

The Hub: Candidates

A simple knock on the door will change the lives of three college students forever. The door swings open, "Hello? Who is it?" asks an anthropomorphic black furred equine, with a blue dotted curved black horn sticking out of his forehead. It comes to two sharp points, one notably shorter than the other, like a small part of a tree branch. He towers over the figure before him, yellow eyes staring down at him.

The black furred sergal with light blue stripes was nearly half his size. The lithe sergal stands tall and proud, suitcases at his feet, "I'm Zridon, your new mate," he says in a heavy accent. He holds out his hand.

The equine shifts on his hooves, wiggling a finger in his blue lined ears, "I'm sorry, what did you just call yourself?"

"I'm your new mate. The college housing assigned me here for my time at college."

He stares at him for just a moment as the pieces click together, "Oh, roommate! You're going to be bunking here for the school year."

The sergal's ear twitches, "I do not know what this bunking is, but I am here for the next two years. In the study away program with exchange of students."

"Right, right. They told us we were getting a new guy. Come right in, my name is Zephyr."

"It is good to see you Zephyr," he says, still holding out his hand.

He chuckles, "Good to see you too," he remarks giving a firm strong handshake, "*We're either going to have so much fun with this or it's going to get annoying very quick,*" he thinks.

"I shaking the hand right? I have not done it often."

"You did it just fine, come in before things get weird."

"Right, right. Sorry," he replies, rushing into the place, taking off his foot gloves the moment he gets in.

"You don't have to take off your shoes right away."

"It's not good manners to walk shoed in a home," he replies.

"Well, it doesn't matter to me. I don't wear shoes," he says, showing off his hooves, "Hey Scyther! Our new roommate is here!" he exclaims. The equine clopping ahead of the sergal, who looks at the simple dormitory with a sense of awe and wonder. His well-dressed attire is rather out of place with Zephyr's casual attire.

Coming out of the hallway is a black scaled red sand yellow stripped anthropomorphic snake. He yawns, showing off his fanged teeth that unfurl as his mouth opens, his forked tongue flicking out, his tail is so long that it slithers along the ground behind him, "He's here already? It's so early."

Zephyr nostrils flare as he huffs, "It's almost ten."

"School doesn't start till tomorrow, it's early," he says, flicking his tongue, shaking his head, his yellow slitted eyes locking on the sergal, "Is he the fresh meat to our little house club?"

Zridon walks up to him, holding out his hand, "I am very fresh here. It is pleasurable to have another mate."

"What? I'm sorry but I don't slither that way."

Zephyr chuckles, "He means roommate. Zridon its roommate, not mate. Mate means something else completely."

The sergal blushes, rubbing the back of his head, "Oh, my apologies. I did not mean something wrong. I appreciate help with my language, roommate."

"You'll get the hang of it."

He rubs his neck, "I do not want to hang."

Scyther chuckles, "*This is just too precious,*" he thinks, correcting, "He means you'll be able to speak our language soon."

"Oh, that is good. We can all hang together then?"

The equine chuckles, "Looks like you are getting the hang of it already. Sure, we can hang out together. What do you know about the city?"

"It's very big, a lot to see. A lot of people curious to see me."

"Right, yeah, I don't know what you are now that you mention it."

"I am a great sergal of the North," he states, puffing out his chest with pride.

Scyther slithers closer, "A sergal? Oh, I know of you. I had two in one of my classes last semester."

"Two?" the sergal asks, tilting his head, "I knew not others were at the college. Where do they come from?"

"I don't know. They are on odd bunch. You know the two I am referring. The one that dresses with cuffs all the time and the other that dresses completely in rubber, claiming that 'it's a toy' and some jazz like that."

Zephyr eyes widen, "Oh, them? I haven't seen them personally, but yeah. I feel sorry for you Zridon. People are going to think they are kinky like them."

"Kink? My neck is fine."

