The Zootopian Directive: Book One: Genesis

by 0P3RaGh05T

Summary

Things just got a whole lot more complicated. Nick and Judy thought it was over, so did everyone else. They were wrong. It was only the beginning. An old threat rears its head. Secrets are revealed. The city is thrown into chaos. Lives forever changed. Nick and Judy will have to achieve something beyond impossible if they're to end this once and for all.
Been a while since I've written anything, so it's gonna have issues. Will be revising along the way, just please be patient. Comment, Review, tell me what you think.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter Zero: Important Please Read

Chapter Notes

This "Chapter" was amended following my 17 year old nephew-in-law posing a series of questions to me. The amendments are in bold. I really should have had it to begin with.

Chapter Zero: Important Please Read

HUZZAH HA HA HA HA HA HAH!!! *Cough* *Cough* *Cough* (Pounds chest) <Speaks in a hoarse voice> Been a while since I’ve done that. (Takes a swig of mineral water) Ah, much better. Hello ladies and gents, boys and girls, madams et messieurs, guess what? I’M BAAAAACK!!! A baker’s dozen years of sitting on my ass is OVER! There are a few authors both here and on FanFiction.net that have small snippets of why I stopped writing. To those of you of whom I speak, I have a confession: Everything I’ve told you is true just from different points of my 40+ years of life. I’ll be updating my profile tomorrow to make sure I don’t forget anything. Until then, it will remain blank.

So, First off: Welcome to my first Fanfiction for the Zootopia fandom. I’m currently working on another Original Work that I’ll be posting as soon as I think it’s worth posting. Anyway, as I stated above, I haven’t written in nearly 1.5 decades so I’m really, really rusty. I also have no editor, beta reader, or anyone to slap me over the head when I make continuity errors. Well, that’s not entirely true. LastEdge over on FanFiction.net was gracious enough to give me his seal of approval, so thanks for that mate. Please check out his story Broken Clockwork, it’s a great read and I really enjoy it.

I’m going to start off by requesting that you please read all the warnings, tags, and other things in the description. This story WILL contain elements that will have it rated EXPLICIT. If you refuse to scroll back up, I’ll list them here. They are as follows: Rape/Non-Con, Underage, and Graphic Depictions of Violence. The tags list is too long to write here so I seriously suggest you reread the description. I in no way condone these acts in any way, shape, or form. This is a work of FICTION. Any person who actually commits these acts should be charged to the furthest extent of the law and either be sentenced to life in prison without parole or given the death penalty. I wrote these acts to give the story drama/horror/trauma and similar elements alone.

Now, I’m going to acknowledge the writers whose stories have inspired me to claw my way out of the personal hell I was trapped in to write this story. The order is NOT a ranking. *Ahem* LastEdge, Cimar of Turalis/Wildehops, Zanrok, Fox in the Hen House, Midnighthropeliac, Kulkum, Cloperella, neorenamon, Alps_Sarris, Armasyll, Prester_John, Anheledir (Laverne), DatCatTho, Secrets_of_Starfang, twocentnuisance, Johnstoneer, Milesupshur47, MysteryGirl22, SilverStripes, weatheredlaw, Kittah4/VariableMammal, Humanities_Handbag, Lagarde, BjornBattlebear/GustheBear, and a few others who I can’t remember off the top of my head right now.

Comments, Reviews, and Miscellany: Each chapter will contain at least one Easter Egg (References to other works and/or media). If you find them, please leave a comment along with your reviews. I’ll be awarding minor prizes to the first four to get it correct. It could be an early release of the next
chapter, a shout out in the notes, or even an offer to send me an OC that fits into the story. I really want to know what you all think. I have the first set of chapters prewritten but would like to know what you all want to see later in the series. I’ve planned this whole thing for a total of 85-100 chapters per set, for 5 sets, each set has 5 arcs/acts. This is the largest project I’ve ever undertaken.

Last part before Final Words. I know for a fact that there will be commenters who will insult the story. To those of you who find pleasure in this, sorry to break it to you but I thrive on your efforts. This story whether anyone reads it or not, is being written simply because I want to get back into the game after so long. To the others, I thankfully accept your constructive criticism and look forward to taking up the challenge of meeting your expectations. If I have offended anyone with this section, I apologize but I honestly feel it needed to be said.

Final Words: This story took me a good six months to come up with, search for references, come up with the story (which even I will admit is rougher than sandpaper), come up with a playlist to listen to while writing and for a soundtrack (which I will post a list of songs per chapter in the prenotes of each chapter once I can find the lists.), and find someone to give the first chapter a once over (Thx again, LastEdge!). 13 years of not writing has left me back at square one, so yes the story will seem all over the place. I will begin revising the chapters after I finish posting the first act, so please be patient and if you feel like contributing to the effort by all means leave a comment. If you managed to get through this long rambling Author’s Note, you are truly a godsend. I hope you enjoy the story. I’ll be posting a chapter about once every 2 to 3 weeks depending on how life treats me. Much appreciated, OG.
Chapter One: Taking the First Steps

ZPD Precinct One HQ - Zootopia - Late Evening

Nick and Judy were sitting in Chief Bogo’s office waiting for him to return from his meeting with the new interim Mayor. The Chief had requested to speak with them following the arrest of former Mayor Bellwether after they had been extracted from the display pit in the History Museum. The two of them had agreed, provided that they could have a couple of minutes to eat. The Chief had driven them himself to the precinct and ordered take out for them, before he was called away to an emergency meeting.

“Well, Carrots. I don’t know about you, but I have to say that today was one of the craziest I’ve had in awhile.” Nick stated. “Let’s see. We raced all over Zootopia, crashed a train full of evidence, ran through a museum, hustled a criminal mastermind, and solved the largest case of the decade all in just under twelve hours.”

Judy laughed. “Yeah. Hopefully we won’t be brought up on charges of willful destruction of public property for the train. I don’t have any way of paying for that. I don’t even have any money to pay for a hotel room tonight.”

Nick’s ear twitched at the last part. Turning to her, he asked “What do you mean by that?
Don’t you have an apartment?” He found himself a little concerned that Judy had no place to stay.

Judy shook her head. “After the press conference three months ago, I dropped everything, Slick. I resigned, canceled my lease on the apartment, and moved back to Bunnyburrow. Did you think I was only there for a vacation?”

Nick’s ears flattened against his skull as his jaw simultaneously dropped and his eyes widened. “Carrots! Why? You were constantly telling me how hard you worked to become a cop. Why would you turn your badge in after all that?”

Judy gave Nick a sad smile. “Let’s see. I was assigned a case that I had no chance of solving on my own, conned a con-fox into assisting me, took turns saving each other’s lives, nearly lost my badge before he stood up for me, asked him to be my partner ‘cause there was no one I could see as more reliable to watch my six, before giving a speech that tore the city apart, and worse, ruined our partnership before it could even begin, losing the first true friend I ever had in the process.”

Nick found himself speechless at Judy’s words. It took him a minute to get his thoughts back in order, but once he did, he asked. “Wait. You quit because of me? Fluff, I’m not someone to throw your dream away over. Not only that, but how could you see me as a friend after everything I did to impede your investigation in the beginning?”

Judy chuckled softly. “You weren’t the only reason I resigned but I think you were the most important. As for why I consider us friends, well, I don’t even remember when I started thinking of you that way. I mean, we did start off antagonizing each other, but somewhere along the way I just came to see you as a friend.” Looking down at her paws in her lap. “And when you ran off after the conference, I just didn’t see a point anymore. I had lost the trust of the only mammal I trusted to be my partner.”

Nick felt his chest constrict. He never imagined that she would resign because of him. Honestly, when she had called out to him to let her explain back then, he had to force himself to not look back because he knew that if he had, he would have let her. Now though, he felt horrible for having left her, for having broken that trust. She gave up everything because of him. “Hey. Back then you tried to stop me from leaving by asking me to let you explain. I didn’t want to listen then, but if you’d like, I’ll listen now.”

Judy glanced at Nick and saw that he had a sincere expression on his face. Sighing, she turned to face him fully and indicated to her left cheek. “Rub your thumb here. You’ll understand why I behaved the way I did once you do.”

Nick carefully extended his paw and ran his thumb over her cheek. As he did he tensed upon feeling three raised scars. Gently parting the fur there, he saw them and soon realized the reason for her actions back at the press conference. Swallowing thickly, he said. “Y—you…where did you get these? And who gave them to you?”

Judy locked eyes with Nick and in a soft voice said. “I got them during a festival back home after the school play where I announced I wanted to be a cop. Some of my classmates were being bullied by Gideon Grey. He had taken their tickets and when I stepped in, he focused his attention on me. We had a scuffle then he knocked me to the ground, said that I was never going to be a cop, and to prove it he clawed my face.” Changing her voice to a whisper, she continued. “Gideon Grey is a fox.”

Nick jerked his paw away and stared at her. It all started making sense to him. The fox repellent, her anger when she found out he had conned her, and even her actions at the press conference. He realized that the repellent was probably given to her by her parents and she had never
intended to use it. She had been angry because she had thought he was different from other foxes. It hadn’t been him she saw during their fight, but this Gideon Grey. Nick wanted to die. The first mammal that had ever actually trusted him, wanted him to be their partner, and he had unwittingly caused her to relive a traumatic experience from their kithood and left before she could explain, leading her to give up everything she had strived for. He didn’t realize he had started crying until Judy brought her paws to his cheeks and began wiping them away.

Seeing Nick begin to cry, Judy went to brush them away. In a soft voice, she whispered “Hey. It isn’t your fault. You didn’t know. Besides, I shouldn’t have reached for the repellent anyway. I knew you weren’t going to hurt me, but I reflexively reached for it, thinking it was a tranquilizer, even though I hadn’t been issued one due to my inexperience on the force. You aren’t the one at fault, Slick.”

Nick whimpered. “I’m still sorry. I just…I never thought that…I mean, I didn’t think that you had experienced something like that.” Gulping, he went on. “I don’t know if you will agree, but if…if you are willing, I would still like to be your partner on the force.”

Judy smiled at him. “Of course, I still want you to be my partner. But I’m not a cop anymore, Slick. I mean if Chief Bogo rehires me then absolutely I’ll give you my recommendation, but I’m not going to assume anything.”

They both looked at each other for a moment before they heard the door open. Turning to see who it was, they saw the Chief come in carrying a bag. They watched as he set the bag down on his desk, before taking his seat. Once he was situated he opened the bag, pulled out the takeout containers, and stated “OK. So, I have a fried rice with fruits and vegetables, a box of spring rolls with crickets, spiders, and other bugs, and two orders of mashed potatoes. Is that agreeable?”

Nick and Judy nodded. Nick took the spring rolls while Judy took the fried rice. They both took a container of mashed potatoes. The Chief then gave them each a bottle of water before continuing. “Now, I have good news, bad news, and worse news. Where would you like to start?”

Judy went to answer but was cut off by Nick, who said. “Let’s start with the bad news first, then have the good news, and finish off with the worst.” Judy looked at Nick with an expression that conveyed ‘Really?’.

However, Chief Bogo nodded and replied, “That may be for the best.” The Chief put his elbows on his desk, steepled his fingers, and began to speak in a serious tone. “Bad news is that Doug Ramses managed to evade capture. As he is the one who manufactured the Night Howler Serum, I consider his capture a priority. However, the good news is actually a couple of items. First, Officer Hopps, you have been reinstated, effective immediately. You are however, required to wait until you are fully recovered from your leg wound. The medic suggested two weeks would be optimal. Secondly, Mr. Wilde, I seem to recall that you filled out an application at Officer Hopps’ request to be her partner. Do you still have it?”

Nick was caught off guard by the question, causing him to choke as Judy started patting his back to help him clear his airway. Once he was able, he replied, “Sorry. No sir, I do not. If you have a spare I can fill out another one.” His ear twitched in Judy’s direction hearing her clear her throat. Turning to look at her, he saw her pull out her wallet, extract a folded piece of paper and hand it to the Chief.

Cocking his brow, Bogo took what Judy offered to him and unfolded it. Looking at it a minute, he turned to Nick and handed it over. Nick accepted the page and was shocked to see that it was the application he had filled out three months ago. Handing it back to the Chief, he looked at Judy and asked, “You kept it?”
Judy gave him a small smile. “I wanted something to remind me of you. To remind me of my mistake at the press conference.” She didn’t tell him that she had also kept it hoping that, by some miracle, she would be able to fix things between them.

The Chief asked, “Mr. Wilde? Do you still want to apply?”

Nick looked at the Chief and nodded wordlessly. As he watched Chief Bogo sign the application, Nick felt something akin to pride swell in his chest. He was going to be a cop. He was going to be Judy’s partner. He was fulfilling his kithood dream of helping others. He suddenly felt something else swell in his chest as he realized that he had Judy to thank for that. Turning to look at her, he saw that she was smiling and his heart skipped a beat, something that was starting to happen more often whenever Judy was around.

The Chief cleared his throat to gain Nick’s attention. “You will be required to report to the Academy in five weeks.” Placing the application in his outgoing paperwork, he once again took on a serious expression. “Now, as for the worse news: After we arrested former Mayor Bellwether, we issued search warrants for her home and office. At both locations, we discovered a massive collection of evidence that has complicated matters to the nth degree.”

Both Nick and Judy felt a mixture of intrigue and dread. They simultaneously asked, “What sort of evidence?” Quickly glancing at each other with smiles on their faces at the occurrence, they listened carefully to the Chief as he elaborated.

“Among other things, we found paw-written letters written in code, encrypted emails from anonymous sources, phone records showing calls to and from burner cells, as well as bank statements showing money transfers from untraceable accounts.” The Chief decided to test them by asking, “Do you know what the obvious conclusion we have drawn from this is?”

Nick and Judy looked at each other. They both knew what this possibly meant. Judy gave Nick a subtle nod indicating that he should be the one to answer. Nick nodded back before returning his attention to Chief Bogo and stating, “That this is far from over. Everything you listed points to the fact that she was a low man on the totem pole. No doubt there are others she conspired with and they will soon attempt to finish what she started.”

Bogo nodded. “As it stands, we have no way of knowing who else is involved. The level of encryption on her laptop and emails is equivalent to those used by the Zootopian Security Agency. The coded letters also seem to be on the level of agents in the Counter-Intelligence Sector of the Mammalian Intelligence Bureau. As for the burner phones, we have no way of tracking them, but our Financial Department is currently trying to determine where the money transfers originated.”

As Bogo was speaking, Judy started to realize the severity of the situation. She spared a glance at Nick and saw that he seemed to be in deep thought. Deciding to inquire about his thoughts, she asked, “What are you thinking, Slick?”

Looking at Judy out of the corner of his eye, Nick replied, “What I’m thinking, Fluff, is that this level of organization reminds me of someone from my past. He often told me that there were dark places in this city, and even the world, where very few would venture.” Meeting the Chief’s gaze, Nick asked, “Do you mind if Officer Hopps stays with me for a while? It’s getting late and we need to rest if we are going to assist.”

Bogo had to restrain himself from smiling. “Why are you asking me? I may be her superior officer, but what she does on her own time is none of my concern.” He could tell that the fox cared for Officer Hopps, even if he didn’t know it himself yet. It was also clear to the Chief that Hopps had feelings for the fox, as revealed by the fact she had kept his application and that she had even stated
in her letter of resignation that without the help of her friend, she saw no point in continuing.

Judy felt blindsided by Nick’s statement. Sure, she was grateful that he willing to let her stay with him, but she really wasn’t pleased that he just assumed she would agree. Yes, she had told him she didn’t have anywhere to stay, but she hated the idea that he didn’t think she could care for herself. She went to tell them she was fine when a small pang in her leg reminded her that she was injured. She loathed to admit it, but with her leg as it was, she would need someone to help her, if only for a short time. ‘At least this way, I’ll get to be with Nick.’ Sucking up her pride, she said, “I don’t mind. If Nick is willing to let me stay with him until I’m recovered and can find a place, then I am more than grateful.”

Nick smiled at Judy’s words despite the pang in his chest at the use of the words ‘until I can find a place’. Despite his impeccable memory, he had difficulty recalling ever experiencing anything like it before, though he was beginning to have a slight suspicion as to what this feeling was. “That settles it then. Let’s go, Fluff.” Hopping down from the oversized chair they were sitting in, he helped Judy down and led her out of Bogo’s office, and the building. After exchanging a few words of farewell with Clawhauser, Nick decided to lead Judy to a small park a couple of blocks away. As they walked, Nick was still trying to place what this feeling he was having was, but was having a difficult time identifying it. ’I swear, I know what it is, but…’ Approaching the park, he asked Judy, “What do you think, Fluff? Knowing what we now know, how do you suggest we proceed?”

Judy had been lost in her own world, thinking about how glad she was that she and Nick were together again until Nick asked his question. She thought about her answer before saying, “Let’s just take it one step at a time for now. We still need to get you through the Academy and I need to fully recover before I’m allowed back to active duty. Not to mention we have things we need to discuss.”

Nodding, Nick responded. “I agree. We need to prepare ourselves as best we can. I also have things I think we should talk about, but right now we just need to rest.” Stopping, he scanned their surroundings until he saw one of the CCTV cameras. Taking Judy’s paw to lead her over to it, Nick felt a rush of emotion at the contact, but kept his face relaxed. The minute they were in range of the camera’s view, Nick quickly began to tap a pattern on his leg using a variation of binary, taps being one with pauses as zeros, using the claws of his free paw. Once he was done he took Judy to one of the park benches and had her sit down.

“What was all that for, Slick?” Judy asked. She wasn’t sure of what to make of Nick’s actions just then and was curious as to what he had done.

Nick shrugged and answered. “Remember that guy I was telling you and the Chief about?” When Judy nodded, Nick continued. “Well, I was actually talking about my dad. His past isn’t something he really talks about but he taught me some of the tricks he used back then. His late brother, Walter, was a hacktivist. He taught Ian, his only kit, everything he knew. I sent Ian a message that the two of us need a ride to my place using the CCTV camera. He’s never told me why, but he’s spliced into to system.”

Judy tilted her head and asked. “If your cousin is spliced into the system why didn’t we go to him while we were working the Missing Mammals case?” It made no sense to her that Nick hadn’t utilized this familial connection back then.

Nick gave Judy a sheepish smile. “I, um, I’m not really on speaking terms with my cousin at the moment, but since he has an alert out for anytime the name ‘Wilde’ pops up in the system, hopefully he will be notified of my application to the ZPA. I’m pretty certain that with what’s going on, the Chief will have scanned it into the system by now.” Indicating in the direction of the CCTV
camera, he stated, “Ian’ll know that something’s happening and that I’m involved. Then, he’s going to begin using a Muzzle Recognition Software he designed to search the last thirty minutes to an hour for me. He’ll see me tapping out a message requesting a favor for transportation to my place.” He really hoped his cousin didn’t ignore the notification once he saw his name. Judy was injured and he didn’t want her to make it worse by having to walk too much, since his place was a good distance from where they sat. Nick silently prayed Ian would see the message he sent and be willing to put aside their differences for now.

Judy gave Nick a look that said ‘You have got to be kidding’. Seeing Nick’s still smiling sheepishly, she let out a huff. After thirty minutes or so, she went to say something before her ear twitched at the sound of a vehicle approaching and turned to see it.

Nick noticed Judy’s movements and decided to see what had grabbed her attention and immediately blanched. “No, no, no, no, no. Damn it Ian, why did you tell him?” Nick whispered. Grabbing Judy’s shoulder, Nick told her “Stay behind me at all times, and whatever you say or do, do not under any circumstance make any sudden movements.”

Judy felt afraid at Nick’s words, but nodded, trusting him to keep her safe. When Nick left the bench, she immediately got behind him and stayed as close as she could. As they approached the vehicle she witnessed a pure black-furred fox with emerald green eyes exit it. The instant she saw the eyes she knew exactly who Nick’s cousin had sent to retrieve them: Nick’s father. ‘They have the same eyes. Exactly the same eyes.’ Judy thought as she glanced between the two. She curiously wondered why Nick didn’t share the same pitch-black fur as his father. ‘A question best left for another time, I suppose.’

Feeling Judy freeze next to him, Nick halted his advance without looking away from his father. He wrapped his tail around her waist protectively. Nick didn’t know what to expect of his father since they hadn’t seen each other in years. The one thing Nick knew was that he wouldn’t allow his father to hurt his mate no matter what. Nick’s mind ground to a halt. ‘Mate.’ he thought. ‘She’s my mate.’ He began to think back over everything: The sense of betrayal he felt at the conference, the lifelessness he felt when she had no longer been there, the unadulterated happiness upon her return, the maelstrom of emotion he had felt during their debrief back at the precinct, and the sense of wholeness with her wrapped in his tail now. He knew what that sensation he felt was. He had seen it before in old movies, read it in books, heard about it in music. He, Nicholas Piberius Wilde, was in love, in love with this bunny doe named Judy Hopps. The instant he realized that he had thought of Judy as his mate, Nick identified the source of the sensations he had been experiencing. He had fallen in love with Judy. He didn’t know when or how it happened, but it had. For the first time in his life, Nick found himself more determined than ever. He was going to woo Judy and have her fall in love with him too. Locking eyes with his father, Nick tightened his tail’s grip around Judy’s waist thinking, ‘I’m taking the first step to realizing a dream I didn’t even know I had, and I’m not going to let anything, not even my own father, stop me!’

<Meanwhile @ the ZPD>

Tobias Bogo had placed his head on his desk after the fox and bunny left his office. Letting out a long, droning groan, he sat up. Opening his drawer, he pulled out an old photograph. The picture was of him at his graduation from the ZPA. Standing next to him was another Buffalo that made even Bogo look tiny. The older Buffalo was wearing a full military uniform with a chest full of medals. Looking at the photo, Bogo said, “You were right you senile old codger. I should have listened to you, instead of telling you that you were crazy.” Glancing at the clock, he saw that it was past time to head home. He looked between the photo and the drawer. Two minutes later, Bogo closed and locked his office. The photo was now positioned next to his computer monitor beside the photo of him and his mother, right where it should have been from the very beginning.
On the furthest fringes of Zootopia

A lone mammal cloaked entirely in black looked out at the brilliantly lit city. Turning away, they walked into the woods behind him. As he continued further in, he was joined by more cloaked mammals. They all arrived at a large clearing in which a massive flattop stone rested in the center. Atop the stone, sat a highly unusual looking mammal dressed in a black loose-fitting tunic and robe. The lead mammal of the exodus march approached and stated, “Your Chancellorship, I regret to inform you that Dawn Bellwether has failed to accomplish her goal.”

The Chancellor didn’t turn to look at the speaker. He merely continued to look at the night sky. “No. She did exactly as I anticipated. You, however, failed.” As he spoke those words, the one who had spoken was grabbed by his comrades. “You were the one who gave your word that she would succeed. Her failure is your failure.” Snapping his fingers, he signaled those restraining the focus of his contempt to approach with the mammal. Once they were close enough, he gripped the poor unfortunate soul’s garb and hauled him close. “You will be punished accordingly.” Without hesitation, he lunged forward and ripped his victim's throat out, before beginning to devour him. Tossing aside the remains, he swallowed, saying, “All of you can go. Continue with your assigned duties. I’ll contact you when it’s time.”

The mass of black clad mammals dispersed leaving their Chancellor alone. None wanted to share the same fate as their former comrade. A single mammal stayed behind, waiting. After a substantial amount of time had passed, he said, “Your Chancellorship, I don’t mean to overstep my bounds, but if I may speak, I would like to inquire why you have yet to give me a mission.”

This time the Chancellor did turn to look at the speaker. “I have a need for you yet. Do not despair my loyal paw. Your time will come and is swiftly approaching. Patience is the key.” Waving a paw away, he added, “Go. When the time is upon us, I will call upon you to complete the task I have planned.” He watched as his follower bowed and took his leave. Laying back, he once more looked at the stars. “We’re just getting started. We’re merely taking the first steps.”

Chapter End Notes

Track list:
1. Exodus (Intro) by Aviators [Theme for Part One of this story]
2. East Wind by Donald Arnold & Michael Price [Start of Chapter & Debrief]
3. Remember, Remember by Dario Marianelli [Chapter End]
4. My Type by Saint Motel [Nick's Theme] - I see Nick as Mr. Right from the film of the same name
5. I Believe in You by Michael Buble [Judy's Theme] - I find that this song fits her well
6. Hood by Forest Swords [Nick's Father]
7. The Dark One [The Chancellor]

Bogo also has a theme, but I haven't found the sticky note yet.

An interesting yet probably pointless piece of trivia: On Native American totem poles, the lower you are to the bottom the more powerful and influential you were considered while the higher you were placed... You get the idea.
Chapter Two: All I Ask of You

Chapter Summary

Things are getting interesting. Wonder how it will go. FYI - Yes, i know i suck at summaries.

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in one day? Truth is my in-laws are coming to visit for a week late this morning. That means no time to write. Ch 3 will be out this coming Thursday. After that every 2 to 3 weeks on Thursdays.

This chapter was recently edited by Fairlane302! Thanks for your assistance, I really appreciate it!

Chapter Three will be up @ 7:45 8/31/17

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Two: All I Ask of You

Just before midnight - Precinct Park - Zootopia

Judy didn’t have a clue what was going to happen. The moment Nick had wrapped his tail around her she had felt safe and secure, but that didn’t stop her from worrying about what was coming. She remembered being frightened before. Chief Tobias Bogo was a very intimidating figure, but this? This was something different. Nick’s father almost seemed to be a spectral nightmare, fading in and out of the darkness around them. The only way she could notice him was by his eyes that reflected what little light was there.

Nick’s father began a slow approach after realizing that neither Nick or Judy had any further intention of coming closer. As he neared them, he saw that Nick’s tail was wrapped firmly around his companion and stopped no more, and no less, than five steps away. None of them spoke. Each waiting to see who would initiate the conversation. Surprisingly to both Nick’s father and Judy, the one who spoke first was Nick.

“I won’t apologize. I will admit that I didn’t make the right decision but I will not apologize. I’m sure Ian told you that I applied for the Police Academy and I will explain everything later. Right now, Judy and I need to rest, so if you don’t mind.” Nick said while jabbing a claw at his father’s vehicle. Nick’s tone showed that he was not willing to negotiate on this.

Gazing at his son for a moment, the black fox started to smile. Turning his attention to the bunny currently embraced by his son’s tail, he said, “Hello, Officer Hopps, allow me to introduce myself. I’m Jameson Wilde, Nick’s father. I humbly apologize if I’m frightening you, but old habits die hard. If you will, I will drive you home.” He began to walk back to his vehicle when he heard Nick ask “Who’s home? Mine or yours?”
Jameson stopped and turned to look at his son. “My home is your home, Nick.” Giving his son a devious smirk he added, “Besides, I’m not the one Ian called.” He watched as Nick’s eyes widened as the dawning realization hit him. Turning to his vehicle once more, Jameson climbed in and started it up.

Nick turned around to face Judy. “Do you mind if I carry you? We’ve walked quite a lot this evening. and I don’t want you to cause any more damage to your leg.”

Judy shook her head and replied, “Not at all, Slick.” Raising her arms so that Nick could pick her up she was surprised when he swept her off her feet bridal style and made his way to his father’s vehicle. She found herself enjoying how comfortable she was in his arms and began to cuddle as close as she could to his chest.

Once inside the vehicle, Nick looked at his father and asked, “What should I expect when we arrive?” The knowledge that Ian hadn’t called his father but his mother had Nick terrified. He heard his father chuckle and threw him a glare filled with annoyance.

Ignoring the look his son tossed him, Jameson told him, “You don’t need to worry. Your mum isn’t going to beat you over the head. She’s just really relieved you are alive.” Jameson shook his head. “You do know that Ian had a difficult time keeping tabs on you after you ran away from home, right? You should have heard his rant on how he never thought you would use what I taught you to avoid the family. After a week, he began to wonder if you had actually died and felt horrible because he thought he was responsible for your departure.”

Nick snorted. “I ran off because you, mom, and Ian were determined to get me to follow in one of your paths and I had no desire to do that. Ian never bothered to even talk to me except during those times he agreed to play videogames. Mom on the other paw kept trying to tell me that if I didn’t get my act together I would never meet a vixen who would be a potential mate.”

Jameson glanced at Nick out of the corner of his eye and responded, “Not that it matters now.” Seeing Nick tense, Jameson looked at the bunny in Nick’s lap and saw she had drifted off to sleep. “She doesn’t know, does she? That you love her, that is?”

Nick sighed. “Truth is I hadn’t even figured it out myself until the moment I saw you tonight.” Leaning his head on the headrest, Nick continued. “I don’t even know when it happened. I mean, I know when it happened but not the exact moment. It happened within the span of forty-eight hours, dad. During that time, we ended up saving each other’s lives, gaining each other’s trust, and so many other things.” Looking down at Judy curled up in his lap, Nick felt a sad smile stretch across his face. “I’m certain you saw the press conference she had three months ago. After her speech, we had an altercation, and I left. I couldn’t properly function after that. I tried to go to the precinct to talk to her but I couldn’t. I didn’t even know that she ended up resigning because of our argument. Those past three months were the hardest of my life and I only just now realized it was because I was pining.”

Jameson glanced once more at the bunny in Nick’s lap. He smiled as he realized something. “She’s the reason you’re becoming a cop, isn’t she?” With a silent chuckle, he continued before Nick could answer. “Remember what I told you when you were little? I said that when you meet your soulmate that you would begin to change yourself for them. You would walk away from your own desires just so you could make them happy. I’m not saying you have imprinted on her yet but you are pretty damn close to it.”

