

Just so no one gets all hot and bothered, yes, I'm taking someone else's idea and using it in this chapter. And there's a story cookie for anyone that can correctly guess which story I'm stealing from, and what I'm thieving. If none of you come up with it I'll point it out next week, and also berate you for not reading enough. Enjoy.

Thursday night his father drove Jeremy to his brother's apartment. It had been the first time since he'd moved out that Steven had seen his son's apartment. Sam was home as was one of his room mates, a raccoon named Remoary. Jeremy was shocked at how small the apartment was. Sam smiled at his father's comment that he was keeping the apartment neat and tidy. Their father left after visiting for only a few minutes.

Sam was happy to see his younger brother even though he towered over him. Jeremy had grown to the point of standing more than a full foot taller than Sam. Remoary looked like he was doing his best at not heading for the safety of a bedroom. The evening was spent watching a few television shows and the occasional round of chatting.

The next morning Jeremy headed down to the office building early for his appointment. He was kept waiting for only a few minutes before being shown in a large meeting room. It turned out he was to take a placement exam. There were five other people also taking the exam with him. Jeremy focused on the exam and as with his experience in the academy finished first. He sat looking at the others for a moment before standing and leaving to hand in his exam.

The assistant that had administered the exam was at her desk just a few paces away from the conference room. The otter was a bit surprised to see him already finished. She asked him to wait outside the conference room. It was half an hour before the next person finished. A few seconds later she joined Jeremy waiting outside the testing room.

With nothing else to occupy his mind Jeremy struck up a conversation with the female. The hyena was also about to finish her own schooling. She went to another academy on the opposite side of the city. In a few more minutes two more finished and joined them. The conversation shifted to focus on the two who had joined them. The assistant came up and asked Jeremy to follow her before the last prospects finished their exams.

Jeremy was shown to the office of another assistant and asked to wait. It seemed longer but was only five minutes before he was asked to step inside one of the small meeting rooms that lined the hallway. The ocelot that was to interview him took a few seconds to look over the results of his examination. Jeremy was simply glad to finally talk with someone.

She looked up to him and said "Mister Dawn, what is it you feel you have to offer?"

Jeremy gave his answer, the first of several. The feline took a few notes and continued with more questions. In just over an hour she was finished with her questions. He was again asked to wait outside the meeting room. By then two of the others were in their own interviews. After twenty minutes the otter came out and suggested they take a break and get something for lunch. She advised them to be back before one in the afternoon.

After lunch four of the others were dismissed. He and the hyena remained. Jeremy was shown into another office where he was again interviewed. This time he met with a kangaroo. He asked almost the same questions as the ocelot. It was a half hour of the same questions before he looked at Jeremy exam

results. He watched the kangaroo blink a few times and look up at him. He looked down and paged through his exam a few seconds before saying "Excuse me a moment."

He left the room and returned after a few minutes. "Mister Dawn, would you follow me, please."

Jeremy followed the male to another room and was given another exam. This one was shorter but also a good deal more complex. He was forced to think through the wording of the questions just to understand what was being considered as a question. When he finished it was with a headache that he handed his exam over to the assistant.

He waited outside the first meeting room by himself for more than fifteen minutes before the kangaroo showed up and asked him to join him. The male led him to the elevator bank and escorted him to a higher floor. They got out and the male introduced him to a squirrel that was waiting at the elevators. Sahar Linwood was a few inches under three feet tall, short even for squirrels. Jeremy offered his paw having noticed the large kangaroo's deference to the squirrel.

After touching pads with Jeremy the squirrel stated "So, Jerrold thinks you're fairly clever. What do you say for yourself?"

Jeremy shrugged and replied "I do my best, ma'am." He wasn't sure what the female was driving at. He watched silently as she accepted the folder the kangaroo had brought with him. With a nod she dismissed him and turned indicating with a gesture Jeremy was to follow her. He followed her to what looked like a small break room. She sat at one of the tables and opened the folder. He watched as she paged through it only seeming to glance at a few of the pages.

She pulled out what he recognized as the last exam and turned to the last page. She started reading aloud the second to last essay question.

"Client zero has made repeated attempts to repair machine Beta. Client Zero has enlisted the help of Assistant Five and Assistant Six. In total Machine Beta has forty nine hours dedicated to its repair and the issue has not been adequately resolved. The deadline for the shipment of Machine Beta is rapidly approaching and Client Zero is requesting a Manager to assess Machine Beta. Where is the greatest opportunity in this situation?"

As she finished she looked at Jeremy and asked "How would you really answer that?"

"Actually, I'd like to know what the machine is supposed to do, and what's wrong with it. Also what has been tried to fix it and just how experienced the people working on it are."

Sahar stared at him a second before looking down and reading. "Substation Epsilon had been down for maintenance for one hour. Substation Epsilon has two more hours of maintenance required before completion. Substation Delta is producing error codes indicating an imminent failure. Substation Delta's output metrics has steadily fallen to critical crossover status. Substation Falcon remains in standby status. Substation Falcon is not responding." The squirrel recited and looked at Jeremy.

