

## Demon Leap Excerpt

“If I don’t graduate,” I said, “bad things are going to happen.”

It was a dramatic statement and I was confident I’d delivered it well, yet my counselor, Mr. Morrison, acted as though I’d made an observation about the weather. He leaned back in his chair and regarded me with steady gray eyes. He didn’t yawn, but it seemed he could have.

“Where did you get that gun, Arrow?” he asked. “You didn’t have it with you when you entered my office.”

“I made it. Just now. Using your stapler.”

His eyes flicked to the space on his desk where the stapler had once sat. “You transfigured it?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“While you were opening the file cabinet.” I jiggled the barrel to keep him on track. “So what do you say?”

“I say you just performed Inanimate Matter Transfiguration without a certificate.” He sat forward. His eyes gleamed like a snake’s. “I’m impressed, young lady.”

I could only stare at him.

Transfiguration—or “meddling”, as I called it—was illegal without a certificate. It would get me ten years in prison at the very least. Then there was the fact that I was threatening to put a hole in Morrison’s head.

“Your grade in IMT was only average,” he went on, ignoring my shock. “Looks like I should have paid more attention to your practical exams. You’re talented.”

“I just need to hear that I’m going to graduate,” I gritted out. Was he stalling for time? Had he secretly alerted the campus police? A bead of sweat slid down my rib cage. “You’re capable of altering my final record. You’re going to do that for me right now.”

“Are you in some kind of trouble, Arrow?”

“You could say that. I can’t get a job without my certificate. *You know this.*”

Morrison looked out the single window in his office. We were on the fifth floor. The rain clouds had locked out the sun, permitting only dread and gloom. This was his last appointment for the day and the campus appeared empty. No one liked to get wet anymore.

“You failed your final,” he told me, still looking out the window. “In addition, your semester test scores are terrible in a way that makes me think other people took them for you.”

I nearly laughed. “I should have. I have the Glyph Eye condition. When it strikes, I can’t read anything. There’s no cure so I deal with it. But gibberish is gibberish, and my scores reflect that.”

“Glyph Eye is a controversial diagnosis,” he said. “Most people consider it bunk. Tough luck if that’s what you have, but a failed score is a failed score. Combined with your overall poor grades...you’ll need to complete another semester.”

“I don’t think you get it, Mr. Morrison. I’m not leaving here without your promise that I’m graduating.”

He looked back at me then. “You’ll kill me otherwise?”

“I’ve got nothing to lose if I can’t get a job.”

I could tell he didn't buy it, but he didn't know my situation. I needed an income more than I needed anything else in my life. Because this wasn't about only me.

"I've alerted the campus police," he told me mildly. As I tensed, he added, "They should be here in about two minutes. I won't change your graduation status, Arrow. Your grades are a matter of public record. If I changed them people would notice and I'd lose my job. You're not worth losing my job over. I'm sorry, but you're not earning your certificate this semester."

The rain hummed. It seemed to laugh.

"You bastard," I choked out.

"However, if you were able to escape this room, there may be options for you."

I blinked back the burn of tears. "What?"

"Escape this room, Arrow. Avoid the police. Show me your ingenuity." His gaze changed, the veneer of a polite school counselor lifting away to reveal the shadiness that had prompted me to believe he might cheat the system for me. "I may have work for you."

"What kind of work?" My shoulders itched. I could sense the police rushing up the stairs from the bottom floor.

"Show me that you deserve to find out."

"What kind of answer is that?" I blurted. I turned my head slightly. I heard the squawk of radios, the thunder of boots.

Morrison smiled thinly. "This meeting is over, Arrow. Put down the gun and surrender."

I threw the gun at him. He managed to dodge it but by the time he'd straightened up I'd grabbed one of the cheap office chairs and launched myself at the window with it.

The glass shattered in a halo around me. I felt shards of it slice through the skin of my cheeks and cut through my hair. As I hurtled through rain and glass I meddled the chair I held, directing its molecules to draw together and separate, to speed up and slow down. The ground rushed up at me—

My body jerked upright as the makeshift hang-glider came together. I gripped the handlebar as the air caught beneath the plastic wings.

I heard shouting from the window but I wrestled my glider through the rain and didn't look back. When I was low enough, I released the bar and jumped to the ground. I skidded in a puddle before I took off running as hard as I could. My glider, unmanned, nosedived into the ground. When I looked back, a single figure stood silhouetted in Morrison's office window, watching me flee.

I was in a heap of trouble. I'd left evidence of my illegal IMT work everywhere: the gun, that hang-glider... It was a matter of time before I was dragged in by the Victory City cops and formally charged. Had pulling a gun on my counselor been the stupidest thing I could have done? I didn't know. But it had certainly felt like the only thing I could have done after receiving a certain text message today. When I reached my parked scooter, I jumped on board and rode it hard through the sheeting rain.

"I should have shot him," I ground out. The rain falling down my face felt warm. Maybe I was crying. But if I was, they weren't tears of sadness.