

This is a prequel chapter to the book "Shark Knights", written by Eric Williams. The book is for sale at <http://amzn.com/1484841026>

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Job Interview

"What am I doing here?"

The athletic nineteen year old fidgeted with her shirt and then spent a few seconds pulling her dark hair into a pony tail. Standing in the shadow of the castle shaped building while getting ready to meet the toughest superhero team on the planet did nothing to help the woman's confidence.

"This was stupid, I don't belong anywhere near this place," she mumbled to herself. Letting out a sigh, she turned to leave. Just then, the fortress rumbled and the front gate slowly began to open. A balding man in his thirties was standing on the other side. He smiled and waved to her.

"Shyanne?"

The woman nodded and smiled back. "That's me."

"Great. Welcome to our headquarters. Come on in and we'll get started." The man shook her hand and led her into the lobby of the building. Shyanne glanced around curiously. She saw a large framed photo of the seven members of the current team.

"So you're...Sensor?" she asked.

"That's right. We all go by code names around here. It's easier that way. If our interview goes well today and you make the team, you'll have to come up with one for yourself."

Shyanne didn't think the chances of that were too high, but she kept her thoughts to herself as Sensor led her to a mechanical platform. Kind of like an elevator without walls, the platform slowly rose and took them to the fifth floor of the Fortress.

Sensor led the way off the platform and into a room full of computers and video screens. "This is our strategy room. We have communication relays set up all around the country, keeping tabs on any possible trouble. If a bad guy starts causing problems, we usually find out about it

pretty quickly.” He motioned to a table and the two of them sat down. Sensor activated a terminal and cued up some video footage that Shyanne was very familiar with.

“As you know, we became aware of your talents when footage of the jewelry store hostage situation went viral. I was hoping we could watch it together, and then you could take me through it from your perspective.”

Shyanne remembered all too well what happened inside the jewelry store the day that four armed criminals stormed inside. She had been working part time at the store while going to college. A woman had just asked her to look at some diamond earrings when the four men, all wearing werewolf masks and holding automatic weapons, charged in. One man locked the door and stood guard while the other three brandished their guns and screamed at the customers and employees to get on the ground.

As Shyanne laid face down on the cold tile floor, she glanced around at the other hostages. She counted four customers plus her boss, who at the moment was pleading with the criminals not to hurt anyone. He was quickly silenced when one of the men hit him across the face with the butt end of his gun. The act of violence only further panicked the customers, who began screaming in terror.

“Everybody shut up!” yelled one of the men. “Next person to talk gets plugged.” When the customers quieted down, the three robbers began smashing display cases and filling up bags with high priced jewelry. The fourth man kept watch at the front door. Shyanne hoped that someone walked by the store. They would definitely notice a man in a werewolf mask holding a machine gun and call the police.

The werewolf closest to Shyanne was throwing silver necklaces into his bag when the customer she had been helping tugged on one of his pant legs. “Please mister, let me go. I won’t tell anyone.”

The criminal shook his leg to break free of her grip. “Lady, you have three seconds to put your head down and shut up before I shoot you in the face.” But the woman was in hysterics and didn’t even hear him.

“Please! Pleasssssse! You have to let me go! Let me go!”

The criminal lost all patience and pointed his gun down at her. “One...two...”

Shyanne didn’t remember what she said to the criminal as she sprang to her feet. Luckily the security camera in the store had picked up the audio just fine.

“Let me show you what a real wolf looks like!” Shyanne shimmered for a second, transforming from an attractive college student into a snarling wolf.

The criminal took off his mask to get a better look, and was stunned by what he saw. Not giving him a chance to recover his composure, the wolf pounced. The weight of the animal knocked the man backwards, and he crashed into a display case. This caused the other three men to notice what was happening. Two of them hesitated, but the third one raised his gun and aimed it at the wolf.

A moment later, the wolf had disappeared, replaced by a bobcat. The smaller and more agile animal dodged the machine gun fire and leapt onto the criminal, ripping off his mask and clawing at his face. By now the other two had recovered from the shock. They lunged for the bobcat, but it shimmered and changed into a grizzly bear. The massive creature backhanded one of the crooks right through the glass door. The second man fumbled with his gun, but the grizzly bear opened its mouth full of teeth and roared right in his face. The man shrieked and dropped his gun. In his panicked state he turned and sprinted straight into a wall, knocking himself out.

The last criminal grabbed one of the customers and held a gun to her head. “You leave me alone, whatever you are, or I’ll shoot this lady! I swear I will!”

The poor woman screamed in fright from being held hostage, but was equally terrified of the giant grizzly bear standing in front of her. Suddenly the bear vanished. The criminal looked around but there was no trace of the ferocious animal. He shoved his hostage to the ground and began to pick up the bags of loot. What he didn’t see was a tiny mouse scurry across the floor and sneak up behind him. He was too busy grabbing the last bag to see the mouse shimmer and transform. But he definitely noticed when the mouse turned into something bigger.

