

Growing Body of Knowledge

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Leaning against the chair's wooden back, the black rabbit impatiently tapped his foot on the tiled floor. "I seriously doubt anyone would notice if I cut out early anyway," he thought aloud while sneaking a glance at his phone. It was four minutes 'til noon. If one of the students wanted to stop by for office hours, they would have done so by now. The smell of roasted coffee wafting through the air gave his stomach cause to rumble, loudly reminding him that he had skipped breakfast this morning. "Screw it." Sliding an arm across the table, he shoved his notebook and textbook into the gaping maw of his backpack resting on the floor. Dropping to his knees, he began fumbling with the zipper. The darn thing had skipped over a dozen or so metal teeth. Shoving a furred finger into the opening, the metal teeth that had interlocked nearby came loose, much to his chagrin. Sliding the zipper back and forth, he eventually got the thing to cooperate and close up tight. Hefting his backpack over his shoulder, the rabbit placed a hand on the railing and poked his head over. Tilting his head back, an uneasy sense of vertigo that never failed to overwhelm overtook him as he looked higher and higher up.

Stretching up nearly a dozen stories in height, the campus library was a frankly awe inspiring structure. Well, at least to someone of his size. Granite staircases stretched up and down the sides of the building, emptying out onto a sizeable landing on every floor. Each landing was replete with offices, a café, study halls, and bookshelves. A couple computers that weren't positively ancient littered the place too, providing handy reference for whatever it was you were looking for. Even if most of the students used them to dick around on whatever was the latest social network, at the very least they were doing so in the confines of the library. Situated on the third floor of the library, the location of his own 'office' was constantly changing. It all depended on whatever free table there was to choose from nearby the stairwell.

In the center of the structure stood its most imposing feature, massive ancient oaken bookshelves towering five stories high. They carried a delightfully musty scent. Bearing the burden of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of years and pounds of knowledge, every book that lined those shelves was as big, if not bigger than he was. The amount of time and money the university was spending remodeling the place was ludicrous. If they could afford to blow this much on trying to make the campus more accommodating to macros, they could at the very least kick a little more towards his stipend as a Teacher's Assistant. What good is a university without the professors and TAs to freaking educate people?

Letting his hand slide down from the railing, Raf turned towards the stairwell. A series of tumultuous rumbles dashed those plans and shook him off his feet, sending him stumbling back

towards the table. A set of ginormous red furry fingers, each one as thick as one his legs, curled around the railing. The sound of heavy panting accompanied their arrival.

“GYAHHHHHHHH!” Shrieking, Raf pushed himself back from the table and toppled onto the floor, arms wrapped tightly around his backpack.

“...Made... it...” Wheezing loudly, a gigantic red panda girl rested her chin upon the railing, causing the metal to creak and bend beneath her.

“AHHH!”

“O... okay. You know any Eng...english? Screaming... screaming isn’t my primarily spoken language.”

Biting his lip with his buck teeth, Raf shot her a scowl. “Very funny.”

Raising a hand, she held up her index finger. Motioning for the rabbit to wait, she gathered her breath before continuing on. “You’re the TA for the morning Calc II class, right?”

Narrowing his hazel eyes, the rabbit’s nose twitched. “...I am. Why do you ask?”

“Why do you think?” A toothy grin spread wide across her fuzzy mug as she stifled a giggle. Brushing back locks of brown hair that draped over her cheeks revealed a charming set of emerald eyes.

Hesitantly rising to his feet, the rabbit dusted off his backside. “I’ve never seen you in class before.”

“That’s because I don’t fit in the classroom.”

...Ask a stupid question and you’ll get a stupid answer. “Well how have you been keeping up with the lectures then and ohhhhhhhhhh. Oh that’s right the professor puts audio recordings of the lectures online.”

“Yeah and the past few days the recordings have been a garbled mess of static. I emailed the professor about it but he hasn’t gotten back to me yet. I was hoping you could bring me up to speed before I get too far behind?” Squeezing her hands around the railing, it crunched and compacted effortlessly in her grip.

“Sorry, but office hours just ended for the day.”

“Can’t you stay past just a few minutes? I don’t even get done with my morning classes until eleven forty-five. I had to bolt across campus to get here when I did!”

Letting out a sigh, the rabbit clenched shut both of his eyes. "When's your next class?"

"I'm done for the day." Twiddling her fingers against the railing, her thick nails knocked chunks of granite loose. The university had to have been sucking soul wrenching amounts of money from the macros for tuition. Just thinking about the amount of money the university pissed away daily on the wear and tear the giants incurred made Raf want to kill himself. The monetary damage to the railing and flooring, damage that Mei had incurred in a matter of minutes, was at least, AT LEAST, double his disposable income for the year.

"Better she shows up now than the week of finals," Raf mentally complained, shifting his thoughts to a marginally less irritating topic. He winced when a shard of stone bounced up against his cheek. "And at least she seems to give a damn about the class." Plodding back over to the table, he set his backpack upon it. "Let me heat up some lunch and I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks a ton! I'm Mei, by the way."

"Rafael." Tearing open his backpack, he fished out a packet of ramen.

"So... should I just wait here until then?" With every tap of her foot, tremors could be felt up to the first few floors.

"Suit yourself." Any sense of shame or self-respect having been ground out ages ago, the grad student ventured towards the closest café and tossed the ramen onto the counter. Familiar enough with the rabbit's antics, the Dalmatian at the register poured him a cup of boiling hot water and shooed him off. Tearing open the packet, Raf dunked the sodium saturated contents into the cup and started stirring with a straw. Careful not to spill any on himself on the way back to his table err... office... oh was he kidding. He didn't even have an assigned table. A look of incredulity plastered across Mei's face greeted him upon his return.

