

# Chapter 1: Ronan Chooses His Apprenticeship

Everyone thought Breon an ideal planet. After all, it was a large producer of technology for many planets, so the people had money. It was a peaceful planet too, as there was a strict level of authority, and no one would be disrespectful to someone in authority over them, as such behavior would be punished harshly. No one ever spoke badly of the government either, perhaps from fear of punishment, or perhaps because everything was as good as they were told. People's lives were rumored to be very good there.

Ronan thought life wasn't quite as good on Breon as everyone on other planets believed. At least not in the Tuval polity, which was overseen by Gerent Basil. The gerent over the polity had the power of a monarch. Sure, he had counselors, but they could only advise and had no vote or say in the gerent's decision.

Ronan had spent his life in Tuval. He was picked very young for a track to work with technology. He did have a natural flair for it, and he enjoyed it. Yet, it was a hard field to pursue, so he didn't get to have the free time that those in his school who trained for hard labor had. He did make time to get some exercise. In fact, he loved the ancient art of parkour. He often would see if he could climb, flip, and skirt his way through the city without being noticed, which wasn't easy because there were security cameras everywhere. The people were told the cameras were there to protect them, so if there was ever a question of what happened in a crime, there would

be no doubt and no one would be falsely accused. Yet, there were those who didn't feel safer with the cameras all over, but instead felt controlled.

Ronan tried to avoid the cameras. He also had built some technology to jam the cameras. If he was found with it, he'd be punished, but he figured the solution was to not get caught.

That's what he was hoping to do the day after he turned nineteen. He walked out of the dorm at his school. Everyone in Tuval moved into the dorms at school when they turned twelve. That was required. Often students did when they were eight, as they were assigned to schools too far away from home. They were allowed to go home on weekends, but they were required to live at school during the week.

Ronan took a deep breath as it was a big day, not just for him, for everyone. It was recruiting day where all the seniors at the school were to be chosen for apprenticeships. It was a great honor, but great pressure. If someone wasn't chosen for an apprenticeship, he was disgraced, often thrown out of the program and sent to a different program, generally doing some very perfunctory task with assembly or repairs of technology. Ronan really didn't want to do that. He loved developing technology, and he loved understanding it. He'd actually helped his uncle, who was a police, to catch criminal activity by hacking into technology. Unfortunately, he couldn't brag about that to the recruiters, as he wasn't really supposed to do it. His uncle could get in trouble if anyone knew.

Ronan walked through campus. The metallic buildings shone in the morning sun, which actually annoyed Ronan, as he was still waking up. Yet, the day was starting early for all the seniors.

He walked to the cafeteria where everyone had breakfast. He wasn't the first one there.

The first face he saw was Lori. That was a good way to get his eyes open. Lori was gorgeous. She had soft, brown, cascading curls around her face that draped over her shoulders, and a very curvy figure. Her looks weren't even the best thing about her. Lori was friendly, the most social person in the school. She worked on technology, so he'd seen her around, but she worked with technology for music and movie productions. She always seemed to have some fascinating idea she was working on.

"Hi, Ronan," she called to him as he passed. He would have been surprised that she knew his name, but she knew everyone's names. She didn't really know him, at least not more than his name, field of study, and that he didn't talk much to people outside of his project team.

"Hi, Lori," he replied, walking past her and saying nothing more. He always told himself he was going to have a real conversation with her, but when it came to her, he could never think of anything to say.

He served himself a plate of food. Some people were too nervous to eat, but Ronan wasn't too nervous to eat. In fact, his nerves made him want to eat more that day.

He was eating when Lori came over, sat by him, and asked, "Are you nervous? I'm sure you'll get a great apprenticeship."

Ronan stared at her, surprised that she was sitting right across from him, but remembered she'd asked a question and answered, "I'm nervous. I wish I shared your confidence. Are you nervous?"

“No,” Lori answered, not seeming nervous at all. “I have an in at a company, so I know they are going to make an offer to me.”

“And your grades are incredible,” Ronan pointed out.

“Yours are too,” Lori noted. “I don’t know much about you, but everyone knows you’re brilliant. You don’t have anything to worry about.”

“It’s not just about intelligence,” Ronan corrected. “I’m not very social.”

“You just need to be around people who are,” Lori suggested.

He didn’t say anything back because Corentin walked up to the table. That couldn’t be good.

“Hey, loser,” Corentin mocked. “Are you ready to be humiliated today?”

Ronan said nothing back, attempting to avoid the argument.

“You will respond to me!” Corentin demanded. “You can’t beat me.”

Unfortunately, that was very true. Corentin did work with technology, but not in the development of it, only in the use of it. He was slated to join the ground legion, a division of the military that fought up close with the enemy, so Corentin was tough and very well trained in hand to hand fighting and weaponry.

Ronan didn’t reply. He was surprised that Lori did. “Stop, Corentin,” she scolded. “You have nothing to prove. We all know you’re strong.”

That was bold. Ronan glanced over at Lori, embarrassed that she'd had to stand up to Corentin for him.