The equine stops dead in his tracks, "We are so going to get you out more and up that vocabulary of yours."

"Don't forget that rubber sergal drone dance club... wait, we were there just last week. How in the world did you not know what a sergal was?"

"I never saw one with an actual face. I didn't know."

The sergal speaks up, "What is this kink you speak of? Why are sergals here kink?"

Zephyr trots over to him, placing a hand on his back, "I'll try to explain this the best I can. Kink refers to sex. They do things that are very sexual and can get someone to get off."

"Get off of what?"

Scyther gives a long-sighed hiss, "You're almost as bad as K-2003. Maybe she is an exchange student too. But she's adamant she runs the toy company. They have a store just a block away. But then that could explain it if you have a lot of money you live in your own world

and can get away with things others can't. Such as walk around the school dressed head to toe in latex."

Zridon blushes a bit, "Latex? I like latex very, very much. This club? Sounds very, very interesting."

The snake and the unicorn look at each other then back at the sergal, "Well *that* is something I wasn't expecting," the snake remarks, flicking his tongue, "He doesn't taste like he's joking either."

Zephyr shudders, "That ability still gives me the willies. Knowing you can tell if someone is lying like that?"

"It's not foolproof, and I need a base line. I talked to the Silent sergal person enough to get a general baseline. But the other? K-2003? I can't make tongue or tail of that one."

"Excuse me, but that isn't a name? Is that an alternate name?"

"You mean a nickname?"

"Their name is Nick?"

"No, nickname is a different way to say an alternate name."

His eyes light up at the realization, "Oh, I make the understanding now. So, K-2003 is their nickname?"

Zephyr shakes his head, "No, K-2003 is their name."

The snake adds in, "She calls it a designation or whatever, but yeah. A real odd one. The only two sergal girls in town and they are both weird, but in a good way I suppose."

"Guess that means he lucks out, doesn't it?" the equine chuckles.

"Yeah... maybe. Zridon, you like kinky shit then?"

"Oh no. I do not like waste."

"Not that kink... but good to know. Neither are we."

The sergal blushes a bit, his tail swishing quickens, "Still new friends. Not talk kink today. Move in first, yes?"

Zephyr smacks the side of his head, "Right, right. You just moved in. I'll show you to your room and then perhaps we can do a few things. Get to know each other better? How does that sound?"

"That sounds really good to me," he replies with a toothy grin, the unicorn takes him to his bare bones.

Scyther, rubs the back of his scaled head, "This is going to be an interesting yet fun semester. I should get a pie and do the pie trick to him," he chuckles.

Zridon yells from down the hallway, "What pie trick? I like pies."

The snake jumps, "Holy shit balls, you heard me?"

"I hear very good."

"That..." he says, trailing off, his mind piecing together puzzle pieces, "Explains so much..."

"Explains what?"

He waves the sergal off, “Nothing you need to worry about. Hey Zephyr! How about we take our new sergal friend to the Hub. See how much he likes it?”

Leaving the room letting the sergal unpack his things, “We just met the man. And you want to take him to the kinky dance club?”

He flicks his tongue, giving a fanged smile, “Yeah. It’s not *that* kind of club. It’s more dance than kink.”

“You can have naked people dancing on the floor. It’s plenty kinky.”

“The drones aren’t naked. They’re smooth and featureless. Heck two of them are so dark it looks like they are walking black holes. It’s real trippy. My heat sensors are the only thing that helps me see them.”

“Why don’t we ask him? I don’t mind going. I have plenty of gear to dress up in. But I don’t want to scare off our roommate. Last thing I want is the college administration getting angry at us that we scared off the exchange student.”

Zridon steps into the room, “I scared not. I survived... uh... what’s that word.”

“Sexual encounters?” asks Scyther.

“No, I sex not yet.”

Zephyr chuckles, “I wasn’t expecting that nugget of information so soon. Normally that takes a few drinks to get out of someone.”

“Would it be odd experiences? Kinky ones?”

