

Recruitment

By: IndigoRho

Sylas slowly looked over the cargo hold, gaze lingering momentarily on each and every container. On the ferret's visor the container in his direct line of sight would be highlighted, a brief description of its contents displayed. He frowned. Nearly all the cargo being loaded revealed only the vaguest of details, some even just listed as "sensitive equipment". Simply a matter of corporate security, he'd been assured, but if it was such an issue then why had they chartered such a small freighter to deliver it?

No, he didn't want to know. They'd make the delivery, get paid, and not have to worry about whatever had been in their hold.

The last container was being brought in just as Sylas finished his scan. The two workers handling it had been sluggish to a nearly frustrating degree, and he couldn't help but wonder if they were new hires. They were both rabbits, orange and white in color with their long ears bent downward by their caps. Twins from what Sylas could tell, though their first names weren't the least bit similar as with other twins he'd come across. Come to think of it, they hadn't shared last names, either.

Sylas brushed the wandering thoughts from his head. There were far more important things to worry about than the life stories of a pair of random dock workers he'd likely never interact with again. Like the odd headache that'd suddenly struck him.

Massaging his head with a paw, Sylas headed over to the workers, ready to sign off on the loading and be done with them. On second thought, maybe he was treating them too harshly. As inexperienced as they were, they'd performed decently enough. His headache was just fouling his temper. And the itching...when had that begun?

It took a moment for Sylas to compose himself, but thankfully the two rabbits were patient, smiling and seemingly in no hurry to leave. "Thank you gentlemen, phase two is now complete." Confusion came over Sylas. The words coming out of his own mouth made no sense.

His headache was growing worse and the itching had spread over his whole body. He was compulsively scratching everywhere. As Sylas worked on his arm he realized there was a large orange splotch on his paw. On both paws. And his fingers, they looked...they looked different. Changed.

The itching escalated into aches, almost like growing pains. Not agonizing, but bad enough to throw off the ferret's balance and make him stumble. "What's...what's happening..."

One of the twins spoke up. "Don't worry, you're being granted a new perspective. A *better* perspective."

The other was silent, but he had some of his fingers partially interlocked, thumbs and pointers touching to form a triangle. He appeared to be concentrating hard on something, and there was a faint blue glow in his eyes.

"Psionics?" Sylas barely mumbled. Well of course, he'd always had psionic abilities why should he...no, everything was wrong.

Large swathes of Sylas' fur had turned orange, but even more drastic changes were occurring to his body. His round, stubby ears were getting pointier and extending, flopping downward. His head was warping in subtle ways. Eyes shifted from brown to green. Gradually his long tail shrunk, getting shorter and shorter with each passing second.

It was all completely overwhelming for Sylas. He needed to call for help, but he refused to activate comms. Alerting the others would ruin the plan. What plan?

"So, how are you feeling?" the talkative rabbit asked.

"Coming along nicely, won't be long now. W-Wait..." Sylas was lost.

Paw shaking, Sylas felt how long his ears had become, and barely managed to turn his head enough to see his tail shrinking into a nub. He was starting to look like a rabbit. And not just any rabbit,

but like the twins. Simultaneous feelings of joy and horror washed over him. It was like having someone else's thoughts in his head, and they were getting louder and firmer and more dominate.

Suddenly Sylas himself was the trespasser, his personality an unneeded nuisance. But he would be gone soon enough, and that made the partially-transformed rabbit smile. Only traces of ferret remained, practically unrecognizable. Memories of being Sylas crumbled. It was second-hand information, overheard tidbits not worth holding onto. They vanished completely without fanfare, and just like that Sylas was gone.

In his place was Kyler.

The brand new Kyler stretched. His jumpsuit was a little loose, but old clothing rarely fit perfectly after a successful override. It'd do for the time being.

As he looked at his predecessor clones he beamed with pride. His psionic talents gave him to power to overwrite another person both mentally and physically. He was only capable of turning them into a copy of himself, and didn't retain any of their original memories or skills. Fortunately Kyler rather liked himself.

In the simplest of terms Kyler was a thief, though at this point he was more of a criminal organization. He'd copied himself dozens of times in order to pull off difficult heists. Space was big enough for the clones to spread out over numerous worlds, spaceships, and stations without arousing suspicion. And creating a few trustworthy partners for a job was delightfully easy.

All it'd taken to convert the dockworkers originally scheduled to load the ship was some liquor and good timing. With their seemingly legitimate credentials the crew hadn't suspected a thing, and Sylas hadn't stood a chance against them alone. Only two crew members remained on the ship to "recruit", and then the cargo could be stolen and sold for a high price to a corporate rival or a pmc or just an eccentric collector for all Kyler cared.

