

The Family Business

Having survived his encounter with the U.S. Army, Dewey now is in a car with the mysterious Mr. Phelps and headed toward an unknown destination.

“Mr. Phelps – who the hell are you and where are we going?” Dewey said to the mysterious man.

“You’ll find out shortly,” Phelps said. “We’re about to arrive.”

“Arrive at what?” Dewey said. “Ah don’t see nothing for miles.”

“There’s more to this than meets the eye,” the gray-haired man said.

The car turned off of the two-lane road and into a field. Phelps deftly maneuvered the car across the bare dirt. A light flipped on, accompanied by the sound of a buzzer, as Phelps brought the car to a stop.

“We’re stopped in the middle of nowhere,” Dewey said. “What are we going to do now?”

“Just hold on, Mr. Webster,” Phelps said. “Be patient, and all will be revealed.”

Dewey had a sinking feeling as he wondered what the heck was going on. Then, he literally had a sinking feeling. The car was moving downward!

The roof of the car went below the surface of the ground. After moving downward another 10 feet, the car stopped moving. Phelps drove the car forward a few feet. Behind the car, the platform on which the car had sat slowly moved back toward ground level.

“You can get out now, Mr. Webster,” Phelps said.

“Hell, it’s dark in here. Where am I supposed to go?” Dewey asked. As if on cue, several lights went on to reveal they were in a black-walled room with a high ceiling. A small light

illuminated a door on the far wall. “Follow me,” Phelps said.

Phelps walked up to the door. He touched a button and a small light came on. Phelps positioned his eye in front of the light. After a couple of seconds, a beep sounded.

“Mr. Webster, come here please,” Phelps said.

Dewey slowly walked over. “Please place your eye in front of this light,” Phelps said. Dewey had to bend down a little bit to get to eye level with the light. He then saw a dazzling array of lights and started to become dizzy.

The light stopped. “You’re in the system now, Mr. Webster,” Phelps said.

“Just what system am I in?” Dewey said.

“You now have a top security clearance. Your eye characteristics were recorded by a retina scanner. To get in this building, you let the scanner read your eye and you’re in,” Phelps said.

“That’s some kind of weird stuff,” Dewey said. “It sounds like it came out of one of those pulp fiction magazines that I write for,” he said.

“What you are about to see far exceeds the imagination of any pulp fiction writer, Mr. Webster,” Phelps said. “You are about to see things you haven’t even dreamed of.”

They walked through the door and 20 feet down a hall. The hall turned right and went another 20 feet to yet another door. Phelps had his retina scanned and Dewey hesitantly followed suit.

The door opened. They walked into a huge room, the size of four basketball courts. Dewey saw several machines around the room with disc-shaped objects mounted on them. There was a black machine about 30 feet long by 10 feet wide. Dewey saw something glowing inside the box. Scattered around the room were men and women sitting at consoles typing.

“What are those machines? They look like

tape recorders," Dewey said.

"They have nothing to do with audio," Phelps said. "They store data for the computer."

"What's data? And what the hell is a computer?" Dewey asked, puzzled.

"Data is information. It can be numbers, words, or even images. A computer is a device that takes data and processes it. For example, it can do addition, subtraction, multiplying and dividing at astonishing speeds," Phelps said.

"So, it's a big adding machine," Dewey said.

"It processes information, Mr. Webster," Phelps said. "The possibilities are endless. As the speed of computers increases and they become smaller, they will be able to do amazing things. Someday they will help men travel in space. They will make car engines more efficient."

"How are you gonna' fit something in a car that's three times bigger than a car?" Dewey asked.

"As I said, computers will become smaller," Phelps said.

Dewey walked over to the computer. He peered inside. "This thing is made of vacuum tubes, just like mah radio. How are you going to shrink vacuum tubes?" Dewey asked.

"Ah, we have a replacement in mind for the tube," Phelps said. "It's called a transistor. One transistor does the job of one tube at a fraction of the size and cost. It does not heat up or draw large amounts of power. There is research that could lead to putting thousands of transistors on a device the size of a penny."

"So what does any of this have to do with me?" Dewey asked.

Phelps started walking toward one of the women operating a keyboard and waved for Dewey to follow him. They approached the woman, who stood up and moved away so they could see the keyboard at which she was working.

The woman blurted out, "Dr. Webster, are you all right? You are dressed kind of ... unusually." Phelps gave her a stern look. The woman cringed.

Then Phelps smiled. "It's OK, Miss Hanrahan.

"Dr. Webster is fine and will be with us shortly. This is his brother, Dewey. He has joined us as an ... uh ... operative."

Dewey looked at the console and said, "That just looks like a typewriter. But where's the paper? And what are all of those cards stacked up there?"

"This is a programming console, Mr. Webster.

Dewey broke in. "Stop the Mr. Webster crap. Just call me Dewey."

"OK, Dewey," he said. "Computers do only what we tell them to do. The instructions we give them are called programs, or software. The instructions must be written according to certain rules. Any mistake will prevent the computer from reading the instructions. It will reject the program," he said.

"What the hell is an 'operative'?" Dewey asked.

"Ah, it's like an agent – worker – employee," Phelps said. "We have a mission for you."

"You mean like Secret Agent X?" Dewey asked.

"Ah, the star of that obscure pulp fiction magazine?" Phelps said.

"Hey, don't go calling that obscure, whatever that means. I loved that magazine. When I was a kid, I wished I could be Secret Agent X," Dewey said.

"You may become even more important than Secret Agent X," Phelps said, smiling.

Phelps turned to the console. He pulled one of the cards out of the hopper. It was about eight inches wide and four inches high. It had several rectangular holes punched in it.

"What's that card for?" Dewey asked.