“No, that’s not it either. It’s at the tip of my forked tongue...”

“Oh yeah, we’re forked tongue buddies.”

“Oh, we are fuck buddies.”

“Fork, not fuck... We are going to work with you on your language. This miscommunication is going to be killing me.”

“That is it! Killing. I survived killing!”

Scyther and Zephyr look at each other, the equine speaks up first, “What do you mean by killing?”

“I lived in the center when I was young. A lot of killing happened. Family moved further North, much better now.”

“Ahh... Are you sure you mean what I think you mean?” he asks, pulling out his phone, doing a quick search on the internet.

Scyther was way ahead of him, and brought his phone up to him, “You meant this right? Just to be sure?”

The sergal reads the phone, “Yup. I afraid not of anything.”

“You know... I think that might be a story after a few weeks of knowing you, and a few drinks. So if you are cool with it. We can go to the Hub later tonight. They don’t open till the afternoon.”

“That sounds good with me.”

Zephyr quickly reads some news articles about the sergal country, a bit lost in it till Scyther nudges his side “Huh, what?”

“The Hub is a go?”

“Sure. If he’s okay with it. I have no problem,” he says, putting his phone away, “It will cost a bit to get in and the drinks are up charged. Ah, I mean they cost a lot, expensive. Are you okay with that?”

“Yes. I got money. But I will need work. Family want not free time. World hard. Earn hard. Be hard.”

The two snicker, “I think there is a mistranslation there,” chuckles Zephyr.

“What, do you not be hard in this country?”

He grins, “I certainly can, but not in the way you are thinking nor am I showing you.”

“Why not show me how hard you are? I want to learn how it is done here.”

Scyther snickers, “This has to be an act...”

The unicorn puts his hand on the sergal’s shoulder, “Zridon. I’ll put this as delicately as I can. And by no means do I mean anything negative by this. But are you gay?”

“Yes. I am very gay. Pleased to be here in a new country. It is so exciting to have a gay ol time.”

Scyther bursts out laughing, moving to the couch to prop himself up.

“Did I tell a funny?”

Zephyr holds back his own laughter, “I think the translation book you have is about half a century out of date.” He pulls out his phone, pulling out the translator, “Gay,” he says into it, showing him the translation.

The sergal’s ears fold back, “Oh... oh! No, no, no. I like women.”

He sighs, while the snake continues to laugh, “Okay, good. We are on the same page here. When people say they are hard. It is often not always but more so than not, referring to a male erection. When you’re aroused, ready to fuck, have sex. Do you understand?”

He nods, “Yes, I know very well. I am very gay... ah, happy to have new friends like you to help me.”

“Shame you aren't. I might have showed you just how much you could handle from me.”

Zridon ear twitches, “What?”

“Relax, I’m joking, unless you are wanting to experiment.”

“Experiment? I do not have any chemistry classes.”

“I mean we could do chemistry, but you don’t go that way.”

“Go which way?”

He smirks, “How about we go over some other phrases over some lunch.”

“That sounds good to me,” replies the sergal, the trio starting to build their new bonds for the hard times ahead of them, across town another, an anthropomorphic grey furred feline was about to deal with a hard moment herself.

She steps into the office of the bulky anthropomorphic moose. The thumping music from the dance floor becomes muffled the moment the door closes behind with an audible nerve wrecking click. The moose holds a thick lit cigar between his lips, taking a deep puff.

Her baby blue eyes stare at him. The feline dressed in a business bouncer suit attire. Her hands held behind her back as she keeps proper posture, yet her flicking tail gives insight at her uneasiness, “You called for me?”

He takes another long puff, “I want to thank you for breaking up the fight amongst some of our more inebriated patrons last night.

“Just doing my job sir. I prefer we avoid conflict, when possible, but I’m glad no one was hurt.”

“You handled yourself well when the police came. That one officer... what was his name?”

She tenses, “Pennway.”