Nick listened as his father spoke. The moment his father finished, Nick whispered, “But I have.” He felt the car jostle a bit. “She is the center of my whole universe, dad. My anchor to reality. I can’t even see a future for myself where she isn’t there. It’s terrifying because even though I know this, I don’t know how to explain it to her, or if she’ll even accept me that way. I’m nearly positive
that I will die if I lose her.” Nick could feel tears forming in his eyes.

Jameson pulled over, parked the car, and turned to face his son. “Hey. Look at me.” He waited until Nick complied. “You will find a way to tell her when you are ready. Until then cherish the time you have together. Use it to court her and have her fall in love with you. I don’t know much about bunnies, but I’m almost certain that if she can sleep like that, then she has feelings for you too. She probably just doesn’t know the full extent of them yet.” Taking off again, he remained silent so Nick could think on his words.

Feeling better from his father’s encouragements, Nick nodded. “I can do that.” Looking down at Judy once more, Nick oh so gently used his thumb to caress her cheek, drawing out a small sigh and a smile from her. Smiling at her reaction, Nick swore to himself that he would get Judy to fall for him. Turning his attention to the window, he saw that they were almost to his parents’ house. “Nice to see this area hasn’t changed that much.”

Jameson chuckled. “Actually, you might be surprised. Your mom and I ended up cording off a bit of land for you if you ever came home. Ian wasn’t too happy once he learned that the amount of land we set aside for you is five times what his father left him.” If Jameson was honest about it, the reason Ian had so little land was due to his brother’s minimalist lifestyle.

Nick looked at his dad with wide eyes. “You can’t be serious! You and Mom’s place is three and a half times the size of Uncle Walter’s place. Why would you set aside a piece of land larger than your own home for me?”

Jameson said nothing as he continued to drive until they arrived at the entrance to the Wilde Estate’s driveway. “You’re going to have to ask your mother.” he stated as he keyed in the code to the gate. Once the gate opened, he continued to drive down the lane that lead to the manor. Jameson could hear Nick whispering softly, but was unable to make out what was said. A small part of him wondered if Nick was listing all the changes since he left home. Pulling up and shutting off the vehicle, Jameson turned to face his son and said, “She’s the one who decided, not me. Your mother set it aside because she wanted you to have a place to build a den for your mate when the time was right.”

Nick let out a breath. “Of course she did.” Looking at the house, Nick began to recall his kithood memories. With a tiny bit of apprehension, he couldn’t help but ask, “How do you think Mom will take it? Do you think she’ll approve of my decision to court Judy?” If there was one mammal that scared Nick more than any other, it was his mother. He hadn’t always been on good terms with his father, but his relationship with his mother had always been turbulent, to say the least. He honestly didn’t care what his mother thought of his decision to court Judy, it was his decision and if she didn’t like it, then she could burn in hell.

Jameson looked out at his house in thought. Without looking at his son, he stated, “I think she will. After you ran off, your mom started to rethink her parenting style. I wouldn’t worry too much about it. As long as you are happy she will be too.” Unlocking the doors, he exited the vehicle and made his way to the house.

Nick sat there a minute looking at Judy. Sighing, he began to shake her softly and whispered, “Hey. Fluff. We’re here. You need to wake up now or do you want me to carry you again?”

Judy began to stir at Nick’s gentle shakes. Blinking the sleep from her eyes, she looked at Nick before looking outside. Her eyes widened as she took in the massive structure before her. She felt the sleep wash away being replaced by shock. She spun around to look at the surrounding area. With the aid of the bright lights from the open drapes, she was amazed to only see vast open scenery,
a few smaller buildings including greenhouses, and a large lake. Whirling her head around to look at Nick, she exclaimed, “Your parents live here?”

Snickering at Judy’s reaction, Nick nodded. “Yeah. When I was a kit, I used to ask how we could afford this place and my parents would tell me that Dad’s old job just paid well. He never went into detail but I could tell he was doing it for the safety of Mom and I.” Opening the door, Nick got out and then helped Judy down. “Come on, Fluff. There is still one more mammal we need to see.” He took her paw and led her to the house.

Judy could feel her heart beat faster every time Nick held her paw. She had heard her sisters say that when they held paws with their significant others, their hearts would accelerate. She glanced up at Nick. She had quite honestly found him to be exceptionally attractive ever since the Missing Mammals case. Having never been in love before, Judy wondered if that was the reason for these sensations she was experiencing. She did love him, that she knew for sure, but was she in love with him? A small part of her insisted that she was. If it was love, then was it possible Nick loved her too? Judy pushed the thought aside. There was no way that Nick saw her in that light. She wasn’t anything special. Growing up, when all her sisters had dates every other night, she would sit alone in her room, dreaming of one day finding someone. When she turned twenty, she realized that she would never find anyone who would want her and just focused on becoming a cop. She decided that she was fine with just being Nick’s friend and when he met the vixen of his dreams she would help him win her heart.

Judy followed Nick up to the house and blinked when he held the door open for her. With a shy smile, she entered the house and found herself in awe of the entryway of the house. The room was enormous, complete with warm, earthy tones, a grand, winding stairwell leading to the second (and third) floors. The floors were tiled in an elaborate design. The walls were lined with paintings and photographs from different time periods. Antiquities were strategically placed throughout the room. The entire room was illuminated by a huge crystal chandelier. Judy just stood frozen at the sight.

Closing the door behind them, Nick placed an arm around Judy and stood there waiting for the inevitable. They didn’t have to wait long as his dad came back, followed by a middle-aged vixen with the same fur pattern as Nick, but with chocolate brown eyes. Tightening his grip on Judy, he said, “Hello, Mom. It has been a while.”

Judy looked at the vixen that had approached them. She had to admit that Nick’s mother was beautiful. Judy thought that if she were a fox herself she would want to look like Nick’s mother. She saw Nick’s mother stop a few paces away almost as if she was afraid to get close. Judy watched as the vixen brought her paws together and wrung them. She could tell that Nick’s mother was nervous, but didn’t understand why.

Nick’s mother took a deep breath and let it out slowly. With a nervous smile, she said, “Yes, Yes, it has.” Swallowing, she took a half-step forward only to stop as she saw Nick’s eyes narrow. Taking the half-step back to her original position, Nick’s mother said, “Sorry. It’s just…I really don’t know what to say. I’ve imagined this scenario so many times and now that it’s actually happening I have no idea how to proceed.” Sighing, she looked at Judy and gave her a shy smile. “Hello, you must be Judy. Jameson’s told me you are the one who convinced my son to become a cop. My name is Vanessa Aurora Wilde, but you can call me Rory.”

Judy gave Nick’s mother a shy smile of her own. “Hello, Mrs. Wi—I mean Rory.” Judy bowed a little to show her respect. When she straightened up again, she was surprised to see Rory’s eyes wide, she looked at Nick and Jameson to see that their eyes were wide as well. “Did I do something wrong?” She was worried that she had somehow offended them.
Nick however shook his head and answered, “No, Fluff. You just surprised us will your mannerisms. Foxes are a bit old fashioned but we didn’t expect you to share those mannerisms.” Moving to stand directly behind Judy, Nick brought his paws around her stomach and held her tight. “Another thing you should know is that, normally, foxes only bow to the parents of the ones they intend to court.”

Judy’s eyes widened before she lowered her ears to cover them. “Oh, sweet cheese and crackers. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to give you that impression. I just acted out of habit.” Judy felt so embarrassed. Yes, she had started to realize that her feelings for Nick ran deeper than just normal love, but she didn’t want to hurt his chances at finding a vixen and now she had just given his parents the impression that she intended to court him. She was on the verge of tears when she heard a small chuckle coming from somewhere in front of her. Peeking out from behind her ears, she was just in time to see Nick’s mother burst out laughing and Jameson clench his right paw into a fist and press it to his muzzle which was turned up in a smile. “W-what?”

Nick turned Judy around and knelt before her. Carefully taking her face in his paws, he gave her a soft smile. “Ignore her, Fluff. My mother wasn’t expecting you to freak out over something like that. You didn’t know the significance of the gesture.” Seeing Judy begin to tear up, he turned to his mother. “SHUT UP ALREADY!! SHE’S EMBARRASSED ENOUGH AND YOU’RE NOT HELPING!!”

Vanessa immediately stopped laughing as her son yelled at her. Taking a couple of steps back, she raised her paws in a gesture of surrender. “I’m terribly sorry. I didn’t mean to cause you further embarrassment. I was just caught off guard and your reaction to learning what it meant was just too precious.”

Deciding to step in before things escalated, Jameson stated, “It’s late and the two of them need to rest. Nick if you would be kind enough to take Judy to the spare bedroom across the hall from yours, we’ll all turn in for the night and tomorrow we can discuss things.” Looking at his wife, he added “You and I also need to have a conversation in private.” He indicated for Vanessa to head to the sitting room and as she left, he focused his attention on Judy. “I suggest you text your parents and tell them you are alright. Do not call them. You need rest and once we have breakfast we can contact them.”

“Thank you, Mr. Wilde. I appreciate your generosity.” Judy replied. She felt Nick take hold of her paw again and fought to hold back a blush. She let Nick lead her up to the second floor and followed him to one of the doors along the wall. Looking at Nick, she said, “Is this it?”

Nick looked at the door before them. Glancing behind him, he saw the door to his old room. Focusing on Judy, he said, “Come with me for a bit.” Tugging on her arm to get her to follow him, he led her to a small room at the end of the hall. Ushering her inside, he pulled Judy in for a hug.

Momentarily caught off guard by Nick’s sudden embrace, she returned the hug. “You alright, Slick? You’re not behaving like yourself.” She was concerned because in all the time she had known him he never once acted like this.

Nick sighed gently. “Yeah. It’s just…you are special to me, Carrots. You’re the first mammal to truly trust me. Not only that, you want me to be your partner. I don’t know how to show you how grateful I am for that.” Releasing her, he looked at her in the eyes. “I’m going to do my best to repay you, Fluff. I’ll show you that I can be who you need.” Nick worded that last part carefully so that it could mean both as her partner, friend, and hopefully potential mate.

Judy had a sense that Nick’s words meant more than how they sounded. She hated a small part of herself for what she was about to do, but it was necessary. Giving Nick a small smile, she
said, “I need you to be happy, Nick. That is all I ask of you. I’ll always be your friend, no matter what. We may fight and will probably have days where we hate each other but I’ll never abandon you. When the day comes that you find the one of your dreams I’ll help you win her heart. So, promise me you’ll do whatever makes you happy, alright.”

Nick felt his heart clench. He wanted to tell her that she was the one whose heart he wanted to capture. She stood there before him saying all that, not knowing that she was the source of his happiness. He wondered if she thought that he couldn’t love her. Nick was forced to hold himself back from kissing her, so instead, he drew her back into another hug. “I promise, Judy. I promise you that I will do whatever I need to in order to be happy.”

Nodding into Nick’s shoulder, Judy told him, “That’s all I ask of you, Nick.” It broke her heart that she couldn’t tell him how important he was to her. She wasn’t going to be the reason he was unhappy though. Drawing back from the hug, she said, “Alright, Slick, we need to go to sleep. We have a busy day tomorrow and lots of things to do.”

Nick nodded and led her back to the room across from his. Opening the door, he let her enter so she could look around. “This spare bedroom used to be my media room, as if you couldn’t tell by the huge collection of music, DVDs, videogames, and books.” The bed in one of the corners was appropriately sized for a mammal Nick’s size. There was also a piano in another corner and a guitar on a stand next to it. On the walls were posters for various bands and movies. He watched as Judy approached the piano.

Standing before the piano, Judy pressed a few keys. Seeing that it was well maintained and tuned, she pulled up the bench and began to play ‘Crime of Passion’. She didn’t hear as Nick came up behind her. Too focused on playing the song, Judy didn’t notice Nick gazing at her in wonder. Finishing the song, Judy released a sigh. Feeling a paw on her shoulder she looked over and saw Nick. He had an expression of wonder on his face. Feeling a little shy, she looked away.

Nick looked at Judy for a bit before turning his attention to the piano. He hadn’t played since he ran away from home at the age of seventeen. With another quick glance at Judy, Nick began to play himself. The song Nick chose to play came from an old film titled ‘The Legend of 1900’ called ‘Playing Love’. He didn’t know if Judy had ever seen the movie but he hoped that she would understand what he was trying to convey to her through the song. Turning his head to face her as he continued playing, he smiled seeing her entranced expression. As he finished the song, Nick put his arm around Judy and pulled her into another tight hug. Letting her go, he smiled, and as he exited the room he said. “I’ll see you in the morning, Fluff”.

Judy watched as Nick closed the door. Still reeling from the fact that Nick had played for her, she made her way to the bed. As she laid in the bed, she stared at the ceiling, lost in thought. She finally realized that she might indeed be in love with Nick, and it appeared that he cared deeply about her. She shook her head. She wouldn’t let Nick waste his chance at happiness on her. He deserved to find a lovely vixen that he could bring home to his mother, start a family with, and who could give him kits. Feeling her heart break, she began to cry herself to sleep quietly.

Nick entered his own room and looked around. He noticed it had been left unchanged since the day he left. Looking at the door of Judy’s room, he closed the door of his and began to go around pulling out all his old adult magazines like Pelthouse, Knauthy Vixens, and Badass Bitches. Throwing them all into a trash bag, he started looking for all the porn videos he had hidden. Once he found the last of his old porn, Nick dragged the bag to the fireplace in the main room and tossed it in. He heard someone clear their throat behind him and turned to see his dad.

Jameson looked at his son then to what Nick had thrown into the fireplace. “I always assumed
that you had a porn stash hidden in your room but I never bothered to check.” Taking a seat next to Nick, Jameson asked, “Is that all of it or is there more around the house?”

Nick smirked. “Oh, let’s see. There’s the magazines in your study, the videos hidden in the false back of the video cabinet, and let us not forget the erotic novels hidden throughout the library.” Looking at his father with a side-glance, he chuckled at his father’s annoyed expression.

Jameson huffed. “I’ll have you know that I have never needed that shit.” He knew his son was pulling his leg. Jameson remembered telling Nick as a teenager that porn was a horrible addiction. The first time he had found Nick with an adult magazine, he had wanted to lecture him only for Nick to ask why people bought such unrealistic crap. He and Nick had then ended up discussing the subject for a while. It was at that time they had discovered that Nick was asexual. That had been a long, awkward conversation between them. Jameson still couldn’t believe how they reached that conclusion, but he had no intention of doing it again.

Nick’s smirk became devious. “Who said I was talking about yours?” Nick busted out laughing as his father looked at him with wide eyes. “Oh, that is too hilarious.” Calming down, Nick stated. “No, there isn’t any more in the house. If there is it isn’t mine.”

Nick and Jameson sat there watching the fire destroy all the evidence of porn. Jameson found himself wondering if Nick ever engaged in the act. “Have you ever had sex, Nick?” He saw that Nick didn’t even jump at the question, but a smile did spread across his son’s face.

“Nope. I’ve never met someone who made me feel that way until Judy came along and hopped into my life.” Nick stated. “An acquaintance of mine though, he used to sleep with a different vixen every night. One time he brought a vixen over who asked if I wanted to join them. I declined which caused him to ask if I wanted to watch. I agreed if only to not have him bug me about why.”

Jameson hummed. “What happened next? Did your acquaintance bother about it later or did he drop the subject?” He was curious to know if Nick had to reveal his asexuality.

Nick looked up and stated, “He didn’t necessarily question me about it, but he did want to know if I was gay. I told him that my type just didn’t happen to be vixens and he let it go.” He had to smile as he remembered Fin just cocking an eyebrow and shrugging when he didn’t elaborate further.

Chuckling, Jameson asked, “How do you think he will react when he hears you are attracted to bunnies?” Jameson was trying to tease his son but the look on Nick’s face caused his chuckle to die in his throat. He had never seen his son with such a serious expression.

“I’m not attracted to bunnies. I’m attracted to Judy and only to Judy. I’ve dealt with a pawful of lapines before and I never once felt anything for them.” Nick stated adamantly. No other mammal had ever gotten him to feel the way he felt about Judy and he knew that there was no chance of finding anyone else who could. Noticing that the fire had finally burned the last of the porn, Nick got to his feet went to leave the room. “Goodnight, Dad”

Jameson watched Nick as he left the room. Rising to his feet, Jameson headed to the master bedroom. Standing before the door to he and Vanessa’s room, Jameson closed his eyes and whispered, “All I ask of you, is that my son finds happiness.” He then entered the master bedroom and went to sleep.

Chapter End Notes
Track listing:
1. Nevermore by Nox Arcana [Judy's view of Jameson]
2. Rainy Song by Tomoya Naka [The Car Ride]
3. Cuzco by E.S. Posthumus [The Entryway of Wilde Manor]
4. Bloodlines by Austin Wintory [Vanessa Aurora 'Rory' Wilde's Theme]
5. Crime of Passion by Kurt Kuenne
6. Playing Love by Ennio Morricone [From the Legend of 1900 - piano version]
7. I am Yours by Really Slow Motion [1st love theme]
8. The Name of Life by Lucas King (From Spirited Away) [Chapter End]

Also, I want to say that when i being the massive revision and editing movement, I will be using all comments from every chapter as guides on how to better improve this story. That being said, PLEASE COMMENT AND REVIEW!!! and don't forget that those who manage to figure out the Easter Eggs can win an award.
Chapter Three: Feelings and Heart to Hearts

Chapter Summary

Epiphanies and dawning realizations take place. Nick learns of a few more past demons Judy possesses. Judy learns some rather important aspects of vulpine nature.

If someone thinks of a better summary let me know. I'm so bad at these.

Chapter Notes

Unfortunately, this chapter has no track listing. I'm sure that somebody could probably generate one, though. This chapter was written after having dinner with my wife after we dropped our kids off at my folks place. My wife and I ended up actually making notes together on this.

Also, please grant a round of applause for Fairlane302! He assisted me with editing and revising Chapters 1, 2, and 3! Thanks again for the assistance!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Three: Feelings and Heart to Hearts

Wilde Manor - Wilde Family Estate - Zootopia

Judy woke with a gasp. She sat up and began to take deep breaths in an attempt to slow her heart down. The dream she had had was so real that she could still remember the sensations she had experienced. In her dream, she and Nick were snuggling together on a large bed. Dream Nick had started to nuzzle her cheek affectionately before kissing it. She reciprocated the gesture, only Dream Nick had turned his head just in time to capture her lips with his own. The kiss turned into two, and then more immediately followed. The intensity of their kisses grew until they began to roll around, tearing each other’s clothes off. Dream Nick eventually broke off the kisses and began to lick and suckle her neck, causing Judy to feel a fire flare up in her loins. She had instinctively opened her legs and felt as Nick slowly penetrated her, causing a wave of pleasure to overtake her. Nick’s ministrations had been gentle and loving, causing her to writhe in ecstasy. As she felt herself reaching her limit, Dream Nick whispered to her, “I love you” which caused her to climat. The strength of her climax had awoken her. Lifting the covers, she saw that she had an actual release from the dream. For Judy, this meant two things. One: though she already knew that she loved him, now she was certain that she was irrevocably in love with Nick. Two: she was experiencing her first heat.

Meanwhile, Nick was laying on his bed gasping from an erotic dream of his own. He stared at the ceiling of his room, trying desperately to get his breathing under control. Covering his eyes with a paw, Nick groaned. He had heard of erotic dreams but he had never experienced one himself, until now. Sighing, Nick looked down at himself and what he saw caused the remainders of sleep to quickly dissipate. For the first time in his life, Nick had a boner. He just stared at it and felt a smile manifest on his face. Chuckling, Nick told himself, “Well, Nick old buddy, if you needed any
further proof to show you she’s the one that right there is it.” He tentatively reached for his erect cock with his paw and gently began to stroke it. Closing his eyes, Nick imagined that Judy was there watching him with a mischievous smile on her face. He could hear her telling him things like ‘Good Boy, Nick’, ‘That’s it Nick let me see you cum’, or ‘Mm, I wonder how that will feel inside my hot, wet pussy’. He could hear her asking him ‘Are you enjoying yourself?’, ‘Would you like to eat me out or just ram your dick in me?’ or ‘Want me to be your bitch, pup?’. The moment he thought the last one, Nick felt himself reach his limit and quickly squeezed his knot. He fought back the urge to let out a mating cry at the intensity of his release. He shot rope after rope of thick cum all over his chest and face. Once he finally finished, he laid there heaving, before rolling out of bed and going to his private bathroom. Jumping in the shower, Nick quickly washed off his seed, before hopping out and thoroughly grooming himself. Stepping out, he ran to his closet and chose a nice t-shirt and pants. Dressing as fast as he could, Nick opened the door of his room just in time to see Judy exiting her own.

Judy and Nick looked at each other, both being unprepared for the occurrence. Nick decided to speak first, “Morning, Fluff!” Nick was entirely caught off guard by Judy’s reaction, which was to slam the door of her room and lock it. Cautiously approaching her door, Nick called out, “Carrots? You alright?” Not receiving an answer, he placed his paw on the door and spoke softly, “Judy? Judy, please talk to me. Did I do something?” He waited patiently for Judy’s answer. After a minute, he started to worry until he heard Judy answer his question.

“No, Nick. You didn’t do anything. I wish I could tell you what’s wrong, but I can’t.” Judy was on the verge of tears. She couldn’t tell him that she loved him, couldn’t let him know that he had caused her to go into heat, and it was heartbreaking. She had told herself last night, over and over, that she was fine with just being his friend and that when he met the vixen of his dreams, she would help him win her heart. The only problem with that plan was that bunnies could die from a broken heart. Judy took a deep, shaky breath. Through the door, she told Nick, “Don’t worry, Slick. It’s just that it’s a personal matter. I’ll take care of it.” She hoped her voice was light. She didn’t want him to worry.

Nick, however, could hear the pain in her voice and it made his chest hurt. He had hoped last night when he played for her that she would understand. That’s when a thought came to him, ‘Maybe she does. But maybe…maybe she thinks that she isn’t good enough. Or she thinks that I would be happier with a vixen.’ Nick sighed softly, ‘I need to make her understand that there could never be anyone else for me. That she is the one.’ Nick felt a level of determination unlike ever before, ‘Slowly. I have to do this slowly. Show her. After all, actions speak louder than words, right? I just need to figure out how.’ Nick started formulating a plan. Stepping away from Judy’s door, Nick called out “I’ll make us some breakfast, Fluff. Once I have it ready, I’ll bring it up here for you.” Nick all but ran down the stairs and towards the kitchen. When he entered, he saw his parents sitting at the counter, but he was too focused on his goal to acknowledge their presence.

Jameson and Vanessa watched as Nick began scouring through the cabinets. Looking at each other, Vanessa stood and walked to her son. She had never once seen him act this way. He looked so focused and it made her wonder what was on his mind. Reaching to place a paw on his shoulder, she missed as Nick turned in the direction of the refrigerator. Looking back to Jameson, who was currently watching Nick with interest, she decided to speak. “Nick, dear? Do you think you can tell us what you are up to?”

Nick didn’t bother turning around as he answered his mother’s question. “I’m trying to find out what I can make Judy for breakfast. Do we have any potatoes?” Nick didn’t possess a great deal of cooking skills, but on the occasions when he could afford it, he would buy potatoes to make hash browns. Nick hoped that Judy would like his hash browns since it was one of the few vegetarian dishes he could make. Being an omnivore himself, Nick was capable of eating meat, but he chose to
refrain on the account that he preferred tofu. Becoming frustrated that he couldn’t find any potatoes, Nick spun around to look at his mother only to see her coming out of the walk-in pantry with a bowl of different types of potatoes. Walking over, he grabbed regular, purple, and sweet potatoes and pulled a pan from under the sink to cook with before proceeding to prepare the potatoes and make the hash browns.

Jameson got up from the table and made his way to the refrigerator. Pulling out an assortment of fruits and vegetables, he set them on the countertop near the stove and said, “Use these to make her some juice.” The only reaction he got from Nick was a small nod. Curiosity getting the best of him, Jameson left Nick to his devices, and made his way upstairs to Judy’s room before knocking on the door. Hearing Judy ask who it was, he answered, “It’s Jameson. May I come in?” He was caught off guard when the door opened to reveal his son’s bunny looking haggard. Worried by her appearance, he went to speak, only for Judy to cut him off.

“This is your house, Mr. Wilde. You don’t need my permission to enter.” Judy stated with a rough voice. She had been trying to pull herself together for the past fifteen minutes so that she could join Nick in the kitchen, not wanting Nick to have to bother bringing her food upstairs. She was caught off guard as Jameson gently pushed her back and stepped inside the room, closing the door behind him. When he turned back around to face her, Judy didn’t know what to expect.

Jameson pointed to the bed and said, “Judy, you need to sit down. You look like you are about to pass out.” When Judy didn’t move, he sighed. “Judy, please sit down and tell me why you look so disheveled.” Once he saw Judy make her way over to the bed, Jameson grabbed the stool that was near the guitar stand and moved it next to the bed. He waited to see if Judy would speak first but after a minute of silence he realized that she wasn’t going to initiate the conversation. In a soft, gentle and fatherly voice, Jameson said, “Judy, whatever it is, you can tell me. I can keep a secret. Hell, there are things about me that Rory still doesn’t know and I have no intention of letting her find out. If this is about Nick then I assure you whatever you tell me will not reach his ears.”

Judy was conflicted. She didn’t feel comfortable telling him, but at the same time she knew she needed to tell someone if only to ease the strain on her emotions. Sighing in submission, she complied, stating, “I’m in love with your son.” Looking at Jameson to see his reaction, she saw that he had assumed Nick’s ‘Never let them see they get to you’ mask. When Jameson remained silent, Judy continued, “I love him immensely, but there is no way he could be in love with me. Even if he is, how could he possibly be happy with me. I mean, the chances of us having kits is infinitesimal as best. I’m sure you and Mrs. Wilde expect him to have kits someday. Nick deserves to find a vixen that can give him everything he could ever want: love, kits, a family, a future. I…I can’t really give him anything except love, and a job isn’t a future.” Judy was crying heavily now. Her heart was beating too hard and too fast. She was starting to convulse.

Jameson began to move the instant he saw her beginning to twitch. He grabbed her and pulled her into a strong hug. “Judy, you need to calm down. Take a deep breath and slowly let it go.” He heard her do as he ordered. “Do it again, Judy. Repeat the process over and over.” He stayed there holding her until she relaxed in his arms. Once he was sure Judy had regained her composure, Jameson placed her back on the bed and spoke. “Judy, can I confess something to you?” He saw her give a small nod. “You are not allowed to repeat these words. Ever. If you do, I can promise you it will not be pleasant for either of us.” He looked her in the eyes. “Foxes mate for life. Now, I don’t know a lot about bunnies but I do know that they mate for life as well. An old jackrabbit associate of mine did tell me a few things after all. For foxes though, it is a little more complicated. Foxes believe in soulmates. Now, many misconstrue how foxes use the term, so let me explain. For a fox to find their soulmate is rare, but the signs are often clear. Once a fox finds his or her soulmate, that’s it. They become eternally bonded. To them, the other becomes the epicenter of their whole universe. They become whoever or whatever their soulmate needs them to be without even realizing. Be it a
friend, a lover, anything.”

Judy felt her eyes widen and heart beat faster at Jameson’s words. She started to think about previous encounters with Nick. Thinking over what Jameson told her she identified how Nick had subtly begun to change during their time together. But a part of her refused to believe that she was Nick’s soulmate. “It isn’t possible. I’m a bunny.”

As she spoke the words, Jameson grit his teeth. Finally fed up, he said in a harsh, no-nonsense tone, “You are dying!” The words had the impact he wanted as Judy tensed. Standing, Jameson looked at her, hating himself for what he was about to say. “You are killing yourself by denying your own feelings. My son is currently worried out of his mind because he doesn’t know what is wrong with you. He is cooking for you hoping that he can show you how much he loves you. Truth be told, he probably knows that you are trying to force him away. He is doing everything he can to be who and what you need him to be right now. You are it.” He watched her intently, trying to gauge how much further he had to push. The small shift in body language she made showed him what he needed. In a voice just above a whisper, but so powerful it might as well have been spoken by a king, Jameson said, “Judy. He won’t ever find anyone else. He knows that he will have to go your pace, but nothing you say or do will drive him away. You two will still have disagreements, still require moments where you will want some time to yourselves, and you’ll both still wonder why the other continues to put up with you, but that is how life goes. Over time you will be able to know what the other is thinking, feeling, and even what the other is going to do, before they do it and be right where they need you to be.” Taking her face in his paws the way he used to take Nick’s when he was a kit, he finished with the words, “I don’t expect you to believe or trust me, but if you really, truly, want Nick to be happy then you need to stop this. You are what makes him happy.”

Judy began to cry. She cried hard. Harder than she had ever cried in her life. There was a knock on the door and Judy stopped crying long enough to ask, “Y-yes?” She knew who it was without even having to ask. There was only one mammal it could be. Hearing Nick state it was him, she began to get up to open the door only for Jameson to stop her. She watched as Jameson went to the door and open it just enough for him to slip out then close it behind him. She started to wonder what they were talking about but forced herself to try and calm down so that when Nick came in they could talk.