"Remember that I told you that the computer must have instructions – a program?" the gray-haired man asked.

"Yep. Is that card how the computer gets its marching orders?" Dewey said.

"Very good, Dewey. You figured that out well," Phelps said.

"Not much gets past old Dewey," came a voice from across the room.

There walked Dewey's brother Huey, a virtual clone of Dewey. "Mr. Phelps," the man said. "I see you finally got Dewey down here. I thought he was going to destroy half of the country before you could rope him in," the man said.

"Huey!" Dewey cried.

"Dewey!" Huey cried. The two large men ran across the floor and collided in an attempt to hug each other. Their 260-pound frames bounced off of each other and they ended up sprawled on the floor.

"Man, have yew ever got me into a mess," Dewey said. "Just what the hell is going on here?"

"Dewey," Huey said as he got up. "We are introducing you to the family business – espionage. It's a Webster tradition. It's your turn to get indoctrinated," Huey said.

"Indoctrinated? What the heck does that mean?" Dewey asked, quizzically.

Huey paused for a moment and put his chin on his closed fist. "It means that we are going to introduce you to what it's like being a spy. It's what Websters do," he said.

"Whaddya mean?" Dewey asked. "Mom and Dad ain't spies. I haven't seen 'em in a while, but they ain't spies. They're farmers – they worked the Webster farm."

His brother told him that his parents did espionage work during the time they were farmers. "Remember all of those 'vacations' they took, Dewey? Those weren't vacations. They were working for the government".

"So, is that where they've been for the past few years? Have they been out spying? I hardly ever hear from them," Dewey said.

"Well, uh, Dewey, I can't say specifically what they are doing – even I don't know. They could be living it up somewhere, for all I know," Huey said.

"Is Louie involved in all of this?" Dewey asked.

"Louie is involved in his own way," Huey said. "Let's just say he makes important contributions to national security."

The door opened and in walked Irisha Iminov and the two black-suited agents. The agents

walked to a point about 10 feet away from Dewey, folded their arms, and stood there. Irisha ran toward Dewey.

"Oh, Dewey, I'm so glad to see that you are here!" she cried. She ran up against Dewey and put her arms as far around him as she could reach. "I would be so sad if anything happened to you!"

"Cut the crap!" Dewey said. "Last I saw yew, I was sitting across the seat with mah hands tied up and I wuz wearing a blindfold. If you're so concerned about me, why didn't yew do something?"

"Oh, Dewey, it was necessary," she cooed. She withdrew her arms from Dewey. She winked at him and walked away.

The agents watched the exchange without changing their expression. "Hey, you two agents," Dewey said. "Why do yew wear sunglasses indoors? And isn't it kind of warm here to be wearing those black suits?"

The agents looked at each other, then resumed their pose.

"What're yer names?" Dewey said.

The agents stood silently.

"Looked, I kicked yer butt. The least you can do is tell me whose butt I kicked," Dewey said.

Phelps stepped in and said, "Dewey, the taller agent is Stan. The shorter agent is Dan," he said.

"Stan and Dan! Well, ain't that cute! Ah hope you guys do a better job on yer other assignments than yew did on me," Dewey said.

The shorter of the two agents smirked and looked at the other. He said, "The only reason you got away is because you've got such a hard head!" The agents laughed.

Dewey was incensed. "Yew think I got a hard head? You wanna make fun of it? OK, well take this!"

Dewey advanced toward the taller agent. "Dewey, no!" Huey cried.

The raging Dewey grabbed the shoulders of the agent in a vise grip. He looked the agent squarely in the eye and then smashed his forehead against agent's head. Agent Stan crumpled to the floor.

“Ah got a hard head and I’m proud of it!” Dewey cried. “And there’s some pretty good brains inside of it!”

He looked at the agent who was left standing. Agent Dan stared at Dewey and said, “I don’t like it when someone hurt my partner!”

“Well, jes’ what are yew gonna’ do about it?” Dewey said.

“Take this!” agent Dan screamed, as he lowered his head and sprinted toward Dewey.

Dewey just stood his ground, arms crossed, like nothing was happening.

POW! Agent Dan slammed into Dewey, bounced off of him, and tumbled to the floor.

Unmoved, emotionally and physically, Dewey stared at him.

“You can’t take it twice!” agent Dan roared. He walked away, turned around and ran toward Dewey again. Dewey yawned.

BAM! Agent Dan bounced off of Dewey again. “How can this be? I’ve leveled guys with that hit before,” agent Dan said.

“Yew done trying to hurt me?” Dewey asked.

“NO!” agent Dan cried. “I’m getting you this time!” Agent Dan took another run at Dewey, but this time he tried to leap and hit Dewey’s head.

Dewey ducked.

Agent Dan went flying over Dewey and tumbled onto the floor. Dewey turned around and stared at the agent. “If yew come at me one more time, ah’m gonna knock yew into next week!” he said.

Breathing heavily, Agent Dan managed to stand up. “But at least we got you that one time at the bar!” he said.

“I wuz half drunk and yew guys had the element of surprise,” Dewey said. “I wuz ready for yew this time. Yew don’t take on Dewey Webster and get away with it.” he said.

Agent Stan regained consciousness and tried to stand up. Agent Dan offered him a hand and he struggled to his feet. “You must have a pretty hard head too,” Dewey said. “Most people are out a lot longer than yew after I head-butt them.”

“You just got lucky,” Agent Stan said. “Better lucky than good, I guess.”

“Ah have whipped your butt twice, once after being tied up and blindfolded. Better lucky than good, you say? I’d rather be good. When yer good, you make yer own luck.”

“That’s my brother,” Huey said to Phelps.

Next: Dewey prepares for his mission.