"Honestly? These questions are too vague to even know what's really wrong. Is that what you want to know?"

The female chuckled and said "Yeah, pretty much." She put the exam papers in the folder and smiled at Jeremy. "The real test was how hard you tried to figure out what the real question was supposed to be. Tell me, did this thing give you a headache?"

"Yes."

"Good. Do you read much?"

"Some. I'm still in school so I don't have much extra time."

"What kind of books do you enjoy?"

Jeremy shrugged. "A little of everything, mostly mysteries and a few spy novels."

"You see the ending coming before anyone else don't you?"

"Yes." Jeremy answered. He was starting to catch on to the point the female was trying to make. "So, this job I'm being considered for, what is it?"

She grinned. "It's a trainee position, of course, but the position is basically as a troubleshooter. I should warn you, nine out of ten wash out in the first months on the job."

Jeremy met her appraising stare. "Why's that?"

"Because by the time anyone finally calls us they're all running around in a panic as though their fur's on fire." she answered with a grin. "This isn't the kind of job for everyone, actually it's not for most. But even after all that, it's always interesting."

Jeremy said "Sounds like a challenge, but I'm interested, if you'll have me."

"Yeah, I thought so. Let me know when you're done with school and we'll start you in the training program."

"What?" Jeremy asked. "Just like that?"

"Yeah, we kind of think it's our job to bend the rules until they break around here. None of us has an office, and we're always on call. There's a lot of travel involved, sometimes international. If that's something you think you can handle, and keep your sanity when all about you have lost theirs, maybe you have a place here. You'll only know if you try though."

Jeremy smiled back at Sahar. "I'd like to try. How much would I start at?"

She gave a number that shocked Jeremy. He would start at more than he was making at the gym.

"I could accept that."

"Good." she said digging into one of her pockets. Handing Jeremy a card she added "Once you know when you'll be done with school give a call. I'd like the chance to train you myself."

Jeremy accepted the card and after a glance did a double take to make sure he read it correctly before pocketing it. "I have to ask, what does Bureau Of Sabotage really mean, other than the obvious?"

"It's an inside joke that you'll be let in on when we're sure you've got what it takes to make it. For now, don't think too much on it, we're not really the troublemakers that implies."

He found he couldn't stop grinning back at the squirrel.

"Go on, get outta here. Just call me first, okay." She said as she stood.

Jeremy stood as well and touched paw pads with the squirrel again. "Okay, I will. Wait, do I need to fill out anything to accept the position?"

"Yeah, I suppose. Stop by, uh, what's his name's office, I'm sure he'll have the necessary paperwork."

A ride in the elevator, finding the kangaroo's office and signing a few papers and another ride in the elevator and Jeremy was on his way back to Sam's apartment with a job offer. He took his time on his way back to actually take in the sights of the city. Everyone was in a hurry past him, he was always stepping to the side to avoid a collision with someone.

Back at Sam's apartment he let himself in with a borrowed key and waited for his brother to get back. After an hour Jeremy started the usual preparations for dinner. He was still getting everything ready to start cooking when one of Sam's other room mates returned first. The mongoose saw Jeremy and paused at the door staring and obviously not sure of his intent.

"Sorry, I'm Sam's brother. I was staying overnight for a job interview this morning."

"Oh, yeah," The mongoose said as he closed the door "he mentioned it." He crossed to his bedroom eyeing Jeremy the entire time.

Sam came in a few minutes later. He joined Jeremy in the kitchen area with a smile and comment that habits die hard. Sam stood watching his brother for several seconds. Jeremy glanced at him waiting and trying his best to keep the humor he felt from his face.

"So? How'd it go?" Sam finally asked.

"I got a job offer." Jeremy answered doing his best to state it as matter of fact as he could.

"Great. Maybe you can move in here then."

Jeremy paused in his work. "I hadn't thought that far ahead. I still have to finish school."

"Yeah, but it's an option."

"Don't you already have three room mates?"

"There's always a bit of turnover. It wouldn't be a couch for too long, and it would help with the rent."

Jeremy looked at him for a moment. He asked softly "How are you doing anyway?"

"Things are still pretty tight. Some of these guys have missed rent more than once and haven't bothered to pay me back."

"Then it wouldn't be a problem of kicking out the next one that misses rent?"

"Exactly."

Jeremy nodded. "Yeah, that sounds good." He said smiling at the thought of being with his brother again.

Sam and Jeremy made their way back home the next morning. Their father was happy to hear Jeremy had landed what he considered a real job, and would also move in with Sam once he started. Jeremy wondered if their father had worried about Sam. From his relieved reaction he guessed he had. While Sam visited with their parents Jeremy got caught up on his missed homework.

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So there you have it. Start your guessing for a free story. Just to be clear, I'll be asking a questing to make sure the right guess was from reading the book and not by searching on Google. Also, since I'm posting on several sites it'll be first answer to come in.

Anyway, I may have another story contest later on in the story. Next week I'll get back to making comments on the background of the story. The past few weeks have been spent getting ready for a road trip to Oregon on Monday.