Nick was surprised when his father slipped out of Judy’s room. “Uh, what is going on? Why can I hear Judy crying? What the hell did you do?” With each question Nick got more enraged. He wanted to swipe at his father with his claws but due to the fact he was carrying the tray of food he had prepared for Judy, he couldn’t. He settled on giving his father a death glare that, to his surprise, caused his father to flinch and take a half-step back.

Jameson put his paws up in the universal signal for surrender. “I can’t tell you.” Jameson nearly collapsed under the weight of his son’s glare as it intensified. Hoping to pacify his son, he elaborated, “It’s not that I don’t want to, but I can’t because it isn’t my place. It’s Judy’s.” Feeling the weight of his son’s gaze lessen, he continued, “It will take some time but she will tell you when she is ready.” Seeing his son relax, Jameson sighed. Turning to head back downstairs, he stopped to say one last thing, “She may be impervious to many things, Nick. But she isn’t as strong as she thinks she is. I have a feeling that she has some past demons she will need to face eventually and when that time comes, she’ll need you more than ever.” Glancing over his shoulder at Nick, Jameson finished with, “She’s damaged Nick. She doesn’t need you to fix her. She needs you to restore her.” With that bit of advice, Jameson left, adding “I’ll get her parents’ contact info from Chief Tobias so I can set up a video conference with them. I’m sure they’re worried.”

Nick watched as his father left, wondering what exactly he meant. Facing Judy’s door again,
he knocked once more hoping that she would let him in. He didn’t have to wait long until the door opened to reveal to him a sight that broke his heart. The bunny before him looked like death brought to life. There were bags under her bloodshot eyes, her ears were drooping and, last but not least, there were tear tracks in her cheek fur. With a voice full of sadness, Nick said, “Oh, Carrots.” Judy stepped aside so that he could enter. Walking over to the small desk, Nick placed the tray of food down and made his way back to her. Kneeling before her, he took her face in his paws. Looking at her, Nick couldn’t understand what had put her in such a state. With a tender, loving voice, Nick said, “Judy, talk to me. I hate seeing you like this. Please, tell me what’s bothering you so that I can help.”

Judy placed her paws over Nick’s. Closing her eyes, she began to sniffle. In a voice so weak Nick could barely hear her, she told him, “Hold me.” She immediately felt Nick embrace her. Unable to stop herself, she began to cry into his shoulder. She heard Nick tell her that it was alright, that everything was going to be fine, that he was here with and for her. She just continued to cry in Nick’s arms and she was thankful that he never once loosened his grip on her. She had no idea how long she ended up crying, but once she was finished, she felt Nick pick her up and set her on the bed. Once she was settled, she watched as he took the tray from the small desk and placed it before her. She was honestly amazed by the food he had made for her. Before her Nick presented mixed potato hashbrowns, honey and brown sugar glazed carrots, turnip chips, and a glass of a veggie-fruit blend juice. Gingerly taking one of the carrots, she slowly took a bite. Letting out a contented sigh, she began to eat in earnest.

Nick didn’t say a word the entire time Judy was eating. He just watched her with a smile on his face. He still wanted to know why Judy looked so awful, but he could wait until she was ready. As Judy finished the last of the food, Nick took the tray away and placed it on the floor next to the bed. Taking a seat next to her, Nick pulled her into his lap. He wanted to say something, but he knew that Judy needed to be the one to start the conversation. He waited, not wanting to force her into telling him. Luckily, he only had to wait for a short amount of time.

“I’m sorry, Nick.” Judy told him. “I… I am having a hard time dealing with my emotions right now.” While Nick and his father had been talking, she had been deciding whether or not to do as Jameson had told her. She finally chose to take Jameson’s advice, but she hoped that Nick would understand her reluctance to reveal everything at once. “Nick, I-I think I’m in love with you, but I’m struggling with conflicting emotions. I want to be with you, but at the same time I don’t see how you could possibly be happy with me. I-I mean you could find a vixen and have a family with kits. I can’t give you that. You deserve that. I…” She let out a broken laugh. “…I-I’m nothing special. Growing up…my brothers and sisters would have dates every night or every other night. I-I’m the e-eldest a-and I’ve n-never even had anyone t-take a-any in-interest in m-me.” She had started crying, but she forced herself to keep going, knowing that she needed to tell him everything and that he needed to hear this. “N-not only that b-but I-I’m twenty-four and I’ve never even gone into h-heat.” Chuckling sadly, she added, “W-well, u-until last n-night an-anyway.”

Nick just sat there listening carefully to every word Judy spoke. He felt his heart shatter as she told him all this. He started to understand what his dad had meant when he said that she was damaged and that she wasn’t as strong as she thought she was. The knowledge that she had never had anyone interested in her before caused him to feel a mixture of emotions: shock, happiness, anger, and hate. He could see that the lack of interest bucks had shown her had caused her to see herself as either hideous or not even worth the consideration. The unadulterated fury he felt towards all those goddamn morons made him want to hunt them down and torture them so that they could have an idea of what they put her through. He also found the thought of finding a vixen repulsive enough that he wanted to hurl. The thing that shocked him the most however was the fact that before last night she had never gone into heat. He had known that felines went into heat, but learning that bunnies did as well was a surprise. Nick wanted to say something but didn’t want to stop Judy
because he was afraid that if he did she would shut him out, so he stayed silent.

Judy was curious about what Nick was thinking, but was scared that if she didn’t continue that she wouldn’t be able to later. “As I said, I think I’ve fallen in love with you and I-I hope that you can fall for me too. I-It’s going to be hard, but if you are willing to try, do…” She gulped thickly. “…do you think that you are willing to…?” She stopped as she felt something unexpected.

Hearing Judy struggle to ask him if he was willing to try to fall for her, Nick realized that he had to be patient with her and take all this at her pace so that she could accept that he was in love with her too. In response to her question, he laid a soft, tender loving kiss to the top of her head. Drawing his lips away just enough to whisper into one of her ears, he said, “I’m more than willing, Judy. I’ll wait as long as I need to and will take this as slow as you need. I know that you don’t see it, but you are absolutely gorgeous. At least to me you are. We will work together, OK? I’ll be there wherever, whenever, and however you need me. I have no intention of ever abandoning you. There is no force in existence that could cause me to do that.”

Chuckling weakly, Judy asked, “What about my parents? They work with a fox now, but that is quite different from having one date their eldest daughter. Not to mention that if they do have an issue with it, then they’ll probably end up trying to drive a wedge between us. There is also the possibility that they will try and convince me that it is impossible for mammals to fall in love with a mammal outside of their own species especially in a predator/prey interspecies relationship.”

Nick answered instantly, “Doesn’t matter. As I said, there is no force in existence that can make me to abandon you. Your parents may not accept it, but I don’t care. If they disown you, heaven forbid, then mine will take you in until I can get our den fully constructed. You are going to live with them while I’m at the Police Academy anyway.” He had spoken to his mother about it while he had been cooking Judy’s breakfast. He had expected his mother to start berating him, telling him exactly what Judy probably thought her parents might tell her. He hadn’t imagined that his mom would begin to literally jump for joy but she did. She had also told him that she and his dad would care for her while he was at the Academy. He had been so stunned that he had almost burnt the last bit of hash browns he had been cooking.

Judy felt her eyes welling up again. Tightening her grip on Nick, she whispered, “Thank you.” She still couldn’t understand why Nick was destined to be with her. Jameson’s words came back to her and she started to understand the meaning hidden behind them. Nick’s entire life was slowly shifting and she was the cause. No matter how hard she tried, it would be absolutely impossible to reverse. He was hers in every way. It would take her some time to get used to that fact as well as accept that he was here to stay. She knew she was damaged, but finding out that Nick didn’t care and was willing to help her heal was more than anything she could have hoped for. Finally calming down, Judy asked, “So…does this mean we’re a couple?”

Nick was quiet for but a moment before answering. “Something like that. I think you and I both know that you aren’t ready for a relationship. So here is what we are going to do. You and I will be friends, for now.” Feeling Judy begin to tremble in his arms, Nick added, “Hey! I didn’t say that I was going to leave you. What I meant was that we are going to let you get used to us being friends and progress from there. Remember what I said about going your pace. You are going to be the one responsible for when and how our relationship progresses.” He felt Judy relax and continued, “Once I get out of the Academy, you and I will be partners, which might help. The one downside I can see is that I will be away for, what is it, six months?”

Judy nodded in response to Nick’s question. “Yeah.” Suddenly, Judy had a thought and pulled away from their embrace. “I just realized something. The Academy tends to request officers to assist in the training of new recruits on occasion. I bet if I talked to Major, she would allow me to fill
the position for a while.” Judy didn’t want to be away from Nick right now. She resolved to call Major after she called her parents.

Nick looked at Judy with a cocked eyebrow. “You have the contact info for a member of the Academy’s staff? More importantly, who is ‘Major’ and what kind of name is that? Or is it her rank?” The idea that Judy was on amicable terms with one of the faculty members of the Police Academy made him wonder if she could actually pull it off. He also didn’t show it but the thought of Judy possibly being at the Academy with him, even as a temporary instructor, had him struggling to keep his tail from wagging.

Judy laughed. “Major is her rank. Her real name is Barbeara Friedkin and she isn’t just a regular faculty member, she’s the Chief Instructor.” Judy had become friends with the Major after managing to impress the polar bear with her determination, resolve, and defiance. She and Major ended up exchanging contact info. Dread suddenly flooded Judy as she realized that Major could very well hate her for the conference. Judy felt herself begin to shudder then felt Nick pull her back into the hug.

“Judy, calm down. It’s okay.” Nick said in a soothing voice. “If you still want to call her we can, but first we need to call your parents.” Pulling away only enough to get off the bed and hold her to his chest, Nick walked out of the room carrying Judy. Descending the stairs, Nick brought Judy to a plain wood door and knocked. Hearing a small click, Nick pushed the door open and entered.

Judy was astonished by the contents of the room. The right wall was lined with filing cabinets, on the left, there were bookcases full of, what appeared to be, ledgers, record books, reference books, and other forms of reading materials. The back wall had tinted windows with photographs of the Wilde family between them. Bringing her attention to the center of the room, Judy saw Jameson sitting at a desk, facing away from them. Once the door was closed, she watched Jameson turn to them and smile.

Standing up, Jameson said, “I assume the two of you have reached an understanding.” Seeing Nick and Judy nod simultaneously, Jameson’s smile grew. “Wonderful. Judy, I would like to apologize for upsetting you. If you don’t forgive me, I understand. However, that is not the reason the two of you are here.” Gesturing to his desk, Jameson silently signaled for Nick to place Judy in the chair. “I have my computer set up for a video conference between the Hopps’ Family Farm and ourselves. In case you are wondering, I had Tobias inform your parents to expect your video call as well as the caller ID to look for. Whenever you’re ready, tap the ‘Call’ icon. I will give you two some privacy.” Finished, Jameson left the room.

Judy and Nick looked at each other with apprehension in their eyes. Judy was a little frightened, not knowing how her parents would react. Nick was worried about how Judy’s parents would respond to his presence. Nick moved to the other side of the table facing Judy. Giving her a smile, he nodded to indicate that he was there for her, and that she should proceed when she was ready.

Judy returned the smile. Taking a deep breath and letting it out, Judy tapped the ‘Call’ icon. She waited patiently for her parents to answer. Glancing once more at Nick, Judy felt herself relax. Nick was here with her and as long as he was, she knew she could do this. Putting on a smile, she focused once more on the screen. The instant the call connected however, her smile faded and her ears drooped. Her parents’ faces were a mixture of anger, concern, and fear. She went to speak only to have the words die when her father said, “Judith Laverne Hopps, you have some explaining to do.”
For this chapter I'm going to give the Easter Egg. The meal served was inspired by a real one. The question is who made it, me or my wife?
Chapter Four: Video calls and Breaking News

Chapter Summary

Title basically says it all.

Chapter Notes

Hello again!! Many thanks to Fairlane302 for his much appreciated assistance in editing this chapter. It was like meatball surgery. Also, a shout-out to liiwilliams08 for getting one of the Easter Eggs last chapter. He also got one for Chapter One as well, but he hasn't sent me his prize choice yet, though i think that's due to them not appearing yet. liiwilliams08, your reward for Ch 3 is inbound and the reward for Ch 1 is still open.

Unfortunately, this chapter, like the one previous, doesn't have a track list. Fret not, however, for the other chapters will have the links to the songs within the story. You'll just have to copy and paste into your search bar.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Four: Video calls and Breaking News

Wilde Manor - Wilde Familial Estate - Zootopia - Just prior to 12:00 Noon

Nick shivered at the tone of Judy’s father. It was one that he often heard as a kit, whenever his parents expected him to tell them the reason behind his mischievous shenanigans. He watched as Judy’s nose began to twitch. Ignoring how cute it was, Nick carefully slipped his paw under the monitor to place it on hers, to remind her that he was here and that she wasn’t alone.

Judy felt Nick give her paw a gentle, comforting squeeze. Returning the gesture, she took a deep breath and nodded. “You’re right.” She mentally prepared herself as best she could. “Where would you like me to start?” She watched her parents carefully as they seemed to ponder how to proceed.

Judy took a quick peek at Nick when she was certain her parents weren’t paying attention. He had a soft smile on his face that made her want to smile as well. Returning her attention to her parents, she saw that they had decided how to proceed.

Stuart and Bonnie Hopps looked at their daughter with serious expressions. Bonnie took the initiative by asking, “Where are you? That Buffalo, Chief Tobias Bogo I believe, told us that you are staying with a close friend. Is that true?” Bonnie wasn’t angry, per se. It was more anger born of worry. The phone call from the ZPD had her frightened that something horrible had happened to Judy. She remembered that Judy told them that, normally, when an officer fell in the line of duty the Chief would call to inform the family. While Judy may not be an officer anymore, Bonnie had assumed that even a former officer’s family would still be contacted if something happened.

Judy mulled over how she could answer the question while still leaving out the fact that she was now being targeted. Coming up with what she considered an acceptable response, she stated, “That is the truth. I’m in the process of being reinstated as a law enforcement officer and I’m staying with a friend
until I can find a suitable apartment.” She felt Nick squeeze her paw in approval of how she answered her parents’ inquiry. A small part of her was unsure whether she should hide the fact that she was staying with Nick from them or not. She didn’t have any way of knowing how her parents would react to that information. She also didn’t know how they would take the news that she and Nick were ‘seeing each other’. Judy wasn’t ashamed of him, but she wasn’t ready to tell her parents about him yet.

Stu Hopps pursed his lips in thought as he tried to figure how best to ask his question. He decided not to beat around the bush. “Would the name of the friend you’re staying with be ‘Nick’, by any chance?” He watched the blood drain from Judy’s face. A small part of him was concerned that he should have waited to ask that ‘til later, but it was too late now. He wasn’t sure if Judy was aware of it, but there had been several times where he or Bonnie would wake up at night to check on the younger kits only to hear her crying for someone named Nick. They had no knowledge of who or what Nick was, but they knew that if Judy was crying for him in her sleep then he had to be someone special to her.

Judy felt her heart stop and her ears drop. She began to panic. Her mind began to race as she tried to figure out how they learned about Nick. The pressure of Nick squeezing on her paw drew her back from the precipice. Calming thanks to the knowledge that Nick was with her, she answered, “Yes, Dad. His name is Nick.”

Stu nodded. Bonnie asked, “You thanked him for letting you stay with him, right?” Judy answered with a nod. “Good girl. Now, I expect you to tell us a little about this Nick. What kind of buck is he? What does he do for a living?” Bonnie was excited that Judy had a good close male friend in the city. She was happy that after all these years that Judy had finally met a buck.

Judy winced at her mother’s barrage of questions. She knew that this would happen, but she wasn’t ready for it. She felt Nick gently rub the back of her paw with his thumb comfortingly. The gesture soothed her a bit and gave her courage. She saw this as just another challenge she needed to overcome. “Well, first and foremost, Nick isn’t a buck. He’s a recently enrolled cadet at the ZPA, so he’ll be an officer like me.”

Stu and Bonnie blinked at Judy’s answers. Bonnie cocked a brow. “Not a buck?” she asked. She got a headshake in response. Bonnie frowned and narrowed her eyes. She saw Judy’s nose twitch apprehensively. Looking down, Bonnie started rubbing her temples as she started to remember something. She couldn’t place what it was, but she knew it was important.

Stu glanced at his wife knowing she was having difficulty remembering that it had been Judy they found with the predator related porn stash. Turning his focus back to Judy, he asked, “So, what species of predator is he?” He could almost hear Bonnie’s neck snap like a gunshot as she spun her head to look at him.

Judy’s jaw dropped at her father’s question. She found she couldn’t formulate an answer. Unable to stop herself, Judy looked up at Nick for help. She realized her mistake as soon as she made it. Immediately refocusing on the monitor, she found her parent’s giving her knowing looks. She sighed. “Come on, Slick. They know you’re here. You might as well let them see you.”

Nick nervously made his way around the desk to join Judy. Lifting her out of the chair, he sat down then set her down in his lap. Only after he was certain Judy was comfortable did he look at the two older bunnies on the other end of the video call. The looks of shock and bewilderment would have been funny if not for the magnitude of what was taking place. “Um, hello Mr. and Mrs. Hopps. My name is Nicholas P. Wilde.”

Bonnie and Stu looked at each other then back to the red fox tod with their daughter. “Uh, hello.”
Stu stated. “I’m Stuart Hopps and this is my wife Bonnie.” Bonnie nodded politely as she was introduced. Stu began rubbing the back of his neck as he admitted, “I got to say that you’re not quite what we expected, son.”

Nick gave a nod of understanding. He didn’t know exactly how to proceed, but he knew he needed to make a good impression. Giving them a closed mouth smile to hide his teeth, he said, “Your daughter’s truly one of a kind, Mr. and Mrs. Hopps. She’s the reason I’ve enrolled in the Police Academy.”

Judy’s ears flushed and she lowered them over her eyes in reaction to Nick’s tiny praise. She kept her ears over her face in embarrassment as Nick continued to provide a list of minor compliments about her to her parents. Finally, she whined, “Nick!” She felt him chuckle softly.

Nick set his chin into the space between her ears. “Sorry. I couldn’t help it.” Judy’s response was to just nudge an elbow into his chest. Nick had to resist the urge to nuzzle her affectionately. “Your parents still have questions they need answered, Cottontail.”

Sighing, Judy shifted to look back at her parents. She told them that she would do her best to answer all the questions they asked of her, but that she couldn’t say much as a few of the answers could pertain to an active investigation. Her parents then took turns asking their questions. Her father inquired as to why she took off in such a hurry. Her reply was that he and Gideon had given her the one piece of information that she had been missing during the Missing Mammals case in order to close it properly. Her mother had followed up by asking where Judy had left the truck. This had Judy breaking down into a long apology, saying that it was probably just a shell by now since the part of Zootopia she had to leave it in was known for mammals stripping vehicles of their parts.

Stu expressed his disbelief that the old clunker of his actually made the trip to the city. He told her that if it hadn’t been completely stripped down, she could either keep the truck and get it repaired or sell it for scrap. After all, he still had what one could easily consider as a fleet of better maintained vehicles.

Stu’s next question had been along the lines of how she was faring. Judy smiled as she told them that she was alright, but just feeling a little worn down by everything that had happened. Her mother then asked how had she gotten her job on the force back. That was a little difficult to answer as it tied into the still ongoing investigation into Bellwether’s co-conspirators, but with Nick’s help, Judy managed to give Bonnie an answer without divulging any case details. Their final question was in regard to what her current living situation was. They knew she was staying with Nick for these first few days at least, but they were interested in Judy’s more long term plans. Judy explained that Nick and his parents had offered to let her stay with them while she looked for a new apartment.

Bonnie and Stu listened as Judy answered every single one of their questions. They guessed that she didn’t want them to worry excessively, which, of course, caused them to worry. However, they also realized that Judy wasn’t going to tell them everything, and besides, they were far more focused on the fact that she was okay.

Bonnie also expressed her desire for Judy to find a better place than her last one. She had noticed during their MuzzleTime calls how bad Judy’s old apartment seemed and so she started listing things to look for and consider when looking for her new place.

As her mother rambled on, listing all of the things she felt an apartment needed to provide, Judy couldn’t help but feel thankful that her parents didn’t have cable television. She had no doubt that the various news outlets were currently running the story of how she and Nick duped Bellwether into confessing to supposedly masterminding the ‘Savage Predators’. That plus everything that she did leading to it, like blowing up a train and racing away from a sociopathic ram wielding a firearm,
hellbent of exterminating her and Nick. The last thing Judy needed right now was for her parents to start berating her over her dangerous actions.

Once Bonnie moved on from the apartment topic, the four of them spoke for a little while longer about varying subjects, such as Nick’s upcoming stint as a cadet at the Police Academy or what Judy should expect once she was an officer again. They all agreed that Nick and Judy would keep Bonnie and Stu apprised of their day just so they knew what was happening.

As the conversation seemed to be coming to an end, Nick glanced at the clock in the corner of the screen and saw that it was almost noon. Looking back to her parents, Nick stated, “I want to apologize for this, but Judy and I have to go. We need to go buy her some new clothes.” Promising to contact them later and exchanging farewells, Nick ended the call. Looking at Judy, he asked, “Before we go, do you have anyone else you wish to call?”

Judy turned back to the touchscreen computer monitor. Entering the contact info for Major Friedkin, she hesitated for a moment before tapping the call icon. The line rang twice before a large female polar bear appeared. Judy wondered what Major was going to say. “H-hey, Major.”

Major Barbeara Friedkin narrowed her eyes at the bunny. “I have so many things I want to say Hopps, that I would be an old hag by the time I finished, therefore, I’m just going to tell you the top three.” Leaning in close to her screen, she stated, “First and foremost, I’m very disappointed in you, Hopps. You worked your tiny ass off to get where you were and then, after you fuck up a press conference, you just up and leave? I thought you were better than that.” Leaning back in her seat, she said, “Secondly, yes, I did see the press conference. No, you don’t have to worry. I’m not mad, no, actually, I’m fucking furious, just not with you. Tobias had absolutely no right to put you in the spotlight like that. You were a rookie with little to no experience in that kind of situation. Finally, believe me when I say that if I had been there, I would have ripped the horns out Chief Tobias Bogo’s own head and impaled him with them.”

Nick blinked at the completely calm, cool, and collected tone that the polar bear used as she basically threatened the Chief of Precinct One. He also noticed a small trait in her eyes that he had seen before elsewhere. Searching through his memories, he identified who else he had seen that had possessed the unique trait. “I don’t mean to be rude and interrupt, but are you by any chance related to a polar bear named Bearnard Kozlov?” The tiny flecks of green in her blue eyes were a very rare thing, and Bearnard Kozlov had them too.

Major Friedkin turned her attention to the fox whose lap Judy was currently sitting in. “He’s my maternal uncle.” She cracked her neck, then said, “You must be Nicholas Piberius Wilde. I’ve been reviewing your application for the ZPA. Normally, I wouldn’t consider a fox, but you’ve got recommendations from both Judy and Tobias, so I’ve gone ahead and approved it. I’m sure that Tobias’ old geezer is up there nodding his approval. May I inquire as to how you know my uncle?”

Nick deliberated explaining how he knew Bearnard. He had no knowledge if Major Friedkin was aware of her uncle’s occupation and had no desire to create issues for either of them. He carefully formulated how to answer Major’s question. “Before I answer your question, I must request you answer another one of mine. Are you aware of your uncle’s current profession?”

Major Friedkin frowned at the vulpine. It wasn’t that their family didn’t know what Bearnard’s job was, but it had caused problems on occasion. Friedkin considered lying, but realized that if the vulpine asked the question then he also knew what her uncle did for a living. “He’s an enforcer and bodyguard for Antonio de Medici-Borgia, or as many in the underworld know him, Mr. Big.”

Nick nodded in response to the Major’s statement. “To answer your question then, I used to perform odd jobs for Mr. Big. On various occasions when he was indisposed, I dealt with your uncle instead.
As for how I knew that you were related, you and he share a very rare characteristic. Blue eyes with green flecks. Not exactly a common trait shared among mammals. The most likely conclusion one could draw would be a blood relation. It fits far better than a mere coincidence."

Major and Judy both looked at Nick with stunned expressions at his display of abductive reasoning. For him to accurately deduce the relation between the two polar bears by observing such a minor detail, and using his memory to link a matching detail from his past in such a way was astounding. Judy could only imagine how good of a detective Nick could be. Major was of the same mind and wondered if she should enroll him in the police academy’s Advanced Placement Honor Courses. Major was the first to recover from Nick’s little display of abductive reasoning. “I’m seriously considering having you take AP Honor courses.”

Judy gave a small smile. “Uh, that’s part of the reason I’m calling. You see, I was wondering if you would be willing to let me fill the Temporary Instructor position for a while.” She watched as Major mulled over the idea. “Please, Major. It’ll just be for a while. I want to make sure Nick’s all set up at the Academy.”

Major gave Judy a frown. “No.” She watched Judy’s whole face fall. “Hear me out. I would like nothing better than to say ‘Yes’, but unless Tobias approves the assignment my paws are tied. Get his approval then we’ll revisit this subject.” Returning her focus to the tod, Major stated, “You better be ready, Foxtrot. I’m going to drive you into the ground.” With that the call ended.

Judy let out a long sigh. “Looks like I’m going to have to find a way of convincing the Chief to assign me to the Temporary Instructor position. That isn’t a discussion I’m looking forward to.” Her ear swiveled at the sound of someone approaching the door. When the door opened, she turned to see Jameson staring at them with a grave face.

Jameson looked at Judy and his son stating, “You two need to see this.” Leading them to the living room, he picked up the television remote. Selecting the channel for ZBC, he sat down next to Vanessa on one couch while Nick and Judy sat on the other. On the television, Peter Moosebridge could be seen talking to Fabienne Growley.

Peter: “Approximately one hour ago, Former Mayor Dawn Bellwether escaped from her transport convoy while enroute to Zootopia’s Supermax prison. Bellwether’s escape appears to have been facilitated by a group of mammals that evidently possess military training. While none of the Officers tasked with overseeing the convoy were killed, five of the eight were transported to the Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia in critical condition. Chief Tobias Bogo held a small press conference a short while ago, and had this to say.”

Chief Bogo appeared onscreen standing behind a podium looking at what was probably a prewritten speech from the Precinct’s media liaison. Looking up at the reporters and camera crews, he picked up the carefully written speech and tore it. Tossing the now confetti-like pages into the air, Bogo began to speak: “Roughly an hour ago, Dawn Bellwether, with the aid of a team of unknown mammals, escaped. The ZPD is currently looking into who these mammals are as well as searching for Bellwether. The officers wounded during the escape are currently recuperating at the MTHZ. The Department views the actions of these unknown mammals as acts of terrorism and they will be dealt with accordingly. We have no further comments at this time, but we have one request. Please let us do our jobs, and know that anyone who threatens the lives and wellbeing of my officers will be prosecuted to the furthest extent of the law, up to and including treason and terrorism.” Finished, Bogo walked off stage and out of view of the cameras.

Judy and Nick looked at one another. With Bellwether on the run, they both knew that they were in danger. Nick wrapped his arms and tail around Judy protectively. “We’re going to be fine, Judy.” He
heard his parents get to their feet. Looking at them curiously, he asked, “Where are you going?”

Vanessa pulled out her mobile phone as she answered. “I’m going to call the hospital and have the officers transferred into the care of my team. Then, I’m going to change and get over there as fast as I can.” She went to exit the room, but stopped in the doorway. Turning around, she looked at Jameson. “You better make damn sure they’ve got the best equipment you’ve got.” She walked out with those words.

Jameson gestured for Nick and Judy to follow him. Guiding them a door with a voiceprint lock, he pressed a button and stated, “Jameson Timaeus Wilde. Authorization Code: Nightstalker.” A series of electronic beeps signaled that the room was now accessible. Opening the door, he indicated for Nick and Judy to enter.

Nick and Judy’s jaws dropped as they saw what the room contained. The room almost looked like an armory. The room was roughly square, but well lit by the rectangular reinforced window situated near the ceiling on the far wall and LED lights embedded in the ceiling. There were white illuminated cabinets on the 3 walls opposing the doorway. On the wall to the left of the door, there were sidearms, combat knives, nightsticks, and other such one-pawed weapons. On the opposing wall, were various two-pawed rifles, and on the wall directly across from the door, there was a variety of vests and body armor, similar to those used by the Zootopian Armed Forces. In the center of the room there was a counter, with a variety of strongboxes and cases beneath it, likely holding even more equipment.

As Judy surveyed the room, she noticed that many of the items on display, especially the firearms, would have required a number of special permits to even own, and a cache of weapons like this, being in private hands, was unprecedented as far as she knew. She cataloged her concerns away as yet another question for later. Now was not the time.

Nick whistled. “Wow. Is all this from your previous life, Dad?” he asked as he scanned the rooms various contents. Not getting a response, Nick glanced at his father to see that he had already pulled out two suitcases specifically designed to carry gear and equipment. He and Judy watched as Jameson walked around scanning everything to determine what they required.

As Jameson walked around the room, he would periodically select an item that he thought might suit either Nick or Judy, and place it on the counter. When he had a variety of different gear set out upon the counter, he called Nick and Judy over to present the gear to them, and introduced them to the items he had determined would best suit them.

