting together a revival of sorts, and would love to have a band on for the entire trip. Gigs are at each stop. The whole thing is on a train."

"Train?!?" a two headed gazelle said, leaning out of the tour bus. "Can we, Killer? Can we?"

"Heh..." Hauler said. "Mussi's excited. Think you can handle her while I handle getting this replaced under our insurance?"

"What's the name of the revival?" Killer asked.

"Station to Station 2." Lights said. "Let me call my old friend Rails, see if we can come aboard."

"Ooooh here he goes again..." Hauler muttered.

Lights pulled out his cell phone and called his friend. "Hey Rails? It's Lights... ha! Glad you remembered. I heard you're looking for a band for a cross-country Station to Station revival... In Boston now? House of Blues?... Oh no, don't cancel! Have you heard of Throng?... You have?... You would?... Can you meet me at the local Greyhound depot, preferably with a U-Haul truck? I'd like you to meet the band... Our bus broke down after a small gig. It's a gonner, and we gotta get back to

Metroburg, and if I remember correctly... Noyce. I think we can work something out by the time we get to Seattle."

Hauler nodded at Lights, while Killer looked on quizzing.

"Oh definitely. Okay, come over as soon as you can, we gotta get a quick contract signed. Are the other venues secured?... I think we can help with that." Lights then pulled the phone down a bit and said "Hey Killer, can you call Elder real quick? Rails needs some help with some of the gigs, and I bet we can borrow Scout." He raised it back and said "Yeah, lets get things together and hash out the plans. Glad we didn't do t-shirts yet..."

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"It's unusual..." an old voice said over the phone as everyone hovered by the bus, "but me and Archer see no issue with it. Killer, get Mussi to print the agreement Archer just sent over. Rails, tell Mussi your travel plans. We'll get Scout to go through them."

"We'll swap emails then." a dark-colored, goat-horned snow leopard taur said among the gathering with Lights, Hauler, and Killer. "I take it we have a verbal agreement until I get the paperwork back to you, Elder? That includes the alt-weekly reporter we have on board?"

"That's correct, Rails. Welcome to Throng."

"Glad to work for 'ya! Welcome aboard Station to Station 2, a Nomadic Event."

Mussi came over and said "Excuse me, Elder? Did Archer send me a contract for a Rails here?"

"She did, Mussi. Can you print it out and talk with Rails? You're taking a train ride, and she's got the passes."

"Ooooh! Sure! I..." Mussi looked around.

"Hi," Rails lifted her conductors hat up. "I'm Rails."

"Ooooh! Hi! I'm Mussi. Give me a few, I'll get the paperwork with you."

Mussi was about to go but Rails said "Here! Take this." She handed the dual-headed gazelle a pamphlet. "Here's the stop list and venues I've secured. Send that to Elder and Archer."

"Mussi!" Elder said. "Send that over to Archer and Scout!"

"Right away, Elder!" Mussi said, before she nodded and headed back out to the bus.

"We got things here, Elder." Killer said. "I'll call at each gig."

"Sounds good." Elder said over the phone. "Hauler, you know what to do."

"Aye, Elder." Hauler said. "Already lined up a contract for a replacement and looped Archer in but it's in Seattle."

"That's our last stop," Rails said. "So, getting there's covered."

"And we're golden." Elder said. "Good job Lights. We'll chat later. Bye!"

"Laters" Killer said before hanging up the phone. "Well?"

"I got a tow truck coming for the bus, so we gotta empty it out now." Hauler said.

"I brought the U-Haul, and I got a shuttle bus rental coming in five." Rails said.

"All right. Open up the truck, everyone gets to move equipment in." Killer said, before opening the bus. She walked in and said "ALL HANDS ON DECK! The bus is dead, but we got a gig. Everyone's hauling the rig into a U-Haul. THIS AINT A DRILL FOLKS!"

"Awww man..." a voice echoed through the bus. "...we gotta haul Coils out. He's hibernating against the back wall."

"Coils out last, Hayden. Equipment in the U-Haul. By the time we're done a bus will be waiting all warm and cozy for him."

"Warm?" a serpentine voice moaned.