“Last name? You two seemed to know each other awfully well to be on a last name basis.”

“We were in the same graduating class at the academy.”

“Ah, yes that was on your resume. It was so peculiar to have someone with such a fine record to be working as a simple bouncer. As esteemed as this establishment is. It did make me question as to *why* you were here.”

“Everyone needs to eat.”

He chuckles heartily, “Isn’t that the truth. But...” he taps the cigar, dumping the ashes into an ashtray that is in the shape of a Moose’s skull, “It just makes me concerned.”

“I’ve been upfront and honest about my resume,” she states, clenching her hands behind her ever tighter, claws extending before she manages to relax enough to have them retract.

He nods, “Yes, you have been rather honest. But here we value loyalty above everything else. So, I just couldn’t help but chat with Officer Pennway. As I couldn’t shake the feeling there was a reason *why* you’re working for me. I had concerns about loyalty, you know.”

She steadies her breathing, ears shifting to listen for anything to put her on alert, “*I’ve heard rumors that this guy was unsavory, but nothing like this... I don’t like the feel of this.*” She kept a stern look, “I am loyal to my job sir. I want to protect others. You hired me to keep the peace and nip trouble in the butt before it can cause a major issue. I’ve done just that. Is there a problem?”

“I don’t think there has to be a *problem* if we can just prove your loyalty.”

She grits her teeth, “Just spit it out sir. I don’t want to play these games.”

“And there it is. You’re not one to play the game, follow the rules. You snitched and broke the code amongst your fellow officers.”

“A code like that deserved to be broken. I do not regret for a single instant taking the stand for that scumbag that dared to not only wear the badge but hide behind it.” He states with a long growl before she catches herself, smoothing out her fur, clearing her throat, returning to her calm demeanor.

He smirks, “You know what they say about snitches... But it needs not to go that way. All you have to do is prove your loyalty to me, and it will be water under the bridge.”

“What is it that you want?”

“Simple, you take my loyalty test, and you get to come back in tomorrow and resume your duties with the occasional check up to ensure that I know just where your *loyalties* lie.”

“And if I don't?”

“You leave and try to find another job. But from what I hear, you've been denied so many due to your inability to prove yourself trustworthy. Shame really, but I am at least giving you a second chance. Such a shame the world is a harsh place that can't let a hardworking and talented woman such as yourself, prove herself worthy of protecting others.”

She sighs, “Please, just tell me what you want.”

He chuckles, taking another long puff of his cigar, pushing himself back from his desk, “I need you to get down, right over here and provide me a service that only the truly *loyal* and *dedicated* can provide.

She hisses, “I will do no such thing! I'd rather die than degrade myself for some creep's kicks!”

“Think about it Gale. This is the best offer you'll get in this city.”

“My answer is no,” she states, turning around, walking straight out.

“If you change your mind, I'm willing to make an exception!”

Her skin crawls, the door closes behind her as she storms out of the club, while keeping a constant surveillance, ready to expect something was going to happen, but when she drives off her powerful facade breaks and turns into tears, “*This is not the way it should be.*”

She gets to her rundown apartment, rushing straight to her bedroom, booting up the computer, she looks at a photograph of her graduating class, of over a hundred promising police officers. Standing off to the side, one of the teachers. Dressed in his blue uniform, an anthropomorphic raccoon that has the criminal face mask. She smiles, thinking of all the cops and robber jokes he tossed his way, and he took it with stride, heck pride, bucking a stereotype like he did. She tenses, running her finger across the picture, “I won't give up. Just like you taught me Ben.” She sits down, getting to work, searching through security detail jobs, catching one new one that is less than a day old, “The Hub? What kind of place is that?” she wonders.

She does a quick search, “Another dance club... but it's new, only a couple of months old and in a nicer part of town, but that drive...” she grumbles, then catches, “Commute expenses paid? Fuck it, might as well apply. What else do I have to lose?”