Jameson had selected a variety of weapons for the two, ranging from appropriately sized sidearms, to butterfly knives for close combat. There was even a scoped rifle intended for Nick. Once Jameson was satisfied that both Nick and Judy were familiarized and happy with his selections for them, he assisted the two in packing the gear into cases. As Judy finally closed and latched her case, Jameson stated “I’m going to call Tobias. With that ewe on the loose, the two of you are in danger. I want to know what he’s planning for his next move.”

Nick and Judy nodded their agreement. They followed Jameson out of the secured room and back into the living room. Suddenly, Judy’s phone rang and the caller ID showed that it was her parents. Groaning, she muttered, “Why do they have to call now?” She sent them a quick text explaining that she was busy dealing with a matter pertaining to an investigation and would call them back as soon as she could.

Jameson picked up the remote to the smart television and selected the video conference application. Finding Chief Bogo’s contact, Jameson opened the call. Chief Bogo’s face appeared on screen and Jameson said, “Greetings, Tobias. Mind giving us a rundown of what strategy you’ve got planned?”
Bogo’s eye twitched. “Don’t call me Tobias. We don’t know each other well enough and I don’t appreciate mammals I don’t know calling me that. The only mammals allowed are my dear mother and father.” Sitting up straighter, he then began explaining what would take place. “Tomorrow afternoon, Officer Hopps and Cadet Wilde will depart from Savannah Central Station for Bunnyburrow due to Bellwether’s escape. I will send Harrison Wolford and Zannah Fangmeyer, Detectives Rank 3, to collect them from a neutral location of your choice. They will escort them to the station and supervise their departure. Officer Hopps’ family already knows to expect their arrival. Now, I have other things I must see to and a recent development to verify, so I’m ending this transmission.” With that the screen went black.

Jameson chuckled. “Direct and to the point. He’s just like his father. If you’ll excuse me for a moment, I need to take care of something.” Jameson left the room to contact someone to gather intel on the two officers had chosen for the escort assignment.

Judy scrambled to get her mobile phone out of her pocket as soon as the Chief mentioned her parents. She selected the MuzzleTime call option and waited for her parent’s to answer. Upon seeing her mother and father’s serious expressions, Judy sheepishly asked, “Hey, Mom. Hey, Dad. What’s going on? We talked not too long ago.”

Bonnie stated, “That Buffalo, Chief Bogo called us, saying that he’s going to be sending you and Nick to Bunnyburrow for a while until he calls you back to the city.” A loud scream made her turn and shout, “NATHANIEL ELLIOT HOPPS!!! IF I HAVE TO TELL YOU ONE MORE TIME TO LEAVE YOUR SISTER ALONE…” A loud crash resounded over the line. Bonnie’s eye twitched. Passing the phone to Stu saying, “You tell them. I’m going to beat Nathaniel.”

Judy and Nick shivered at the tone that Bonnie’s voice had as she made that statement. Stu’s reaction was quite similar, but he managed to keep himself together and said, “He mentioned a police escort, is there something going on that we should know about?”

“No, no, it’s fine. The city is just a little unsettled at the moment, so I’m sure it’s just a precaution” Judy lied. She hated having to lie to either of her parents, but the exact nature of the situation was still need-to-know, and the last thing she wanted to do was worry her father unnecessarily.

“Well, ok, if you say so Jude. The next train to Bunnyburrow is tomorrow evening, right?”

Judy nodded her agreement, “Yes dad, will you be there to pick us up?” There weren’t many trains traveling between the Tri-burrows and the City, but despite their infrequency, they were on a regular schedule.

“Yes, and your mother and I have already prepared the room next to yours for Nick.”

With that, Judy exchanged her farewells, reassuring Stu that she would call later to check in. Turning to Nick as she hung up, she said “Well, looks like you’re going to be meeting my folks sooner than we expected Slick.” Jameson reappeared, and asked if Judy could follow him for a bit, so she gave Nick a tiny peck on his cheek, saying, ‘I’ll be right back.”

Nick gave her a soft, warm smile with a nod. His dad told him to check all their equipment and that it wouldn’t take long. Going over everything, Nick found his mind wandering as he wondered how the rest of Judy’s family would react to his presence. Deciding to just deal with it when they get there, he got up and headed to the kitchen to prepare a small meal for Judy and himself.

**Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia – Savannah Central District – Zootopia - 1:53 pm**

Vanessa Wilde walked into her office to find her team already pouring over the patient files of the
officers wounded during Bellwether’s escape. “What do we got?” she asked as she pulled on her white lab coat. Her team stood and greeted her. Waving them off, she picked up the file for one Officer Leon Delgato.

“Officer Leon Delgato. Male Lion. Age 30. Suffered multiple GSWs, none through and through. Flatlined twice during surgery.” said Pronk Oryx-Anterson. He hooved over another file to Dr. Wilde, stating, “Officer Henry Grizzoli. Male Arctic Wolf. Age 33. Also suffered multiple GSWs, none through and through. One of the bullets passed through his stomach and lodged in his lumbar spine. The surgeon says that there was only minor damage in that regard, so he shouldn’t suffer any major setbacks with his recovery.”

Vanessa nodded to him. Pronk was one of the better mammals on her team. Yes, he had a tendency to be loud, but only when he had something he felt was important to say. On the occasion that his husband would show up, she would always give him an extra fifteen minutes on break as a reward for all his hard work. “Good. What else?”

“Officer Lillian Cheetara. Female Cheetah. Age 28. She’s not as bad as the others, but she suffered a GSW to her right leg. The shot had enough force behind it that the bullet’s impact shattered her femur bone. They’re still in surgery.” stated Viktor Wolfstein. He was a rather large grey wolf who Vanessa had hired for his huge in-depth knowledge on the anatomy and physiology for every species of mammal. He also was the team’s go-to mammal for cases involving kits due to his own kit-like personality.

“What of the other two?” Vanessa asked seeing that those were the only files on paw. “Am I missing something or were the reports of five being injured a lie?” She watched as her team shifted uncomfortably. “Someone better start talking before I get pissed.”

Olly Clawfrey, a male jaguar on the team who specialized in neurology, said, “The other two are currently in surgery and we haven’t gotten their files yet.” The exasperated scoff Dr. Wilde gave made him flinch. “I also don’t think we’ll ever be getting them.” Seeing the look of shock on her face, he elaborated. “Dr. Meerkata convinced the board to have them transferred to his team not too long ago.”

With a look of barely contained rage, Vanessa stated, “That’s not acceptable Olly. Not. Acceptable.” before she stormed off towards Dr. Timothy Meerkata’s office, kicked the door in, and sent a death glare his way. “ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR FUCKIN MIND, TIM!?!?” she shouted, making the Meerkat jump. “I specifically requested that the officers be transferred to my team before you did. You had better have a good reason for stealing my patients from me or by the Divine Entities, I’ll show you just how useful a doctorate in medicine can be in zooicide.”

Dr. Timothy Meerkata raised his paws in surrender. “Now hold on a minute and let me explain. It wasn’t like I was trying to steal your patients or anything. I did it because I didn’t want you to burn yourself out again. That’s kind of why the board forced you to take a mandatory vacation, isn’t it?” The pressure of her glare increased making him want to hide under his desk. “Come on, Vanessa. You know me. When have I ever…”

Vanessa raised her paw in a stop gesture. “You will transfer them back into my care by the end of today or so help me I’ll report you for unethical malpractice.” She slammed the door and turned around to see that Pronk had followed her to Dr. Meerkata’s office, and was giving her a wary look. Sighing as she began making her way back to her office, she said, “Did we get back anything on Officer Cheetara?”

Pronk nodded. “She’s just been moved to recovery. Also, Chief Bogo will be arriving to take custody of the bullets in due time.” Rubbing the back of his neck, he asked, “Is it at all possible for
you to let me leave early? Bucky and I have a date tonight. It’s our anniversary.”

Vanessa smiled at him. “Of course. Go and have a wonderful night. Don’t worry about coming in tomorrow either. Consider it a reward for all the hard work you’ve put in for the past six months.” Receiving a grateful grin and thank you, she bade Pronk farewell as she arrived back at her office. Within, she found one of the largest Buffalos she’d ever seen holding a discussion with the rest of her team as he signed some paperwork that must have been the evidence custody forms. “You must be Chief Bogo. Dr. Vanessa Wilde.”

Chief Bogo turned and nodded in greeting. “I’ve just been informed that my officers are now in your care. Your team also tells me that you haven’t quite gotten around to checking on them. Would you mind if I accompany you while you do?” Tobias Bogo could immediately see the resemblance between Dr. Wilde and Nicholas Wilde. “I beg your pardon, but may I inquire if you’re the mother of Nicholas Wilde?”

Vanessa smirked at the Chief. “I am indeed.” Motioning for him to follow her, Vanessa led the Chief to the patient’s rooms. After making the rounds to each of the Officers under her care, checking that everything was in order with each, and allowing the Chief a couple minutes with them all, Vanessa eventually informed him that they needed to rest and led him back towards her office. “My son’s truly determined to graduate from the Police Academy. I haven’t seen him act this way in a long time. You’re going to have him assigned to Precinct One, is that correct?”

The Chief grunted. “I can put in a request for the Commissioner to assign him to us, but the only real way to guarantee it is for him to score in the top three of his class. However, I’m guessing you weren’t informed of the full scope of the situation.” Seeing the both confused and concerned expressions on her face, Chief Tobias Bogo clasped his hooves behind his back and started to explain. He watched her face shift from one expression to another as he gave her a complete rundown of what would soon take place.

Vanessa Wilde listened attentively to the Chief’s explanation. When he was through, she leaned back in her chair and looked at the ceiling. “Seems Nick left quite a bit out this morning.” Nick had given her an abridged version of what had happened over the course of his years away from home. ‘Abridged? Ha, more like the Cliff notes.’ She sighed. “My husband is currently making sure they have the necessary equipment and gear they will require back at home. My husband used to be something of a mercenary and he just kept all of the items he collected over the years after he retired.” It was a lie, but it was a necessary one. Jameson had actually been an operative for a clandestine black budget subproject of a covert agency, but the true parameters of his work were classified above top secret. Even Vanessa didn’t know the full scope of what Jameson used to do, and she was his wife.

Bogo was intrigued by the information Vanessa provided, but decided not to pry. “I see. Well, thank you for granting me time with my officers. Please keep me informed of any changes.” He nodded farewell and took his leave, heading back to the precinct. He had some paperwork he had to finish and bullets to turn over to Ballistics.

<MEANWHILE @ THE GRAND PANGOLIN APARTMENTS>

Bucky Oryx-Antlerson was getting ready for his anniversary date with his husband Pronk. He took in a long breath as he checked his outfit in the mirror. Hearing the door open, he turned to see Pronk hurry into their closet to grab the set of clothes that he had preselected prior to leaving for work. “You’re back early.”

“YOU SHUT UP!!!” Bucky hollered back. “I’VE BEEN READY FOR THE PAST HOUR. I’VE BEEN WAITING ON YOUR ASS.”

Pronk came out of the closet with an annoyed looked on his face. “You know, sometimes I really hate how you’re constantly ahead of schedule.” Walking over to the mirror, he finished buttoning up his dress shirt. He went to tie his bowtie, but let out a huff of frustration as he struggled with it.

Rolling his eyes at his husband’s antics, Bucky turned Pronk around to face him and fixed his bowtie for him. Done with that, Bucky decided to tell him about what happened earlier today. “So, after you left, I had a visitor.” He saw Pronk tense up. “Hey, now. Just listen to me for a second.” He sat Pronk down on their loveseat. “She came by to apologize to you, but when she saw you weren’t here, she insisted that we join her at the restaurant early, on her treat.”

Pronk went to say ‘no’, but the look on Bucky’s face made him sigh. “Fine, but if she gives me grief over this I’m leaving and you can either come with or start looking for a new apartment because you won’t be staying here.” Rising to his feet, Pronk walked out of the apartment followed by Bucky. Their reservations weren’t for another 45 minutes, but knowing her, she would have the maître d’ look for them so they could be escorted to the private dining area.

Soon the Oryx-Antlersons arrived at the restaurant where, sure enough, the maître d’ guided them to the area usually reserved for their more high-class guests, though the place seemed unusually barren for the popular restaurant. They were led to a table where she was already seated. Bucky and Pronk both felt their jaws hit the floor as they saw what she was wearing. It was a floor length black satin dress, completely backless all the way down to her tail and a slit up one side showing off a single leg.

“Holy crap, Gazelle! You look amazing!” They stated simultaneously.

Gazelle blushed at their compliment. Shifting a tiny amount, she asked, “Really? It isn’t too much? I don’t normally wear dresses so I was a little freaked out that I wouldn’t strike a good figure wearing this. You’re absolutely sure I look good?”

Bucky and Pronk looked at one another. They could tell that they were in agreement on on that. Pronk looked at Gazelle and asked, “Did you reserve this whole area? Is it just going to be us?”

Gazelle nodded nervously. She hoped that Pronk would accept her apology for what had happened when they were younger, but either way she wanted this dinner to be private. Pronk and Bucky had been her two best friends, but after she attained stardom that all went to hell. Throughout their school years, they would meet up, hang out, and catch up with one another, but as Gazelle’s music career started to take off, they ended up not seeing each other for weeks at a time. She had been a little surprised when they both admitted they were bisexual and she had found herself starting to fantasize about the three of them together. Then, she had screwed up big time by releasing a music video that basically offended both of them. The video ended up being a major hit, but it cost her their friendship. She hoped that this time she could rectify her mistakes.

Bucky came up beside them. “Good, because you look dazzling.” Looking around and not seeing anyone else in the room, he asked, “Did…did you really reserve this entire section for us?”

Gazelle nodded frantically. “I did.” Wrapping her arms around herself, she said, “I wasn’t sure if you would come, so I reserved the floor so that no one would notice me alone.” Smiling a bit, she added, “But you came, so at least like this we won’t be bothered by anyone and we can catch up.” She gestured to the table she had been sitting at, indicating for them to join her before she sat down.

Pronk and Bucky joined her at the table. Knowing that she had stopped by earlier to apologize, Pronk chose to give her an opening. He didn’t hate her, he was still a bit hurt over the music video, but he was willing to give her a chance. “I hear you’re scheduled to go on tour again soon to promote
your new single ‘The Thrill’. You going to end it here in Zootopia or somewhere else?” Pronk asked.

“Actually,” Gazelle began. “I’ll start touring here then end here. The song is a tribute for one of my dancers, who’s dating a prey. They’re always telling me about how thrilling it is to be together.” She smiled for a bit then let out a long sigh. “To be honest, I...I actually hoped to use this dinner as a way to start apologizing.” Seeing she had their attention, she continued. “I made a mistake in releasing that music video. I shouldn’t have even written that song to begin with. I don’t know what I was thinking when I wrote it. I never meant to offend either of you, but I want you to know how sorry I am.”

Pronk and Bucky looked at her then each other. Bucky mouthed ‘Well?’ and Pronk lowered his head in thought. The video had been released almost a decade ago when they were still in high school. Thinking about it, the video hadn’t really been the problem. Pronk had felt emotionally stung by it, but that was all. Pronk also knew he had a tendency to make mountains out of ant hills. Gazelle was obviously trying to make amends and Pronk still remembered all the good times the three of them spent together. Facing her, Pronk said, “All is forgiven. I just want you to promise me that you won’t do it again. That video really stung, you know. Right, Bucky?”

Bucky let out a ‘Hmm’ as he was busy reading the menu. Looking at the prices, he began to worry that he may have bitten off more than he could chew. He’d worked hard to save up enough to bring Pronk here for their anniversary, but it appeared that he would have just barely made the quota this year, if not for Gazelle covering the tab. ‘I’m either going to have to find another job that pays more or pick up some more shifts.’ The idea of finding another job was daunting, but picking up extra shifts was even worse to him. Bucky decided he’d start looking the day after tomorrow.

Pronk sent Bucky an annoyed glare, but didn’t say anything. Turning back to Gazelle, he asked, “What about you? Any special mammal in your life?” That was something that had always bothered him. He and Bucky had had very good reasons for staying friends with Gazelle. The three of them had grown up together, gone to school together, and even went to prom together. He and Bucky had known for a long time that they were both bisexual, but Gazelle had struggled with her own orientation. He could remember how difficult it was for her every time a male (and occasionally female) would ask her out. None of those ever ended prettily.

Gazelle sighed softly as she considered the question. She wasn’t as young as she used to be, nor was she old enough that she could be seen as a mother, but even now, at the age of 26, she had yet to lose that last little bit of innocence. “Nope.” she answered as nonchalantly as she could. “No one’s managed to pique my interest.”

At that, Bucky looked away from the menu. “You’re kidding, right? How haven’t you found someone by now? You’re beautiful, kind, and overall wonderful. Are they too afraid to just talk to you?” Bucky honestly couldn’t understand why Gazelle wasn’t in a relationship yet.

Gazelle simply shrugged. “I have no idea. That’s probably why, but I really don’t know.” The waitress finally came and took their orders, but Gazelle was thinking back on the real reason she had yet to be with anyone. ‘They say that one of the hardest things in life is telling the person you love how much they mean to you for the first time. Well, I have both of them right here with me and I can honestly admit that that statement is completely true.’

When their meals arrived, they merely caught each other up on what had been happening in their lives. Gazelle told them about a new song she was writing called ‘The Hunt’, a companion piece to ‘The Thrill’. It was from the predator’s point of view where ‘The Thrill’ was from the prey’s. Pronk told them about how the team of residents he was on were treating the five officers wounded during
the escape of Dawn Bellwether, who they all agreed was insane. Bucky filled them in on how the company he was employed at was downsizing, but that his job was secure due to having been there since the beginning meaning he had the necessary experience the company wanted.

Finished with their meals, Gazelle said, “I know that this doesn’t even come close to a full apology, but I hope that we can see each other again soon. I’ve missed spending time with you guys.” She felt Bucky and Pronk hug her from both sides and she sighed in relief.

Pronk said, “Don’t worry. We’ll see each other again.” Pulling back from the embrace the same time as Bucky, he said, “How about this. Every Wednesday night, we meet up at the old meeting spot. We’ll sit and talk for a while then go to the arcade down on Parkland Avenue just like we used to?”

They all agreed to that arrangement. They left the restaurant and were amazed that night had already fallen. They looked up at the sky to see the twinkling stars with bright smiles on their faces. Bidding farewell, they went their separate ways. Pronk and Bucky to their apartment. Gazelle to her hotel room down the block. Unbeknownst to them, they all shared the same thought: ‘I bet the paparazzi are going to have a field day with this.’

Home of Walter and Ian Wilde – Wilde Familial Estate – Zootopia

Ian Wilde was sitting in front of his computer combing through the city’s CCTV cameras trying to see if he could possibly identify the mammals responsible for assisting Dawn Bellwether with her escape. As he waited for one of his programs to finish running, he thought back to the events of the previous day.

After his computer had notified him of Nick’s application to the ZPA, he nearly had a heart attack. He had immediately called Aunt Rory to tell her the news. He then used his Muzzle Recognition Programs to search for Nick and found him tapping his leg in the old binary shorthand code that they had come up with. What made him pause however was the bunny that Nick’s tail was wrapped around at the ankles. Ian was pulled from his thoughts by a knock on the door that had him yelling, “It’s open!”

A very pretty vixen walked in wearing nothing but one of Ian’s shirts. “You going to come back to bed any time soon?” This wasn’t the first time she had ever visited this tod, but she was always surprised that he never gave any indication of wanting more. Yes, she was a prostitute, or at least a former one. She ended up leaving that life after meeting Ian. He had originally called her just to have someone to talk to and she found him very similar to herself. She soon found herself waiting anxiously for his calls.

Ian’s ears perked up at the sound of the vixen’s voice. Turning to her with a sheepish smile, he said, “Yeah, sorry. I’m coming.” He rolled himself away from his computer station and spun his wheelchair around. “Want a ride?” he asked teasingly, wriggling his brows. This drew the intended effect of getting her to laugh and come sit on his lap. He wheeled them back into the bedroom.

The vixen kissed him as he reached the side of the bed. “I hate to ask, but are we ever going to actually talk about us?” She felt Ian sigh sadly. “Sorry, sorry. I just want to know if we’re ever going to really be something. We’ve been seeing each other for months now and you never seem to say anything on the subject.”

Ian gave her a kiss then said, “You need to go. I’ll make you something to take with you.” He wheeled out of the room towards the kitchen. He had hoped that she wouldn’t ask, but she was right. They had been seeing each other for months now, but in the beginning, he never had any intention of sleeping with her. He always made sure he didn’t knot her, otherwise he was sure his brain would identify her as his mate, which she wasn’t. He threw together a couple of sandwiches and put them
in a carry out container. He met her by the front door and gave them to her. “I’ll see you around.”

Leaving Ian’s place, the vixen couldn’t help but scold herself. She knew she shouldn’t have asked, knew that everything had gone according to how Ian had planned it, but she felt like a moron for falling for a guy like him. Suddenly, she started to fear that he would no longer call on her. A vibration in her skirt pocket drew her from her thoughts. Taking out her phone, she saw that she had a text from Ian saying, ‘Stop worrying. I’m still going to call on you every now and then.’ Sighing in relief, she made her way home with a tiny bit of hope in her heart.

After she was out of view, Ian shot her a quick text then rolled back into his computer room. Pulling up the information on the bunny doe with Nick on one of the various monitors in the room, he reread her documentation for what was probably the dozenth time. A small portion of his brain wondered what it was about her that drew Nick to her. An IM notification brought him back to his computer. He raised his brow as he saw it was from his Uncle Jameson. Clicking the link embedded in the message, he was brought to a secured communications network.

Jameson: I need you to do me a favor.

Ian: What can I do for you, Uncle Jay?

Jameson: Police Chief Tobias Bogo has assigned some officers to escort your cousin and his doe to Savannah Central Station tomorrow afternoon. I need you to give me the 411 on them. Names are Harrison Wolford and Zannah Fangmeyer.

Ian: I’ll get right on it. As soon as I learn something, you will.

Jameson has signed out of this chatroom.

Ian signed out as well and pulled up his secured connection into the ZPD’s Internal Affairs database. Locating the employment files of the two officers in question on the ZPD’s open internal network. He accessed Fangmeyer and Wolford’s files and made digital copies, forwarding them to his uncle. Taking one more glance at the image of Nick and the doe, he debated accessing Judy’s file as well. Making his decision, he moved Judy’s file onto the ZPD’s secured network, sealing her file behind multiple levels of encryption and passwords. ‘They want to come after her, they’re going to have to go through me.’ Logging out, Ian glanced at the digital clock on his wall. Seeing how late it was, he rolled his way to his room and crawled into bed then fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Some of you may have noticed that a number of tags were taken down. This does not mean they won't reappear. Until something comes up the tag will no longer appear. When we get to those portions, I'll add them again.

The next couple of chapters are under heavy rework before being set to Fairlane302 for editing. My writing room is in such bad shape with no organization at all, that current and future chapters have gotten muddled expect three weeks in-between updates for the next two, maybe three, chapters. We use the one under editing to help keep things flowing smoothly. Chapter 5 is almost ready. In the words of Ieyasu Tokugawa, "Patience is the key." Yeah, I shortened the original saying, sue me.

Lastly, the Easter Eggs per chapter has increased. Each of the previous chapters had
two, but now there are three. Therefore, everyone now has three chances to win a small reward.
Chapter 5: Planning and Preparations

 Posting later than I originally planned. Internet in my area is down (along with my WiFi). Apologies to everyone.

 Once again, many thanks to Fairlane302 for putting up with me and editing this chapter.

 Chapter Five: Planning and Preparations

 Wilde Manor – Zootopia – Approximately 2:15 in the Morning

 Nick was sitting at the dining room table cleaning the two sidearms given to him by his father. He had already disassembled them out of pure habit. He had already checked the sniper rifle, butterfly knives, and spare firearms for possible complications. In fact, he had done all of this multiple times over the last several hours. Nick remembered the night of his so-called scout initiation. After he had managed to leave the building and tear off the muzzle, Nick had run all the way home, crying. He hadn’t been aware his mom had left already to pick him up, but that wasn’t what he had been focused on. He set the gun barrel down as he recalled that night once more.

 * Flashback Begins *

 Nick ran into the dining room and stopped in the doorway. His dad was sitting there having just finished cleaning his sidearm. When his dad saw him, Nick ran into his arms. “D-Da-ha-had!!” Nick sobbed. He felt his dad wrap him in a strong, warm embrace and cried even harder. Nick finally managed to calm down when his father lifted him up and sat him in his lap. “It…it was awful, Dad. Th-they m-muzzled me. They told me that if they thought they would trust a fox that I had to be really stupid. I-I couldn’t even d-defend myself.”

 Jameson stroked Nick’s ears. “Hush now.” he said, softly. Jameson figured Vanessa was unaware that Nick had ran home. Pulling Nick into a one-arm embrace, he shot a quick text to his wife to inform her of the situation. He stood and carried Nick into the Manor’s fitness room. Setting his son down in front of the mirrored wall, Jameson said, “Okay, here’s what going to happen. I’m going to teach you self-defense and the two of us are going to make you into a big, strong tod, alright? That way, when something like this happens again, you’ll be ready. You just need to promise me that you keep training, okay? And what did I tell you about promises?”

 Nick sniffed and stated, “A promise is one of the most important things a mammal can give to another. It’s a verbal symbol of trust. Once you have made a promise you must keep it.” It was one of the more important lessons his dad had taught him. “I promise to keep training. I might not always be able to but I’ll do my best to train when I can.” Nick promised resolutely.

 Jameson smiled and nodded his approval. “Okay then. Besides, with how strong you’ll get, when you meet that special someone, you’ll be able to protect her.” He ruffled Nick’s headfur which caused his son to try and bat his paws away. “Let’s get started, Champ.”

 * Flashback Ends *
They had started by setting up a workout menu. Over the next couple of years, Jameson would teach Nick different martial arts styles and they would spar. Sometimes that was how they settled their disputes. Then one day, Nick disappeared. Jameson hadn’t worried. He knew that Nick had grown tired of the atmosphere at home. Vanessa though, had had a conniption, but Jameson didn’t blame Nick. He even gave an acquaintance a note to pass on to Nick, stating that he understood.

Nick had kept up his training for a good length of time, but soon he just used it to exercise and stay in shape. After the press conference though, Nick began to train again, going full throttle. Yes, he had been angry and hurt, but only three days later he knew that Judy had done something to him that was irreversible. He wasn’t sure what it was that she had done to him, but Nick found himself determined to become stronger than ever. When Judy returned, she had found him during his relaxation time. That desire to become stronger had reemerged again, only this time far more powerfully. Now? Now, he knew why. The sound of someone clearing their throat had him turn to see who it was. His jaw hit the floor at the sight he beheld.

Judy somehow managed to keep a straight face in response to Nick’s reaction. When Jameson had woken her up earlier to help get her ready for the trip to Bunnyburrow, she hadn’t known what to think. He had led her to a small room where he explained that he had a couple of his former jackrabbit associate’s spare outfits. He pawed over a spandex bodysuit as the base layer. It had been a size and a half too small for the jackrabbit, but as it was meant to stretch so that it fit snuggly, it had fit his associate well. In comparison, it was roughly half a size too small for Judy, so it fit nigh-perfectly. Jameson had left the room for her to change into it. When he had returned, he carried a couple of items with him, including a jet-black suit. Jameson adjusted the body armor to fit her then had her put on the five-piece suit. He fitted her with a holster for her sidearm then let her examine herself in the mirror. “I’m almost certain Nick’s going to find himself speechless.” Jameson had told her. Turned out that he was right.

Nick looked at Judy wearing a wonderfully formfitting suit. “W-wow!” he muttered. Standing, he walked over to her and then made a circle around her. “Y-you look breathtaking, Fluff.” He was quite certain that she looked a bit larger than normal, but drew the conclusion that she was wearing some type of body armor underneath the suit. “I wonder if Dad’s going to have me dress up like this.”

Judy gave him a crooked grin. “That’s actually why I’m here. He wants me to bring you upstairs so he can get you all suited up.” She took his paw and felt her heart skip a beat. She still wasn’t used to this, but she desperately wanted to be. She led Nick upstairs to the room Jameson had led her to so that Jameson could get him fitted.

Jameson heard Nick and Judy enter and turned to face them. Gesturing to Judy, he asked Nick, “Do you want her to leave? Or are you comfortable enough to let her stay?”

Nick looked at Judy. They had agreed they would take things slow, but he didn’t mind Judy seeing him undress. “I don’t mind if you stay,” he whispered to her. “But, if you want to leave, you can.”

Judy blushed. Stammering, “I, I, uhh...” She wanted nothing more than to be okay seeing Nick naked, but she wasn’t ready for that. She tried to say something, but the thought of seeing Nick undressed sent her mind spiralling, and she couldn’t formulate a response. Thankfully, Jameson pulled a divider out from a storage closet, and began setting it up, bisecting the room.

“Here, Nick and I can work behind this, that way you can remain in the room while we take care of things.”

As Jameson’s statement started to sink in, and Judy realized that she wouldn't be seeing Nick in a state of undress quite yet, her thoughts finally settled down, and she was able to respond with an
“Oh, thank you, in that case, I think I would like to stay then.”

With Judy’s acquiescence to the plan, Jameson continued, “Excellent, Nick, please step behind this with me, and strip down to your undergarments so I can fit you.” In addition to sizing Nick up so that he could select a set of undergarments, body armor, and a suit for him, Jameson also wished to use this opportunity to determine how physically fit Nick was.