“LION!”

The lion pounced on the criminal. Its large teeth grabbed the werewolf mask and ripped it off. Watching the video, Shyanne noticed a dark patch slowly appear in the crotch section of the man’s pants. She giggled. Sensor started laughing too and stopped the video.

“That was pretty awesome how you handled that, and very heroic. Those men could have easily shot and killed you.”

Shyanne shrugged. “I couldn’t let them hurt those people. Everything else...I didn’t really think. I just reacted.”

“Well you had great instincts, and changing into various animals threw them off guard. I think you could be an asset to our team. Would you be willing to face danger on a more consistent basis?”

“On my own, I’m not so sure, but I think as part of a team I could do it.”

“That’s why we’re a team. Everyone works together to make sure we defeat the bad guys and get back safe. Speaking of, it’s time you met them. Follow me to the third floor.” Sensor stood up and walked back to the platforms.

“Is that it? Am I a member?”

“You passed the interview, but there’s still the physical portion of the exam.”

Shyanne gulped. “Physical?”

The platforms stopped on the third floor. They walked past a fully equipped gym. Shyanne noticed a muscular man working a weight machine. He was struggling to finish his set. Sensor called out to him. “Mountain, you need a spot?”

Mountain laughed between gritted teeth. “No offense dude, but I don’t think you could help. I have it set on eight hundred pounds. Mountain took a deep breath, and then his skin changed into solid rock. With his strength now amplified, the Knight easily handled the weight.

Sensor clapped. “Don’t tire yourself out, you might need those muscles. I’ve been getting reports that a couple villains have been sighted in the area.”

“Bring it on,” said Mountain, and started another set.

Sensor led Shyanne through some doors that opened into a large area. The rest of the team was in there already. “This is our battle chamber. I’m sure you can figure out why. Oh, and watch out for Pierce and Chase. They have a bet to see if she can dodge all of his energy beams.”

The heroes Sensor mentioned were indeed locked in a contest. Chase used her super speed to dodge all of Pierce’s energy blasts. His hands glowing blue, Pierce kept firing off multiple energy beams in various directions. Chase had so far been able to evade the blue beams, but Pierce was determined to get her.

“All I need is to fire one in front of you, and you’ll probably run straight into it,” said Pierce.

Chase came to a quick stop. “You’re dreaming if you think I’m gonna run into anything.” But she unwittingly reacted exactly how Pierce had hoped. Now that Chase was standing still, he fired off energy blasts to either side of her. Chase turned to run, and smacked straight into one.

“Gotcha.”

While Chase angrily demanded a rematch, Sensor introduced Shyanne to Aura, Tag and Sky Hunter. The leader of the Shark Knights cut the pleasantries short.

“I saw your video of the jewelry store, but unlike Sensor I wasn’t impressed,” said Sky Hunter. “Any one of us could have used our powers to take out those petty thugs. But how would you do up against super villains? People stronger, faster and more powerful than you?”

“I think she’d be fine,” said Aura.

“Let’s find out,” said Sky Hunter. He pointed at Shyanne. “If you can last one minute against the three of us, then I’ll consider adding you to the team. If you don’t, then you’re just wasting my time.”

Shyanne wasn’t prepared for this kind of test. “Well, hold on a second. I mean, don’t ---”

“Ready GO!” Sky Hunter threw a punch right at Shyanne’s face. She managed to duck in time, but wasn’t ready for the knee he drove into her stomach. She exhaled sharply and fell to one knee, trying to breath.

“Pathetic. Don’t bother unpacking your bags.”

Shyanne balled up both her hands into fists. She shimmered and transformed into a gorilla. One furry hand grabbed Sky Hunter by the neck, pulling him closer. The other hand delivered an uppercut that sent him sprawling. Aura stepped in to protect Sky Hunter. A red glow appeared around her, and her muscles visibly increased. The gorilla bellowed a challenge and swung at her. Aura casually deflected the blow with her forearm, then spin kicked the gorilla into the wall. Aura followed up with a mighty punch, but the gorilla changed into a cardinal and flew out of the way. In the air, the cardinal was immediately set upon by Sky Hunter, who flew at it with alarming speed. Rather than dodge, the cardinal turned into a python and wrapped around the Knight’s neck. The snake tried to choke Sky Hunter, but he dipped and flew back to the ground. The snake suddenly stiffened, unable to move. Tag had put his hand on it, rendering the python immobile with his touch.

Sky Hunter untangled himself and nodded to his close friend. Tag released his hold on the snake, which shimmered and transformed back into Shyanne.