"Heh." Lights said as he entered the bus. "Hey Hauler, we got a metal pail, a bottle of mineral spirits, and a full roll of toilet paper? I got another trick up my sleeve..."

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"There 'ya go, Mussi." Rails said, signing the last of the documents behind the scenes of the House of Blues. "You're good to go."

"Thanks, Rails!" Mussi said. "Oh, Scout's asking for when the train leaves so we can arrange for a hotel stay."

"Ask Scout if the Taurn Inn nearby is good. I got a group deal with them for a few nights."

"Oh! That one is on our Awesome list! She'll have no problems, and..."

**"ARRRRGGGGHHHH!!!!"** a three headed snow leopard yeowled. "**WHO'S THE IDIOT ON THE SOUND BOARD?** This is..."

"Guy named Waxman." Rails said. "Said he was the best."

**"FIRE HIM AND GET STEREO UP THERE!"** boomed the cerberus feline. "I think I just blew out an eardrum."

"Oh great..." Killer groaned. "...We better get up there."

A short trip into the sound booth saw a old hound ignoring a double-headed tiger giving him the fifth degree... or could he not hear her? It was hard to say.

"Waxman, you said." Killer asked.

"I'm not believing him ether." Rails said. "Especially when they gave me a megaphone to get his attention."

"Ugh. He under contract?"

"No. WAXMAN!!!"

The old hound gave no response. Killer then snuck up on him, and gently removed the headset off of his head. He didn't even blink, like he was zoned out... and for good reason. His ears were completely clogged.

Rails shook her head, and thumbed down. She then motioned Killer to grab the chair and move it out of the booth. Stereo would take over. All nodded in agreement, and on a silent three, Waxman was pulled out and onto stage... to a pissed off Yukon being tended to by Hayden. Coils then wrapped around Waxman, and Hayden cleared his ears out.

Rails whispered in one ear of Yukon, "This is Waxman. He's fired."

Yukon cleared her throats and screamed "**WAAAAXMAAAAN!**" so loud a glass nearby broke. This startled the old hound, sputtering "Wha... whut? Can't a... hey, where am I?"

"Front stage, where you nearly blew out my ear drums on my outer heads."

"Front stage? I was last at the nursing home, in front of the TV. Is Springer on? Unusual controls on the TV..."

Killer groaned. "Come on, Gramps. Lets get you back home. Someone pulled a prank on you." Shi motioned Yukon and Coils to back off and wheeled the hound out.

Once the hound was gone, Rails asked Yukon "Are you OK? That's my fault for 'hiring' him. He was the last one before Lights called."

Yukon looked at Hayden, who said "Yukon will be fine. She'll have to use her inner head for monitoring but other than that..."

Stereo popped on the monitor saying "Sound check one two three, this will be soft. Resetting sound check."

Hayden looked up at the sound booth, seeing the two heads of Stereo up there. "Our savior! You're a few notches short, Stereo. Gimmie two. Yukon's going to be on central." Stereo looked down, pulling the monitors for Yukon down on one and three and mixing two as stereo sound, and pulling Hayden up two notches. "Check one two three. How you're doing Yukon?"

Yukon's center said "Ow... Drop it three, will 'ya Stereo? Waxman did a number on my outers." Norse meanwhile put hir earpieces on. Stereo pulled Yukon's monitor down and said "How's this? Better?"

Yukon said "Thanks. Gotta take it soft today." before Norse said "Stereo dear, please keep my monitor the same."

"Copy that." Stereo said. "Can I get a few riffs?"

Yukon picked up and plugged in her double Stratocaster, and said "You got it." She then strummed a bit, and started playing a bit of Jimmy Hendrix. Stereo then tuned the board and said "Oooh baby, there we go. Good and angry. Hayden, you're up."

Hayden joined in, seamlessly entering in the song. Yukon said "Drop it another notch, Stereo?"

Stereo dropped it down again and said "I dropped it two. Norse, your turn."

Norse nodded both heads and spoke into the mike, imitating Hendrix. Stereo kept tuning and tweaking... and came on at the end of the song. "Okay, I need Hayden's and Yukon's vocals. Gimmie some California Raisins."