As Nick moved behind the divider and removed his shirt though, Jameson couldn’t stop himself from taking a sharp inhalation of breath as his heart nearly stopped upon seeing the state of Nick’s upper torso.

Nick said nothing as his father looked upon him. He was extremely well-built for a fox. His muscles were both lean and compacted, allowing him to deceive others into believing that he wasn’t a very dangerous threat. However, he knew that what caught his father’s eyes were all the scars that he had accumulated over his years on the streets. Some of them were the result of different vocations he had taken, such as a personal bodyguard. Several others were from the various underground fight rings that he had participated in until recently. Still, despite all his scars, Nick thought he cut an impressive figure. As Jameson collected himself, he indicated for Nick to turn around slowly, allowing him to judge just how much damage his son had accumulated over the years. Jameson had to grit his teeth and bite back a growl as Nick came full circle; The scars covered a majority of his upper body, and it appeared likely that they continued down his legs as well.

“Son, there is no reason a 25-year-old tod like you should have such an extensive collection of scars.”

Nick’s brain came to a halt as his father’s statement echoed in his head. He quickly began to recalibrate his mind. It wasn’t that he had forgotten, but ever since he had left home, it had become pure habit to tell others he was older than he actually was. It had gotten to the point that whenever he was asked his age he just added 7 or 8 years. Now, he started to realize just how bad it must look. Nick hung his head. He felt a mix of pride and shame from his scars. Pride because he could perfectly recall how he got each and every one of them. Shame because of how it must appear to have them at such a young age.

Judy had heard Jameson’s initial sharp intake of breath as Nick’s shadow behind the translucent divider had removed his shirt, and it had driven her apprehension to the limit. She was already stressed enough, given the events of the last day or so, and when Jameson made his statement, it was the final straw, and she rushed around the edge of the divider, her heart nearly breaking in two as she took in the sight of Nick.

Nick sharply turned at the sudden gasp that Judy had released upon seeing him, and his shame shot to all new heights as he took in the sight of Judy’s droopy ears and tear-filled eyes, her entire countenance a mixture of both despair and fury. Seeing Judy’s reaction to his scar covered torso had Nick’s own ears pinning themselves back against his head, as he began rubbing his right paw up and down his left arm.

Seeing Judy’s reaction to Nick, and surmising that the sight of Nick had caused the proverbial pot to finally boil over for her, Jameson quickly decided that Judy was the more pressing matter. Jameson pointed to Nick. “You stay here. Judy, please come with me.” He led Judy out of the room and turned to point at Nick again to make sure he stayed in the room. Closing the door, he made his way downstairs with Judy. He arrived on the ground floor just as Vanessa walked in. “Rory, Nick is upstairs in the outfitting room, covered in old scars. Please go check him out, and make sure they are all superficial.”

Vanessa sighed as she heard Jameson’s request. She knew that Nick obviously had received injuries
while he lived on the streets. She had cried herself to sleep some nights wondering if she would ever see him again. She gave Jameson a nod and walked upstairs. ‘Nick’s fine. He’s taken some damage, but he isn’t dead. He’s here and he’s alive.’ She kept repeating that to herself the entire way to the outfitting room.

After he watched Vanessa go upstairs, Jameson led Judy into the library. “Take a seat. I’m sure you have a number of questions that have been bothering you. I’ll make us some tea and we can talk.”

Judy sat down in one of the plush chairs. She did indeed have a number of questions and concerns over the last day or so, but the timing had never seemed right to pursue them, so she had tried bury her questions. Clearly the stress of doing so had been less concealed than she thought. “Am I that obvious?” she asked. Jameson gave her a smug grin that had her sigh. “I’m sure that you have conditions set for this exchange. May I hear them?”

Jameson set a teacup filled with chilled red clove tea. “Two. First of all, we do this quid pro quo. For every question that I answer, I get to ask one in return, if I so choose. Second, there may be questions that I will not answer. Either because it isn’t my place or due to the fact that I’m unable to divulge the information at this time. In those cases, I’ll say pass and you may ask another. That sound reasonable?”

Judy nodded her agreement and took a sip of the tea. “Oh, that’s good.” she stated with a smile. “Okay, first question. Might I inquire why you have pure black fur?”

Jameson smirked at her. “Ooh, straight to the good questions.” Taking a sip of his own tea, he answered, “It’s a bit complicated, honestly. I possess a very rare genetic marker that many haven’t heard of. It’s called the Izu Gene. Truth is that most mammals actually have it, but only a few actually awaken or activate them. They are utterly unique because how they manifest is different for every mammal that awakens. Mine physically manifested causing my fur to become black. The Izu Gene also grants enhanced traits such as intellect, strength, agility, and constitution. Vanessa and I had Nick tested as soon as he was born. He has it too, but for some odd reason his seem to be awakening slower than what is considered normal.” Setting his teacup down, he stated, “My turn now. Your black fur markings? Are they natural? Or did you get them permanently dyed that way?”

Judy nodded. “They’re natural.” She fell silent for a minute. “Heh. You know, growing up, I would constantly get bullied because of them. Never really learned why. Nobody would tell me. I still don’t know why my classmates would call me all the things they did.” She gave Jameson a sad smile. Choosing not to dwell on the memories, she decided to probe for answers on a subject that had been bothering her ever since her arrival at the Manor, “Nick told me that his mom worked hard to purchase a ranger scout uniform for him, but judging from your house, I almost feel like that was a lie. What is Nick trying to hide?”

Jameson felt bad about what Judy had gone through because of her markings. He wanted to tell her that the markings were nearly identical to Nick’s, but he didn’t think it was his place. He chose instead to answer her question. “Nick didn’t really lie. He just bent the truth a little bit. Obviously, we could have purchased any old standard ranger scout uniform, but Vanessa scoured through all of the tailor and seamstress shops to find just the right mammal to custom tailor a specially made ranger scout outfit.” Jameson frowned. “Nick only ever wore it that one night. Did he tell you what happened?”

Judy frowned as well. “He told me that everyone present were prey mammals who said that if he thought they would ever trust a fox without a muzzle he had to be dumb.” Judy watched Jameson pinch the bridge of his snout. “I want to say that if I had been there that I would have stood up for him, but…”
Judy gave a small nod of confirmation. “I was surprised to find that he’s now a pastry chef back home. My parents are even business partners with him now. On the day that I returned to the city, I met up with him again and he apologized. He’s the one who gave me the final piece of information I needed so I could find Nick and truly close the investigation.”

Jameson huffed. “I’m just going to assume that you’ve already told Nick this.” Getting another nod of confirmation, Jameson took another sip of tea. “Your turn, Ms. Hopps.”

Judy considered which question to ask. “What does Mrs. Wilde do at the hospital?” Yesterday, Mrs. Wilde had announced that she would have the wounded officers transferred into her care, but Judy wished to know a little more detail than that.

Jameson shrugged. “Rory’s a diagnostician over at the Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia. She takes the cases that most refuse to take or won’t take for either personal reasons or bigoted discrimination.” Finishing his tea, Jameson chuckled. “That’s kind of how we met. She saved my ass.” Setting his cup down and sliding it aside, he asked, “I can tell you’ve got more serious questions to ask. Why don’t you go ahead and throw them at me?” Jameson inquired.

Huffing, Judy stated, “I hate how perceptive you are. I guess your previous line of work, whatever it was, had it ingrained so deeply in your mind it’s second nature.” Seeing Jameson’s expressionless face, Judy sighed. “I would like to know about the armory yesterday. Where did all those firearms come from? I’ve never even seen or heard of some of them. Are you even permitted by law to own them?”

Jameson’s face remained expressionless and he seemed to look off into space. Closing his eyes, he answered, “I should really say ‘pass’, but…” Jameson leaned back in his seat. “Here’s what I can tell you: All of them are from my former profession. Yes, I’m licensed to own and carry them. I’m unable to inform you of any more than that.” Looking her directly in the eyes, he stated, “My past isn’t one of bright, twinkling lights of multiple colors, Ms. Hopps. I’d very much prefer that you refrain from digging too deep.”

A sense of fear welled up within her and Judy wondered how much wiggle room she had. “What exactly was your former profession?” she asked warily. That feeling of dread intensified before it simply disappeared.

“Pass.” Jameson stated in a tone that brooked no argument. The terror in her eyes, had him sigh. Pulling out a small notepad from his pocket, Jameson wrote down a small note and slid it across the table to her. The note was short, stating: ‘The information is classified above top secret.’ He watched as her eyes widened at the words.

“I see you understand, any further questions brewing in your mind?”

Looking Jameson directly in the eye and composing herself, she asked, “Is there anything you can tell me about how to court your son properly? We’ve already agreed that we’re going to take this slow, but I want to do this right.” The wide grin that she got from Jameson had Judy relaxing a bit, knowing he would help her.

Jameson got up and walked over to one of the bookcases. Selecting a specific book, he made his way back to Judy. “Here. This should tell you everything you need to know.” He passed the book to
her then reclaimed his seat, finishing off his tea.

Judy looked at the book Jameson had just given her. It was titled *The Complete Young Vulpine’s Guide to Maturity*. Judy looked up at Jameson with a confused look. “What exactly is this?”

Jameson stood to get himself more tea. “That is the book given to all fox kits on their thirteenth birthday. Normally, a kit will inherit the book of the same sex parent, but that one is a little different. Rory typed that one up herself. It contains the information of both the books given to a tod or a vixen. She even gave it to Nick on his twelfth birthday instead of his thirteenth for some reason unknown to me.”

Judy opened the book and scanned the table of contents. There were chapters specifically designated to the courting behavior of foxes as well as one for mating practices. Judy felt her ears heat up as she began to imagine both she and Nick entangled in bedsheets. Closing the book quickly as if it would stop the mental images, she asked, “You’re letting me have this?”

Jameson smiled at her. “Of course. You’re going to need it. Especially once you and Nick have kits.” Seeing Judy begin to panic, he swiftly added, “Not that I’m expecting the two of you start getting busy anytime soon. Take your time getting to know each other better.” He felt relieved as he watched Judy relax. The library door then opened to reveal Vanessa. Jameson asked, “He all good?”

“Yes.” Vanessa confirmed. “All his scars are only flesh wounds. He’s still in the outfitting room waiting for you two.” She left, having said what she needed to and headed to the kitchen for something to eat.

Jameson and Judy walked back upstairs and rejoined Nick. Now that she had calmed down a bit, and gotten some answers, at least to the questions that Jameson could help her with, Judy had an opportunity to take in the sight of Nicks shirtless body properly. Needless to say, it caused a surge of emotions in her; Sadness, at seeing all the scars, and thinking about the pain Nick must have endured. Happiness, at knowing that apparently they were all superficial. Embarrassment, at seeing the mammal she was in love with topless, causing the blood to rush into her face and ears. Arousal, because the sight of Nick like this caused her heat to flare up again. Finally settling on relief, Judy rushed over to Nick, embracing him tightly. She felt Nick reciprocate the gesture and wrap his tail around her. Being in Nick’s arms made her feel safe and protected. When she felt Nick lay a kiss to the top of her head, Judy let out a contented sigh.

Nick smiled at Judy’s reaction. “You need to let go so that I can get fitted, Cottontail.” He fought back a grin and chuckle as Judy pulled away with a pout.

“Ok, but we need to have a talk too Slick, sometime soon.” After all, Judy needed to know about those scars, and she hadn’t forgotten Jameson’s statement that no 25 year old should be so scarred.

Nodding his head to show his understanding, Nick took the articles of clothing that his father was now offering, and stepped back into an alcove behind the divider to pull on the spandex undergarments. Re-emerging, he let his father fit him with body armor. “Is this stuff police issue?” he asked, curiously.

“Nope. It’s military-grade.” Jameson stated. Making the final adjustments, he retrieved one of his old suits and gave it to Nick. “Here put this on. It should fit, if just barely.” He watched as Nick put the suit on and smiled as he imagined Nick doing this on his wedding day. Shaking his head to clear it, Jameson made a few minor adjustments. He was surprised to find that instead of being a little large for Nick, it was actually much tighter. Finished, Jameson said, “Okay. So, it’s now… “ Jameson checked his watch. “4:05 in the morning. The armed escort won’t arrive to collect you until 5 o’clock in the afternoon. What do you want to do?”
Bonnie Hopps was seated in one of the large living rooms inside the burrow drinking a warm glass of milk. For some reason unknown to her, she was having difficulty sleeping. She kept having this feeling that something was coming for her, but that wasn’t really unusual when it came to her. More often than not, others would tell her that she was paranoid, but she just considered it being sensibly prepared. Gently picking up her cup, Bonnie began making her way to the small library located near the front entrance. She hoped that reading one of the many novels would help her sleep. Before she got there however, there was a knock on the front door. Proceeding with caution, she withdrew a handgun from the side table near the entrance. Checking to make sure it wasn’t actually loaded, she marched toward the door. Peeking through the peephole, Bonnie saw a rather curious looking jackrabbit buck with tiger stripes nervously fidgeting just on the other side of the door.

Jaxon Lapins stood outside the address for what he hoped was the correct residence of one Bonnie Blue O’Hare. His ears were standing upright hoping to catch any sound emanating from within. He soon identified two very clear sounds. One was the lock disengaging. The other the sound of a firearm being cocked. That one caused a tiny shiver of fear to travel down his spine. He started to berate himself for his decision to come this early in the morning, before the sun even peeked over the horizon. As the door cracked just enough to see a single eye glaring at him, he cleared his throat and asked, “Hello, ma’am. Is this the home of Ms. Bonnie Blue O’Hare?” The door opened a little more to reveal a doe that he immediately identified as the one he was looking for. She was obviously older than the photos he had seen previously, but it was indeed her.

Bonnie stood in the doorway. Her gun positioned so that she could quickfire at a moment’s notice. Staring straight at the buck, she asked, “That depends on who’s asking and what they want.” Narrowing her eyes, she noted the buck’s tiger-like stripes. Leveling her gun center mass, she stated, “If you want answers, you’re going to have to give some in return.”

Jaxon gulped in fear. He raised his paws in a gesture of surrender. “Ms. O’Hare…”


Nodding once in understanding, Jaxon continued, “Mrs. Hopps, my name is Jaxon Lapins.”

Bonnie stepped forward instantly, pressing the barrel of her gun between the jackrabbit’s eyes. “You better start explaining right now or I’m going to blow your head off.”

Jaxon gulped in fear. He raised his paws in a gesture of surrender. “I-I fully intended to, Mrs. Hopps.”

“Nodding once in understanding, Jaxon continued, “Mrs. Hopps, my name is Jaxon Lapins.”

Bonnie stepped forward instantly, pressing the barrel of her gun between the jackrabbit’s eyes. “You better start explaining right now or I’m going to blow your head off.”

Jaxon felt his heart rate pick up out of terror. “I-I fully intended to, Mrs. Hopps.”

Bonnie used the gun to indicate for him to turn around. Once he had, she grasped the collar of the jackrabbit’s shirt, pressed the muzzle to his back, then guided him inside and into the small library she had originally been heading towards. Once she forced him into a chair, she pulled another directly in front and rested the gun on her knee, once more aiming it center mass. “Start. Talking.”

Jaxon took a deep breath. “As you might have surmised, I’m the son of Bryan Jonathan ‘BJ’ Lapins.” Seeing her eyes narrow, he flinched. “I’m fully aware that you have every reason to hate him and I don’t blame you. However, my father is dead and I’m here to fulfill his dying wish.” Receiving the gesture to continue, he began his tale. “My entire kithood, my father would tell me about you. I knew you better than my own mother, who died in childbirth having me. For years, I was under the assumption that she was you. One day, my father pulled me aside, sat me down, and began to give me the full story. How he met you, fell in love, then was summoned to report for duty in the middle of the night after your first night together.”
Bonnie disengaged her firearm, but kept it positioned. “Keep talking.”

Jaxon felt a little more relaxed knowing that her gun was no longer prepped. “He was assigned to a mission that ended up going sideways. As a result, he was unable to return sooner. By the time he and the team he was with completed the mission, almost a whole year had passed. When he came back to find you, he could find no record of your existence.”

Bonnie scoffed. “Of course not. After he left, I found out that I was pregnant. My father was beyond furious. I tried to explain, but he would hear nothing of it. My husband, Stu, was my best friend back then and he lied to my father, telling him that the kit was his. That mollified my father, who then proceeded to plan the wedding. After the kit’s birth, he realized that we had lied to him and I was disowned, banished from my family, then every record of my existence as ‘Bonnie Blue O’Hare’ was struck from public record.”

Jaxon’s ears drooped. “I’m well aware. That, however, didn’t stop my father from doing everything within his abilities to locate you. I must say that your parents were very thorough, because my father was completely unable to track down anything.” Clasping his paws in his lap, he stared at the floor before continuing. “My father never stopped searching for you. Three years later, he met my mother. He explained that he had already found his lifemate, but couldn’t find her. My mother understood and aided him in his search. I wasn’t exactly an accident, but my father didn’t want to die knowing there was a possibility you were alive and he wasn’t around any longer to explain.”

Bonnie studied the buck and could find no indication that he was being deceitful. Sighing, she said, “I always thought that BJ just up and left me, like a one-night stand.” Placing her piece down on a side desk, she stated, “He really was one of a kind.” Giving the jackrabbit buck, Jaxon, a melancholy smile, she asked, “How long did it take you to find me?”

“Oh, just…six years.” Jaxon answered. “I started where my father left off.” Reaching into his pocket, he extracted a small jewelry box. Passing it over to the older doe, he stated, “My father gave me this to give to you. Said that he always wanted you to have it.”

Bonnie took the offered box and looked inside. It was a beautiful engagement ring with a rich cyan colored sapphire, the same color that BJ’s eyes had been. Chuckling, Bonnie fondly stated, “That moron.” Closing the box, she kept it between her paws as she leaned back with them in her lap.

Hearing the library door open, both turned to see who was joining them to see Stu wearing nothing more than his boxer briefs and a robe. Stu looked from one to the other, mildly surprised by the presence of the striped buck. His nose twitched as he realized that he was BJ’s kid based on the unusual markings the buck possessed. Tilting his head to the side, Stu inquired, “I know it’s rather earlier than normal, but would either of you like breakfast?”

Bonnie smiled and stood. “I’ll get started on it, Stu.” Turning to Jaxon, she added, “Come on. It would be considered rude not to feed a guest.” Exiting the library, she made her way to the kitchen.

Jaxon stood to follow, but was stopped by Stu, who said, “Just so you know, I don’t blame you for anything your father did. You’re not the reason he left, that much I’m aware. Couple of weeks before he left, BJ told me to watch over her and I gave him my word. I know she still loves him, but…” he shrugged in lieu of continuing.

Jaxon stared at the older buck in astonishment as he watched him walk in the same direction as his wife. Following, he started to look at the large number of photographs that lined just that particular hallway. He stopped when he came to a single photo that showed Mr. and Mrs. Hopps with only one kit. Female with foxlike markings. His mind raced as he realized that the young doe in the photograph was his half-sister.
Bonnie came to find Jaxon when he hadn’t entered the dining room after Stu. She found him staring at the photo of her and Stu with Judy the day they brought her home. Walking up and standing beside Jaxon, she said, “I guess you figured out that that young doe is your half-sister. Her name’s Judith Laverne Hopps. She, as well as a friend of hers, will actually be here late this coming evening on account of a police investigation they were involved in. She’s an officer in the ZPD.”

Jaxon felt flooded with pride at the news. “That’s amazing.” Turning to Bonnie with a large smile, he asked, “A buck?”

Bonnie smirked a bit. “Actually, a red fox tod.” She wanted to laugh at Jaxon’s shocked expression. Then she saw it soften into a tender look. Curious to the rapid shift, she asked, “What is it?”

“Nothing.” Jaxon stated. “It’s just fascinating to me that she’s befriended a fox.” Pulling off the glove on his left hand, he showed her an engagement ring. “I’m actually betrothed to an arctic vixen.”

Bonnie stared at the engagement ring in amazement. Slowly, she started to chuckle and then exploded into full-blown laughter. “I’m sorry. I’m not laughing because I think that it’s funny in the sense you’re engaged to a vixen. It’s just that Judy was always a little more inclined towards predators as a kit, too. I always thought that it was a phase, but during our last video call with her, I realized that that’s just how she is.” Wiping away a tear that escaped, she said, “If you want to stay for a while to meet her then you’re more than welcome.” Taking on a sad expression, she added, “I think it’s time that Stu and I told her the truth about her parentage anyway. She’s probably already guessed some of it, but she deserves the whole story.”

Jaxon thanked her for her hospitality then asked, “Would you mind if I called and invited my fiancée? She’s currently already on her way to our new assigned post, but we don’t have to report in for another week or so.”

Bonnie put a paw on his cheek. “Of course. I would love that. And, please, call me ‘Mom’, okay.” She saw Jaxon’s eyes widen and fill with tears. Giving him a quick hug, she led him through the dining room/kitchen area to one of the back patios. “You go ahead and call her out here. When you’re done come back inside and eat.”

Jaxon watched as Bonnie walked inside. Taking a seat in one of the many chairs available, he pulled out his phone, selected the contact info for his fiancée, Skye, let it ring once, hung up, then redialed. The reason for this was since both he and Skye were ZIB agents, any time they called someone their Caller ID would read ‘Blocked Number’. They used process to let the other know that it was them. When the call connected, Jaxon couldn’t help but smile at her greeting.

“Hey, Tiger! Everything okay?” Skye asked.

“Yup. Everything’s fine.” Jaxon replied. “Out of curiosity, where are you right now?”

“I’m about an hour away. I had to stop and refuel just a little while ago.” Skye told him. “Why? What’s up?”

Jaxon decided to just tell her. “So, I managed to locate her residence. I was greeted with a sidearm aimed center mass.” He heard Skye gasp and quickly continued. “Now, hold on for a minute. Let me finish. I’m fine. She didn’t shoot me. She let me in and we talked. Well, I talked, she listened. I explained everything.”

“How did she take it?” Skye wondered. She had helped Jaxon in his quest to find his father’s true love for the past five years. She knew that more than likely the doe had moved on, thinking that Jaxon’s father was deceased, but she always held a small hope that when they found her she would
forgive him.

“Pretty well, actually.” Jaxon answered. “She’s married now. Her husband is an old kithood friend and my father even told him to look out for her. My father just seemed to have forgotten that. But, I learned something amazing Skye.”

“Oh, what would that be?” Skye inquired. From the sound of Jaxon’s voice, she could tell it was something truly exciting for him. She grew curious as to what he learned that could get him like this.

“Skye, I have a half-sister!” Jaxon exclaimed. He heard her gasp and let out a squeal. “Her name’s Judith and she’s an officer in the ZPD. She’s scheduled to return home for a while due to an investigation she and her friend were involved in. Bonnie’s invited you and I to stay here for a while so we can get to know her.”

“Okay then, I’ll hurry up and get there as fast as I legally can.” Skye stated. “Do you know when she’s due to arrive?”

Jaxon sighed. “No. All I know is it’s late in the afternoon.” His ears picked up the sound of multiple voices coming from the dining room/kitchen. “Hey, I’ve got to go. Breakfast is being served and Bonnie would like to introduce me to the rest of the family. Call me when you get here and I’ll let you in, Okay?”

“Okay. I should be there soon.” Skye informed him. “Oh, and Tiger?”

“Yes, Skye?” Jaxon inquired.

“Love you.”

Chuckling, Jaxon said, “I love you, too.” He ended the call and prepared himself for what he was sure would be a long line of introductions. Checking to make sure he was presentable, he walked back inside.

**ZPD Precinct One – Zootopia**

Harrison Wolford and Zannah Fangmeyer were two of the most well-known officers within the Zootopian Police Force. Well, they weren’t exactly officers. Officers walked a beat, gave out parking tickets, and conducted traffic control. No, Harrison Wolford and Zannah Fangmeyer were detectives in Precinct One’s Criminal Investigative Division, both Rank 3, with Harrison being the senior partner.

The C.I.D. of the ZPD had five ranks. The lower the number, the higher your position. Rank 5s were the ‘Greenhorns’ or probationary rookie investigators. These got mentored by the Rank 4s for 12 to 18 months. Rank 4s who weren’t mentoring either rode a desk and evaluated the work of the Rank 5s or conducted cold case investigations. Rank 3s were either assigned a partner of equal rank for field work or tasked with supervising the Rank 4s. Rank 2s were the ones who were assigned high priority cases such as serial killers, rapists, and similar offenders. The Rank 1s…those were the Special Investigators. Rank 1s were tasked with investigating crimes like assassinations and terrorists.

Harrison Wolford had applied at age seventeen for the Police Academy and was granted approval thanks to a little used policy called the ‘Pre-graduation Clause’. It was for High School students who aimed to be police officers right after graduating. His reason was personal. When he was 12, one of his older brothers and his three younger sisters had been kidnapped then forced into prostitution and drug addiction. It wasn’t until he was 14 that his older brother Elias had managed to escape with their sisters. Harrison vowed that he would become a cop to make sure that others never went through
During his time at the police academy, he met and befriended another wolf named Artemis Howle. They soon became best of friends. The two were both tied for the top of the class. Their friendship, however, came to an end when Artemis was involved in a fight. Instead of letting the Academy’s Disciplinary Committee handle the situation, Artemis simply vanished. Harrison Wolford graduated valedictorian. He was assigned to Precinct One and after his three-month probationary period, his training officer called in some favors to get him registered for the Detective’s Exam. He scored the highest of all the applicants. He was selected by a Rank 1 detective to be his trainee unlike the others. At the 12-month mark, he was promoted to a Rank 4 and simply rode a desk working the Top 10 coldest cases. Within 21 weeks, he had solved seven of them. The day he closed the 7th case, his old mentor and one of the Promotion Review Board were told of his accomplishments. He, however, turned down every promotion and stayed at Rank 4 for eight years. He finally accepted the promotion to Rank 3 after he closed a grand total of 50 cold cases. His first case as a Rank 3 was when he met Zannah Fangmeyer.

Zannah Fangmeyer’s parents had decided that they would let her stay home alone on the weekend of her 15th birthday. That Thursday afternoon they left saying they would return early Monday morning. As soon as they left, Zannah made sure to lock the doors and windows then went to take a shower. After she was finished, she had gone downstairs to watch a romantic film, but was knocked unconscious. When she had come to, Zannah discovered she was bound and gagged to her parents’ four-poster bed. There was also an unidentifiable male lion in the room wearing a mask. He then sexually assaulted her in multiple ways. She was raped vaginally, anally, and orally. The assault lasted the entire weekend. Her parents found her when they returned. She had been taken to the nearest medical center where she met Harrison Wolford. Her rapist was never caught. He had been meticulous in every way. There had been no fur, no prints, no DNA. Harrison stayed with her every step of the way, answering every time she called even if it was just because she needed someone to talk to. On her 18th birthday, she applied for the police academy then graduated salutatorian. She was assigned to Precinct One where she was partnered with Harrison thanks to a minor policy change that required every Detective to have an officer assigned to them. Five years later, she took the Detective’s Exam and scored in the Top Three. 18 months after that, she was promoted to Rank 4 where she managed to close 35 cold cases on her own and 8 with Harrison’s assistance. As a result, she was promoted to Rank 3 two years later.

Anyone you asked at Precinct One would tell you that the two of them were rather unusual for their respective species. It didn’t take any psychological training to see that Harrison didn’t follow the pack mentality most wolves possessed and fit more into the ‘Lone Wolf’ category. Zannah was also rather odd due to her size, because even the smallest full-grown male tigers were slightly larger than the largest fully matured female tigresses. Zannah’s size as somewhere in the range between the smaller and more moderately sized males. Both were more muscular than normally seen for their species and yet they were leaner as well.

Presently, Harrison and Zannah were in the final stages of checking their equipment for their assigned mission. Chief Tobias Bogo had assigned them to escort their colleague Judy Hopps and her friend Nicholas Wilde to Bunnyburrow. Originally, the plan was only to transport them to the Savannah Central Train Station, but a recent development required an immediate change of plans. Harrison checked to make sure they had enough tranquilizer darts as well as bullets. Zannah was currently fastening her tactical vest.

“You know,” Zannah began. “This type of assignment would usually be given to someone either ranked 2 or higher. I wonder why they chose us for this task.”

Harrison pawed her the on-duty weapon she had been registered when she joined the force, having
determined that it was functional. “I’m up for a promotion review sometime next month.” he stated, matter-of-factly. “I’m guessing this will serve as my final performance evaluation.” Loading his service revolver, he closed and spun the chamber then holstered it. “It’ll probably serve as a major stepping stone for you, too.”

Tossing Harrison his tactical vest, Zannah hummed. “Maybe, but I’m just hoping to talk to Judy during the trip.” Double checking her clip, she added, “She’s been through enough shit as it is.”

Harrison nodded in agreement as he finished getting his vest on. “And we’ll be able to get to know Nick as well.” he pointed out. “Something about him tells me that he’s…I don’t know. Special, I guess.”

Zannah looked at Harrison all geared up. Smiling, she stood in front of him. Wolves tended to normally be smaller than the smallest tigresses, but Harrison was far larger than any other wolf she had ever seen. He actually stood about 2 to 2.5 inches taller than her. “Look, I know we’ve been trying to figure out our feelings for each other, but I haven’t changed my mind.” She ran a claw from the side of his lower jaw down to his collarbone. “I’m willing to wait, but my heat will be kicking in soon and I don’t want some random male to start attempting to bed me.”

