



American Mustelid Alpha

EPISODE 5 "Young Thing"

PART 1

March 1, 2020
Apopka, Florida
7:30 AM

It's early morning at the Burrow, most of the players sleeping in after returning home from their road trip to Tampa. Greasy Z is snoring loudly, blanket pulled down to his stomach as he lies on his back. Kenneth is curled on one side, while Arron sleeps belly down - his cornrows loose and falling on one side of his head. However, others are exploiting the relative calm to start on their early bird routines.

the camera shows the marten fixing his head of hair* "So after almost dying, bombing the individual, and a whole weekend's worth of drama, Cris barely manages to edge through and sends Michael home in a squeaker. I'm honestly shell-shocked by the whole thing, he has proven he is the one to beat once he heals up. I know guys in the house would be like "Nah baby, take your time, it's fine!" I mean, me." *snerks

~Chayne, 28, Beech Marten, Bartender

Meanwhile, a buzzing sound can be heard from the communal bathroom - the Burrow's resident otters having woken up early as well.

"I hope you ain't doing some bullshit designs over there," Crispin jokes to Eddie, the giant otter passing the clippers through the bouncer's head after selecting the correct guard.

“Nah, don’t worry...” Eddie chuckles. “I used to shave my own weekly back in the military, I reckon I could do this blindfolded if I had to...”

“Gotta say it feels like my hair’s growing at double the usual pace. Must be all the testosterone flying around in here,” Crispin says with a laugh.

“It should be fallin’ at double the pace!” Eddie chortles, expertly working the razor around Crispin’s ears.

*“This has been the most intense days of my life, and that’s saying something,” *coughs* “I’m still... not great, but that duel victory helped me psych up for what’s to come. I know this’ll pass, and these guys won’t see it coming, I tell ya.”*

~Crispin, 29, European Otter, Bouncer

*“The more time we spend together, the more I’m stunned at how well I actually relate to Crispin. I never expected to buddy up to someone like him in this game, but we got lotta things in common and I’m starting to grow pretty fond of the guy.” *Eddie is shown passing a webbed paw through Crispin’s head, rubbing some post-shave balm in to prevent irritation* “Here in the Burrow, I really feel he’s the one guy I can go to war with.”*

~Eddie, 32, Giant Otter, Demolition Foreman

“As long as you don’t chop one of my ears off, all fine here!” Crispin laughs. Eddie smiles, happy to see his friend’s spirits slowly getting back to normal. “Have you kept the shaven look for long? I know I gave up on this issue after I started losing mine for good...”

“I started shaving on the regular after I got out of... you know,” the bouncer sighs. “Before that, I honestly didn’t mind if I looked like a hobo. I just kept them tidy enough to hit the gym every now and then,” he says, getting up as soon as Eddie signals he’s done. “Want me to do you?”

“Sure... and you sure you don’t want a Superman logo? Still time!” Eddie grins, taking Crispin’s spot on the seat.

“You could shave an Alpha and spook the rest of the group,” the bouncer laughs. “Actually, now that I think about it, I could do it for you. You’re the only one of us still unbeaten...”

“I still wish I won the last individual,” Eddie sighs. “People are gonna be making choices, and I’m at their mercy this time around. Especially if they see me as this huge threat.”

Crispin starts to run the clippers across the back of the giant otter’s head. “Ain’t got much to cut here,” he chuckles, removing a bit of black stubble from the base of his nape.

“Oh, I’d say they’re plenty of ones I’d rather see cut,” the Navy veteran retorts in jest. “Kenneth, Arron, John, Chayne, the two Texans for good measure...” he says. “We can’t lay low now. It’s time to act like we own this place, ‘cause nobody here gonna kick out either of us...”

*“You can only play a big, flashy game for so long until a target forms on your back. I know it might be the case with me, but I’m going to give it my most to stay safe, and come on... they respect Eddie Caprio around here.” *grins**

~Eddie, 32, Giant Otter, Demolition Foreman

Meanwhile, with William once again at the helm of the kitchen, the mustelids start to gradually gather around the mess hall for their breakfast.

“And on the third challenge, he rose again, innit?” Zakee quips with a snort, looking at Arron - the honey badger firefighter concentrated on his morning coffee, soon to be joined by Andrew at the main table with his own mug.

“Did you really say...?” Arron shoots the hog badger a bewildered glance. “Way to mock some fur’s personal beliefs, Z. Very mature of you,” he scoffs.

“Hey, I’m just sayin’ it in a way you’d relate...” the hog badger shrugs. “Just three days ago you had a foot on the door and now you beat the otters at their game and score two Ws, shit’s wild.”

“Water under the bridge now...” Arron shrugs, taking a sip of his drink.

“So, making the math, you got two caps,” Andrew points at Z, “And you got two caps in a row,” the polecat points at Arron. “If we gotta take that as a measure of who’s running the show, y’all got something going, followed by Ed, who’s yet to lose.”

“But Ed’s not in control for now,” Zakee ponders, wiping the sweat he worked out at the weights with a towel. “And hey, ya got cap too, young thing.”

“Don’t call me that,” Andrew snorts, playfully elbowing the hog badger and earning a surprised oink out of him.

“I’m sitting here thinking, we are a third of the way to the big final... I cannot coast along on this ‘pretty fly for a young guy’ shit some of these guys tag me as, and I know that won’t win me anything in the end. It’s time to put my paw down and gauge my options, I can’t waste this chance.”

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

John, Chayne and the otters soon make their way into the dining area. “Speaking of that... have you guys thought about the challenge? It’s a three for three, Ludwig said...” Andrew lowers his voice to a whisper.

“We don’t even know what the challenge will be, Drew,” Arron replies to the polecat. “For what is worth, it’s more water...” he shrugs.

The hog badger looks up at the faces entering the room. His gaze averts to John, and huffs. “With yer permit...” Zakee steps away from the pair, a glint in his eye as he steps closer to the kitchen to serve himself some coffee, strategically moving to the center of the room with the steaming mug in his paw. “So, plenty of new things we learned from our water football guests, innit?” he asks, loud enough for the room to hear.

“How so?” Chayne asks, his gut feeling telling him something was going to happen.

*“Ever since we got back from Tampa, I still can’t shake off what our special guest trainers told me - that is, basically John calling me the shittiest hog in history to their darn faces.” *Z props his back to the wall, his stance clearly provocative* “If Johnny boy thinks he can spew his opinions willy-nilly, let’s see if he’s willing to back ‘em...”*

~Greasy Z, 29, Hog Badger, Automobile Mechanic

“Well, I heard a good thing or two,” Z steps to the side to let Kenneth pass. “Some mustie here said that, like... the whole house here hates me.”

Through his peripheral vision, John can see the hog badger looking intently at him, then gazing up towards his companions. “Our trainer asked me who was the wacky one in the house, and Mike and I said who we thought as such,” the stoat says matter-of-factly. Kenneth shoots a knowing look at Andrew next to him.

“Now ya call it wacky...” the hog badger snarks. “Well Seaborn said you said they all fucking hated me. So what’s the true story, Johnny?”

“True story’s that we’re all fed up with your fucking antics,” the jailer spits, clearly annoyed at being put on the spot by the mechanic. “There’s maybe two people who put up with your bullshit, and that’s your roomies,” he says.