Hayden grinned and said "Sign, Sealed, and Delivered on three!" He then smacked his drumsticks thrice and started up the song. "**YEEEEAAAAAHHHHHAAAAA!**"

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"What did you do? Didn't you think about the hotel image?"

The wolf of desk clerk nodded twice, once per head, while a third said "That's why I went through with it. The hotel is listed as multi-friendly and our bookings are up because of it."

"But our regular guests are going to complain..." the manager complained, a short skittish male fennec perched on a stool.

"They haven't. They actually say they choose a public list first, from a band named Throng, because they have the best service."

"But the press might... EEEP!" The manager had turned, seeing the band come in, and froze in shock. The desk clerk turned, smiled at the sight, and said "Why hello! Welcome! Oh, hello there! Is this..."

"I'm Rails, and this group is Throng." Rails purred. "The cabbit is Karen, but shi goes by Killer. I called ahead on the phone."

"Ahhh, but..." the desk clerk checked. "...I hate to say this, but I don't have enough rooms individually..."

"Mussi and myself can take a double." Norse chimed in.

"I got Lights! Gimmie a King!" Stereo added.

"I better room with Coils." Hayden said. "He's got that... look again. I'll take a King, but with extra blankets."

The desk clerk tapped the keyboard and said "Okay... I need one more to pair up. There seems to be one extra in your group..."

Rails looks over and notices another taur. She turns and says "Oh, you mean Blacklight behind here with the rainbow tail? That's my sister. She's with me."

"Perfect." The clerk taps a bit more, "All on one card?"

"Yes," Rails said, producing a credit card and her ID.

"Okay. We do have a service for what I can guess is Coils to help him out of his skin, but that may blow your incidentals coverage..."

"Can I prepay that here?" Killer said. "No sense in having you have all the fun, Rails."

"Oh sure! Can I..."

"Here." Killer produced a corporate credit card and ID, and the clerk updated the systems. The manager by that time had snapped out of it, observing the professionalism, and said "You got this."

The clerk smiled on all three heads and said "Good good. Okay, let's get your key-cards together and into your rooms. How was the after-concert party, by the way?"

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"Whoa" Hayden said, observing the lights changing on the outside of the train. "This is just trippin'. You getting this, Jade?"

A mint-colored tiger was snapping away, purring "Oh my yes yes..."

Rails grinned, saying "Ain't it? They're my work. They change with the environment, powered by solar cells. The cars they're on passed FRA and several railroad inspections with the lights on and going without issues. Hell, the engine is a rebuilt FL-9 with the New Haven Railroad's styling on it, but using the new CMP BH-3 engine and head-end power generator."

"Sis dear," the other taur said, "You're geeking out again."

"Oh, sorry Blacklight. You know how I get with trains."

"I'd like to know more..." Mussi then said, before Norse chimed "After your homework, dear. Papa Hauler wouldn't want you to miss that."

"Awwww..." Mussi moaned.

"Enthusiastic little one," Blacklight commented. "Maybe we can get some video cameras set up with her help so she won't miss a thing."

"Oh! Can I Mama Norse? Can I?"

"Lets get everything settled in first, dear Mussi, and see about that homework."

"I'd like to interview you later about the train, Rails." Mint said.

"Definitely," Rails said. She then pulled out a radio, tuned it, and said "Station to Station 2 P98142, Charlie you read me?"

A small bit of commotion from the engine and the radio came alive with "P98142, Charlie reading 'ya, Rails. You the taur in the conductor's hat?"

"Copy that. Can you let us board? I got the train orders."

A conductor popped out and said "Oh hey! All aboard! I'll open up the freight car for your equipment."

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As the train started to set off from Boston, everyone gathered in the last train. Rails sat down by the end facing everyone else. "How 'ya doing, Coils?" She called out.

"Cozy, Railsss," the four-handed snake replied. "Thanksss."

"Good good," Rails said, grinning. "Everyone, welcome aboard this nomadic journey. I want to quickly get you familiar with this train, since you're all going to be here for the entire trip.

"This car we are in is the Cedar Rapids, a great round-tail caboose, plenty of seating and great views. Bathrooms by the exit. I bet Mussi will spend some time here.