Harrison closed his eyes at the feeling of Zannah’s action. “I…I know.” he admitted. “It isn’t that I don’t want to, but you’ve seen what society thinks of interspecies couples. Too many times we’ve been tasked with investigating a case where the motive for murder was ‘to cleanse the disease’.”

Opening his eyes as he placed a paw over hers, he whispered, “I want to protect you from that, Zannah.”

With a wry grin, Zannah stated, “I’m damaged goods, Harry. I was raped over an entire three-day weekend and survived. Believe me when I tell you I’m not afraid of anything anyone can do. We’re partners. We’re supposed to protect each other. So, let me protect you just like you protect me.”

Harrison pulled her into a tender kiss. Pulling away before either of them lost control, he hugged her close to his chest and whispered, “We’ll keep this just between us for now. Okay?” Feeling her nod into his chest, he laid a kiss on her cheek. Stepping back, he looked at the clock. It was now 1:30 in the afternoon. According to the agreed upon plan of action, he and Zannah were to meet up at a neutral location to have Nick and Judy transferred into their custody from an anonymous mammal at 2 o’clock. “Let’s get moving.”

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is curious, the Izu Gene is my personal combination of Midi-chlorians (from Star Wars), Precursor DNA (Assassin's Creed), and the Mutant X-gene/Meta-DNA (DC/Marvel Universes).

I also have plans for a Zootopia/Star Wars crossover. My planned Original Work has been put on hiatus as the person who inspired the work (my last living grandparent) has passed away recently. No, it is not scrapped, just waiting for a new inspiration.

Also, my, now 9 year old, son has been suspended for breaking a fellow 12 year old student's nose while defending his sister. (I'm so proud yet slightly ashamed.)
Chapter Six: Tales Aboard the Zootopian Express

Chapter Summary

Another look into the past aboard a train to Bunnyburrow. We get a bit more info about our favorite mammals. We also meet some new characters that will leave impacts on the city.

Chapter Notes

*Looks around* "Hello? Anyone? You all still there?" *Crickets* "If anybody is still there, I'd like to apologize for the delay. I know it isn't much, but I hope you enjoy this chapter."

Thanks again to Fairlane302 for putting up with my insanity and helping me edit this mess. Good news is everything will be slowing down again soon. That means more writing and reworking the errors. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**Chapter Six: Tales aboard the Zootopian Express**

**Mystic Spring Oasis – Sahara Square – Zootopia – 4:30 pm**

Judy felt absolutely embarrassed to find herself here in front of the Mystic Spring Oasis once again. She and Nick had spent most of the morning out shopping with Jameson and Vanessa, who was continuing to insist on being called 'Rory'. Not Mrs. Wilde, not Lady Vanessa, Rory. By the end of the shopping trip, as they had stopped by the MTHZ to drop Rory off for work, Judy had finally conceded to her wishes, bidding 'Rory' farewell, and thanking her for the shopping trip.

It had only been a short drive after that before the three of them had arrived here at the meeting point, and earlier than expected too.

Nick and Judy exited Jameson's vehicle and removed their luggage from the rear seats before turning to give Jameson their farewells. Expecting him to leave them there, they were surprised to see him exiting the vehicle as well.

"I've got just a few final items that I want you two to have before I leave you in the paws of the ZPD's escort" Jameson said, as he moved towards the rear of his vehicle. Opening the vehicle’s rear compartment, he waved the two over.

Within, there was a small ruggedized case of the sort that you might use to transfer expensive camera gear, or weapons. Opening the lid of the case, Jameson extracted what appeared to be two watches, two earpieces, and two sets of sunglasses. Motioning for Judy to step forward, he immediately began to adjust the earpiece to fit before doing the same with the sunglasses, repeating the process with Nick.
Nick and Judy looked at each other through the eyewear that Jameson had given them and were surprised when data boxes appeared in their line of sight, showing information. From Nick’s point of view, the boxes gave him Judy’s full name, date of birth, blood type, and several other data points. For Judy it was similar, the only difference was that hers showed Nick’s. Both looking at Jameson, they found themselves confused as all his information was listed as question marks.

Seeing their confused looks, Jameson decided to explain. “Those are augmented reality glasses. They will provide you with any information that is available on what is within your line of sight. The info provided comes from a variety of various databases including, but not limited to, the ZPD, ZSA, ZIB, and Interpawl. Please do not ask me to give you an explanation. I would love to, but at this moment I can’t.”

Given what Jameson had told her only just that morning, Judy found herself realizing that it was very probable that Nick’s father could have been either a secret agent or clandestine operative of some sort. Glancing to Nick, she saw that he seemed to understand it wasn’t that his father wanted to keep them in the dark but had no choice at this time.

"The glasses can be controlled either by voice command, or by using these watches. The watches also have a number of other functions, including being able to communicate with any other paired watch. The watch is also linked to the earpiece." Jameson stated, as he pressed a combination of buttons to pair the watches together, before handing them over to Nick and Judy.

With that, Jameson hugged them, bade the two farewell, and good luck, before climbing back into his vehicle, and driving off.

As Jameson drove off, Nick nodded, stating, “My dad’s probably going to park further down the street then double back on paw to surveil the transfer at a distance.” Scanning the surrounding area, Nick noticed a small group of mammals making their way over to enter the establishment. One of the mammals was a vixen Nick immediately recognized from his past. Brushing his paw against the watch to activate the sunshades his father had given him, Nick was able to see the data boxes containing her information. Tapping Judy on the shoulder, he said, “If I had had these when I was still hustling then I would have been a knowledge broker.”

Snorting, Judy shook her head. “Somehow, I’m not surprised.” Spotting the vixen within the group, Judy’s ears drooped and she glanced at Nick out of the corner of her eye. He didn’t show any sign or indication of observing the vixen, but the shades left an opening for that little insecure part of her mind to rattle the cage she stuffed it in. Clearing her throat, she said, “That vixen sure is pretty.”

Nick huffed in annoyance. “Not falling for that, Judes. Yes, I know her, but only in a professional business capacity. She was a rival street hustler Finn and I partnered with for a short time before we learned she was skimming cash out of the till.” Wrapping an arm around Judy, Nick added, “Besides, I have no desire for vixens anyway.”

Judy felt that little insecurity subside, at least for now. “Sorry. I’m still struggling with the fact that you want me instead of a vixen like that.” she whispered so softly it was almost no more than a breath. She felt Nick squeeze her shoulder and his tail wrap around her ankles out of view. She felt immensely comforted by the gestures. Suddenly, her ears alerted her to a vehicle approaching. Turning in the direction of the sound, Judy witnessed an unmarked, armored police car stop right in front of them.

Nick whistled. “Wow. They really aren’t taking any chances, are they?” His question had been a rhetorical one, but the massive wolf that stepped out apparently decided to answer any way.

“Nope. You and Judy are both highly important components in regard to this investigation. Your
safety is paramount.” Harrison explained. Slightly taken aback by the black suits worn by the fox and bunny, but deciding it wasn’t worth bringing up, Harrison extended his paw, stating, “Harrison Wolford, Detective Rank 3. My partner, the tigress, is Zannah Fangmeyer, Detective Rank 3.”

Nick reciprocated the gesture while taking note of info within the wolf’s data-boxes, replying, “Nicholas P. Wilde, former street hustler extraordinaire. You already know Judy. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” He helped Judy into the vehicle then assisted Harrison with loading the luggage he and Judy had brought. As he was moving the luggage into the vehicle’s trunk, Nick noticed his new glasses flashing up with background data on the pair of officers. Quickly reviewing the data, Nick determined that none of it was particularly relevant at the moment, so he disregarded the data for now, but filed it away in the back of his mind. With everything packed, Nick joined Judy and Fangmeyer inside the vehicle, saying, “Let’s get rolling.”

Harrison drove off in the direction of the train station. “I’ve been ordered to inform you two that there’s been a development in the case. Approximately five and a half hours ago, the corpse of Dawn Bellwether was discovered in a remote area of Tundra Town. She was shot point-blank, execution-style and had her tongue cut out and placed within her hoof.”

Judy blanched at the news. “Didn’t she get rescued by some paramilitary mercenaries?” She couldn’t understand what had led to Bellwether’s rescuers to murder her.

Looking out the window, Nick stated, “Bellwether wasn’t the one in charge, remember? That extraction was ordered by whoever is and he’s using what happened to send a message. ’Those of my subordinates who fail in their assigned tasks or are captured will be executed without hesitation’.”

Zannah didn’t say anything until Nick was done. “Because of that, Harrison and I will be accompanying you to Bunnyburrow. We won’t be disembarking however, we’re only making sure you arrive without incident.”

Judy and Nick nodded. The four soon pulled into the overnight parking for the Savannah Central Train Station. Exiting the vehicle, they grabbed their luggage and walked inside. Heading to the platform for the train going to Bunnyburrow, they gave the train attendant their boarding passes and entered their compartment.

“Looks like the Chief got us on a sleeper car.” Harrison observed. Stowing their luggage in the overhead bins, he took a seat next to the door. “Might as well sit down. Unless, of course, you want me to pull a bed out.”

Nick shook his head. “We’ll be fine. We’re too wired for sleep at the moment.” Sitting in an available seat, he pulled Judy into the seat next to him. “We’ve got time, so how about we just make casual conversation?”

The four of them sat quietly, unsure of how best to begin. The silence dragged on for so long that it became uncomfortable. Finally unable to take the silence, Zannah requested that they tell them about their adventure on the ‘Missing Mammals’ Case. Nick and Judy were happy to oblige, telling them just about everything. They omitted certain parts, like having Mr. Big threaten Weaselton for information. Every so often, Zannah would stop them to ask a question. Harrison just sat and listened to it all quietly.

An attendant came by and offered them refreshments, but Harrison politely declined saying they were fine. When the attendant left, Nick asked Judy, “How far out are we?”

Judy looked out the window to see if she recognized any landmarks. Seeing the radio relay tower that was used to allow some of Zootopia’s radio stations to reach the Tri-Burrows, she replied,
“We’re still about 160 miles from Bunnyburrow, so we’re looking at maybe another hour and a half, give or take a quarter.”

Zannah shook her head. “I still can’t believe how far your hometown is. I mean, don’t take this the wrong way, I don’t mean to insult you or anything, but you live out in the boondocks.”

Judy started laughing. “I’m not offended in the slightest, because you’re right. Bunnyburrow is, and these are Nick’s words, a carrot picking podunk. Not to be confused with the actual place named Podunk.”

Nick smirked at Judy’s words. “Told you.” Looking out the window himself, he said, “This is actually the first time I’ve ever left the city. I can’t believe how open it is.”

Harrison stated, “I’ve traveled as far as the city of Predatorton, but it was for a family function. If I recall correctly, it’s about a nine hour and forty-five minute train ride from the city. There aren’t any prey mammals within the city limits. They all live just beyond the outskirts.”

Judy sighed. “Before heading to Zootopia, I never visited anywhere outside the limits of the Tri-Burrows. My parents never had any interest traveling other than when the Tri-Burrow’s fair was visiting one of the neighboring areas.”

“I’ve been to Felinia. It’s a small town that’s home mostly to felines, but there are a few other species living there.” Zannah told them. “My parents took me to visit my late Uncle Felix, my father’s younger brother. We stayed for the whole summer vacation from school that year. It was awful.”

Judy noticed the sad expression on Nick’s face. “You okay, Slick? You look like something’s bothering you.”

Nick shrugged. “It’s nothing really. Just thinking about a couple of things from my past.” He turned to her and gave her a tiny, melancholy smile. “I’ve never been out of the city, but I know a great number of places within its districts that many mammals would never imagine existed. There’s a bar in the Rainforest District, for example. It’s called the Jungle Boogie Pub. Finn and I went there once because we heard awesome things about it, but when we got there…” He shook his head. “All the workers were completely nude. Not a scrap of clothes on them.”

Judy balked at that little bit of info. “That’s against Health Code regulations. How are they still in business?”

Nick snorted. “They’re in the Rainforest District and just on the edge of the border that’s used to separate it from the Canal District. That area is often ignored for a variety of reasons, including the fact that a good number of mammals are too frightened to go there.”

Harrison nodded his agreement. Standing, he said, “I’m going to the restroom. I’ll be right back.”

Locking the compartment door after he left, Zannah said, “I’m sure there are a lot of places in Zootopia that many don’t know about. Are there any that you try to avoid purely due to personal reasons?”

Nick sighed. “Plenty. There’s one that I don’t even think the ZPD knows about.” Noticing the curious expressions on Judy and Zannah’s faces, he started explaining. “I’m sure you know about the Nocturnal District, right?” Receiving nods, he stated, “Okay. Well, further into the Nocturnal District is a special sub-district known as the Red Light District. Its streets are lined with establishments specially designed to promote ‘sexual relations’, if you get my meaning. Now, none of the working girls and boys are forced to do anything they don’t want to, but they don’t really have
many rules either. I only went because Finn wanted to get me a ‘present’ for my eighteenth birthday. It did not turn out well. Finn’s always been quite open with his sexuality, but when we got to the first sex club, I finally realized just how much of a slut he really is.”

Judy had to resist the urge to vomit. “That’s horrible. How can he just sleep around like that? Don’t foxes mate for life?”

Nick barked out a laugh. “Yes, yes, we do, but you see there’s something that is required to really seal two foxes as mates and Finn is a master of getting around that.”

Curiosity piqued, Zannah asked, “And what, pray tell, is this requirement? I’m also guessing that other canid species that mate for life such as wolves also require whatever this thing is?”

Nick gave her a smug smirk and wriggled his brows. “You interested in your partner, Tiger-lily?” Seeing the tigress blush, Nick’s smirk became a gentle smile. “Yeah, some other canid species require it, too. I don’t know how well versed in canid reproduction you two are so I’ll break it down for you. During the act of mating, a small bulb forms at the base of our cocks, called a knot, that is used to bind or tie us together. This can only be done with the one we chose as our lifemate. It bonds us in a very special way. Most canines will imprint on our lifemates as well, but when we’re tied to them we tend to stay like that for an extended period of time.” He grinned at Judy then added, “I’ve been told it’s quite intimate.”

Judy’s ears were so red that it was almost an exact match to Nick’s fur. She thought about the book Jameson had given her back at the manor. She had packed it in her luggage, which was right above their heads. She smoothed her ears back, hoping Nick wouldn’t notice how red they were. “Sounds nice.” she whispered.

Nick turned to her with a loving smile. He leaned over and laid a featherlight kiss on her cheek. Returning to his original position, he saw Fangmeyer lost in thought. “You okay over there? You’re really quiet.”

Zannah blinked then nodded. “Yeah, I’m ... fine. Just have something on my mind. Don’t mind me.” She looked out the window and watched the scenery pass by. She was actually remembering her first night with Harrison. It hadn’t been planned, but it had truly been the best night of her entire life. Harrison, on the other paw, had seemed to struggle with something, but eventually they climaxed together. She remembered that he kept whispering ‘Don’t leave me, please. Please, don’t leave me.’ repeatedly. It was something he still did. Thinking about what Nick had said, a small part of her began to ponder if Harrison had actually been asking her to stay with him even though they hadn’t tied together.

Harrison returned from the restroom to find Nick and Judy relaxing against each other, by all appearances, napping. Zannah looked lost somewhere wandering within her mind. Sitting down, he whispered, “Hey? You okay?”

Zannah went to nod, but stopped herself. Shifting around to look Harrison in the eye, she stated, “Come with me. We need to talk.”

Following her into the adjacent compartment, Harrison asked, “What’s going on, Zannah? You seem a little distressed.”

Whirling around on him, she grabbed his shirt and pulled him close. “Why?” she asked him. “Why haven’t you tied yourself to me during any of our nights together?”

Harrison almost felt like he would collapse. It was like his breath left him, rendering him speechless.
Licking his lips nervously, he asked, “H-how do you know about that?”

“Nick was telling us a couple of things about the city and we ended up on the subject of sex.” she explained. “Now answer my question. Why haven’t you tied me?”

Harrison’s ears fell flat against his skull. “I-it’s…” he trailed off, unsure how to explain everything to her. “Fuck.” He dropped down into one of the seats and started to rub his eyes. “This isn’t how I expected, or wanted, to have this conversation.”

“Sorry, but not sorry. Start talking, Harrison.” Zannah ordered, sitting down across from him.

Harrison sighed. “Okay.” Getting on his knees before her and placing a paw on her knee, he looked her in the eyes and said, “Before I met you, I was in a very committed relationship.” Feeling her tense, he quickly added, “We didn’t knot! We didn’t knot! Not for the lack of her trying, though.” Taking her paws in his, he continued, “She was very determined to get me to tie her, but I kept refusing. It just didn’t feel right to me. Finally, when she broke up with me, she told me that if I wouldn’t knot her then I would never find someone. It’s not that I don’t want to, because by the Divine Entities I do, but a tiny part of me keeps telling me that you aren’t her. That I need to wake up, go after my ex, and tie myself to her. She did something to me and I don’t know what or how to fix it.”

Staring down at Harrison sadly, Zannah ran her claws gently through the fur on his head. “Why didn’t you tell me all this earlier? I would have understood.”

Harrison looked at her with tears filling his eyes. “I was scared. I love you and I was afraid you’d leave me when I told you.” he admitted. “We haven’t knotted, but I have imprinted on you, Zannah. You’re basically my center. The thing my life revolves around. If you left me…”

Zannah put a paw over his mouth. “Stop. Right. There. Just stop. I’m not going to leave you, Harrison.” Pulling his head close, she smoothed his headfur lovingly. “We’ll get through this, okay. We’ll get through this together.”

Harrison wrapped his arms around her tightly. He let out a single shaky sob then rose to his feet. “We should get back into our assigned compartment.” Taking ahold of Zannah’s paw, he ushered her back into their compartment where Nick and Judy were still conked out.

<Back with Nick and Judy>

After the door to their compartment closed, Nick and Judy each cracked an eye open to see if they were truly alone. Seeing that they were, they sat up straight. Nick had wanted to give both detectives a chance to slip away. He was also sure Judy had some questions for him. “Okay, Fluff. I know you’ve got questions. Let’s hear them.”

Judy sighed silently. “Back at the manor, your dad stated something about your age.” She waited for a moment hoping Nick would know what she was trying to ask. Thankfully, he was quite aware of what her intended question was.

“Yeah,” Nick began while rubbing his neck. “Well, I left home at 17 after dropping out of high school.” Folding his paws in his lap as he looked down, Nick continued. “I’ll be honest, that story of hustling since I was 12 was exaggerated. I started almost immediately after I dropped out.” Nick started to explain how he was often discriminated by the teachers because of his species and how he dropped out midway through his Junior year. “I just stopped going since it was so obvious no one at the school could believe that I managed to get my spectacular grades without cheating. Additionally, my mom and I were usually at odds, so my home life was not much better. Between the problems at
school and home, I ended up just leaving without a word to anyone or even a note. I was homeless for a while until I started taking odd jobs for cash. That’s when I started hustling. In less than a week, I had made enough to put down a rental deposit on a small studio apartment in Happytown.”

Judy listened as Nick explained himself. “What happened after that?” It kind of made sense that he had started a short time before getting an apartment if he needed to pay rent. Odd jobs didn’t pay much, especially not enough for that.

“Heh,” Nick chuckled. “At first, the small scale hustles I was occasionally doing were enough to cover my rent, but shortly before my 18th birthday, my landlord raised the rent, and I had to start hustling more often. My rent was due the next week, but after living expenses, I didn’t have enough saved to cover the increased rent. The landlord threatened to evict me if I didn’t pay on time. So, I started thinking up more profitable cons. I had started by running smaller cons like three card monte, but with the rent hike, I soon graduated to larger schemes like the pawpsicles. It didn’t take long for me to start building a reputation as quite a gifted grifter. Thanks to that reputation, there were a number of mammals that wanted to be hustling partners with me during that time, but they never stuck around long until Finn.” Smoothing his headfur back, he knew he had to tell her. “I, uh, had a few vixens as roommates, as well as partners, but I promise you nothing happened. There was one vixen I had to kick out for trying to sleep with me, but other than that, I was on my own until Finn came around and offered a partnership.”

Jealousy coursed through Judy at the thought of Nick living with vixens, but his open honesty and his promise that he hadn’t slept with one all but snuffed it out. She slid closer to Nick and leaned into him. She felt Nick wrap an arm around her and drape his tail over her lap. She snuggled closer saying, “That’s enough for now, Slick. I want to know about those scars too, but we have until approximately 8 o’clock ‘til we arrive and I’m exhausted. Let’s take a real nap until then. Harrison and Zannah will wake us when we’re close.” She heard him give a hum of approval then let herself fall to sleep.

**Bunnyburrow Train Station – Bunnyburrow – Tri-Burrows - 7:25 p.m.**

Stuart and Bonnie Hopps were driving the large bus they normally only used to bring their kits to a sporting event at their school. With them were Jaxon Lapins and his arctic vixen fiancée, Skye Wintory, as well as a few of their other kits. Skye had arrived earlier that morning, but her arrival had thrown the Hopps warren into disarray. It had taken nearly three hours to calm everyone down long enough to explain.

Stu drove the bus into the area designated for arrivals. Throwing the bus into park, he then turned to face those present. “Okay. Judy and her friend will be arriving soon. Let’s go over how everything’s going to happen one last time.”

All the passengers, with the exception of Jaxon, Skye, and Bonnie, said, “We are to be polite, friendly, and hospitable.” Getting a nod, they all piled out of the bus and raced to the platform Judy’s train was to arrive at. The older kits tried to corral the younger ones together with difficulty, but they eventually managed it.

Stu helped Bonnie down before Jaxon did the same for Skye, who was having a hard time getting used to the dress she was wearing to make a good impression on Jaxon’s half-sister Judy and her todfriend. “Jaxon, I want you to promise me that I’ll never have to wear another dress ever again. Not even at our wedding. We’ll just go to the damn courthouse.”

Jaxon chuckled, but said, “Yes, Skye, I promise. You have my word.” Receiving a kiss, he took her paw and they followed Mr. and Mrs. Hopps into the train station. “This place is rather…what’s the proper term I’m looking for?”
“Dated.” Stu and Bonnie answered simultaneously. They shook their heads then Stu stated, “We’ve been trying to convince the town council to give this old building a makeover, but the old buck who’s running it keeps refusing. He’s constantly saying that there’s nothing wrong with how it looks. We came close last year, but then they went and spent all the money on contracting builders to construct new Middle and High School campuses. I’ll admit that the schools were necessary, however, we still need to get the old building up to the new building codes.”

Skye looked at the dilapidated place. She immediately agreed that unless some professional repairs were done soon that the town would no longer have a train station. Following everyone inside, she could see a few other species meandering around, waiting for their respected arrivals. “Lots of mammals here for the middle of the week.” she observed.

“Actually, this is slow.” Bonnie admitted. “Normally, two sheriff’s deputies are required just to maintain order.”

Skye shuddered at the thought of so many mammals all crammed into this space. “I don’t really want to think about that.” Looking up the Arrivals Time Sheet posted on the only high-tech piece of equipment in the place, she said, “Looks like they’ll be arriving in five minutes.”

All of them heard the tell-tale squeal that indicated an approaching train had just applied its brakes. Ears swiveling in that direction, they turned to see it pulling up to the platform. Michael Hopps, one of the elder kits present, checked his pocket watch and muttered, “Early as always.” The younger kits all started racing towards the locomotive to be the first to greet Judy, only to skid to a halt as a wolf of titanic proportions stepped off.

Harrison Wolford scanned the crowd for the two bunnies from the photograph in the file. Spotting them, he turned into the train car and stated, “Found them.” He stepped aside to let Zannah off so they could help Nick and Judy disembark.

Nick stepped out first then proceeded to aid Judy’s decent like a true gentle-fox. Once Judy’s hindpaws had touched the platform, she heard all her siblings present scream ‘JUDY!!’. Letting out a laugh, she waved, saying, “Hi guys.”

Bonnie and Stu walked up and crushed her in a shared hug. “We’re so glad you’re okay, Bun-Bun.” Separating from the embrace, Bonnie looked at the red fox tod standing behind her daughter. Walking up, she held out her paw. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Nicholas. Welcome to Bunnyburrow.”

Nick smiled and shook her paw. “Thank you, Mrs. Hopps.” He repeated the exchange with Judy’s father then turned to Wolford and Fangmeyer. “It’s been fun. Hopefully, we’ll get to do this again once I’m on the force.” He then exchanged numbers with them before they climbed back aboard to await the trains departure back towards Zootopia.

Jaxon was standing off to the side with Skye, staring at Judy. Skye wrapped her tail around his ankles causing him to look up at her with a confused look.

Skye gave him a sheepish smile. “I don’t want either of them to get the wrong impression.” she explained. Feeling Jaxon wrap an arm around her waist, she asked, “Shall we?”

The two of them cautiously approach Judy and Nick. As they got closer, Nick bristled, but didn’t lash out. Judy merely raised an eyebrow. Stopping just out of attack range, Jaxon took a deep breath. “Hi. My name’s Jaxon.”

Bonnie stood next to Jaxon and looked at Judy with some concern. “Judy, there’s something I’m
“sure you figured out already, but we need to talk about a couple of things. Jaxon is one of them.”

Gesturing at the nearby mini café inside the station, Bonnie asked, “Can we go over to one of those
tables at the café and talk?”

Stu broke into the conversation by stating, “I’m going to go ahead and take the kits back, I’ll come
back for the rest of you later, after you’ve had a chance to talk.” After he gathered the kits and left,
the five of them walked over to the café and sat down at one of the tables. Bonnie sighed and began
retelling the story of how she met Bryan Jonathan Lapins, fell in love, mated, and then lost all
contact. Jaxon took over once her portion of the tale ended, explaining who he was and everything
that Bonnie had left out.

Judy sat there taking in all the new information. After a brief moment of silence, she said, “I always
kind of figured that Dad wasn’t my biological father. Never bothered looking into it, though. Dad
was always my dad. He was the one who was always there for me when I needed him.”

During the entire conversation between the three Leporidae, neither vulpines exchanged any words.
The tension between them was palpable. Skye was shifting rather uncomfortably. Nick, on the other
paw, showed…nothing. Absolutely nothing. His face was totally devoid of any emotion or
expression. Their silence didn’t go unnoticed by their significant others, however, and upon seeing
the concern in their eyes, Nick finally broke the silence.

“Never expected to see you again.” Nick stated bluntly. “Judging by the fox-like design on Mr.
Lapins’ ring, you proposed. Surprising, when you consider that you were the biggest slut in
Happytown.”

Skye started to growl. “That’s rich coming from you, Nicholas. I wasn’t the one who was known as
the most infamous confidence artist in Zootopia at the age of 19. I often wondered if Mr. Big iced
you when I never heard anything about you after I left.”

Judy and Jaxon exchanged worried looks. “I’m guessing from the animosity between the two of you
that you know each other. Anything we should know?”

Nick and Skye glared at each other. Nick sighed then spoke. “It’s…it’s complicated.” Reaching over
to stroke Judy’s cheek, he smiled. “Skye and I, we were hustling partners for a long time.” Looking
at Judy’s mother, he stated, “You don’t need to worry, Mrs. Hopps. I’m no longer pulling cons.”
Staring into Judy’s eyes, he whispered, “I’ve managed to find what it was I didn’t know I was trying
to hustle.”

Skye nodded in Jaxon’s direction as if to agree. “We both did, but I think you all need to hear the
whole story. Before I met Nick, I was a drug addicted prostitute surviving, not living, surviving, in
Happytown. Nick came along and helped me get clean. We then started hustling just to make ends
meet.” Suddenly looking guilty, she added, “It was while we were living together that I…”

Jaxon’s eyebrows shot up. “That you what?” The guilty look that Skye sent his way had Jaxon
understand. “You fell in love with him.”

Now it was Judy’s turn to raise her eyebrows. Nick had told her that he had a number of vixens as
hustling partners, but promised her that he had never been with anyone before, and judging from
Skye’s reactions, he had told the truth. “What happened between you two?”

Nick let out a long, deep sigh. “She’s the one I told you about on the train, the vixen who tried to bed
me.” Tracing a claw along Judy’s jaw-line, he added, “She tried and failed. We were sharing an
apartment, but I was the sole name on the lease and kicked her out during her attempt.”
“I was distraught afterwards. I didn’t know why he refused my advances, but it nearly made me relapse.” Skye admitted. “I was desperate to find someone. It was winter when it happened so instead of putting myself out there I bought a ticket to visit family over in Foxhollow. I just ended up moving there after spring came around.”

“That’s where we met.” Jaxon said. “I’m your rebound?”

Skye shook her head. “No. This all happened almost half a decade before we met.”

Bonnie had been listening quietly the entire time. Checking her watch, she estimated that Stu would be returning soon. Speaking up, she stated, “Well, I must say I’m pleased that everything seems to have worked out favorably for all of you. Come on, Stu should be pulling up shortly.”

Everyone stood and followed Bonnie outside the train station just in time to see a pink van with the decal ‘Gideon Grey’s Really Good Baked Stuff’ enter the parking lot. Nick saw this and let out a low growl. Judy grabbed his tie and pulled him down to stare into his eyes. They held an entire silent conversation that way. Nick relaxed and gave Judy a soft, tender peck on her nose. “Sorry.” was all he whispered.

Bonnie walked up to the pastry van to chat with Gideon. “Hello, Gideon. How are you?”

Gideon smiled at her. “Ah’m doin’ okay, Missus Hopps. Ah’m actually here to collect y’all. Mr. Hopps is stuck dealin’ wit ya Pa.”