The wheels of fate continue to turn, events are centralized around the Hub as a white skinned human with well-kept black hair steps off the plane, a phone in hand, “Mom, I'll be fine. If I can make three tours, I can make it in the city.”

He listens to her streams of complaints and concerns, “I know, but I can help more people in the city. A town of a thousand doesn't need me. You know what Dad always used to say, do the most good where it's needed the most.”

“I'll be sure to call every day. Twice if I can... yes, I promise. Look, I need to run down a taxi. I'll talk to you tomorrow, okay? Love you too, bye.” he sighs, smiling, “She'll be fine.” He grabs a taxi, straight to a hotel deeper into the city. He admires the bustling city under a cool and restrained demeanor. After checking in he runs a few errands. Grabbing some food for a

couple days, checking the progress on his new apartment, making sure everything is in order so he can move in just a couple of days.

He greets everyone with a smile and a wave, to the point that it catches a few off guard that are not used to such a happy-go-lucky acting gentlemen. But as he makes his way around the area, he catches the Hub dance club. His brown eyes gaze upon the neon lights, the thumping music, the line of people dressed in latex gear, ready to have a good time, “Oh, my what do we have here? This was certainly not here when I checked the maps when I picked out the place.”

Like a moth drawn to a flame he gets in line. His casual military attire does feel a bit out of place, but his rubber boots do not, “This place seems to be popular, doesn’t it?” he asks a femboy sergal in front of him.

“Oh, hello. I see not why. First time here.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you. You’re a Northerner?”

“Yes, I am.”

“I can tell by your accent,” he responds, changing the language, “Would you prefer if I speak in your language?”

“Oh, you speak my language. I wasn’t expecting that. Not many know it,” he replies.

“I did a year in your country for humanitarian aid, five years ago. Lovely place.”

“Thank you. Your country has a lot to offer to. I’m really excited to be here. I’ve already made some nice friends. These two in front of me are my roommates. They are taking me here to see this sergal themed dance club. I’ll be honest, I’m quite curious about it.”

“I did see the sergal dancing on the outside, I didn’t know it was sergal themed.”

Zephyr dressed in latex and leather pony gear bondage harness, minus the pony hooves, “Zridon, do you know this guy?” he asks, looking at the older human with uncertainty, “*He’s certainly dressed odd for a club like this.*”

“No. We Met just now. He speaks my language.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to cause an issue. My name is Jerome. I just moved here, and I was curious about this club.”

“It opened a few months ago. It’s a latex fetish dance club. The people who work here dress up as faceless sergal drones with a lot of flashing lights and shit.”

“Amazing. I hope they keep themselves cool and hydrated. Latex doesn’t like to breathe.”

“There hasn’t been an issue that I know of.”

Scyther remarks, “I tried one of their rental sergal drone hoods. It was *amazing*. I would highly recommend it. We’re going to treat Zridon here to…” he says as he gets elbowed in the side.

Zephyr shoots him a look, “Don’t ruin the surprise.”

The sergal asks him curiously, “Treat me to what?”

The unicorn waves his concern off, “Don’t you worry about it. You’ll see once we get inside.”

“Okay. I am very excited. Surprises are very much fun.”

Jerome chuckles, “I might take you up on that offer. I do feel a little out of place, given to everyone else,” he says looking at all those in line.”

“You’ll be fine, but those hoods go fast. I’m not sure if you can get one.”

“How do you go about getting one?”

“You can put a deposit to reserve one beforehand or do so while at the club. They’ll let you know one becomes free.”

“What happens to the deposit if I don’t get one?”

“If you are at the club at any time when you put it on hold, you get the deposit back. But if you do so before hand and never show? You forfeit it.”

“Tough but fair. Prevents people from reserving them willy nilly.”

“Something like that.”

“Do you two then come here often? You seem to know a bit about this place.”