“Right...” Z replies, seemingly calm, looking down as he starts serving his plate high-up with the pancakes William cooked. “Darn shame ya got the body and the talent, but that don’t work if you fucking waste your brains doing shit like that.”

“Yooooooo...” Chayne can’t help but laugh at the situation, looking with amusement at what is unfolding before him.

*“Zakee can speak circles around you, cuss ya out, hang you to dry, and seeing that happen to John it’s just, ugh... amazing. I wish I could record this. Save me the tape!” *points at camera**
~Chayne, 28, Beech Marten, Bartender

Seeing most people are keeping out of the confrontation, John presses on. “Well write this down, piggy, I’m the only one in this house who’s upfront and honest with you all. And if you don’t like it, don’t complain.”

“But if you keep going around talking shit, you’re not gonna make a lot of friends in this race, even if you’re honest...” William speaks up, somewhat done with the drama that unfolded, but taking the hog badger’s side after knowing well what John and Mike did to him.

“What’s friends you buyin’ in here, hombre?” the stoat asks the Honduran weasel, clearly bothered by his remark. “I’m not here to make friends, I’m here to win. And mark it down, I’m gonna send the pigass home, I’m gonna send the marten’s...” he motions towards Chayne, before turning to William with a huge scowl on his face. “And I guarantee I’m sending yours.”

“Haven’t heard that ‘friends’ bit before...” Chayne snickers to Kenneth.

Meanwhile, Zakee sits on the counter in a provocative stance. “Everyone wants to win, but ya been mighty disrespectful to every guy in this Burrow,” he replies, intently pointing at John.

“So what?” the white stoat scoffs. “Others have been disrespectful to me, and you don’t see me bitch around! We’re here to settle who’s the American Mustelid Alpha. A-L-P-H-A, Alpha,” he spells out, much to everyone’s chagrin. “Keep playing the game like you were fuckin’ high schoolers, see where it gets you,” he says, storming off the room.

As John makes his way back into his bedroom, the rest of the mustelids are still digesting a lot of what just happened. “He seemed to sound somewhat upset right now...” Kenneth comments

sarcastically, patting the hog badger's shoulder. "The walls have ears and the mouths are big, right?" Zakee loudly oinks in approval.

Chayne points at Andrew and Arron next to him. "This is a bad... bad... bad stoat, I tell ya..." he says to the pair, both nodding along.

"I keep telling them, I keep telling these guys that the fish dies by its mouth. And if you can't stand for your opinion, you can't possibly think you will command any sort of respect in the long run. John just got put in his place, what's more to it?"

~William, 34, Least Weasel, Personal Trainer

After breakfast, it doesn't take long before the Burrow is bustling with activity - most mustelids exploiting the day off to put in some more training. The otter pair of Eddie and Crispin is taking on the swimming pool, the former wanting to help the latter get back on his paws as they loosen up their limbs with a few laps. William and John keep to themselves on the weights, and the day ends up being well on its way to get pretty mundane. Too mundane for one hog badger.

Greasy Z starts to discreetly fill an ice bucket with water and crushed ice, knowing full well most mustelids would want to shower after training up. He looks around, needing something more to make sure his plan went smoothly.

"Drew..." the hog badger calls. "Hey Drew..."

The polecat walks over, peeking into the bucket with a puzzled look on his face. "Whatcha doin' there, Z?" he asks with a smirk, immediately guessing what the mechanic is planning.

"I need assurance. Is Kenny still showerin'? Anyone else in with him?" he inquires.

"Ooooooh..." Andrew chuckles, rubbing his paws. "Yep, I think he just laid off the weights..." he confirms, taking a quick glance around the gym area before nodding to Z. "And he's alone."

"Wait out here and see..." Zakee grins, tiptoeing into the shower area, immediately noticing that Kenneth has opted for the one showerhead next to the raised edge - eyes closed as he enjoys the hot, soothing jet washing the sweat away. "Perfect..." Stepping on a bench and peeking his head in, the hog badger proceeds to dump the content of the bucket over Kenneth, sprinting out as fast as he could.

"WHAT THE F..." Kenneth manages to utter as he feels the bucketful of ice water crashing over him. "ZAKEE!" he screams, storming buck naked out of his stall at the prankster's pursuit.

"Haul ass!" Zakee tells Andrew, both mustelids sprinting out to the living room area and diving onto the couch. "Act normal, act normal..."

The black-and-white mustelid pokes his head into the living room a second later, a towel tied around his midsection, water dripping everywhere as he pads in with little care for his surroundings. "What the fuck do you think you're doing?" he asks, paws firmly planted on his hips.

"Oh hey, Ken..." the hog badger greets the soaked roofer as nonchalantly as possible. "You should towel off better..."

Kenneth unsticks his long, damp hair from his muzzle. "You fuckers nearly gave me a heart attack there!" he scowls. "And don't fucking watch me like that... Who else in this house would be dumb enough to start pranking others?"

"I got no idea what you're saying..." Andrew replies. After a pause, Greasy Z finally cracks in laughter, followed by the polecat.

"So very funny," the badger shakes his head. "You both are damn lucky I can't get ya without making a mess of the couch..."

"Aw, come on Ken, it was just an innocent joke, don't blame me for your no sense of humor!" the hog badger oinks, amused.

Kenneth raises an eyebrow, taking a slight, odd offense against Z's statement. "No sense of humor?" he ponders, his face making somewhat of a scowl, looking away at the entrance to the poolside. "Are the guys still exercising outside?"

"Yeah, why?" Z asks, glancing over through the big glass door. "They likely drying up from the pool that way..."

"You two follow me," Kenneth answers knowingly, going to the fridge to fetch one of his tins of plain, white yogurt before directing the pair upstairs.

*"I know these guys sorta see me as a bit of a stick in the mud cuz how stuff has developed, but... Even two years out of college, I'm still a frat boy at heart." *the trio makes their way to the balcony in the second floor* "My brothers at Pi Kappa Phi are gonna love this..."*
~Kenneth, 24, American Badger, Roofer/CrossFit Instructor

Kenneth looks down, spotting Eddie and Crispin fresh out of the pool and chatting up Chayne and Arron, who have opted to join them for some stretches and light yoga. Smirking, the roofer opens the yogurt tin and digs his paw in the container to pick up a healthy scoop. "Blame it on the birds..." he says with a chuckle. "Z, pick a number between one and four."

"Let's see..." the hog badger ponders. "Three, like the girls that were all over me in Tampa?"

"You said it," Kenneth replies, looking over at the four mustelids right below. The badger lobs the blob of yogurt at Eddie, hitting the otter square on the shoulder and immediately ducking afterwards.

"ARGH! FUCK!" the lutrine curses as soon as he's hit, immediately dropping his position and getting to his feet in an instant - eyes scanning around in search of the culprit, Crispin and Chayne taken aback and starting to laugh. Behind the balcony door, Kenneth, Z and Andrew are struggling to keep quiet, looking down as Eddie scoops some of the substance off his arms - a scowl immediately forming on his face.

"Tha-that's good luck in some countries!" Chayne comments, trying to hold back laughter the best he can.

"I don't think this came from no birds..." the otter retorts, putting his arm close to the marten's nose. "Does it smell like bird poop to you?"

"Psh, get that away from me!" Chayne pushes Eddie back.