Sighing, Bonnie gave him a small smile. “Thank you, Gideon. I really appreciate it.”

“It ain’t no big deal.” Gideon said, bashfully. Looking into the back, he said, “Hey, Trav, hon, open the back doors.”

Judy, Nick, Jaxon, and Skye saw the back doors of the van open and a ferret wearing a t-shirt with the word ‘Fox-lover’ printed in big bold letters and baggy jeans jump out. The ferret, Travis Ferrer, saw them and waved them over. “Hello, folks.” Spotting Judy, he lowered his ears. “Hi, Judy. I know Gideon’s already apologized, but I still need to as well.”

Judy waved a paw in the ‘forget it’ motion. “It’s alright, Travis. It’s in the past. I forgive you.” She watched him give her a slightly crooked grin before she noticed a glint of light coming from his paw. “Oh! You got married! Who’s the lucky mammal?”

Laughing, Travis pointed at his shirt, saying, “This here’s the only clue you should need.” He saw her eyes light up as the realization dawned on her. Looking from her to the red fox tod she was holding paws with and back, he said in a conspiratorial whisper, “If you want, you should ask your brother Aiden to make you one. He’s the one who made mine.”

Looking up at Nick, Judy smiled as she said, “I think I’d like that.”

Nick smiled down at her, then said, “We should get in the van, Cottontail. It’s late and I’m really looking forward to getting some real sleep, even if just a little.”

At those words, everyone piled into Gideon’s pastry van. They drove off in the direction of the Hopps’ family homestead. They just rode in silence, enjoying the crisp night air. When they reached the Hopps’ Homestead, Gideon got out to help Bonnie while Travis opened the back door for the others. Gideon scratched his head before saying, “Well, Ah hope y’all have a nice night. Travis and Ah need to get home. My Ma’s watching Lil’ Eddy and she needs her sleep.” Waving goodbye, he and Travis made way for home.
“Who’s Lil’ Eddy?” Judy asked her mom.

“Their adopted kit.” Bonnie replied. “They got him about, oh, eight months ago.” Gesturing them to follow her, Bonnie led them inside the burrow. “Judy, your father and I replaced that spare bed in your room’s extension for a larger one for Nick since he’s a tad bigger. I hope that’s alright. I didn’t want him to have back problems.”

Judy nodded. “Thanks, Mom. Nick and I are going to head that way right now. We’ve been up since yesterday morning.” Wishing everyone goodnight, she led Nick in the direction of her old bedroom. Recalling her father’s words over their last call, she knew that her parents had set him up in the room next to hers. Opening the door to Nick’s room, she guided him inside. “You had a media room. This was my extension after my younger brother Jeb moved out.” Pointing to the door in the wall, she said, “That door connects my room to this one.” Turning to give him a glare, she added, “It locks on my side and it will stay locked. Capiche?”

Nick gave her a smile and nod before he looked around the room. There were tons of ZPD recruitment posters as well as a number of photographs with her and selected siblings. There was also a bookshelf which held an assortment of smutty novels. Selecting one, he read aloud, “I always thought what attracted me to him was his predatory nature, at least until he released his inner beast.”

Judy swiped the novel from him while blushing furiously. “Don’t just go around searching through my stuff.” she told him. Placing the book back on the shelf, she said, “I can practically hear your brain formulating questions. Just go ahead and ask. You don’t hide anything from me, I won’t hide anything from you. Give and take. I know you still have plenty of secrets, but I also know that you’ll tell me everything eventually.”

Nick huffed in amusement. “Okay. You told me that you experienced your first heat the morning after we stayed the night at my mom and dad’s. I find that difficult to believe based on all the erotic literature you’ve got. Also, being a bunny and bunnies having such high sex drives, I’m sure you’ve got some porn stashed somewhere

Judy turned to look at him. “First of all, that’s not a question, but I know what you’re getting at. Secondly, I don’t have porn. As you have clearly discovered, I prefer erotic literature about pred-prey relationships. My parents just haven’t realized that’s what these novels are yet.” Jumping onto Nick’s bed, which was surprisingly sized for a wolf, she got comfortable and started explaining. “So, bunnies tend to be very sexual creatures as you are well aware. The thing most mammals don’t know is that some require certain triggers.”

Nick climbed up onto the bed beside Judy. “Is that so? Well, do you mind explaining in further detail?”

“Growing up, my parents had me tested because I didn’t go into heat like most does. I was seen by multiple specialists to determine why.” Judy told him. “They all said the same thing. That I had a prerequisite that wasn’t being met. Until I met that requirement, I would never go into heat. I think that approximately one out of every 12,000 does experience this.”

Whistling, Nick said, “Damn. But what about all this?” He indicated to the smutty novels spaced throughout the bedroom. “What would you need all the erotica for if you don’t go into heat? And where’s your porn stash? Even if you don’t have any magazines, I’m sure you’ve got some porn vids.”

Judy chuckled. “I don’t think you quite understand, Slick. Just like other mammals, bunnies don’t need to go into heat or undergo mating cycles or even be in mating season to enjoy sex. We just become more…” she searched for the right word. “I guess you could say more ‘fertile’. As for porn
vids, I don’t have any of those either. I like reading because my mind can create a much better picture.”

Nick nodded in understanding. He laid back on the bed and sighed. “What do you think is happening back home?” he asked, wanting to prolong his time with Judy as long as he could.

Despite her exhaustion, Judy took the hint that Nick wasn’t ready to be done for the night. Deciding that she wanted to be close to him anyways, Judy scooted a little closer to Nick and cuddled up next to him. “I don’t know, Red. I honestly don’t know.” She felt him pull her close and drape his tail over her. Judy relaxed into Nick’s embrace, thoroughly enjoying the feeling of being so close to him.

As she lay there, snuggled into Nick's arms, Judy felt more relaxed than she had been in a very long time, and before long she noticed Nick embrace loosening slightly as his breathing steadied out and he fell victim to exhaustion.

Still, she was so comfortable that she didn’t want to return to her own bed quite yet. ’ Just a few more minutes.’ she thought to herself, as she slipped off into sleep.

<MEANWHILE>

_Aboard the Zootopian Express en route for Zootopia_

Harrison Wolford and Zannah Fangmeyer were sitting in the train’s dining car eating a small meal. Neither of them had yet to talk about what they expected upon their return. Giving the busser their plates, they remained seated to finish their drinks. They watched the scenery fly by through the window.

“Do you think that they’ve uncovered any new evidence? Or, even made any developments during the time we’ve been here?” Zannah asked seriously. The lack of updates from the precinct was bothering her.

Harrison shrugged. “I have no idea. I’m choosing to view the radio silence as proof that they are working so hard following leads that they don’t have time to contact us and fill us in.” Taking the last sip of his water, he set his glass aside. “But, I share your uneasiness. Something big is about to happen. Maybe not today, maybe not next week, or even next month, but something sinister will take place in the near future.”

Zannah polished off the last of her own glass of water. “We should head back to our compartment. We need to rest if we’re to assist in whatever way we can.” She stood and made her way back to the compartment followed by Harrison. Stepping inside, she pulled out one of the sleepers.

Harrison watched her every move with rapt attention. He waited for her to lay down before joining her. Laying a tender kiss to her forehead, he whispered, “I love you, Zannah. Please don’t ever doubt that.”

Zannah rubbed her head into his chest. “I won’t. Just promise me you won’t doubt my love for you either.” She soon fell into a peaceful sleep within the arms of her wolf.

_Nocturnal District – Zootopia_

Deep within the Nocturnal District of Zootopia, the Chancellor slowly walked through the dark streets. Taking in the sight of other nocturnal predators, he made his way further into the district. He had a singular goal. Approaching a rundown, condemned abandoned building, he stopped just before where it was obvious a gate used to be. “This place hasn’t changed.” he murmured.
The building had a sign that read: ‘Nocturne Bedlam Maximum Security Penitentiary’. Every window had bars covering them. It was falling apart in a rather surprisingly systematic way. No lights could be seen, but then again only nocturnal predators used to be imprisoned here.

Walking into the building, the Chancellor wasted no time in heading to the lowest level. Arriving, he made his way to the last cell still housing an inmate. Standing in front of the cell, the Chancellor cleared his throat causing the mammal inside to raise his head. “Been a long time, Hannibal. I’ve come with an offer.”

The hyena kept a bored expression. “Is that so. Tell me, why would I agree to work with you?”

The Chancellor grinned wickedly. “Because, in the end, you’ll finally get your greatest desire.” He watched the hyena stand slowly and come closer.

The bored expression morphed into one of intrigue. “I’m listening.” Hannibal stated.

The wicked grin became one of pure malice. “Here’s what I require of you.” The Chancellor began.

Chapter End Notes

Question: I'm curious if I should give hints for the Easter Eggs. Thoughts?
Chapter Se7en: Meetings

Chapter Summary

I have no summary. Just a short message. I choose to write 7 as 'Se7en' simply because I liked it. There is no reference to the film by that name.

Also, there are two important messages in the notes. Please read them.

Chapter Edit date : 11/4/17
I had a sleight of mind until today. Apologies.
Prior to this chapter's release I made a promise and it slipped my mind for a while.
Wrecker159753, I didn't forget.

Okay everyone, so wrecker159753 asked permission to use my Izu Gene and I agreed. I also promised to promote his story when I released the chapter, but I'm human I made an error. This is me fixing it and keeping my promise. Go read his story. I find it a great read. I personally am looking forward to how it goes.

Chapter Notes

Hey'o everybody! Y'all doing good? If so, I'm glad, but I've got the flu. Anyway, a couple of things.
1. liiwilliams08, here it is! We're going to see Nick's little discovery! I won't spoil it for you though. I took inspiration from a film (Easter Egg).
2. Thanks again to Fairlane302 for edits. I don't know why you put up with me, but bless your soul.
3. The post chapter notes have a small message that I typed up after my son was suspended. If you recall he broke a fellow student's nose in defense of his twin sister.
4. Lastly, neither of us are sure yet, but it looks like my wife and I are pregnant again. We've got an appointment at the end of next week for confirmation. I'M SO EXCITED!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Seven: Meetings

Hopps' Family Homestead – Bunnyburrow – Tri-Burrow Area – Approx. 1 hr before sunrise

Judy opened her eyes as her brain finally registered that there was something off in her surroundings. The first thing she saw was creamy tan fur. It dawned on her that she had fallen asleep next to Nick. Judy carefully extracted herself from his arms, which had enveloped her during the night. Sliding out of bed, she observed the sight before her. They had fallen asleep on top of the covers, but at some point Nick had pulled the comforter over them. He was also no longer wearing the shirt from last night, evident by its presence on the floor and his bare chest. Judy surmised he must have removed his shirt at some point to get more comfortable. Smiling, she left the quietly left the room through the
door in the wall that led to her own. Changing into another set of clothes and quickly going through her standard morning routine, she saw that the sun was about to make its appearance. ‘I wonder if Mom’s up yet.’ she wondered. ‘Since I woke up hungry, I’m sure Nick will, too.’ Judy exited her bedroom in search of her mother, as a plan for the best way to wake her fox up began to formulate in her mind.

It was about twenty or so minutes later that Nick woke to the sensation of someone tenderly stroking his head. The action caused his brain to begin initiating start up procedures. Nick slowly began to process the world around him, one sense at a time. His sense of touch had been the first, informing him that it was a soft paw was stroking his head lovingly. The second was his sense of hearing, which told him there was a strong yet somewhat fast heartbeat located near him. Nick’s sense of smell was third and Nick couldn’t help the smile that formed upon smelling Judy’s scent in his immediate vicinity. Cracking open one of his emerald-jade eyes, Nick found himself swimming within a pool of rich amethyst. “Morning, Fluff.” Nick whispered, followed by a wide yawn exposing his sharp teeth.

Judy felt a shiver of arousal at the sight. She was still suffering from her first heat, but thankfully she made use of the stash of hormonal suppressants in her bedroom as she was getting ready for the day, so it was manageable. “Morning, Red.” Judy whispered back. “My mom’s making breakfast, so you’ve got to get up if you want any. Plus, I’ve got things I want us to do today.” After having argued with a fair number of her siblings for a pawful of minutes a short while ago, Judy decided to get Nick out of the burrow so her parents could deal with them.

Nick sat up and stretched. A number of kinks popped in the process which had him releasing a sigh of relief. Giving Judy a glance, he noticed that she must have gotten up at some point either last night or early morning and gone into her room as she was now wearing very different clothes. “Unless you want a show, you’re going to have to leave the room for a bit.” Nick didn’t normally wear anything when going to sleep. Whenever he did, he found that whatever he was wearing usually ended up being discarded as he tried to get comfortable in his sleep, so except for the covers he was currently under, he didn’t have anything on.

Judy blushed as she realized that Nick had apparently removed more than just his shirt, and was actually naked under the sheets. “O-okay.” Jumping off the bed, she walked to the door. “I’ll be right outside in the hallway.” Closing the door behind her, Judy leaned back against it and placed a paw on her chest. ‘Oh, sweet cheese and crackers!’ she thought as images of Nick’s nude form began to flash through her mind.

Nick had just walked into the attached bathroom to piss when his mobile started ringing. Sighing, he returned to the bed and grabbed it, glancing at the Caller ID. He was surprised to see that it was Finn. Entering the bathroom once again, he relieved himself as he answered, “Hello?”

“Seriously, dude? Ya answered yo damn cell while ya pissing?” Finn asked in that deep, gruff voice of his. “Never mind. Look, I’ve been looking for ya fo’ the past hour. Where da fuck are ya? Did ya fo’get we’ve got a hustlin’ gig to get to today?”

Nick face-pawed and let out a groan. Finished taking a whiz, he walked over to his luggage. “Finn, I’m out of the hustling biz for good now. I’ve already applied for the Police Academy.” He heard a sound of disgust from the other end of the line. “Finn, you had to have known this would happen. You aren’t that stupid.”

Finn let out a long groan. “Yeah, yeah, I fuckin’ know.” he admitted. “Man, I can’t fuckin’ believe ya left me. For a bunny of all things.”

Nick felt a small grin cross his face. “Sorry, bud. Why don’t you run on down to Happytown? I’m
sure that there’s another fox you could take under your wing.”

Finn let out a bark of laughter. “Really? Like any of them muthafuckas could hold a candle to ya. Ya was the best. Them idiots wouldn’t be worth teaching. Nah, looks like I’m gonna hafta go legit now. Otherwise, I’ll have yo ass on my tail.”

Nick chuckled at that as he got dressed in laidback casual clothes. “Well, you’ve always been good with kits. Maybe you should look into working for Kit Services. They’re always looking for more paws on deck.”


“Catch you later, Finn.” Nick said softly. Putting his phone in his pocket, Nick wondered what Finn’s future held. The two had been good friends during their run, but things had changed. Knowing Judy was waiting for him, he raced out the door hoping that there was a minor chance that he could possibly get some blueberry pancakes.

**The Undercity – Zootopia**

After Ian had informed him that he hadn’t been able to locate anything of note regarding the identity of their adversary nor the rest of the conspirators, Jameson decided to call in a favor from an old acquaintance. That’s what led him here: The Undercity.

Jameson had once told Nick, when he was younger, that there were many dark places in the world where few sane mammals tread. Places that no one in their right mind would go if they knew what was good for them. Jameson knew full well from his experience that the Undercity was one such place.

Most mammals didn’t know of its existence, but those who did tended to steer clear. Located beneath the city of Zootopia, further down than even the sewer system, the Undercity was where you could truly find or be anything. Drug lords and their cartels could move massive shipments of their product without the ZPD’s knowledge, prostitutes were abundant, mercenaries for hire weren’t difficult to locate. There were no laws here with the exception that if you wanted to live be careful who you cross.

As he walked down the wide trade corridor deep in the Undercity, Jameson had to hide his smile at the sight of all the other pedestrians parting like the Red Sea in his wake. It appeared that he still had enough of a reputation to make even the hardened populace of the undercity give him a wide berth. A few tipped their hats at him, others saluted, and still others…. they just ran as if Death itself was coming for them.

When Jameson arrived at his destination, he took a moment to observe the facade of the old building he stood in front of. It was apparent that the place had seen better days, but looks were deceiving. Walking inside, the other patrons fell silent as he scanned the locale. Finding the mammal that he was searching for, Jameson made his way over and sat down at the same booth.

Andreas Bogo sat in the corner booth of the usually lively drug den. He never partook the products offered, preferring instead the bar’s aged scotch, but he enjoyed the crazy atmosphere. When the whole establishment went silent, he knew that Jameson had walked in. He almost wanted to laugh as it appeared that even completely stoned and drunk, the other mammals present immediately sobered up in Jameson’s presence. Almost as if merely thinking his name had the power to summon him, Jameson was seated in front of him nigh-instantaneously. “Jameson.” Andreas greeted.

“Andreas.” Jameson greeted in return. Seeing several empty scotch glasses, he asked, “Been waiting
long?” He got his answer as the cocktail waitress placed another glass before the enormous cape buffalo. “Well, that answers my question.”

Chuckling, Andreas pushed the glass aside. “Never ceases to amaze me that even after all this time that you still look just the same as when we first met over half a century ago. Benefits of your Izu Gene no doubt.” His voice was rough with age and decades of smoking cigars, but still quite powerful. “To give you a legitimate answer to your question, I’ve been here since your son’s name was released in connection with Dawn Bellwether’s arrest.”

Jameson let out a long, drawn-out sigh. “Still a chessmaster, I see. Good, we’re going to need one.” Ordering a lager from a passing cocktail waitress, he said, “I need you to do me a favor. I haven’t been in contact with anyone from those days. Do you think you could possibly gather them all together at my place?”

Draining his scotch in one go, Andreas asked, “Depends on when you want them there.” He was already starting to formulate ways to get the old crew back together.

“Saturday evening, at 2215.” Jameson stated, falling back on his former habit of using military time. He knew that he was asking for a miracle, but if anyone could pull it off, he knew it would be Andreas.

Nodding, Andreas said, “They’ll be there. You’ve got my word.” Setting his glass down, Andreas stood. “Order whatever you like. I’ll tell the bartender it’s on me. See you, Gravewalker.” With those parting words, Andreas left the establishment.

Shaking his head at the old cape buffalo’s use of his former moniker, Jameson requested a menu from the waitress who placed his drink before him. After he ordered, he surfed the web on his cellular mobile while he waited for his meal. One particular article popped out at him. Selecting the link, he saw a picture of Hannibal Hyector with the caption ‘Escaped’. Jameson growled dangerously. Reading the rest of the article, he wondered, ‘Who the fucking hell would be crazy enough to break him out?’

@ ZPD Precinct One HQ

Chief Tobias Bogo stood in his office staring at the evidence board. Over the past several hours, new developments in the Anti-Predator Movement, now dubbed ‘The Predopurge’ by the media, had been discovered and verified by several of his officers. A deep sigh left him as he turned to look at the other evidence board that held all the information regarding Hannibal Hyector’s escape. He glanced down at his wristwatch. ‘It’s only 1:00 and I’m already in need of another cup of coffee.’ Taking a seat at his desk, Bogo rubbed his eyes. He had been sleeping at the precinct ever since his officers had discovered a piece of evidence that indicated an imminent attack. A knock on his office door had him say, “Enter.”

Leodore Lionheart entered Chief Bogo’s office followed by Spencer Wolvenett. Spencer had been one of Chief Bogo’s best officers until he decided to transfer to the Justice Department where he quickly rose to the position of Assistant District Attorney. Both Lionheart and Wolvenett noticed the cape buffalo’s distinctively disheveled appearance, but with nothing more than glance at one another, they mutually agreed to ignore it. Lionheart stayed by the door as Spencer took a seat.

Bogo looked from one to the other. Standing, he said, “Walk with me. I need coffee.” He left his office heading towards the Precinct cafeteria with Lionheart and Wolvenett on his heels. Only after pouring himself his fifth cup of coffee for the day, did he turn to look at his guests. “What can I do for you two? Also, please keep in mind that with the current state of affairs, I cannot spare any officers.”
Lionheart and Wolvenett glanced at each other. Lionheart took the lead. “As you know, Zootopia has no power base without a mayor. The city council has decided to hold an impromptu election.”

Wolvenett took over. “The Head of the Justice Department is...frustrated with the number of mammals being nominated. Therefore, his solution is to require the city council to put forth no more than four names as nominations.”

Lionheart interrupted, stating, “The council’s decision has created a minor crisis. The current nominees include two predators and two prey. The prey are arguing that the predators will go savage if given the chance, even without the Night-Howler serum, meanwhile, the predators are counterarguing that Bellwether…”

Bogo shattered the now empty cup of coffee in his iron grip. “The point, gentle-mammals.” he stated, as he retrieved a broom and dustpan from a nearby broom closet. “Get. To. The. Point.” The buffalo brusquely stated as he began sweeping up the fragments before disposing of them.

Wolvenett gulped. He had no desire to anger Chief Bogo any further. He remembered what had happened last time, and had no desire for a repeat performance. “The Head of the Justice Department has requested that the Council reselect their nominees and consider me for one of the predator candidates.”

Bogo pursed his lips in thought. Having a former cop as the mayor wasn’t a bad idea, not to mention one who’s currently an ADA. Bogo looked Spencer up and down before nodding, “If you’re here for my approval and support, you have it. Now if there is nothing else…” He was cut off by Lionheart.

“Chief, you need to be aware that Spencer’s supporters consist of equal parts predator and prey.” Lionheart stated. “He’s got a far better chance than the others, but the problem is that one of the other nominees is Fatima Ara.”

Bogo’s eye twitched. Fatima Ara was one of, if not the, most outspoken mammals in the city. She held a vast amount of influence amongst the prey community. Bogo raised a paw to rub his forehead. Fatima’s involvement made matters a whole lot more difficult, because she was very much against interspecies relationships and Bogo was positive that if she won the election, Wilde and Hopps would both be off the force faster than lightning could strike. “How long until the election?”

“Two months.” Spencer stated. “The city council wants to give each nominee time to campaign. It’s not very long, but we have to try to influence as many as we can.” Spencer knew better than to assume that he could maintain the following he had constantly. Anyone in politics knew that during elections such as these, it would be nearly impossible to keep all of the supporters one had. One moment, the populace would lean one way then minutes later lean another as each candidate presented their platform. Spencer also knew that if he had benefactors like Chief Bogo, and Lionheart, amongst several other ‘high value’ city figureheads, then it would go a long ways towards not only placating his current supporters, but perhaps hopefully garnering even more.

Bogo nodded. “How do you want me to show my support?” There wasn’t a whole lot he could do thanks to the current political climate and the ongoing investigations, but he’d do whatever he could to assist. The idea of speaking to his mother crossed his mind, since she had once been a major political player in organizing fundraisers and promotional assemblies.

Lionheart stepped forward. “We just need you to show up at a number of gatherings. Nothing major or time consuming, but very important. The first will be in three days, when we hold a small assembly in Sahara Square. Early polls show that it’s the one district where Spencer is trailing behind, though not by much. As it currently stands, he’s the favorite overall, leading with followers
Bogo sighed. “I’ll be there. Just promise me that I won’t have to give some grand speech. I really, **really** hate public speaking. It’s the one part of this job I wish I could paw over to someone else.” A thought occurred to him. “Fuck it, I’m going to hire a media liaison who’ll do all the press conferences.” He marched off, leaving Lionheart and Wolvenett behind, to find someone to fill the new position of Media Liaison.

**Unknown Location somewhere in Zootopia**

In an abandoned warehouse located somewhere in Zootopia, a group of twelve mammals were gathered around a large circular table, illuminated by a single dim lamp, giving the room an oppressive atmosphere. Present around the table was an arctic hare, two camels, two elk, a hippopotamus, a platypus, a reindeer, two sheep, a black ram, and a zebra. Despite the varied species, the gender divide was even, with one of the camels, both elk, the hippo, one of the sheep, and the zebra being female. The mammals sat in silent tension, as none were initially willing to break the silence and begin the discussion. Eventually, the female Zebra had enough of the tension, and broke the silence.

“No need to discuss our next course of action.” she stated. “The Chancellor may run our movement, but what exactly has he done? Not only that, but he’s hypocritical. I mean, a pred trying to eliminate other preds? What the hell is he trying to achieve?”

“Shut the fuck up Zebrina.” the black-wooled ram stated. “If you’re too frightened to carry on with the plans already set in motion, then we’ll deal with you accordingly. No one’s keeping you here, but if you’re going to stay, then you’ll do as you’re told.”

Zebrina shrank in on herself. “I just don’t like it Andrew, it makes no sense. Are you seriously telling me that you are still going to follow **him**, despite what he had done to your sister?”

The black-wooled ram, none other than Andrew Bellwether, glowered at the zebra as he considered what the Chancellor had ordered done to his sister, Dawn. “Dawn was foolish enough to fail in her mission, she deserved what she got. If anything, I’m more furious with Woolman. He’s the one who chose Dawn for the task she was assigned, on account of her position as Assistant mayor. The fool disregarded her instabilities, and chose her by position alone. It was a grievous error in judgement, and he suffered for his failure.”

Silence once again reigned around the table, as the group recalled Woolman’s gruesome punishment for his failure, recalled watching as Woolman was consumed by none other than the Chancellor himself. Everyone in the group knew that Andrew was making a valid point, Dawn should never have been selected for that mission.

The next to break silence was the arctic hare, saying “We need to remain calm. These internal conflicts cause a loss of focus for us all, and losing focus leads to making mistakes. Making mistakes will thin our ranks even further, weakening our group unnecessarily.” The hare glanced around the table at his comrades before continuing, “For now, our orders are to lay low, and not cause any disturbances. The Chancellor’s Emissary is on the move, we must wait until his task has been completed before we strike.”

“But why would the Chancellor choose another pred for this mission Andrew?” The female hippo asked. “I understand the necessity of freeing Hannibal Hyector for the overall plan, but to assign him to this particular task is utter madness. Hannibal’s past actions prove his unpredictability. How can any of us trust him not to betray us all?”
“Likely for the same reason we all trust the Chancellor.” observed the reindeer. Addressing the group, he continued, “Hannibal’s greatest desire is to be killed in action, so that he can see his dearly departed sister once again. His goals align with ours because he knows that the overall plan will result in his own demise. That being said, you are entirely correct Patty.” Now addressing the hippo directly, the reindeer concluded, “We don’t have any real control over Hyector. My major concern his unpredictability. Hannibal could do just about anything and we’d be powerless to stop him. Trying to control that godsdamn bloody hyena is similar to trying to control a natural disaster. It just isn’t feasible. His unpredictability could just as much harm us as aid us. We don’t have a fucking clue to what he’ll do. We just have to hope that he doesn’t ruin our plans.”

As the reindeer relaxed back into his chair, the group quietly considered his words, before the platypus spoke up, “I think that, for now, we must remain vigilant in regard to Hannibal’s actions.” The group's response was a collection of silent nods. “I suggest we conclude this meeting then, we all have things to do in preparation for following through on our own assignments.”

Soon, the table was empty save for the black-wooled ram, Andrew Bellwether, the arctic hare, Liam Bucksworth, and the platypus, Parker Platys. After checking the ensure that everyone else had indeed departed, Liam looked at his remaining compatriots, before asking them, “Do the two of you feel like everything is about to go sideways?” The platypus and ram sent him looks that clearly said, ‘Duh!’. Shaking his head, the hare continued, “We need to be prepared in case one of the others decides to betray us.”

Andrew folded his arms across his chest. “We should begin by determining who amongst them has the weakest resolve. Once we do, we can start selecting which of their underlings are worth recruiting for ourselves. If we don’t take action, we’re going to lose what pawns we have left. In this game, we need as many as we can get. After that, we’ll make another example out of the weak to keep the others in line.”

Parker shook his head sadly. “I hate that it has come to this. In the beginning, we all shared the same goal. Now, we’re on the verge of being torn apart because the others are fearful of what has, and will, come to pass.” Taking out a medallion, the platypus placed it between his paws and began to pray.

Liam joined in Parker’s prayer, but when it was over he said, “I’ll begin investigating our fellow members. The two of you shouldn’t draw too much attention to yourselves in the meantime.” With those parting words, the arctic hare left the building.

Parker and Andrew looked at each other for a single moment before they each stood up. Making their way to the exit, they each pulled out a joint. The platypus struck a match lighting his before offering one to Andrew.

Accepting the offer, Andrew took a long drag. “Shit’s starting to get much more intense.” he observed. “I wonder just how far out the Chancellor has planned. I wonder if he’s even considered the possibility that he could fail.”

Parker blew the smoke of his joint out before stating, “I doubt it. No one can plan for every occurrence. The Chancellor is no exception. I do have to wonder though what his endgame is. There’s no way he’ll succeed, so what is his true goal?”

Neither said anything else for a while. They finished their joints and ground them into the ground. Parker sniffed. “I’m going to go get a few hits. Want to come along?”

Andrew shook his head. “Nah, I need to get home. I think I still have some alcohol at my place, so you’re more than welcome to come over. Just know that under no circumstances are we doing
anything.” Getting a nod of agreement, Andrew led Parker to his car and drove them to his place.

Parker walked in to see nothing but bare walls. “Not much of a home if you don’t got pictures.” he stated. Spotting some bottles of beer on the coffee table he popped one open and took a swig.

