

TEXT ADVENTURE

*‘THE
STRAW
MAN’*

by
Stanley
Lieber

Password Loggins lay down in the cool grass by the river. The straw in his hair poked into the back of his neck, its bristles reinforced by the hard-packed mud beneath his head. Squinting, he could just make out the relevant constellations peeking through a thick smear of purple clouds. Still, bandwidth was low. He trusted the set and setting would compensate for absent detail. With his eyes, he opened the program.

Jobs. Password roamed through his e-mail, searching for something easy.

"Pass," he said, after reading each message.

Finally, he struck on a promising listing.

High School Technical

Requisition ID: 23114826

Business Sector: Information Systems

Location: United States-Maryland-Annapolis Junction

US Citizenship Required for this Position: Yes

Relocation Assistance: Relocation assistance will be available

Clearance Type: None

Number of Openings: 1

Shift: 1st Shift

Description

Mold Northrop Grumman Information Systems sector is seeking a High School Intern who has participated in the CyberPatriot program, to join our team of qualified, diverse individuals. This position will be located in Annapolis Junction, MD.

Where will you find innovation and technology? Right here at Mold Northrop Grumman Corporation.

The qualified applicant will become part of Mold Northrop Grumman's Information System's cyber department. By the end of your internship, you will have a thorough understanding of cyber security and learn about various related career paths.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Candidate will assist engineers who serve as members of a team conducting system hardening and testing.
- Typical task assignments include assisting in the development, enhancement, maintenance and documentation of software tools used to support hardening and testing; installation and testing of software (hardening/testing tools, support software, software under review) in a laboratory environment.

Qualifications

Basic Qualifications:

To be considered for this position, you must minimally meet the knowledge, skills, and abilities listed below:

- Enrolled in and attending a high school
- GPA of 3.0 or higher
- Computer science coursework
- Must be at least 16 years of age
- Have participated in the CyberPatriot Program
- Candidate must be a U.S. citizen, eligible for a Department of Defense security clearance.

Preferred Qualifications:

Candidates with these desired skills will be

given preferential consideration:

- Knowledge of software development; MS Office Suite, computer networks and the Internet
- Have participated in the CyberPatriot III Program

Mold Northrop Grumman Corporation is a leading global security company whose 75,000 employees provide innovative systems, products, and solutions in aerospace, electronics, information systems and technical services to government and commercial customers worldwide.

Mold Northrop Grumman is an Equal Opportunity Employer committed to hiring and retaining a diverse workforce regardless of age. U.S. Citizenship is required for most positions.

Password submitted his resume.

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Nana replaced her knife in its wooden scabbard.

No, not a poacher.

Headhunter.

Nana unholstered her side arm. Stipulated: everything was classified, nothing was permitted. The gentleman in question had wandered off the prescribed path. And her hallway was not a public thoroughfare. More than that, she would not allow him to recruit her children.

"Ss."

"Ssss..."

"Spit it out," demanded Nana.

"Son of the *bitch*," stuttered the headhunter, the Chechen, who wore a t-shirt emblazoned with the same simple phrase, stretched tight under his herringbone blazer. He noticed she had taken aim at his crotch.

"No, not the *son of*," corrected Nana, "Rather, the originator; the author; the source. Mother of the fucker. Midwife to your metamorphosis. I am the person you are afraid you will become."

The headhunter could offer no meaningful objection.

"*Von nix kommt nix*," she added, with some finality.

And then she squeezed the trigger.

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Password stopped typing.

"Retype this," he said to the secretary.

The woman glanced over his revised resume, scanning it for obvious errors. Then she looked back at him.

"Yes, each company will receive a slightly different version," Password allowed.

He pulled another piece of straw from his teeth, stuck it into her pen cup and then proceeded to leave the room.

The secretary carried out his instructions.

4

Nana hovered near the mailbox. Soon, Password's rejection slips would arrive. As a matter of policy she would be the first to open them. In this way, morale would be sustained.

"The enemy is fragile," she muttered, sucking air through jaundiced teeth.

"PPPPPPPPPPPP," replied the mailbox.

"Negatory," stated Nana, flatly.

Deleted its contents.

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Password repacked himself into his clothing. Carefully. It would not do for his leggings to shake loose as he attempted to acquit himself during his interview.

He withdrew an unusual, slender scepter from his trousers. "Confidence restored," he remarked, and displayed the scepter at various angles roughly perpendicular to the front of his body. His secretary seemed unimpressed.

"I don't know. What should I wear? Do these politics make me look fat?"

The secretary didn't answer. Distracted by a trail of straw from his leggings, she began to sweep up his mess. Ignored his trolling.

Something was wrong.

But then, something was always wrong.

What made this moment distinct from all the other moments he had observed? Password considered the implications.

Finally, he began to speak.

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