"That looks like some bald eagle shit or something..." Crispin tries to not join in the collective guffaw.

*"Got a hint or two we're gettin' pranked." *chuckles* "I mean, if they wanna waste energy that way, fine by me. We'll see if they want to keep at it after the next challenge is over."*

~Eddie, 32, Giant Otter, Demolition Foreman

Up the balcony, Kenneth takes a proverbial bow to the two Texans. "No sense of humor my ass..." he taunts, crawling back to the entrance.

"I gotta admit, that was some real good pranking there, Ken. You ain't such a stick in the mud, as I thought." Zakee concedes, stepping up. "Plus you got terrific aim, bud. Getting Eddie right on the arm from this far, wow!"

Andrew dusts off, getting back on his feet. "Least we got a fun buddy out of thi--"

"Hey look! It was Z and Andrew! Eddie, look up!" Arron points to the balcony above, startling the pair of Texans.

"Is anyone surprised?" the lutrine shrugs, still trying to scrub the remains of the yogurt from his bicep. "Could have put my finger on Z being behind this..." he says, before turning towards the pair. "Once I get you two, you gonna be dead fish, you hear?"

Before the polecat or the hog badger can say anything, they spot Kenneth inside the room, winking and saluting them off as he makes his way to his room to dress up.

"This motherf...." Andrew sneers. "He framed us!"

"He's a master at this game," Z scoffs, still lying on the ground, his back pressed to the wooden floorboards. "I'm glad to see he's opening up to us, though..."

Andrew shrugs. "It took him this long, but at least the house is more lively now--"

"Now, where was I?" Eddie interrupts the pair, cracking his knuckles. "Too much of a circus for such few clowns..."

"Eddie, I... I can explain," the hog badger immediately puts his paws up in mock surrender, starting to squeal as the lutrine pulls closer and closer. "It was Kenny's idea, he picked up the yogurt and all..." he says, motioning to the near-empty tin.

The giant otter scoffs, undeterred by the mechanic's plea. "Tell it to the marines, because the sailors won't believe you..."

Andrew chimes in, trying to defend his friend. "He's right, Ed... Ken was here until a minute ago!"

"I know Z here is the mischievous one of the house..." Eddie approaches the hog badger. "Andy, I like ya, so you get a ten second head start to get outta here... This little piggy's gonna go to town," the otter says before roughly yanking the hog badger from the ground and taking him in a headlock, Z's pleas muffled by the lutrine's muscular arm as the polecat sprints out.

The day goes on without much to report, most of the contestants chilling around the living room until dinnertime. Ever the rowdy instigator, Greasy Z is quick to initiate some playful bouts of wrestling among the Burrow's residents, pushing away the sofas to make space for an impromptu ring. Mustelids are eager to take on each other, the good natured fun soon making way for some serious settling of egos as the onlookers take different sides, openly cheering for the wrestlers as they try to pin each other. Before the situation can escalate, William is quick to call the group to order: a huge plate of steaming roasted turkey breasts with veggies is soon served for dinner, the entire group heartily taking to it.

*"I can't stop thinking about tomorrow. It will be my first challenge as a captain, and if I don't take the lead, it'll be as good as over for me..." *the polecat looks at Crispin next to him**

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

"You're a damn trooper, you know that?" William tells the tall otter before taking a bite of his mashed potatoes.

"Uh? For?" Crispin asks, puzzled at the weasel's remark. "Staying in after what happened in Tampa? Heh, that's long gone now..."

"Still, remarkable, to be honest," the weasel continues.

"I'm here on a mission, Will," the otter shrugs. "It would have been easy to throw in the towel, but I can't let go of this chance so soon..."

"The hierarchy of the house is sort of established: You see Eddie Awesome, three challenges in a row and Crispin the wonder comeback kid. Those otters have been holding too much power for long..."

**pauses to think, the polecat remembering something suddenly* "Oh! And then there's Arron!"*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

"See that I was right, honey?" Eddie nods to the firefighter, lowering his voice. "No Ken, no worries."

The honey badger keeps focusing on his plate, his own tone reduced to a whisper. "Keep it on the DL, brother. I don't want to upset anyone..."

The giant otter gives a subtle nod of his head, hiding his grin behind a forkful of spinach. "It's fine, 'Ron. You don't really need him to move forward. Soon as you had a chance to prove your own worth, boom... challenge win and a grand in your pocket," he says in a conspirative tone.

"We'll talk later, Eddie," Arron curtly nods.

*"Arron has been on the lows and now rides high beyond everyone else. Kenneth has not won a team challenge yet, but everyone just still sees him as the one to beat. And Z... come on... he's meant to be here." *the two badgers are shown bantering**

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

"Ayo Ken?" The hog badger oinks. "You ever thought of dying that mop, you got a ton of it!"

"You better be joking there, piggy..." the roofer snarks, running his paws along his shoulder-length locks. "I'm not letting ya turning me into an extra from My Little Pony..."

"No need, man, just think of how a streak might look or two. I got gold color, you from Philly, right? Black n' gold and shit?" Zakee eggs on.

"Gotta say I didn't think about it before," Kenneth chuckles. "As it is, if I got highlights, people would just point at me and call me their Barbie. It'd look good if my hair was just a little bit shorter, though..."

"Short? And then what she'd grab on at night?" Z bellows out a guffaw.

The badger takes the hog's joke with a hearty laugh. "Imma tell ya what she can grab on," he says, cockily cupping his groin with a paw.

*"And then, the wildcards. John may not be the popular man, but he has been amazing in the challenges. Chayne got his momentum back, and William's a force to be reckoned with regardless." *the polecat makes his way into his room and sits on his bed* "And then there's me... the young thing of the Burrow."*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

John suddenly peeks around the door. "Kid...next time, pick up after yourself. Don't stink up the weight room," he sneers, tossing Andrew's dirty clothes and shoes at the entrance of the room.

*"All this to say that I feel I'm not respected enough in this house even if I know I'm good enough... Kind of like in real life." *sighs* "I've never been given the credit I deserve. I love my mom and dad to death, but they've been hard on me and the path I chose to take since I was sixteen. Never actually giving me credit for proving over and over that the little shy Andy they know and love is no more. So yeah, I'm gonna prove what I'm made of, the only way I know how to..." *Andrew stretches out his limbs, soon starting to disrobe as he gets ready to lay down**

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

Chayne sprints into the room, looking at his roommate. "Drew, Drew! There are two guys talking shit about the whole house..." he says, his gleeful tone slightly lower than normal.

"Again with this, Chayne?" the polecat yawns, lifting his head towards the blonde marten. "I swear this shit is turning into American Mustelid Gossip Girl..."

The marten nods. "Just saying, two guys are up in everyone's business right now," he gestures excitedly.

"Just say who..." Andrew insists.

The marten lets a pause happen. "Dude, me and you!" he snickers, earning a laugh from the youngster.

"You're such an idiot, Foley..."

The blonde marten sits on Andrew's bed. "Oh, am I?" he chuckles, scooting closer towards the polecat. "Am I?"

Andrew sits up. "I'm just like...growing tired of those guys one-upping and posturing 24/7. We're all Alphas here, but people here are so straight up high-strung even a hurricane wouldn't bend them..."

Chayne blinks. "I ain't straight... up high-strung."