“That was less than a minute,” said Sky Hunter.

Shyanne cast her eyes to the ground, too embarrassed to look at him. Before, she figured she wasn’t cut out for this. But now she wanted more than anything to prove herself and had failed.

“Hold on a sec,” said Chase. She zipped over to join the rest of them. “She didn’t do that bad.”

“She lasted longer than I did during my test,” said Pierce. He reached out a hand and helped Shyanne to her feet.

Sky Hunter snorted. "I'm still not sure about you either."

"Fair enough," said Pierce. "Let's make it interesting. The new girl versus Tag. First one to land a hit on the other wins. Chase and I will team up to help her, and you and Aura run interference for Tag."

Sensor slowly backed up out of the way while the two groups circled each other. It started abruptly with Chase taking off towards Sky Hunter. Aura's glow changed to orange and she quickly teleported away. Tag ducked an energy blast from Pierce and made his move towards Shyanne. Sky Hunter took to the air to avoid Chase. He flew in a corkscrew pattern towards Pierce, but Shyanne transformed into an eagle and attacked him.

Chase built up some speed and then slipped underneath Tag's outstretched arms. She grabbed him by the ankles and flipped him to the ground. "Shyanne, come and get him!"

The eagle diverted from Sky Hunter and plunged towards the ground. Aura teleported behind Chase. Her glow turned yellow as she leaned in and whispered into Chase's ear. "Can you please high-five Tag for me?"

A puzzled look spread across Chase's face as Aura's persuasion power took hold. "Um, sure." She reached down and offered a hand to Tag, who was more than happy to take it, freezing her in place.

The eagle transformed midair into an alligator and crashed into Aura. Meanwhile, Pierce managed to hit Sky Hunter with an energy beam, but the leader of the Knights kept coming. "That tickled," he taunted.

"All right," answered Pierce. "Full blast this time." His hands began to glow as he charged up his power. He raised his arms and aimed at Sky Hunter. As he was about to let loose, Aura teleported next to him. She grabbed his arms and yanked them up as Pierce released the blast. The beams missed their intended target, but Sky Hunter didn't. He plowed into Pierce, taking him out of the fight. Sky Hunter got up and dusted himself off.

"Chase and Pierce are out. That brings us back to where we started. The three of us against the rookie."

Aura tapped Sky Hunter on the shoulder and pointed to the other side of the battle chamber. "Don't be so sure." Sky Hunter followed her gaze. A giant tortoise was sitting on top of Tag.

Sky Hunter scratched his head. "I can't tell. Did Tag freeze that thing or is it just moving real slow?"

Tag called out from under the animal. "The tortoise landed on me before I could freeze it. If you don't mind, can we end this exercise? It's really heavy."

Aura laughed. “Looks like she beat us. Good job girl!”

The tortoise transformed back into Shyanne. Tag got up and unfroze Chase. Aura helped Pierce up.

Sky Hunter frowned at Tag. “I don’t know if this is a win for her or just a loss for you. If you had avoided her for a few more seconds we would’ve been there to finish it.” Aura elbowed him and nodded towards Shyanne. Sky Hunter addressed her as well. “Still, good job by you. Too bad your teammates didn’t fare as well.”

Pierce was about to retort when Sensor interrupted. He and Mountain walked into the battle chamber to join the rest of the team. “We have multiple calls coming in. Seven and Bench Press were spotted together breaking into a car dealership. At the same time, there was an explosion at the city bank not far from here.”

“Do you think it’s Time Bomb?” asked Tag. Sensor nodded yes.

Sky Hunter took charge. “Okay. Aura, Tag and Sensor with me. We’ll take out the main threat of Seven and Bench Press. Mountain, Chase, Pierce and the rookie can investigate the bank. If it’s Time Bomb, can you guys handle it?”

Mountain answered with a sarcastic smirk. “Come on, you know we can.”

Shyanne meekly raised a hand. “Sorry. Does this mean I passed the test?”

“Tell you what,” said Sky Hunter. “If you make it back alive, you’re on the team. Let’s go!”

The Shark Knights headed for the exit. Sensor caught up to Shyanne. “We have an extra set of flex armor on the second floor, ask Chase to grab it for you.” Shyanne nodded. Suddenly, she was feeling butterflies in her stomach and short of breath.

Sensor smiled. “Relax, you’ll be fine. These goofballs will take good care of you.” Mountain and Chase clapped her on the shoulder as they walked by. Pierce smiled at her.

“Oh, and one other thing,” remembered Sensor as he got on a platform to head to the lobby. “You’ll need a code name. What do you want us to call you?”

The newest member of the team mulled it over for a second before reaching a conclusion. “Just call me Shy.”

“Sounds good. Welcome to the Shark Knights.”