Reaching into the outer pockets of his backpack, the rabbit pulled out a handful of taco sauce packets. Not even the disapproving stares of fast food employees, entirely warranted by his shameless efforts to empty out their stock of condiment packets every time he visited, was enough to faze him anymore. Tearing the plastic edges off, he squirted the hopefully still edible concoction of flavoring onto his meal. "Mmm mmm mmm, tastes like poverty." Forcing a painful smile, he started digging into meal. He was honestly still amazed at how few heart palpitations he'd suffered through given his diet.

Arching a brow, Mei's eyes uneasily darted back and forth. "Yeah so... I was hoping you could give me a run down on derivation and integration? The examples in the book weren't all that helpful."

"They never are." Loudly slurping up the noodles and bits of peas and carrots, the rabbit stuck his hand inside his backpack and held it there for a moment. "...What am I doing? She's not even going to be able to read a single damn thing I write."

"This is what I have so far," Mei interjected as she slid a massive piece of loose leaf over the crumpled railing. Four feet by three and a half. The dimensions on these macro sized school supplies were practically cartoonish. Eraser shavings and gray smudges covered the entire upper portion of the oversized piece of paper. Two faded equations rendered in graphite were neatly positioned between the horizontal blue lines running in parallel along the paper, the majority of the mess concentrated around them.

"Wow, she actually took a crack at these? That's a pleasant surprise." Raf couldn't remember a time when a student hadn't thrown down a blank piece of paper, bawling for help. Those bums were supposed to at least try to smash their heads against it a little before coming for help. The whole point was to learn the process of coming to the right answer, not the answer itself. "Heh, let me guess. Examples showed you what you start off with and what you end with, with none of the in between?"

"Mmhmmm." Furrowing her brows, the red panda's lips curled down in frustration.

Padding over to the loose leaf, Raf trampled atop it and pointed down to the first equation. "Alright, so let's say we're going to derive this first equation. You see the exponent on the variable here?" Focusing intently on where the rabbit was pointing, Mei's ears perked up. "What you're going to want to do is bring it down in front of your variable and multiply it by whatever integer is currently there. Once you've done that you then subtract the exponent by one. So the steps you'd go through for deriving four x cubed would be as follows."

Flicking her long orange and cream colored bushy tail to and fro, Mei poked her head forward to get a better view of what the diminutive fur was up to. Straining her eyes, it was difficult to see what he was writing on her paper. "So four x cubed becomes twelve x squared?"

"You got it."

"Huh. And what about integration?"

"It's literally just reversing the order of operations. You add a value of one to the exponent on your variable, and then you divide the integer slapped on your variable by the new value of the exponent."

"Okay, so then twelve x squared becomes twelve x cubed... divide by three and... we have four x cubed!" Stamping her feet against the ground excitedly, the red panda was thrilled to have caught on so quickly.

“See, that wasn’t so bad. You hardly even needed my help.” Collapsing back into his chair, Raf occupied himself once more with shoving his now lukewarm and somewhat nauseating meal down his throat.

“You make it seem so easy.” Poking a hand over into the landing, she hastily scribbled some notes onto what little white space remained on the loose leaf. The tapping of her pencil against the floor left massive indents. “You wouldn’t happen to be able to go over a few homework problems with me, would you?” Clicking her teeth together, the red panda pressed her luck.

“I have classes of my own to run off to, it’ll have to wait.” A dark brown mixture of salt and preservatives was all that remained in his cup. Swirling it around, he winced at the sight of it sloshing against the side of the Styrofoam cup. Chucking it into a nearby trash can, he trotted down the stairwell.

“Tomorrow then, maybe?” Bending at the knees, Mei poked her head into the second floor’s landing, her long brown hair draping along the floor.

“You’re only going to get another five to ten minutes out of me.” Not even stopping to shoot her a glance, the rabbit continued jogging down the stairs. Sighing loudly, Mei rubbed at the back of her neck and scrunched her toes. Emptying out of the stairwell onto the ground level, Raf rolled his eyes. “If you’re really that desperate, I do have a half hour review section Tuesdays and Thursday at four. Attendance isn’t required. You can imagine how crowded and overwhelmed I get.”

Smirking, Mei donned a sly grin. “Sooooooooo... what you’re saying is that I’ll be able to utterly monopolize your time?”

“As it stands now, I’m currently being paid to sit around and do nothing for hours a day. Giving me something remotely intellectually stimulating would be a godsend. I suppose I could relocate class here without any complaints.” Meandering towards one of the side entrances, a gust of air nearly bowled him over. Holding open one of the gargantuan newly installed doors open, Mei laughed nervously. Shaking his head, the rabbit continued along his original path. Exiting out a side door, he weaved his way towards the main street running down campus. Sticking to the left side of the gargantuan sidewalk, he shoved his hands into his pockets and began counting the steps it would take him to reach the Mathematics department’s building. Rhythmic tremors bounced Raf a good foot or two up into the air, along with a handful of other pedestrians, as Mei came jogging up beside him. Slowing her gait considerably, she walked alongside the rabbit, the smaller fur not quite coming up to her knees.

“So how long have you been on campus?” Getting rid of her for any amount of time was proving to be difficult.

“I’m a super senior. Four years down, two to go. You?”

“Sophomore. You live on campus?”

“Yep, over in the campus housing over the sandwich shop.” Catching himself, Raf paused before he blurted out another stupid question. One a day was plenty enough. Letting his eyes sneak a scan up and down her long toned legs, and mindful of how few buildings she could actually fit into, he cleared his throat. “Let me guess. You commute?”