Just as long as they got paid.

With the cargo hold secured, the three Kyler went in search of the others.

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Dayne felt he never left the mess hall satisfied anymore. The selection in the food synthesizer was pitiful, and no matter how much the cougar complained, Captain Aiden refused to invest in it. Sure they almost spent more time loading and unloading the ship than transporting the goods, but a decent meal would've gone a long way towards improving his morale.

Busy silently grumbling about the food situation, Dayne nearly bumped right into the orange rabbit who suddenly blocked his path. Mid-apology Dayne realized he was talking to a dock worker and not Aiden or Sylas. "Oh, are you lost?"

The rabbit shook his head. "No, I'm exactly where I need to be."

Before he could question the rabbit further, Dayne was grabbed from behind. He struggled, but they managed to force him onto his knees. To the cougar's surprise his two attackers looked exactly like the first rabbit. And one was wearing Sylas' clothes and visor.

"Who...who are..."

"Shhh, you'll know soon enough."

The rabbit in front of Dayne placed his palm on the cougar's forehead. A surge of aches shot through Dayne's body, followed by a wave of dizziness. He cried out in pain.

Within seconds Dayne's body was being rearranged, shifting in both form and color. His mind was jumbled, concentration impossible as invasive thoughts flooded in. Dayne didn't have a clue what was happening, just that it wasn't good. Or maybe it was?

All feline aspects of Dayne faded away. He forgot everything about himself at a horrendous rate without even realizing it. The food synthesizer, relationship woes, hobbies. They were gone, not missed in the least. Better things had replaced them.

When the conversion was complete, both the new and old Kyler were left gasping for breath. Applying his powers with direct contact was faster, but also considerably more exhausting. Kyler had numbers on his side, though, and now there were four of him, and only one of the crew. Success was practically guaranteed.

In the small room generously referred to as the ship's bridge, Aiden was unaware of all that had befallen his crew. The horse was running through checklists, waiting for Sylas to contact him with the news they were loaded and ready to liftoff. If he were lucky the call would come in right as Dayne was returning, ensuring he wouldn't have to listen to the cougar complain about the food again.

When the door slid open he quietly sighed, and turned around to face who he assumed would be Dayne.

Instead he saw a rabbit in Dayne's jumpsuit, the cougar's collar around his neck. Another, identical rabbit entered after, this one dressed like Sylas. Aiden stared in confusion, before chuckling nervously, convinced he was the victim of a weird prank. At least until two more rabbits arrived. Worry came over Aiden as he faced the set of identical quadruplets.

"What the hell?"

"We didn't intentionally leave you for last, Captain," the Sylas rabbit spoke. "But it feels appropriate. I think you'll enjoy the new you—they're far better than the current you."

All four Kyler's gestured towards Aiden, their eyes glowing. The same aches that had plagued the crew now plagued Aiden, who was too overwhelmed to even slide out of his chair. He watched as large swathes of color on his arms faded to pure white, while the rest shifted from brown to orange.

His muzzle was shrinking, and his hooves spasmed as they steadily transformed into paws. Aiden felt like his jumpsuit was getting larger, but in reality he was simply growing shorter to match the height of Kyler. With the rabbit's thoughts creeping into his head, Aiden was left horrified.

"Shame the ship really won't be worth much," the Dayne rabbit said. "Would require extensive modifications to be useful in the long run, but for now it'll help us get situated in this region."

"Crew lacked any good connections, too," another rabbit said. "But they're invaluable as new Kyler's."

"That's always a benefit—there can never be too many of us," said a third. "From a couple simple dock workers and the crew of an insignificant freighter we'll gain five new operatives, and a solid foundation for much more valuable heists. Thank you Aiden...or should I say Kyler?"

All that had been Aiden was wiped clean, replaced by the memories and personality of Kyler. It was like being obliterated without leaving any trace of the act behind. No one would ever know what happened to Aiden or Dayne or Sylas. No one but Kyler.

The newest Kyler rolled up his sleeves to make his jumpsuit fit a little better, but he'd need to find a new one soon. He guessed being too big was better than being too small.

"Congratulations everyone on another job well done. Ship should be almost ready to launch, so let's make our leave before anyone starts wondering where those dock workers disappeared to." Kyler turned back to the console in front of his seat and continued the work Aiden had been doing before conversion.

The others nodded, one taking over another console on the bridge while the rest dispersed elsewhere. The most complicated part of their plan was finished but plenty of work remained, from forging new identities to finding a seller for the cargo. Thankfully there were plenty of Kyler's to split the burden...