"Not talking about you, but-" the polecat bites his tongue as soon as he realizes what the marten is hinting at. "You just had to say that," he shakes his head, playfully elbowing his friend.

"You made it too easy..." Chayne laughs. "And speaking of hard dudes to bend, man I could tell you stories."

Andrew makes a face. "You sure don't mean..."

"I could tell them," the bartender smirks, Andrew smacking him with his pillow in response. The marten's grin doesn't wane one bit. "You're so feisty," he smiles, playfully patting the polecat's shoulder. He smirks as his eyes fall on the twin nautical stars etched on either side of Andrew's upper chest. "What's the story behind these?" he curiously inquires, following the outline of a star with his finger.

"Heh, if you're expecting anything super deep... Spoiler, it ain't," the polecat shrugs, letting the marten take a closer peek of the design. "Too much emotion and beer after a gig," Andrew makes a face. "At the time I picked the stars just because they looked cool, and you know, rock stars, stars... Later on, someone told me it was like a 'warning', like if to say here I come now!"

"I see," Chayne nods. "Eager to prove you belong in this world, aren't you?"

"You... can say so, yes..." Andrew nods, looking from the side as Zakee enters the room to burrow in his bed. "I signed up for AMA because I got tired of hiding my potential and being talked down at every twist and turn... It's down to the last nine and I'm still here, so I guess I'm doing something right," he says, slumping against the wall.

"You ain't doin' a good job in cleanin' your room..." Z replies jokingly, pointing at a pile of sweaty clothes on the floor. "And guys call me pig!"

"Hawhaw, don't start, kettle. Pot's taking care of it soon," Chayne answers, playfully bumping Andrew's shoulder. "We better get some rest before tomorrow... I swear, if you two leave me with Arron's team, I'm gonna ask to move in with the otters!" the marten laughs.

"I never expected to meet cool guys such as Andy and Z, but I can't lose sight of the end goal. I'm fresh out of a win, and with three captains on the loose, it's even more important that I further my position beyond this spot."

~Chayne, 28, Beech Marten, Bartender

"All in all, there's a lot to ponder for tomorrow. If I can pull this off, it'll cause the rift I need to come out on top and flip the totem pole on its head. It's time I start clawing up, and it's time they start to feel the stinging."

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

March 2, 2020

11:00 AM

78° F

"It's hot as balls today..." Z chortles, walking out of the Burrow with the rest of the group. As usual, Ludwig is already waiting for them, clad in his usual street clothes.

"Morning, guys!" Ludwig greets the top nine with a big smile on his face. "Numbers are dwindling, I see... Does the house feel more lively as people drop out, Will?"

"It does if we end up eliminating the quieter guys first..." William nods knowingly. "But yeah, Ludwig. It's tough to work your way through all these type-A dudes, but we're getting along more and more as days go by."

The host directs his view to another competitor. "Z... again with the swap?" he points at the bright orange mohawk, causing the rest of the group to laugh.

"I didn't bring a full case of stuff here for nothin'!" the hog badger says, undeterred by the jesting. "Let 'em laugh, Lud. I'm gonna stay around enough to show a bunch more. It's the trademark, gotta flaunt it, bitch!"

"And Chayne..." Ludwig pauses, looking well at the marten. "In a house full of beasts, how come you always look so prim and cleancut in the morning?" he chuckles.

The marten raises his eyebrows. "I'm like... does it make you less of an Alpha to spend five extra minutes in front of the mirror?"

"Five minutes, sure..." Kenneth interrupts, gesturing with his paws. "He gets up before everyone to get the bathroom all to himself, try five liiiiiiiiiiiiiight years," he says.

"C'mon Kenny, it happened just once!" Chayne puts up his paws in mock defense. "And besides, you're born with half of it, and that's the part you can't pamper, aight?"

Ludwig tries to restore some order in the group. "I see you're in a great mood this morning... but as usual, we got a team challenge to run," he says. "Today's challenge is called Share The Load, and will test your strength, endurance and ability to work and think as a squad. You'll be divided into three teams and be asked to keep a heavy boulder suspended in the air through a rope-and-pulley contraption." Several players nod along. "Every fifteen minutes, each team will be asked to drop one of its members, until it's down to the final three. The last contestant to keep their boulder in the air wins the challenge for their team," the stoat concludes. "Remember, weight management is crucial here. You can shift it around however you want, but you better think long and hard on who you want to put in the most crucial position - 'cause at some point the entire weight of their team will be on him."

"Gotcha," Kenneth nods. "Can it be anyone playing hero, or does the captain need to step up somehow?"

"Up to each team to decide," Ludwig says. "As you see, we got our usual white and black shirts..." he says, motioning to two small piles in front of him, "...but since we got three teams to play this one, I'll say it's time to bring some color into the fray." He pulls a bunch of red T-shirts from under the table, the whole group gandering at the new outfits. "As usual, we're giving out \$1000 to the

winning captain, plus his entire team will be granted access to a small shop of fine leather goods set up by Schott NYC.”

“Leather goals...” Chayne mutters.

“You heard it right, guys,” the stoat host confirms. “The winning trio will be able to pick up the best clothing on offer among an exclusive selection provided by Schott. We’re talking top class leatherwear, the best in its range for quality, durability and craftsmanship. Not a bad souvenir to take home, right?” The whole group nods, some clapping their hands in anticipation.

*“This challenge sounds pretty straight up on paper, but I know better than that. I need to build the strongest team I can and snatch the people I can work the best with.” *the honey badger is shown scanning the group, immediately matching Kenneth’s gaze* “If I can lead my team to two wins in a row, my stakes on the title would be pretty much set.”*

~Arron, 28, Honey Badger, Firefighter

“Alright, so... As you guys remember, today’s captains will be the winners of the last Individual Challenge. Arron, Andrew, Z, you can come here...” Ludwig says, motioning the trio forward. “Since you posted the best time in last week’s individual challenge, Arron, you got dibs on both your team’s color and the first pick. What are you gonna choose and who is your pick?” he asks the honey badger, pointing at the three piles of T-shirts in front of him.

“Last time I chose black and I won, so let’s see if we can do a back-to-back,” Arron says, grabbing one of the black shirts from the table. “As my first pick, I’m choosing the one who I feel got the best knowledge of endurance...” the honey badger elaborates. “So I’m going with Kenneth.”

“For real?” Eddie curses under his breath as the badger steps forward, immediately bumping fists with his friend.

*“I swear Arron sometimes got goldfish memory. Pairing with Kenneth is like a hex, you won’t win, wasn’t that clear before?” *frowns* “I don’t know what strategy he wants to play, but if it backfires and I win again, no skin off my rudder.”*

~Eddie, 32, Giant Otter, Demolition Foreman

“Alright then... Andrew, it’s your turn,” Ludwig turns toward the polecat.

*“My stomach just drops to the tip of my footpaws. What I’m about to do is by far the biggest risk I’ve ever taken in this competition,” *Andrew is shown grabbing the red shirts* “It could be a disaster, but if I can make it work, it’ll be a defining moment for me in here.”*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

The roadie inhales sharply. “I believe I can build a winning team with this one. We need that immunity above all, so for the red team...” he extends his arm. “I’m choosing John Blake.”

