

When Jeremy stepped into Gakota's office he instantly noticed that the walls had been stripped bare. The ocelot stood and smiled. Jeremy stood just inside his office looking around in shock. There were a number of boxes along the wall with his pictures and other assorted items in them. The cat was even dressed fairly casually. As he touched pads with the feline Jeremy said "Something I should know about?"

"Nothing happens in a vacuum. Its been noticed that I've been liquidating my stock in the company. Its been mentioned several times but in the past few months I've accelerated the process. Things like that don't go over too well when one's already got nothing but enemies around them." He paused and with a wry smile said "I've been granted a week to shift my responsibilities to others."

"They fired you?" Jeremy asked in a whisper.

"Not exactly. If they had I wouldn't still be here." Gakota answered as he picked up his own personal tablet from his desk and pulled his jacket from the back of a chair. He led the way to the elevator.

Jeremy, on alert from their short conversation noticed the eyes watching their progress. "You weren't kidding about nothing happening in a vacuum."

As they stepped into the elevator cab Gakota snorted. "Half of them couldn't wait to start fighting over my office."

Jeremy waited for the door to close before observing "Looks like thats already been decided considering the amount of disgruntled faces I noticed."

The ocelot chuckled. "That may be so."

"So does this speed things up?"

"Likely. As technical advisors you in the Bureau won't be fired. You'll most likely stop getting calls from Nicholson."

Jeremy nodded. "We've already transferred most of our communications to our personal phones. We'll be able to keep in touch should they terminate the accounts of the business phones."

"Good." Gakota said with a nod.

The doors opened and the feline again led the way. Jeremy had expected him to head toward the parking garage. Instead they were on the ground floor heading for the main entrance. As they exited the building he couldn't miss the large limo parked in front. Jackson was leaning against the side watching their advance through dark sunglasses and a smirk. The pangolin at his side wore similar sunglasses but his face didn't show any of his humor.

Gakota stopped half a pace from the large fox and touched pads with him smiling. Jeremy was smiling at Zane surprised the pangolin was there.

"Sorry I neglected to tell either of you about our other partner. Jeremy, you already know Zane. Gakota, this is Zane Rook. Zane, Gakota Ogoltay. He'll be the CEO of The Bureau Of Sabotage."

Jeremy and Jackson were sharing the greeting of equals as Zane touched pads with Gakota asking "Are you sure of that for the name of the company? Its seems more than a bit counterproductive."

"It's been the name we've been going by for decades. It's got instant recognition in the circles we're hoping to attract business from. Also, when we succeed it'll ensure that certain people that wish us less than the best will have to eat crow."

Zane shrugged. "I'll bow to your experience in that point."

Jeremy had listened as watched the small ocelot. Despite being the shortest by a foot and a half and forced to look up to each of them he seemed confident. His smile hadn't wavered during the exchange and he'd also caught Jeremy watching him.

"Shall we?" Jackson said as he opened the back door of the limo. Jeremy gestured for Gakota to climb in first. He glanced at Zane seeing his smile as he turned to climb in next. Jackson motioned for Jeremy to go next with a movement of his head. Once the fox climbed in and settled himself he pushed a button on the car armrest. "Let's go Scott."

"Jeremy, since Zane hasn't been in any of the meetings, please brief him on the specifics of this location."

Jeremy nodded and began. It was a short ride to the first location and forced him to be brief. Still, as he watched the pangolin he seemed to keep up with his rapid explanation. As they parked at the front of the building Jackson said "Excellent review." and opened the door.

Jackson led the way inside and to the elevator. As they waited Jeremy asked "Shouldn't we stop at the management office?"

"No need." Jackson said. "Someone should be waiting for us outside the space."

The leasing agent for the building turned out to be a weasel. The expression on the male's face forced Jeremy to once again realize just how large he was becoming compared to normal weasels. As the male stuttered apologies and fumbled with the keys Jeremy could sense one of his dominant companions projecting. With the office door open the weasel stepped aside and once Jackson and Zane had passed inside took a deep breath. Jeremy paused letting Gakota enter next.