Corentin glared back at her, but before he said anything, Ronan stood up and argued, "Leave her alone, Corentin. I know you've never liked me, but this is between you and me. Leave Lori alone."

"Oh, you like her," Corentin mocked. "You're not good enough for her." He then stepped closer and hissed, "Don't try to steal my girl. You've stolen enough from me already."

"Let's not do this," Ronan begged. "Let's just all focus on the recruitment."

"I'm not your girl, Corentin," Lori insisted. "I never was. We didn't date that long."

Corentin glared at her, but Ronan couldn't tell if the expression was anger or pain. Corentin then turned back to Ronan and warned, "Stay away from her."

"Let's not do this," Ronan again pleaded. "We were just eating breakfast."

"You can leave, or I can make you," Corentin threatened. "You chose this path for me, and you can suffer for it."

Ronan knew exactly what would happen next. After all, they'd been through the same thing many times. Corentin was jealous, and determined to pull Ronan down.

As expected, the punch came. Ronan anticipated it and ducked under it. He then rolled over the table, jumped on the next one, and flipped off of it.

“I’ll get you!” Corentin yelled as he pursued, but Ronan made it out of the door, and Corentin didn’t follow.

Ronan wasn’t surprised. Corentin had a grudge against him, but still wasn’t going to miss breakfast on such an important day.

Ronan wished he’d had time to finish his, but instead he headed to the event center where the recruitment event was to take place. The school Ronan attended was downtown, only blocks from the event center he was headed to.

He walked in all alone. He had a team he worked with at school, but two on the team weren’t seniors. One was going to the recruitment event, but was going with his girlfriend, and the other had a father who was a teacher, so he was going with him. Ronan wished his mother was coming, but parents weren’t actually allowed. His teammate’s father was only allowed because he was a teacher there.

Ronan walked around, wishing he’d been able to have Lori come with him. It started his day off right to have her talk to him. After all, that seldom happened. Getting up the nerve to talk to a pretty girl wasn’t as simple as designing a graphics chip for a holographic projector. Of course, Ronan was a prodigy where technology was concerned.

He looked around the large main room of the building. There were stations set up representing different companies, and all the students were to go around and talk to the representatives from the companies.

Their futures weren’t all determined just from the first impression. There was a great amount of prep work that went into the day. Resumes were submitted to companies early, so

they often already knew who they wanted to interview and had a good idea of who they would take on as apprentices.

Ronan had four different interviews scheduled for the day already. His first one wasn't for half an hour, so he had some time. He walked up to a station for a company called Turin Bauku. There was no way he'd get an apprenticeship there. They made military technology, and took on many of the people from the legion tech groups. That wasn't Ronan's specialty. Yet, he walked up to the station.

A man greeted him, introduced himself as Ken and added, "It's nice to meet you, Ronan."

Ronan did a quick double-take. How did the man know his name?

"Your resume is impressive," Ken explained, answering the unasked question. "Would you consider working for Turin Bauku? We could use apprentices like you."

Ronan didn't respond immediately, as he was too shocked. He shook his head to clear it and answered, "I would definitely consider an apprenticeship with you. You do realize that my specialty is in automation, design, and networking. Don't you work in explosives and fire power?"

"We do more than just that," Ken answered. "Honestly, we could use your skills as we are developing spy technology. I can't talk to you about it here, as it's top secret, but we've already done your security clearance, and you passed. We could use you."

They talked for the half hour, and Ronan was very interested, but he had an interview to go to.

He went to his first interview. The man who interviewed him was very stuffy. Ronan was used to technical nerdy types, but this man was just stiff, very proper and business-like, but not very comfortable to be around. Ronan didn't think the job sounded that exciting. He was told that his resume was impressive for his age, but that no matter what he had done that apprentices were only allowed to do so much. It sounded like Ronan would spend the entire time there being more of an office boy than actual scientist, and it didn't pay well. Still, he was very polite. He'd rather take that job than not get an apprenticeship. Not getting chosen was very embarrassing and a sure way to get demoted to menial labor for a career.

When he was finished, he looked back over at the station for Turin Bauku. Ken was talking to someone else. Surely there were so many people wanting to hire on there that he wouldn't get an offer.

He started to head over there, but he ran into Corentin who stopped him and whispered, "Give it up. Turin Bauku would never take you. They do boss stuff there."

He was right. Ronan knew it. Boss was an expression used to mean really impressive or very strong, as the boss was supposed to be the best.

"Their tech is boss," Ronan agreed politely. "I have another interview to go to." He started to walk off, and was pleasantly surprised that Corentin didn't stop him or make a scene. Of course, Corentin needed to make a good impression and get a good apprenticeship too.

Ronan didn't make it to the Turin Bauku station again, as he was stopped by another recruiter. The man was from VH-

Teltek, and talked to Ronan about the possibility of working for them. That made some sense, as holographic tech he'd developed could be useful in their movie productions. Perhaps Lori would even get an offer there. He wouldn't mind doing an apprenticeship at the same place she did. Perhaps he'd get to know her better.