"Going forward, we have the Super Dome, which is the kitchen and dining car. Hold onto the rails as you switch cars and climb stairs. The kitchen is underneath. Don't drink the coffee just yet, I gotta swap it out in New York for something that doesn't start with 's'.

"After that we have the Minnesota River, which is your cabins. I'll assign them in a few moments.

"Further back is the St. Croix Valley, which is the recording studio. It's an open car, and some artists will work in there. I had you put your instruments there. Stereo, you may find the mixer a bit old and rustic. Feel free to play with it.

"We also have the Silver Quail, which is for the train crew. That's the crew sleeper. It's a bit tighter than the Minnesota River."

"The Taos contains all your equipment and spare clothing. It's a luggage car. Be careful in there. We got stuff tied down for a reason. 125 of them.

"The Lambert's Point is the Executive Suite. That's where me and Blacklight will be, and it's basically will be train and event operations management. The boardroom is in there.

"The Wisconsin Valley is the content car. Mint, your station has been reserved. We will have other writers and journalists along the trip at times. The connection is multi-provider cellular, so try not to be heavy on it.

"The Mohave is a general-purpose car reserved by our sponsors. They have a few setups in there. Be nice, they'll invite you in.

"And of course, our engine. Stay out of it. We get dinged by the Feds if anyone but the conductors and the engineers go there. I'm allowed in.

"Any questions? And Mussi, hold yours, I'll answer them all along this trip."

"Yeah," Hayden spoke up. "Where 'we going?'"

The PA system popped on and a conductor started up. "**WELCOME ABOARD P98142, STATION TO STATION 2. MAKING THE FOLLOWING STOPS: NEW YORK! PHILADELPHIA! BALTIMORE! WASHINGTON DC! PITTSBURGH! CLEVELAND! CHICAGO! ST. LOUIS! NEW ORLEANS! HOUSTON! DALLAS! PHOENIX! LAS VEGAS! LOS ANGELES! SAN JOSE! METROBURG! PORTLAND! AND SEATTLE!"**

"Elder's got the PR going already," Killer said, "...and Archer's working out the ticket exchange."

"Oh, nice." Hayden said.

"All right, let's get rooms settled in. Coils, you'll need to be in an Executive suite, so you're next to me and Blacklight. Everyone else is in the Minnesota River. There's four main suites and crash space for some of the short-term folk we'll be picking up starting in New York..."

Stereo grabbed Lights, nearly dragging him to her, and said "We're sharing a suite."

Rails smiled and said "Okay, and I bet Norse and Mussi will take another. Hayden and Yukon..."

"They need the separate rooms." Killer says. "We had an... issue some time ago. I'll grab a roomette."

"I'll grab a roomette as well." Mint adds. "I don't need much."

"Then it's settled. Next stop, New York!"

## Blog Post: Among Elders

Everyone, I know you don't like it when I write here, so I'll try to be brief.

The bad news: The bus broke down. It's a loss.

The good news: **MORE THRONG DUE TO VENUE CHANGES!**

Archer and Scout are finalizing the full list with our new partner, and will have all the details, but this one can't wait.

**NEW YORK! THE THRONG IS TRIPLING UP!** The band will perform at:

- **STATION TO STATION 2 IN CENTRAL PARK DAY 1 WITH PENNCENTRAL (FREE!)**
- **CBGB OMFG REVIVAL DAY 2. (SOLD OUT!)**
- **RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL DAY 3 WITH PENNCENTRAL (ON SALE NOW)**

I'm getting the t-shirts and merch re-ordered, but we *WILL* have stands at Radio City Music Hall for you to order and get shipped the new tour shirt. That includes multifurs! The timing won't be until DC at least.

One last thing, if you haven't guessed: We're joining the Station to Station 2 Nomadic Train as their house band for this trip back home. There's going to be a *LOT* more than just music, and I encourage you to join in the fun. That includes you eggheads out there.

I've gotten some advanced pictures of the train, and *oh my FSM!* You got to see it. Our partner has said to look **TODAY** on the Northeast Corridor Line for train P98142, the Station to Station 2 train. You can't miss it, but **PLEASE** watch from an Amtrak, Shore Line East, CT-rail, or Metro-North station! Safety first. Squished fans are no fun.

More info from the train and from Scout. And remember, listen to your Elder. :)