Jeremy put a paw on the weasel's shoulder and gently guided him inside with him. Leaning slightly and whispering he advised "Relax, they're really nice people."

He looked up at Jeremy with wide eyes and nodding at the reassurance. Jeremy smiled and patted him on the shoulder letting the male step into the room ahead of himself. The slight reassurance and projecting did wonders. The male started explaining the amenities that would come with the space.

Feeling the other weasel confident enough to field questions he asked "What's that smell?"

Zane and Gakota looked at him with curious expressions. Jackson didn't turn to him and said "I can't quite place it. I could just be from the space being closed for a period of time."

Jackson's reaction and tone of voice hadn't been out of the ordinary but Zane continued to sniff at the air in an effort to sense what Jeremy had questioned. It took him a few seconds to realize he'd commented on something he was only able to detect due a PATOMES alteration. He shrugged his shoulders and looked away from Zane hoping the male would dismiss the slip.

With his attention on the weasel showing the office space Jeremy listened and watched his companion's reactions. Zane and Gakota were also paying attention to the weasel. Jackson was looking around and clearly only listening with half an ear. After about half an hour they were ready to leave. The weasel escorted them to the lobby

Even once they parted from the weasel there were few comments about the space. On the way to the next building Jeremy gave a brief overview of the next stop's pro's and con's. Pulling up to the office building was much the same as the first. They went directly upstairs and met with an otter female that showed little surprise at attending to three dominants.

On this occasion Jackson asked a few questions. To Jeremy it seemed he was actually interested in the space. His behavior when compared to the first stop could be characterized as almost excited. Gakota was also interested in the space. Jeremy could see why.

The previous tenants had spent a good deal of expense in outfitting the space. Even the telecom wiring had been left behind and looked to be functional with just a few slight adjustments. According to the otter a law firm had just moved out to more spacious offices and had arranged a discount on breaking the lease in exchange for leaving the space ready for occupancy. For a turnkey business move in, any expense would be minimal.

The third stop was a completely different story. Even as he unlocked the entry doors the tiger was apologizing for the condition inside. As they walked inside even Zane commented on the smell. Jeremy stopped only steps inside wondering if rats had last occupied the space. He mentally kicked himself at the thought but he was instantly reminded of the apartment he'd snuck into that had been in the process of cleaning after an eviction.

Broken furniture and litter were everywhere. By the smell trash had been left behind somewhere for an extended period and had clearly begun to ferment. Once he looked past the trash and smell Jeremy was surprised at the location. The view was right out of a television series. Several of the offices and conference rooms sported views of a large swath of Center Park. Jackson stopped and looked out on the Park from each of the rooms.

Jeremy too lingered in several of the rooms, even going so far as to mentally select two top contenders for the office he'd like to occupy. Considering Gakota would get first pick he'd likely reserve the next pick for himself. He forced himself to focus on the condition of the utilities within the space. Despite the surface appearance the space itself showed little need for repairs or updating.

As they left even Jackson thanked the tiger for his time. Once in the limo the fox took the lead of the conversation.

"This last one would be almost perfect. A Parkway street address would give The Bureau that added sense of respectability we could use as consultants. It has my vote."

"I agree." Gakota followed him. "Entertaining prospective clients in either of those conference rooms would only add to the sense of us running a prestigious business."

Jeremy was a bit surprised and even more pleased that both were in agreement on the last space. He looked at Zane.

The pangolin glanced around at everyone. "I'll defer to the experience of the rest of you."

Jeremy paused and looked back to everyone for a few moments. He smiled at Jackson and said "I too feel I should defer to the experience of you and Gakota. I can't find any reason to disagree with either of you, besides I do like this location too."

With a look to Gakota first, Jackson looked back at Jeremy and said "That settles it then. Jeremy, see if you can negotiate a bit of a lower rate but lock in a move in as soon as is feasible."