The entire group lets out a gasp, as the white stoat steps forward with a huge grin plastered on his face. “Kid knows who’s gonna bring it,” he smirks, taking one of the shirts from Andrew’s paws. The polecat flinches at John’s words, but doesn’t budge. “Let’s do this, man,” he encourages the jailer, patting his back as he turns to face the remaining people.

*“At last!” *John gestures with his paws* “Finally someone is giving me some credit! I figure Andrew needs help and guidance to bring home the bacon, and the fact he picked me over Eddie and all his*

*buddies shows he both respects me and has me down as the heaviest hitter. Let's do this!" *rubs paws**

~John, 36, Stoat, Jailer

Zakee looks bewildered at the scenario. "Eddie..." he opens his paw at the otter, ignoring the protocol established by Ludwig. "C'mere, bud, I guess?"

"I can't fucking believe the only one who's three for three was still available when it came to my pick. Their loss, my gain, aight?"

~Greasy Z, 29, Hog Badger, Automobile Mechanic

"So, Arron... it's down to Chayne, Crispin and William. You got one more mustelid to bring in and close your team," Ludwig recaps. "Who's your pick?"

"Again, I'm going with experience," the firefighter says after a brief ponder. "This guy's job is to teach stuff like this. I reckon it gotta be William..."

The weasel steps forward, mildly surprised at being called by Arron. "I did not know my job amounted to teaching furs to hold big weights up, but I'll take this," he chuckles. "Gonna help you keep your form straight, dudes."

"Alright, Andrew. Time for your final pick," Ludwig motions to the polecat. "Who's getting on Team Red, and who goes on Team White with Z and Eddie?"

"Considering all I've seen so far, I'm picking Chayne," Andrew says matter-of-factly, surprising Eddie, and making his teammate shake his head.

*"I don't know what game Andrew is playing at. Everyone here knows John and Chayne don't see eye-to-eye, to put it mildly - and he tries to pair those two?" *Eddie is shown as he welcomes Crispin into the team, the tall otter hugging him, then Z* "He might have done well for himself this far, but now that he's thrust into a leadership position I guess he might be a bit out of his league."*

~Eddie, 32, Giant Otter, Demolition Foreman

"Crispin is still reeling from that large scare of the last challenge, but I know he is still a big figure in the house, so I don't want him either safe or against me at an individual challenge. I picked John and Chayne because I feel we are out of the big main house dynamics, and they may be seeing us as the ones that should go next. If we go get that immunity, the tides will shift against the main competitors - and force them to scramble bad."

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

"Alright, take this moment to change and strategize. We will be back in ten and head out..." Ludwig instructs the nine.



Back in the locker room, the three teams have taken different corners - changing up into their challenge gear as they discuss the strategy for the challenge. "I feel Cris should go first, you need the breather," Greasy Z talks to the otters.

"Fine by me," the heavily tattooed otter shrugs, strapping on his lifting gloves. "I know I'm gonna hold out better than whoever they pick up as their weakest link. Gonna get as much weight as I can off your paws..." he says. "I assume Eddie is going last, right?"

"I dunno..." the hog badger shakes his head, clearly not feeling Crispin's suggestion. "I feel I can hold it, plus bet is all caps on the final, so I can't fold like that. Can't keep coasting on ya, moreso now that I'm leading..."

The giant otter folds his arms across his chest. "I don't know, buddy. You don't need to prove shit to anyone only to put the entire team in jeopardy," he says. "I believe I should stay in until last... No offense, Z, but this challenge is testing pure strength, and I know I can hold on for hours if it comes to that. Now, can you?"

"I think I can, yeah," Zakee scoffs as he looks up to the lutrine, his features lacking the usual cheerfulness. "You're making it sound like you got the key to everything. Put some damn trust in me for once, man. Plus, remember the last individual?"

"Sure, I got bested at muscle-ups by someone who weighs forty pounds less..." the Navy veteran rubs his neck. "This is 100% arm strength, and you know I got that in spades," he says, pointing to his massive biceps.

"I'm siding with Eddie," Crispin doesn't relent, scooting closer to his friend. "We're two against one, Z. What now?"

"Well I'm the captain here," the hog badger huffs at the lutrine. "And I dare say I can take it just like last time."

The two otters glance at each other, realizing their teammate isn't going to budge. "Fine, dude," Eddie says, putting his paws up. "I'm just sayin' - you better bring it, otherwise I'm gonna make you pay at Indy..."

"I know Eddie thinks highly of himself, and that he thinks he can sell ice to the eskimos, but sometimes you need to put the darn paw down and not be a whiny subordinate. Who's the cap here?"

~Greasy Z, 29, Hog Badger, Automobile Mechanic

On the black team, things are decided pretty quickly. "William first, then Ken, then I'll go last," Arron states, pretty sure of himself, unwilling to negotiate. Kenneth needs a bit of convincing, but eventually agrees to give up the strongest spot to his friend - William helping him to see through the firefighter's request.

"He won his right to decide," the weasel points out. "You'll get your time to shine, Ken... Just let Arron take care of this, he's strong enough and has enough stamina to keep up with anyone."

*"It is a bit... unsavory for me to depend on someone else, but Arron's been on fire... " *shrugs* "My man has what it takes to make us win big."*

~Kenneth, 24, American Badger, Roofer/CrossFit Instructor

Meanwhile, the red team is off to a rocky start. "Wait, who died and made you king?" Chayne retorts to the white stoat. "Last time I saw Andrew's cap, and I trust he can handle being last."

"Oh shush," John hisses. "The kid picked me to cover for that position. Are you really gonna argue he's stronger than me?"

The marten pauses, taking a side glance at Andrew. "It's his job to deal with heavy loads. He's got upper body strength, he's got stamina... To me he's a perfect fit for this one."

"John, it's decided," Andrew insists, clearly growing frustrated at his teammate. "I know what I'm doing, I know about lifting, this thing's settled."

The jailer opens his mouth in surprise at the polecat openly challenging him. "And who do you think you are, kid? You've been dragged to this point and now you actin' like you rule the fucking roost?" John says, finger pointed at the youngster. "I didn't come here to--"

"Get to clowning, John Blake..." Chayne interrupts the jailer, who instantly leers at the marten. "Keep clowning."

"Who asked for your opinion, Foley?" John abruptly turns to the New Yorker. "If I'm the clown, you're the entire fucking circus," he huffs, a silence falling on the trio, who tried to go mind their own business. "You fucking fruit..." the stoat mutters.

“What did you call me?” Chayne raises his voice and bares his fangs, stepping all the way to the stoat’s face. “You better fucking watch what you saying or I’m gonna fucking kick you to the curb!”

“Hey hey!” Andrew couldn’t help but yell out loud, trying to separate the two. The other two teams stare at the red team in disbelief, as the polecat tries to sit the marten down before he can lay his paws over the stoat.

*“It is so damn tense right now.” *Crispin holds his palms up, almost touching* “They’re standing THIS close to each other’s faces, and I’m wondering who’s gonna throw the punch first and get DQd. Kinda reminds me of my job in a way.”*

~Crispin, 29, European Otter, Bouncer

“Hit me if you got the balls!” John growls at Chayne.

“Don’t fucking get me started, Blake!” Chayne replies and points at the stoat’s face, the shouting between the two escalating as Andrew tries to separate them. “You ain’t fucking worth my bother...”