When he finished, he again tried to go talk to Turin Bauku, but Ken was talking to someone else. There were several other interviewers from the company there too, but they were all busy.

He would have waited around, but he had another interview scheduled.

The day went pretty much that way all day long. There was a lunch served, which Ronan enjoyed. Of course, there was hardly a food Ronan didn't enjoy, when he wasn't too busy to eat.

It was near the end of the event when Ronan finally made it back over to talk to Ken. Ken introduced him to the others at the station.

Ronan thought it looked really interesting to apprentice there, as it was a top secret company that did military weapons. Perhaps he'd be used as a spy too. He was pretty well versed in how to hack into a computer.

If only he had more time, but there was only ten minutes until the interviewing closed. At that point, there was a reception for the students where there were snacks and a few speakers, so the companies could have time to make their decisions.

Ronan was so nervous. Corentin walked by him and whispered, “Be prepared to be humiliated.”

Lori was much more encouraging, as he passed by her and she told him she was sure he’d get several great offers. Still, Ronan was so nervous.

When the companies finally came out, everyone was told to take a seat. Ronan didn’t get to sit by Lori. He wished he could, but he sat with his teammate and his father.

The dean of his school stood up in front of everyone and announced that they would be sent the offers digitally, and they would have until dinner to decide which offer to take. He then gave a speech about the importance of choosing well and what to do if not chosen. There were a few choices that were contingent too, so the dean explained that. If a choice was listed as a back-up, then it could only be accepted if the first choice person didn’t accept the offer. He then told everyone to check their devices, as the offers would be sent them.

Ronan could feel his heart beating as he waited. His hands were shaking, and the room felt suddenly hot.

He didn’t really have to worry, as he received five offers, all first choice offers. That was incredible. No one received five offers. Two was good, and three was considered really high.

Ronan’s nervousness turned to shock and he stared at his device. How could he have received five offers?

They had very little time to look over the offers. Most people knew what company they wanted, and they only had one or two choices. Ronan started looking through them. The

first was from VH-Teltek. The pay wasn't very good, but it did seem interesting. He'd consider it.

He looked over at Lori. Likely she wouldn't be considered for the same companies, except possibly that one, as she was in production tech, and he could do graphics and optics. Of course, he really did about everything with computers, as he was truly a prodigy.

He looked at the next offer. They didn't get to take them back to school and debate it for days. They had only until dinner to make a decision, and that was less than an hour away.

The next offer looked pretty good. The third one wasn't interesting to him at all.

It was the fifth offer that really caught his attention. The offer was from Turin Bauku. He really had no idea what he'd be doing as an apprentice there. Were top secret jobs interesting or boring? He scrolled down. The pay was really good, over double the next highest offer.

He stood up and walked over to Lori. That was fine, as most of them looked at their offers and talked to friends about them.

"Did you get the apprenticeship you wanted?" Ronan asked Lori.

"I did," she answered.

"Was it VH-Teltek," he asked.

"No," she answered.

She was going to say more, but Ronan turned down the VH-Teltek offer and walked away, as they weren't likely to have other offers in common.

Perhaps he should have asked what her other offers were, but he never was good at talking to girls. He looked back at her to see if he should go back and ask. She was laughing a soft laugh, and another guy walked up to her.

Ronan looked through his offers. He had to make a decision. Time was running out. He took a deep breath, flipped through the offers, and hit “accept” on the offer from Turin Bauku. Hopefully, he’d just done the right thing.

It wasn’t much later when the dean stood up in front of everyone, announced that it was time to make a decision if they hadn’t already, and that they only had two minutes before the offers opened up to accept back-up choices. They were all informed that as soon as they made their choice, they were to go to dinner with the company they selected.

Ronan walked into the great dining hall. Each company had tables for those who were going to apprentice with them to join them.

Ronan went over and was shocked that Lori was there. “What?” he asked rather awkwardly.

Lori smiled at him. “This is the company I had the in with. They want an apprentice to do a documentary and a few commercials for them, so I’m going to do my apprenticeship with them.”

Ronan stared at her, still in shock even after she’d explained. He was going to work at the same company as Lori for his apprenticeship.

His excitement was deflated as Corentin walked up to the tables.

“What are you doing here?” Ronan asked, realizing that was a stupid question. After all, Corentin would be a good choice for a weapons company.

Ken walked over, reached his hand out for Ronan and shook hands, congratulating him on the apprenticeship.

Ken then shook Corentin’s hand, congratulated him, and assured him that even though he was chosen as a back-up that he would be treated as any other apprentice.

Ronan held his tongue and didn’t make a comment about Corentin being back-up. Instead he held his hand out to Corentin and offered, “Let’s put everything behind us, since we have to work together.”

“I’ll work with you like I have to,” Corentin responded. “I have to act professional, but I still don’t like you, Ronan.” His eyes locked with Ronan’s, and Ronan had a sudden chill of fear run through him. The apprenticeship was going to be interesting, and he’d likely have to watch his back.