He glanced at the ocelot before looking back to Buttons. "Yes, sir." From the cat's sly look this was going to be his first test in his new position as Chief Operating Office of The Bureau. Jeremy couldn't help but grin his enthusiasm.

Back at the Nicholson Building he and Gakota stepped out of the limo and said their farewells to Zane and Jackson. On the way back upstairs his new boss said "Good work, Jeremy. You may not have noticed but Jackson was impressed."

Jeremy turned to him from watching the number count as they rode the elevator upward. "How so?"

"All three locations had something to offer. To me it was actually a close call, but as Jackson said the deciding factor was really down to our need for instant respectability. The Parkway location will be perfect."

"Thanks, but I hadn't considered that." Jeremy admitted.

"That's fine. In the preselection process everything has to be taken into account." he answered as the stepped from the cab. As they walked to Gakota's office he glanced at the weasel sideways and asked "So, have you picked out your office?"

Chuckling and glancing at the cat Jeremy said "I'm guessing you want the corner." at the returned smile he continued "I'd like the one right next to it on the east side."

"Good pick." the cat replied as they stepped into the male's office. He turned and leaned his rump against the edge of his desk and crossed his arms. "As soon as everything's ready for signatures let us know. I'd like to get started on preparing the space as soon as possible."

Jeremy nodded and said "I'll call him with a counter offer."

Gakota held up a paw. "No, make him wait. A bit of a delay will give you a bit of negotiating power. Call him at close of business Monday. Be tough too. Every dollar reduction in the lease frees up several of its twins in our operating budget."

Jeremy smiled at the advice. "Alright. What about the rest of us giving notice?"

"Lets see how things shake out over the next week. I wouldn't be surprised if they just stop sending us work for the meantime. We don't need to burn too many bridges here."

Jeremy nodded and sat looking around Gakota's office for a moment. "I feel like there's something I need to do, but there's nothing."

"I know, waiting in situations like this is tough." He answered smiling back. Gakota let Jeremy scan the bare walls a few more seconds. "We do need to start the process of hiring a staff."

Jeremy listened to his advice for nearly half an hour. He'd known before hand Gakota had far more experience than him but this was the true sign of just how much he would need the male's help. Together they were to build the new Bureau but it was going to be the feline that knew how to put together the actual meat on the skeletal framework that was Jackson's plan.

At the end of Gakota's discourse Jeremy looked up from making notes on his tablet. "Got it."

"Good. So, since we're at a standstill for this weekend take some time out to relax. There's going to be very little chance for that for the foreseeable future."

Sitting back Jeremy smiled and commented "I know just what I want to do this weekend. Its been a while since I've taken a drive out of the city."

"Isn't that what you did when we got back from Chile?"

"Yes. I went a little overboard on how far I went but for me its a good way to relax."

Gakota laughed. "Well, whatever it is that helps relieve the stress. Anyway, that's it for now. Let me know how it goes Monday night."

Jeremy stood and said his farewells. He made his way to his apartment smiling at the thought that the weather would cooperate with his sudden plans.

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The territory to the east of Appalachia is a patchwork of relatively small states. The area is not only seen as a buffer between Appalachia and Mexico but is such in application as well.

The leadership of each nation in this zone has by tradition changed allegiances between Appalachia to the east, Mexico to the west and Oklahoma to the northwest. Its more likely for a dominant to rise to power in these states than anywhere else in North America. Typically, once a new leader takes control they change allegiances at whim. The resulting political chaos has had a negative affect.

The nations of the zone between the three larger nations are known as chess pieces in a larger political game. Its an unfortunate byproduct of the games larger states play with little regard to the populations under their puppets states. Its not that they're in the shadows of larger more powerful states that tends to keep them small and economically insignificant. With the constantly shifting allegiances its almost impossible for each state to maintain any stability. As such its no wonder that names and borders have changed a number of times over the corse of the past few decades.