

—

#14

by stanley lieber

The Bay Area was too expensive. He'd planned on finding an apartment in the city, but it had quickly become apparent that this wasn't going to happen. He'd made a promise to himself that he wouldn't touch any of the New York money while he was in San Francisco. He ended up with a room in the compound. No rent.

Sonja visited him often. Her room was just down the hall, so presumably no one would notice as she came and went. He'd lived through worse.

Taking on the family's assignments gave him time to think. The relative anonymity was a relief. These weren't prestige jobs, where his reputation hung in the balance of every minute decision made under fire. Mostly he just did as he was told. The money wasn't great, but, again, no rent.

Maybe a month of this and he was ready to think about what had happened in Japan. When he'd taken on the job he realized immediately that there was less preliminary data than he was accustomed to. He figured he'd have to work a little harder. It hadn't occurred to him that he was being set up for failure. And why hadn't it occurred to him? It troubled him that he was missing even these obvious clues. He needed to pull himself together.

He carried on in this fashion for some months. The mindless work allowed him much too much time to stew on his own failures. By the time the family was ready to make his interim position permanent he was well and truly ready to leave. But for some reason he stayed on. He hadn't quite sorted it all out, and in any case they needed his help. He couldn't just abandon them to the lions. He settled into his role as the chief. They even called him that: The Chief.

The Chief wanted discipline. Minds tended to wander. He knew from his naval experience that this was bad for propulsion. Focus must be restored. The first step would be to eliminate (or at least, curtail) distractions. He banned non-work media from the compound. Networking had already been forbidden, but he replaced the honor system with active countermeasures; devices would simply no longer work.

Uniforms would now be required during shifts. His own brown jacket and fatigues would serve as a model. Fright wig optional.

Revisions would continue until morale improved.

Before long, the family business was running just like a real business.

Maybe that was the problem.