“Like hell I’m going to allow this to continue...”

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

“Chayne, John, fucking DROP IT!” Andrew warns his teammates, raising his voice as he puts himself between the yelling pair.

“No, no, fuck you!” Chayne growls, still focused on the jailer, his features uncharacteristically angry. “You talk to everyone like they’re pieces of shit! I’m from New York, and I ain’t gonna take that crap!”

“Oh Chayne, you go get fucked and outta here!” John sneers at the marten.

As the two loudly argue to each other, the polecat steps out to John’s back, locking his upper body, and forcibly twisting him to make him face away from Chayne. “You two, it stops NOW! YOU HEAR ME? NOW!” Andrew growls close to the stoat’s hear, keeping him in a lock as the marten huffs in anger. “Take all of your bullshit, and DROP IT. We got a challenge to win. Get it?”

For a second, John makes it as if he’s about to retaliate - but then he forcefully breaks away from Andrew’s grip, leering at the polecat as he sits back on the bench. “I’m gonna give all I got for the team, kid,” he says. “Don’t fuck this up for me, else we’ll have a few words back at the Burrow.”

The hog badger oinks at Eddie tauntingly. “And you thought I was bad...” Zakee whispers.

“I’m a lot more confident now. Those three are gonna fold like a house of cards,” the otter grins. “He totally manhandled Blake, though...” he chuckles, shooting a look at Andrew as he slips on his red gym trunks.

*“Oh Andrew. I like ya, but... I’ll help ya pack anyway.” *grimaces* “You had a good run here, but it’s time for the big boys to step into the limelight.”*

~Eddie, 32, Giant Otter, Demolition Foreman

**the polecat rubs his temples* “Lord... please make this bet work. For all that you want, make this work for me.”*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

The camera zooms into the challenge arena, a big contraption having been built in the middle of the sandy field. Three heavy boulders are suspended through long ropes, each station painted with the respective team's colour. A wooden brace marks each player's stand, allowing them to rest the rope on should they need it.

The nine mustelids walk in, most of them donning just their shorts and arm protections. Kenneth openly marvels at the massive set-up, others smiling and pumping their arms in anticipation as they settle in front of Ludwig. "Y'all settled and ready to get this show on the road?" the stoat asks, all players roaring enthusiastically. "Alright, get into position, let's get started..."

*"I really feel bad for Andrew. The last half hour that transpired has been a DISASTER." *camera hovers on Andrew, then William as the contestants take their spots behind their respective braces* "He doesn't deserve this, but I guess everyone makes a bad call once in their life, and we all get moments we eventually have to learn from."*

~William, 34, Least Weasel, Personal Trainer

"Looks like we're all set," Ludwig says, as all nine players test their grip on the rope. "William, Crispin and Chayne will cover up for the first stint, then Kenneth, Eddie and John will pick up the slack for the second," he recaps, moving back and forth between the lines. "Each team put their respective captain in the last and most decisive spot... Arron for Team Black, Greasy Z for Team White, Andrew for Team Red." John is shown flinching as the polecat is mentioned, but then he reassures his grip on the rope, slightly leaning his body back.

"Captains, you can unhook your ropes..." the host motions to the last row, the three mustelids releasing the pressure keeping their weight pulled. "This challenge is on."

All players settle into position, the atmosphere immediately growing tense as the weight of the boulders is forced onto the first three. William looks pretty confident, the weasel periodically shaking off his arms to keep the circulation going. Crispin has his eyes closed, rudder and left leg pulled back for leverage - while Chayne is already gritting his teeth, the bartender not being used to heavy duty arm work as much as his opponents. "I need a paw here," the marten turns towards his teammates, John begrudgingly applying more strength to the rope to take some weight off Chayne's shoulders.

"You good Cris?" Eddie asks, leaning forward as his teammate visibly readjusts his grip..

"Never been... better," the tattooed otter replies, a strain in his voice. "Don't pull too hard, we need you later..."

*"Not five minutes in and I'm feeling that pesky pain again. My lungs can't seem to be taking in enough air." *the otter bites his lip as he pulls back with all his might, letting out a small grunt* "But I won't let this injury of mine cost me, not anymore."*

~Crispin, 29, European Otter, Bouncer

Ludwig walks to the front row, smirking as he moves closer to the black team's post. "How you doing, William?" he asks the weasel.

"All good, Lud," the personal trainer smiles. "I'm pretty sure Arron's yet to start pulling."

“Good,” The stoat nods. “You need to take off as much weight as you can from your strongest players!” he admonishes the entire front row. “Ain’t got too much left for you three...”

“The black team is the only one without seeming stragglers, I know I’m pushing my limits, so I’m confident I have taken pressure off of Andrew.”

~Chayne, 28, Beech Marten, Bartender

“Alright, the first fifteen minutes are up. Chayne, Crispin, William, let go and step out...” The three mustelids drop at once with a loud grunt, the second line taking their place in keeping the rope pulled taut. “This is about to get a lot tougher,” Ludwig comments. “If your middle guy falters, it’s up to the big men to pick up the slack. And you know you want to be saving energies as much as you can before it gets to the last three...”

It doesn’t take much for the second line to start feeling the strain. Kenneth starts to growl and shift as he readjusts his grip on the rope. Eddie moves his rudder side to side, looking to ease off the pain from his forearms. John keeps mostly composed, looking forward with a focused gaze while leaning his body back as much as he dares. Neither of the three is willing to ask for help and appear weaker than the others, so it’s down to the captains to feel any slack to the tension in their respective ropes.

*“Everyone always says communication is key, but I’m not even feeling anyone at this moment, I’m tensing my muscles down as much as I can and readying for any changes in pressure to whatever John’s doing.” *camera shows the white stoat straining to keep the weight in place* “I have given points away in both team challenges, so this is do or die for me.”*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

“I’ve won every team challenge to date, and I am not going to make it any different today. My strategy is to give it my 100%, so that Z enters fresh in the last run. I know I can assure my four out of four.”

~Eddie, 32, Giant Otter, Demolition Foreman

“Arron, pull a bit more, will ya?” Kenneth suddenly turns towards the honey badger, his face visibly strained. “My paws are getting fucking sweaty, can’t get a proper grip on the rope as is...”

“Roger that,” Arron says nonchalantly, leaning back as he pulls hard on the rope. The black team’s boulder gets pulled up a few feet, William clapping his teammates in encouragement.

“Let go a bit, Z. Let me handle most of this, stay fresh...” Eddie speaks up.

“Ya sure you can handle the full weight?” the hog badger says, concerned at their own boulder which is hanging the lowest.

The giant otter huffs. “Just let me deal with this...” To punctuate his words, he starts pulling the boulder up with a few powerful yanks, heavily grunting with each motion until it is sitting at the highest.

Crispin goes to whisper to William and Chayne. “The only team that ain’t talking is the red team...”

“I see, dude...” the weasel says. “John’s arms are starting to shake there...”

Chayne shrugs off the worries. "Just look at how solid Andrew has been so far... I swear, he hasn't budged one inch!"

"Wait until he goes up against Arron and Z," the otter insists. "No way he can endure more than those two..."

"Hey Andrew, I'm not deaf. If you don't let me know how you feel, then we won't be able to score this win. Else, you're on your own, and I don't want to get screwed over this."