Scyther answers, “We’ve been here a few times.” They soon reach the front of the line. There’s a sign right outside that reads “Want to join the Hub?! We are hiring, apply online or inside! All are welcomed on the network. The Hub must grow.”

Jerome chuckles, “That sounds like some kind of collective dystopia talk right there.”

Zephyr smirks, “Well that’s part of the charm of the place, they play that up to an eleven.”

1G0R stands at the cashier greeting those that come in. The black, pink striped and grey hexagonal marking female faceless sergal states in a smooth monotone voice, “**Welcome to the Hub.**

The human cracks a smile, “I can see that now.”

Zridon looks at the sergal drone curiously, “It’s... odd.”

Zephyr looks at him, “Odd how?”

“I’m not sure... “

“Perhaps its just the facelessness. Are you okay with it?”

He nods, “I’ll be fine. They are not real sergals?”

“Not that I know of. All people in sergal drone hoods from that toy company I told you about.”

“It is fine,” he says, the trio of friends paying.

Zephyr clearing his throat, “I put on a reserve for a drone hood?”

The sergal drone nods, “**Affirmative. We have your reservation here. Please step into conversion room three.**”

“The hood is for my sergal friend here, is that alright?”

“**Do you accept all legal responsibility for the use of the Hub drone hoods?**”

Zridon looks at the drone curiously, “What?”

Zephyr nudges him, “Just say yes so you can use the hood.”

“Oh, okay. Yes.”

“Statement acknowledgement accepted. Please proceed to conversion room three. Place your clothes in the locker and put on the hood and the network will take care of you. Remember, the Hub must grow.”

“O-okay...” he says with a hint of nervousness, a mixture of excitement and curiosity, “*This has to be a fun place to work,*” he thinks, heading over to the conversion chamber.

Scyther flicks his tongue, “Don’t worry. We’ll wait right outside for you.”

“Thanks,” he says with a blush, stepping into the room, pulling the curtain behind him. The loud thumping music is almost a bit too much for his sharp sergal hearing, “*I hope the hood helps quiet things a bit.*” What he does hear though is Jerome talking with the sergal drone up front.

“Hello, I’d like to reserve a sergal drone hood.”

“Affirmative. Current wait time is estimated to exceed the hours the Hub will be open tonight. Is that still acceptable?”

“Yeah, that’ll be fine.”

“Affirmative. Please register yourself with the basic personal information, valid credit card and phone number.”

“The usual, I got it,” he replies, filling out the information and giving it back to the drone to enter into the system.

“One moment please... All registered. Please set your phone to vibrate. It will make it easier to contact you when your drone hood is ready. And please enjoy the Hub.”

“Thank you,” he says, stepping through the next set of doors into the thumping beating neon music filled dance floor. The sergal drone customers setting off the club with their lighted steps, flashing to the music, while the actual drones work their hips on the raised dancing platforms or the bar. But as he does, the Hub’s network lights up.

“Perfect match for Hub position detected,” states the smaller drone collective, **“Transmitting data to administrators.”**

R4T1 processes the information, “*Jerome Powell. Experienced medic trained medical doctor. Experience in treating multiple different species. Current registered address is several hundred miles away. Local scans do not indicate he is currently employed at any nearby location. K4T3, do you have a visual on the potential new member of the Hub?*”

The black 2.0 and dark blue sergal drone walks from upstairs, her feet causing splashes of blue on the glass floor. She locks onto the human as he makes his way to the bar where unit NIT3 is busy serving up drinks, “*Affirmative. Target acquired.*”

“Proceed to have unit NIT3 attempt to recruit Jerome into the Hub through voluntary means.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

“Subversion. 1G0R, did you process their credit card to put a hold on the public drone hood?”

The collective of hot pink drones respond, “*Negative.*”

“Excellent, we have a plan. Execute it.”

“Affirmative,” the smaller collective responds, just as N1T3 moves towards Jerome to take his order. The hub is ready to grow, and it will do what it must to make that happen...