~John, 36, Stoat, Jailer

"Alright guys, time to drop..." Ludwig pokes in after the clock marks thirty minutes. "We're down to the final three. John, Eddie, Kenneth, out of your posts..." The badger shots one last look at Arron before letting go of the weight and falling supine on the sand. Immediately, the firefighter lays on the ground for better leverage, Z immediately copying his move as all partners carefully drop their pressure on the respective ropes.

"This is gonna go on until the last one stands," the host says, walking back to the last line as the dropped out players make their way to the bench. As soon as Andrew feels the shift in weight, he makes his first movements since the start of the challenge - putting his back all the way to the ground and his footpaws on the beam, as if to tug more on the weight.

*"This challenge is no joke. I'm holding onto this rope as if it's my last lifeline." *Andrew is shown gritting his teeth, his whole body tensed up as he pulls the boulder up some* "I know the three of us are in the same exact pain, I just hope I can hang on a second more than them."*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

"How does it feel, Arron?" Ludwig asks as he walks behind the honey badger, who's opting to sit on the ground - his massive feet planted on the post of the beams, as if he were in a rowing machine. "How much do you think you can hold on?"

"Not now, Ludwig, I'm busy..." Arron replies curtly, making the bench of mustelids let out a few nervous giggles.

The stoat host smirks. "Alright, I'll move on," he says, crouching next to the polecat. "Andrew? You comfortable?"

"I do this as my job, so I literally can't complain," the young roadie snarks.

"You think you can beat these two?"

"I need to," Andrew answers, matter-of-factly - his focus never faltering from the rope. From the bench, Chayne lets out a soft whistle at the polecat's confidence.

"Those are some fighting words, Drew..." Ludwig nods, moving towards the last mustelid on the line. Greasy Z is visibly in pain, hanging on with gritted fangs as his boulder has fallen way below a comfortable level. "And you, Z? How you holdin' on?"

"Darn skippy, Lud..." the hog badger chuffs. "Forearms are hurting a lil'... but otherwise, darn fine."

"I'm not sure if Z's decision to bench Eddie first was smart enough. We all know Eddie would have hung to that rope until he literally passed out, while not five minutes have passed and Z is already

*repositioning and pulling his rock up and down.” *the hog badger is shown letting out a growl as he yanks on the rope with all his might, bringing the white team’s boulder up to a safer spot* “My fate in the game is down to Z’s ego playin’ it right.”*

~Crispin, 29, European Otter, Bouncer

The camera shows a timelapse of the three captains holding on to their ropes, moving around and repositioning in the hope to get some respite from the excruciating pain.

“We have been here for fifty minutes now and-”

Just then, a big thud is heard, with one of the contestants falling down to his back and cursing loudly between breaths.

“And just as I mark fifty minutes, Greasy Z drops - the white team losing their shot at safety,” Ludwig says, the bench letting out a surprised reaction as Eddie gets up and walks a few feet out.

“Sorry, guys...” the hog badger huffs, turning to his team. “Couldn’t hang any longer...”

*“I’m obviously mad at myself for dropping out first. I kinda underestimated the effort I needed and went too hard to help up Crispin and Eddie, when they probably would have made it through on their own.” *shrugs* “At this point, what can ya do? Eddie will be mad at me, but like... he’s got a vendetta against everyone in the Burrow but his buddy Crispin, so what’s new?”*

~Greasy Z, 29, Hog Badger, Automobile Mechanic

*“What the hell, Zakee? You just threw my streak off.” *Eddie groans* “Now it’s on me to fend off these people at Individual. I’m sure they already crunching the fuckin’ numbers.”*

~Eddie, 32, Giant Otter, Demolition Foreman

Meanwhile, the challenge goes on - the two finalists not showing any sign of discomfort as they hang to their ropes. “It’s down to Arron from the black team, and Andrew from the red team,” Ludwig says, walking back and forth between the two posts. “We could be in here for a while...”

It doesn’t take long before polecat and honey badger start feeling the strain, as well as the stress from the fierce competition. Arron bears down on the rope with all his might, veins bulging under his forearms’ skin as he manages to hoist the boulder up a few inches. Hearing the badger grunt in pain, Andrew turns his head towards him, then dares to take a paw off the rope - making sure his opponent can clearly see him shaking out his arm, slowly but deliberately. “Be careful there, Andy...” Chayne whispers under his breath.

*“No matter how much pain I’m in right now, I can see Arron’s suffering just as much. I’m trying to look relaxed, I’m trying to smile and push through the pain in order to try and psych him out.” *the polecat leans back, his shoulders tensed, yet still looking solid and focused* “I know he’s a hard nut to crack, but I want this one.”*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

“Alright, guys... we gonna make this challenge a little tougher,” Ludwig says, his clock marking an hour since the challenge began. “From now on, you can’t use your hitching post to keep yourself steady. You can stay up or down, your call... but you gotta hold on to the weight with your strength alone.”

The group follows with bated breath as both Arron and Andrew take their feet off the post, the entire weight of the boulder now leaning on their arms. "Alright, you've successfully completed the transition," Ludwig comments. "Gotta say I'm impressed by how well you're holding out. Do you think you can stay in for much longer?" Neither contestant responds, both giving their entire focus to the task at hand. "Oh well. Guess we just have to see how it plays out..." the host smirks.

Both mustelids are in a world of suffering right now, unable to get respite from the excruciating pain as they hang on with what energy they got left. At last, Andrew is unable to suppress a painful wince, sweat dripping down his forehead and into his eyes before he can blink it away. Turning around, he can barely distinguish Arron in the same conditions, the badger's left forearm paralysed by the rising of a cramp. As the firefighter takes the paw off the rope to relieve the pain, it begins slipping through his fingers - forcing him to tug back with all he got left. "Shit..." he involuntarily curses, as the pain in his arm immediately returns with the intensity of a stab.

*"I'm hanging on to the rope through sheer willpower. My arm feels like it's gonna give up on me before my brain does." *Arron's back muscles are spasming as he pulls all the way back to sustain the rope, tears rolling down his face* "I dunno from where this kid is pulling out all this drive, but man... he's gotten me on the ropes."*

~Arron, 28, Honey Badger, Firefighter

"You win... this... round..." the honey badger groans through gritted fangs, utterly defeated as he shoots Andrew one last, pleading glance. One second later he lets go of the rope, the boulder hitting the ground with a resounding thud.

"After seventy-three minutes of battle Arron finally drops... which means the red team has won the challenge! Andrew, John, Chayne, you're safe from elimination!"

Still tugging on the rope with all his might, Andrew fails to realize any of the commotion that has formed in the wake of his win. "Andrew! Andrew! You won, it's over!" Ludwig exclaims to the competing polecat, Chayne and John clap and boister out loud in celebration of their team's triumph.

The polecat snaps his eyes open. "What the..." he utters, turning left and seeing Arron laying on his back, holding his sore paws as he recovers from the effort. "Did I win...? YES!" the roadie asks, then roars with all of his might as he lets go out of the bolder - muscles still tensed with sweat and adrenaline as he sits up. Chayne is quick to jump on the heaving polecat, wasting no time in going straight to him and pulling him into a grateful hug.

*"What we saw in the locker room with Andrew's team was... pandemonium. And somehow, the kid made it all work much better than Zakee or myself. I think I've been looking at the competition the wrong way." *camera focuses on Eddie and Crispin sulking in a corner, then to a celebrating Andrew - his back still matted with sand and sweat as he mockingly flexes**

~Arron, 28, Honey Badger, Firefighter

Team Challenge #4, "Share The Load"

	2nd (1h 13:42)	1st	3rd (50:12)
1	 ARRON	 ANDREW	 GREASY Z
2	 KENNETH	 JOHN	 EDDIE
3	 WILLIAM	 CHAYNE	 CRISPIN

"Alright, guys..." Ludwig addresses the contestants, as soon as all have regained their spots. "Red team, congrats on winning this challenge and the reward that comes with it. You're all safe from elimination and about to enjoy your reward, courtesy of Schott NYC," he recaps. "And of course, Andrew, a thousand dollar tip is going straight to your pocket. How does it feel to be today's hero?"

The polecat shakes his head, still in a bit of a disbelief. "Sometimes Ludwig, in these challenges, you have to make wild bets, and when they work... they really fucking work," he exhales. "Whatever happens from now on, I feel I've managed to prove I belong among this group, and pardon the pun... I really feel like a thousand bucks."

"Arron, Crispin, Eddie, Kenneth, William and Greasy Z, I'm sorry, but your quest goes on. We'll see each other tomorrow at Individual, when you'll fight to earn your chance to survive this round. And remember... one of you six will eventually become the fourth mustelid to bite the dust," he says, the contestants nodding along. "Go back to the Burrow, I'll see y'all later..."

"This is the fourth time I lost the team challenge. Fourth fucking time. I can't even process how shitty it feels, and I think if I want to win this, I will have to fight fang and claw every single one of these guys solo."

~Kenneth, 24, American Badger, Roofer/CrossFit Instructor

Back at the Burrow, the losing teams are washing off the sweat of the challenge. Crispin leans closer to William as the weasel lathers up, whispering in a bid not to be heard by the badgers. "So it's the two best of the first day, Zakee and yourself... Eddie on his first... Arron on his momentum..." the European otter counts, making the math in his mind.

"I think it was pretty thought out that John would be the main target due to the whole tension he was causing, or Chayne and Andrew because they have not been that impressive so far. But looking at who is at actual risk right now I now see... this young thing just turned the Burrow on his head! It truly is a free for all battle for the scraps between the ones we thought were the safest."

~Crispin, 29, European Otter, Bouncer

"Yep, Cris... Some bigshot is gonna leave tomorrow," the personal trainer nods. "But then again, the circle will become tighter and tighter as we go, that's for sure. I do not want to be Eddie now, though..." William makes a face, pointing to the giant otter taking his shower on the opposite stall.

"I mean, man..." Crispin shrugs. "If we look at our records, he's likely gonna cream the rest of us. Personally, I think it's Ken, man's at zero out of four... If I can dispose of either him or Arron at the

duel, all the better," he nods, tossing his head back towards the water flow as his throat suppresses a small cough.

As the nine mustelids enter into the living room - freshly showered and wearing clean clothes again after the hard effort of the morning - they see a striped hyena in a three-piece suit, standing next to a rack and a glass drawer full of leather clothes and various types of leatherwear front and center of the large round sofa.

"What's even happening?" Kenneth cocks his head.

"Welcome, gentlefurs..." the hyena greets the competitors. "I am Landon Grey, from Schott NYC."

The blonde marten starts to clap and exclaim loudly, knowing what was about to happen. "Guys, it's our reward!" he says, immediately turning towards Andrew and John.

"Indeed it is," the hyena confirms, cracking a faint smile at Chayne's obvious excitement. "We've decided to set shop here for you to go wild, try on some of our merchandise, and take the items you enjoy the most. Mr. Foley and Mr. Blake, you get a choice of two items. Mr. McKnight, as the captain of the winning team, you get an extra one," the hyena says enthusiastically. The rest of the mustelids sit down on the main couch, looking at the red team getting spoiled on their goods.

"Man, these are tight..." Andrew muses, zipping up a pair of straight leg leather jeans. "I'm not sure if these ones are-"

"Ayo, Chayne, look at them buns... Baked just for ya!" Zakee loudly interrupts the polecat, laughing at the youngster's obvious blush.

"Don't listen to him, Andy..." the marten smiles from ear to ear. "You can't pass on those. Though I'm lowkey upset you held that cake from me."

"Like... I'm pretty sure you can make out the outline of anything and everything through 'em," Andrew shrugs, still unconvinced.

Chayne chuckles. "You've bared it all to us twelve and now you actin' shy over a pair of leather pants?"

"Bottom line, this reward is a dream coming true. Each of these clothes is worth maybe a full paycheck of mine, and the fact everyone's being extra jelly as they take on the sight of us getting to enjoy the prize only makes the whole thing better."

~Chayne, 28, Beech Marten, Bartender

"This is a Shell Horsehide Leather Wallet with chain, it is made from our most luxurious and favorite leather on the market..." Landon elaborates, everyone noticing John's notable tail wagging and giddiness as he details the item.

"I'm going for it, 100%," the stoat nods, instantly making his decision. "That and the lambskin blue jacket, those are my two."

*"And just like that, I've scored another big day at the Burrow." *lets out a laugh as he zips up the jacket, admiring the garment up close* "They can talk all they want, but I've been consistent and*

successful. I can live with being public enemy number one if it wins me all of these goods.”
~John, 36, Stoat, Jailer

The hyena helps Andrew to put on one of the jackets on display. “This is a Classic Perfecto Steerhide Leather Motorcycle Jacket in brown... the one model that kick-started our brand.” As the clerk describes the item, Andrew almost starts to have a freakout at the item being fitted on him. Eddie and Crispin start to look miffed at the display.

*“This jacket is the thing that the high end rockstars and musicians whose stages I build up wear. This is Sabbath, this is Dio, this is rock and roll stitched up in cowhide. It’s what everyone at the top of the top wears, and now that is on my back...” *Andrew cups his paws to his face, shaking his head* “It’s so unreal...”*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie

“The “Free Speech” jacket and the slim straight leg leather pants for me! Tom Of Finland could never...” Chayne smiles as he details the enormous peace-sign on the back of the garment with the words “We the People, for the People” stitched under it. “What you getting, Andrew?”

“Well, I have the classic jacket and the Iron Ranger boots, but... I got no idea what’s next,” the roadie replies, still fawning over the display.

“Just saying... you won’t ever get a shot at free leather pants again,” the marten winks. “And they’d fit amazingly with your new rockstar jacket...”

“What the hell... I’m taking the pants too. But the boot-cut looser fit,” he adds, Chayne mockingly pouting at the polecat’s choice.

“We will throw a kit of our very own Otter Wax leather care kit, so these last a lifetime,” the hyena says to the three newly-clad winners.

“I’m so fucking thankful we got this specific reward...” John says with a grin, shaking Landon’s paw as he accepts his prize. “Finally something I can take home from this ride, and y’all better know this is only the start...”

*“I am living my dream!” *laughs* “This is quite the reward, and I feel I’ve now left my pawprint on this game. A lot of big competition is at risk of elimination, and at the end of the day, this deep in the game, my rise couldn’t have come at a better time. Now let’s see how the cookie crumbles.”*

~Andrew, 22, European Polecat, Roadie