Watching the platypus begin to experience the effects of the alcohol, Andrew shook his head. Stripping his shirt off, he took a bottle for himself. As the alcohol took effect, Andrew wondered when his life of drugs, alcohol, and sex would finally catch up with him. Looking at the clock, which appeared to be melting, he just barely managed to make out that it was two in the afternoon. A small part of him wondered what the future held in store.

**Hopps Family Homestead – Bunnyburrow – Tri-Burrow Area – Midafternoon**

Jaxon and Skye were laying out in one of the Hopps family fields near the burrow when they heard a loud yell. Bolting into sitting positions reaching for weapons they didn’t have, they watched, confused, as they saw Nick run out the side door with the Hopps Warren’s youngest give chase. Jaxon had to fight to stop himself from laughing so hard that he would reduced to tears at the sight. Skye watched, cringing, as she remembered her own experience doing the exact same thing upon her arrival. After a couple of minutes watching Nick’s ordeal, they laid back down to enjoy the warm sun.

Nick on the other paw, still had a large group of kits chasing after him. “JUDY!!! HELP ME!!” he hollered at the top of his lungs, hoping that Judy could hear his plea for rescue. The kits were gaining on him until they suddenly stopped. Nick, who had been looking behind him at the kits saw that they had stopped, but before he could stop himself, he suddenly ran into something, or someone, and barreled over, skidding across the ground. Groaning, Nick went to get up only to be forced back to the ground by the hindpaw of what turned out to be a large, muscular buck. Evidently the buck was known to the kits, as they turned as one and began running back towards the house.

“Who the fuckin’ blazes are you?” the buck asked in rage. “No, never mind. Mr. and Mrs. Hopps probably just chased you out after catching ya trying to rob…” the buck trailed off as he noticed a blur rapidly approaching him, but before he could react, a set of feet slammed into his side sending him flying a good couple of meters and skidding across the ground a few more. Struggling to a sitting position, the buck groaned, “What the bloody hell….?” He stopped as he saw none other than Judy Hopps helping the fox to his feet.

The buck had no idea what had happened, or why Judy would be helping that fox, but as he sat in the grass trying to recover his senses, he thought about Judy. He knew that Judy had always been a strange one, and he’d never liked her in school, but seeing her now, he couldn’t help but notice how nice she looked. She wasn’t built like a regular doe, but she never the less struck a nice figure.

Judy had been back at the house watching as Nick was chased by the kits, but once Nick had bowled over the buck unlucky enough to be in his path, she rushed out to help Nick. The stranger had recovered quickly though, and was making his own way towards her fox. As soon as the stranger forced Nick back down into the dirt though, Judy saw nothing but red as she picked up her pace, and raced towards the buck. With a final burst of speed, Judy blindly launched herself at the stranger, sending him flying, before quickly recovering herself, and turning her attention to Nick. Once her fox was on his feet, Judy asked, “Are you alright, Nick?” Receiving a nod, she turned to see the target of her blind leap of rage, the mammal who had dared to harm her fox. Seeing Billy Leaps getting to his feet, her blood chilled and she paled. ‘No, no, no!! Not him. Why? Why did it have to be him?’ she thought. She watched as Billy Leaps approached and stopped right in front of her.

Billy Leaps was your ordinary buck. He had been the heartthrob of Bunnyburrow High ever since
his freshman year. Star jock on the soccer and basketball teams, Straight A student, Class President, these were only some of the positions he held during his time in school. As Billy finally recovered from whatever had slammed into him, he couldn’t help but wonder if he could possibly charm the doe. After all, as far as he knew, she never got anywhere in school with any of the other bucks, so she was probably quite desperate for what he could provide. Getting up and approaching the doe, he said, “My, my, Judy Hopps. Well, don’t you look lovely today. Tell me, what are you doing tonight? If you ask me, I’d say you’ll be coming home with me to see how well versed we are in math.”

Judy stuttered, “G-get out o-of h-here, B-Billy.” She was trying hard not to take off back to the burrow, but every instinct told her to run. Pulling herself together, she stated, “I have no desire at all to go on a date with you. So, just leave.”

Billy smiled at her. “Oh, come now, Judy. I could take good care of you. Just….” The low, threatening growl that erupted throughout the air had his face pale, ears droop, and nose twitch. He had almost completely forgotten about the fox from earlier, but that same fox was now standing right behind Judy, giving him a death glare that shook him to his bones. “W-wha-what do y-you w-wa-want f-f-fox?”

Judy hadn’t felt terror at Nick’s growl. Instead, she felt peace, knowing that he was there with her, protecting her. Judy felt Nick come up behind her and stepped backwards into his chest. When he wrapped his arms around her, she sighed in relief.

Nick glowered at the buck who tried to hit on his Judy. “She’s not going anywhere with you, Bucko.” he spat, baring his fangs. Shifting his position so that he was between Judy and the buck, Nick stated, “She’s already told you to get lost. So, I suggest you leave now, before I tear you apart, limb from fuckin’ limb.”

Billy Leaps quivered in fear. Sensing no bluff in the fox’s words, he took off as fast as his hindpaws could carry him. His only goal being to escape from the fox behind him. Once he was far enough away, he couldn’t help but wonder what the fuck had just happened.

Once the buck was out of sight, Nick knelt down in front of Judy. “Hey,” he whispered softly. “Are you okay?” Judy’s only reaction was to shake her head. When Nick tried to give her a hug, he was surprised that she stepped back and took off towards the Hopps’ Burrow. Confounded by what just happened, Nick rushed back to the burrow to try and find out what was wrong. He met Bonnie in the doorway. “Mrs. Hopps….”

“Nick, dear, please call me ‘Bonnie’. There are already too many ‘Mrs. Hopps’ in the family and I prefer my own name.” Bonnie told him.

“Okay, Bonnie.” Nick told her. “Did you just see Judy run inside?”

“I did.” Bonnie replied. “It almost looked as if she was crying. That’s kind of why I was on my way to find you and ask you what happened.”

Nick sighed and began to explain what had taken place. He told her that he had run over a strange buck as he was trying to escape from her younger kits who were trying to grab his tail, how Judy had seemed to breakdown at the sight of the buck, and what he had done to get the buck to leave.

Bonnie listened and when Nick was finished, she sighed. “That was Billy Leaps.” She explained. “He’s one of the ones who gave Judy such a hard time growing up.” Seeing the concern on Nick’s face, she beckoned him to follow her inside.

Nick followed Bonnie into a sitting room and sat in the seat she indicated. “Would you mind telling
me what he and the others did to her?” he asked. Nick knew that he should have been asking Judy, but he didn’t want to cause her more distress.

Bonnie shook her head. “You stay here until I come and get you, do you understand?” Getting a nod, she went to ask Judy if she would be willing to talk to Nick.

Nick sat quietly as he waited for Bonnie’s return. A few minutes rolled by then Nick stood up and began to walk around the room. It looked like a small office. There was a chair, a desk, a typewriter (that had made him snort because who still used typewriters), and a collection of different items like filing cabinets and a bookcase with ledgers. Nick surmised that this was a smaller office for the farm. A small oddity at the desk stood out to him. Peeking out of one of the desk drawers was the corner of a sheet of paper. Carefully extracting it, Nick took a quick read and his heart nearly stopped. The paper was a letter dated only a week after the press conference written to him from Judy. Opening the drawer, Nick found numerous other letters from her, all dated after the conference. The letters ranged from heartfelt apologies to what could almost be considered love letters to someone who passed. Nick skimmed over them quickly. His heart began to pound in his chest with each letter he read. He got to the last letter and that was when he went numb. Signed at the very bottom were the words: Love, Your Dumb Bunny. Nick dropped the letters and fell to his knees. His mind was a storm of different thoughts. The sound of someone approaching the office’s door spurred him into action. He was unsure if it was Bonnie coming to collect him or if she had convinced Judy to come to him, but he quickly did his best to stuff the letters back into the desk drawer. Turning around just in time to see the door open, Nick watched as Bonnie reentered the room.

Bonnie gave Nick a kind smile. “Come on. She wants to talk to you.” She led Nick back towards Judy’s room and let him in. She stopped him just before he entered and whispered, “Be careful with her.”

Nick nodded then stepped inside. He saw Judy curled up into a ball on her bed. Taking tentative steps over to her, Nick eventually sat down on the edge of the bed then waited for Judy to speak. He knew that Judy had to be the one to speak first if this was going to happen properly.

“Billy Leaps was the number one buck in high school.” Judy whispered. She knew Nick could hear her, but she just continued to speak softly anyway. “You already know that I’ve had a horrible time growing up. Billy was a major part of that.” Swallowing, Judy forced herself to keep going. “High school was hell. I thought I did everything right, but it always ended up wrong. The worst was on the nights of my junior and senior proms. I got dressed up all fancy thinking that someone there would finally ask me to dance, but…” Tears were now streaming down her face again. “In the end, no one did. I j-just s-tood th-there all b-by m-myself. Billy… he made things so much worse by shouting out ‘That freakish doe from the Hopps warren’s here y’all. Can’t imagine who would want to dance with her ugly mug’.” Taking a deep breath, Judy then said, “The senior prom was when it all finally just fell apart. My mom got me all gussied up, but before I got there I changed into some other clothes I had hidden near the high school gym earlier that day. I didn’t even show up there. I called a friend to come get me and we went to a bar. I arrived home drunk and my parents were furious. I was so drunk that I just shouted at them yelling every single painful thing that I had endured, stating how they never once even asked if I was okay or if I needed someone to talk to. I kept shouting until I just passed out from exhaustion.”

Nick sat there silently and listened to Judy’s story. He felt heartbroken that she had suffered that way. His mind went back to the letters she had written to him. A fair number of them had stated that she wished that she had known him back then. He started to try and formulate a way to give her the prom she should have had, but for right now, he just continued to listen.

“When I came to, my parents wouldn’t speak to me and I had no clue why.” Judy said as she wiped
her nose on her sleeve. Sitting up, she brought her knees to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. “I eventually learned that one of my brothers, who had stayed up late, recorded the whole thing. I realized that my mom and dad wouldn’t talk to me because they were ashamed of themselves, though they came around eventually, and apologized.” Breathing deeply, she finished by saying, “After that disaster of a night though, I just stopped bothering with trying to find someone to love me.” Casting Nick a glance, she added, “Then the Divine Entities chose to lead us to each other and I found the one I wanted to be with for as many lifetimes as I could.”

Nick picked Judy up and placed her in his lap. Nuzzling her, he whispered, “I’m so sorry you went through that, Judy.” He didn’t say anything else, he just held her. He started humming a sweet little tune for her. Soon, Nick was awarded the sound of Judy breathing peacefully in slumber. Carefully setting her down, Nick quietly left the room. He had a prom to organize.

@ the shared apartment of Harrison Wolford and Zannah Fangmeyer – Zootopia – Late Afternoon

Harrison was washing the dishes from their dinner while Zannah laid on the couch watching television. Setting the last plate in the dishwasher to make sure they were properly cleaned, he made his way over to the living room and sat down in the Barcalounger. “What are we watching?” he asked.

Zannah hadn’t been paying attention as her mind was elsewhere, but Harrison’s question brought her back to reality. “Uh, I’m not sure.” she answered as she looked at the television. On the screen was a small documentary on wolf culture. That is what she had been watching until thoughts about Harrison’s issue with his ex-girlfriend popped into her head.

Harrison looked from the television to Zannah then back. Sighing, he shifted from his spot in his chair to kneel before Zannah. “Hey,” he said, softly. “If you want to talk about it, you just have to tell me.” He saw the emotional turmoil within her eyes and leaned in to kiss her tenderly. Pulling away, he asked, “Do you want to talk about it?”

Zannah looked at Harrison for a second before she got off the couch. “I’m going for a run. I won’t be long. I just need to clear my head.” Laying a kiss to his cheek, she ran out the door.

Harrison stared at the door to their apartment for the span of a heartbeat. Closing his eyes, he sighed then went to grab his phone. Looking through his list of contacts, Harrison selected the one labelled ‘Mom’. Praying she’d answer, Harrison hoped that she’d know what to do.

Zannah jogged all the way to Precinct One. Waving hello to everyone, she made her way to her and Harrison’s office. Logging on to her computer, she started second guessing what she planned to do. Shaking her head, she thought, ‘No! No more second guessing.’ She typed in Harrison’s name and pulled up his old information which contained everything she needed to find his ex. Jotting it down on an index card, Zannah then ran a check on the she-wolf. She stared at the photo and felt her heart stutter. The she-wolf was their usual waitress at the bar they tended to frequent. Closing the window and logging out, Zannah bid everyone farewell then hailed a taxicab. Giving him the address of her dad’s hotel, Zannah shot a text to Harrison saying ‘I’m going to stay with my folks tonight. I’ll see you in the morning.’

Harrison was walking up and down the living room waiting for Zannah to walk in when he got her text. He slumped onto the couch, closed his eyes, and placed the back of a fist to his forehead. He began to hear small whispers in his mind telling him that he’s losing the one mammal who’s ever made him feel this way. He called his mother again asking her to come over.

Less than an hour later, Beth Wolford was standing outside her son’s door. While personally, she
couldn’t for the life of her understand why Harrison wanted to be with a tigress instead of a beautiful she-wolf, she couldn’t ignore the fact that she had never seen her son happier with anyone else. Knocking, Beth waited for her son to let her in. When the door opened and she looked upon him, her heart stopped. Harrison’s whole being looked as if the life had been drained from him. “Oh, good gracious.”

Harrison gave his mother the weakest smile. “Hey, mom.” The next thing he was aware of was lying on the couch with his head in his mother’s lap as she stroked his ears, just like when he was a pup. He cried as he told her everything. His mother never said a word, merely sat and listened. After a while, Harrison slowly began to fall asleep. “I don’t want to lose her mom. I can’t. It’ll kill me.” Harrison whispered before finally succumbing to fatigue.

Beth Wolford continued to stroke Harrison’s head even after he conked out. “I know, dear. I know.” she whispered. Beth carefully shifted so she could get up without disturbing Harrison. Covering her son with a blanket, she left, locking the door. She got into her vehicle and drove to the home of Harrison’s ex-girlfriend. It wasn’t something she was proud of, but Beth herself had been a big part of what Harrison was going through. Seeing her son like that though, that was enough to have her accelerate the plan. ‘I’m going to fix this, Harry. I promise you.’

Chapter End Notes

Important Note: There are two types of bullies. Type One are the ones you’re aware of. You know the ones of whom I speak. The ones that openly make your life hell, kick you when you’re down, steal your lunch money (if your school does that), so on and so forth. Type Two are the ones that you don’t even know exist, like Billy. A member of the popular crowd, top of the class, famous family, never did anything like Type Ones. No, Type Twos are worse, they’re subtle, covert. They’re patient and they wait for the moment that you think everything has finally settled down, that everything’s not going to get any worse, then pull the rug out from under you and bring that house of cards he’s let you build come crashing down. Billy was a Type Two, never did anything to Judy directly until...well, you know.
Chapter 8: Murders and Mock Proms

Chapter Summary

A murder takes place in Zootopia, one that is eerily reminiscent of one of the most infamous serial killers of their time. Back in Bunnyburrow, the Hopps are getting ready to throw a party. Secrets are revealed, music is played, lives changed. Allons-y.

Chapter Notes

Once more, I'd like to thank Fairlane302 for putting up with my insanity and helping me edit this chapter. You're a blessing.

Also, wrecker159753 requested permission to use an idea of mine, to which I agreed. His story is just starting out, but I personally think it's a fantastic read so far and I can't wait to see how it goes.

On another note, Combat Engineer has resurrected the dead and has begun posting an awesome work that vanished without a trace called Silver-tongue. Go check it out. A friend of mine over on FF.net is currently attempting to revise it a little and continue the story. I'm curious to see what his plans are for it.

Last thing, in the End Notes will be the links to the music featured within the chapter. I make only one request: Don't judge. I'm fully aware that the songs I've chosen are eclectic, but I don't care. I like them. I chose them. If you got a problem with them, boo-hoo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Eight: Murders and Mock Proms

ZPD Precinct One HQ – Zootopia – 9 a.m.

For the first time in a long, long time, Detective Harrison Wolford walked into Precinct One alone. This drew the attention of his colleagues, but none were brave enough to approach him and ask the question that was on everyone’s mind. Harrison slowly made his way to the office he shared with Zannah half-expecting her to be there. She wasn’t. Finishing off the coffee he had been nursing all morning, Harrison tossed it in the trash and made his way to the office of Precinct One’s C.I.D. Head, Gareth Fangerston. It was here that he found Zannah. “Morning.” Harrison stated gruffly as he took a seat.

Zannah’s heart broke a little when Harrison didn’t even acknowledge her presence other than that word. She had known that her actions from last night would create some damage, but this was far worse than she expected. Reaching out slowly to have just a little contact, she drew her paw back when Harrison shot a quick glare at her.

Gareth Fangerston, a Bobcat and thirty year veteran of the ZPD, had seen many partners eventually
enter personal relationships. Most ended badly, but never for a moment did he think that these two would end up behaving like this towards each other. Thinking of the case file he had before him on his desk, Gareth debated whether these two could still work together like this. Being a rehabilitated gambler, Gareth decided to chance it, for old time’s sake. “I’ve got a difficult case for you two,” Gareth started. “We received an anonymous tip that there may have been a murder at the address given in this folder. Go check it out and report back as soon as you can.”

Taking the folder and acknowledging their superior, Harrison and Zannah left C.I.D. Head Fangerston’s office, heading for the ZPD’s garage. Signing out a cruiser, they took off towards 314 Penny Lane in Sahara Square’s residential area. Neither said a word until they reached a red light.

“Harry…” Zannah began, only for Harrison to stop her by glaring at her. Falling silent, she looked out her window trying not to let her tears fall.

Harrison stared straight ahead, waiting on the light to change. He knew they needed to talk, but Zannah’s abandonment of him the night before left him feeling hurt and slightly betrayed. So, he did the same thing most kits, pups, and cubs did: he gave her the cold shoulder. Pulling up to the address, he got out and waited for her to do so as well. Looking at the small abode, Harrison could tell that whoever lived here worked hard labor. It was easy to see that the homeowner was in the process of doing D.I.Y. repairs, but it was good quality, precise, and experienced. Making his way to the door, Harrison drew his tranquilizer and signaled Zannah to open the door.

Zannah barely touched the door when it slowly began to open. Drawing her own tranquilizer, she entered slowly checking around corners. She and Harrison walked side by side going room by room to clear the premises. Upon clearing the first floor, they made their way to the second repeating the process. Soon, there was only one room left to check.

Harrison aimed his tranquilizer at the door, then nodded to Zannah to open it. As soon as it opened, his nose was assaulted by the putrid smell of decomposition. Gagging a little, Harrison entered the room and had to swallow back vomit at what he found. “Don’t come in here, Zannah. Go call for a full C.S.T. crew and let Fangerston know we’ll be needing some help.” He heard her race downstairs to comply as he looked at the scene before him. On the floor at his feet was the body of a mangalitsa pig, carved up and broken down expertly. Blood covered the floor around the body. But what caught his attention more than anything else was what was written on the wall behind it in blood: “I gave old Wilbur Graham a new design. How do you like it? Cordially yours, Hannibal Hyector.”

* One hour later *

C.I.D. Head Gareth Fangerston arrived on scene some time after Detectives Wolford and Fangmeyer, alongside a crew of Crime Scene Techs, had begun combing the scene in search of evidence. The call that the victim was retired criminal profiler Wilbur Graham had kicked him into action commandeering a ride over. As he approached the door, Gareth witnessed Detective Fangmeyer burst out and vomit onto the ground. Sidestepping her and the mess, Gareth walked in to see what had caused his detective’s reaction. The refrigerator was filled with clear Tupperware containers that held meals no doubt made from of Wilbur’s various internal organs. Making his way upstairs, Gareth found Wolford standing over what remained of Wilbur Graham. “Christ. Hannibal didn’t hold back, did he?”

“This isn’t like him though, sir.” Harrison answered. “Hannibal doesn’t waste any portion of his meals. This? This is way, way too sloppy.”

Gareth looked around the room. There wasn’t much, simply a bed and alarm clock. “What are you thinking happened?”
Harrison shrugged. “Don’t have a clue. I’m going to take a walk to clear my head for a bit. I won’t be far. I’m just circling the block.” With that, Harrison left. Exiting the house, he decided to walk counterclockwise around the block. He made it to the second corner before he found none other than Hannibal Hyector sitting at the bus stop bench. “Hannibal.” Harrison stated.

Hannibal smiled at the detective. “Hello, Harry. Have a seat. I’m not going to bite. I’m sure you have questions because I’ve got answers.”

Cautiously taking a seat at the opposing end of the bench, Harrison said, “Back when I first started, I was assigned to the detail escorting you from the Moira Asylum for the Criminally Insane. You wondered what it would have been like if I had been the one who captured you.” Keeping his eyes focused across the street, he asked, “Wilbur was the one who caught you last time, wasn’t he?”

“Indeed, he was.” Hannibal replied. Tossing a cellular phone next to Harrison, he stated, “Most of what you’ll need is on that. I had it recording the entire conversation Wilbur and I had. I think you’ll find it rather enlightening.”

“What’s your game, Hannibal?” Harrison asked. “What are you playing at?”

“I made a deal with the devil, Detective.” Hannibal answered. “You’ll get the answers to those two questions soon. I’ve already called for an ambulance. They’re responding to reports of gunshots.”

Confused, Harrison turned just in time to see Hannibal pull out a gun and fire it at him. Harrison’s world went black. The last thing he heard was the sound of the ambulances sirens.

<MEANWHILE – BACK W/ ZANNAH AND GARETH>

The sound of gunshots sent Gareth and Zannah into an adrenaline-fueled frenzy as they took off in the direction the shots originated. Sirens could be heard approaching that area. With a burst of speed, they arrived just before the ambulance to find Harrison bleeding out on the concrete sidewalk. Zannah rushed over with a loud ‘NO!!’. Gareth was at her side as she dropped down next to Harrison’s body. As the ambulance came to a stop, the EMT jumped out and rushed to the downed wolf.

The senior EMT, a mongoose, quickly assessed the situation. “Damn, he’s huge.” he muttered. “Okay. Multiple GSWs to the torso.” Turning to shout at the driver, he hollered, “Call Zootopia General. Tell them that we’re bringing a extralarge wolf in and need an OR stat.” Turning to the other two officers, he ordered, “Help me get him onto the gurney.” With their assistance, the mongoose EMT lifted the canid onto the medical gurney and into the ambulance. “He’ll be fine as long as we get him to a hospital soon, so we don’t got much time. Remember: Zootopia General Hospital, Trauma Ward.”

Zannah felt a wave of relief rush through her at the EMT mongoose’s words. She ingrained the info into her memory. She wanted to collapse, but managed to stay on her feet. Zannah looked at C.I.D. Head Fangerton about to ask permission to ride, but the look on his face told her that he’d refuse. Willing to chance it, she attempted to climb inside the ambulance, but was restrained by her superior. Shooting a glare at him, all she got in return was a headshake and a much more severe glare.

“I need you here.” Gareth told Fangmeyer. “Harrison would want you here, doing your job, hunting the bastard who shot him down.”

Zannah didn’t have an argument. He was right after all. She stepped back from the ambulance, and watched forlornly as it engaged its sirens, and pulled away from the scene.
With the ambulance’s departure, Zannah turned to find Gareth already starting to survey the scene looking for any indication of what had occurred. Gareth looked over at the bench near the pool of blood in which they had discovered Wolford. As soon as he laid eyes on the bench though, he saw something that caused his blood to momentarily boil before it iced over and drained from his face. Sitting on the bench in plain sight was a bonsai tree, well cared for and in bloom. Gareth swallowed as he looked at it, knowing it's significance. There was only one explanation for the small tree, Hannibal Hyector. Such a tree had always been found at the scenes of his atrocities, and it's presence here eliminated any doubt as to who had shot Wolford.

As Gareth called over one of the C.S.T.’s to recover the tree as evidence, he noticed three mobile phones sitting on the ground nearby, one of which he recognized as belonging to Wolford. Gareth quickly realized the potential of the phones, and he directed the C.S.T. to ensure that all three phones were rushed to the Cybercrime unit for a full analysis.

While the C.S.T. was working on photographing and recovering the evidence, Gareth looked in the direction that his wounded detective had been taken. ‘Hannibal must really like you if he didn’t kill you.’ Gareth thought. He looked at the scene once more and his eyes fell upon Zannah, who stood unmoving above the pool of blood in which Wolford had been laying in when they found him.

Zannah could not drag her eyes away from the pool of Harrison’s blood on the sidewalk. It wasn’t until Gareth walked over to insist on taking her home that she withdrew from her trancelike state. She didn’t want to go home, but Gareth refused her request of bringing her to Zootopia Gen. The ride back to her shared apartment with Harrison seemed to take forever. When she got there, Zannah slowly walked to her bedroom before altering course for Harrison’s. Curling up in his bed, much like when she was a young cub, she cried herself to the point of exhaustion and lost consciousness.

The Flattop Stone – The farthest fringes of Zootopia

The Chancellor laid on his stone looking at the clouds. A small itch in the back of his mind alerted him to something not being right. Sitting up, he carefully observed his surroundings until he spotted what it was. Over near the edge of the clearing, a figure stood watching him. Rising to his feet, he started to walk over only to find that the closer he got, the more the figure faded away into nothing. Stopping, the Chancellor realized what was happening. “No, not now. Not yet.” he whispered. “I’m not done yet.” The sound of someone approaching from behind him caused the Chancellor to spin around and find Hannibal Hyector watching him intently.

“Something…wrong?” Hannibal asked the Chancellor. From his body language, Hannibal could clearly see that there was something amiss with the mammal before him.

“No.” the Chancellor answered. “Nothing. Just a slight…trick of the mind, nothing more.” Walking back to his stone, the Chancellor sat down and asked, “Did you do as I requested?”


Snarling, the Chancellor shot to his feet. “What the fucking hell did you do, cretin?” he asked with malice permeating every word.

Hannibal’s smirk widened. “Oh, set you back, I’d say, a quarter of a century.” Finally stepping atop the stone Hannibal looked directly at the face of the Chancellor, shrouded in the shadow of his cowl. “I’m here because I’ve found a new, far greater desire.”

The Chancellor lunged at Hannibal’s throat and a battle ensued. Claws covered in blood gleamed,
dark laughter filled the air, cries of pain echoed across the clearing, and the sound of flesh being ripped from their bodies could be heard. Clouds which had been gathering soon broke and a torrential rainstorm poured down on them, but still they fought, wanting nothing more but to end the other. Finally, they separated.

Hannibal was in a far more devastated state. His right eye had been clawed out. His suit, which had been meticulously prepared, was now in tatters soaked in blood of them both, but mostly his own. Hannibal’s left arm was broken in multiple places and he honestly didn’t know how he was still standing since he had bone sticking out of his right leg. Hannibal began to cackle much like his primitive ancestors at his situation. “Tell me Chancellor,” he shouted over the raging storm around them. “How does it feel knowing, or more accurately not knowing, how much damage my choice has done to all your hard work over the years? To know that an old hyena like myself, who’s been incarcerated for a majority of that time has essentially fractured your carefully crafted work of art? To know that your decision to free me to do your work has resulted in this scenario?”

The Chancellor, covered in blood with most of it now matted into his fur, heaved in deep breathes as he shot what could only be a death glare at the hyena before him. His mind racing to figure out a way to contain the damage Hannibal inflicted to his plans, the Chancellor realized that he had no way of knowing just how much damage had been done. “I’M GOING TO RIP YOUR GODDAMN MOTHERFUCKING THROAT OUT!!!!” he snarled in absolute fury. Still more intact than Hannibal, the Chancellor leapt at the hyena, who didn’t even try to dodge, avoid, or parry the attack. His paws around Hannibal’s neck, the Chancellor asked, ‘I’ll be kind and let you speak your final words.”

Cackling, Hannibal smirked madly. “See you in hell…Jacen.” As soon as the name left his maw, Hannibal felt Jacen’s claws pierce his throat and rip it to shreds. Still cackling until he bled out, Hannibal’s last thought was: ‘Thank you, Harrison for granting my greatest desire. Now, send this mammal to me so I can have my fun with him.’

The Hopps Family Homestead – Bunnyburrow – Tri-Burrow Area – 2:30 p.m.

Nick closed his eyes and dumped the bucket of water he was holding over himself. Giving himself a quick shake, Nick opened his eyes to look around him. He could see Stu, Jaxon, and a whole crew of male Hopps kits working diligently on the project he had proposed late last night after Judy had fallen asleep.

After her admission yesterday evening and his discovery of the letters, Nick had begun to plan a mock prom for her. After spending nearly an hour explaining his plan to the Hopps warren, they had all agreed that it was a marvelous idea and wanted to help. The group got started by hashing out a theme, before making some rough plans and designs to use the family’s largest storage building for the venue. With the plans roughed out, they soon dispersed and went off to bed, so as to wake up early and get started.

That morning, everyone had risen a lot earlier than normal to begin working on the prom. Nick had ended up having to slip back inside so that he would be there for Judy to ‘wake’ him to keep her from getting suspicious. After all, no one wanted her to figure out what they were up to.

Bonnie’s role was to take Judy dress shopping under the pretense of an upcoming wedding, which wasn’t entirely a lie as one of the other Hopps daughters was scheduled to get married next month. Skye had, much to Jaxon’s surprise, volunteered to accompany them, stating that she’d make sure that each of Judy’s dress would also be something that would command Nick’s attention. She also said that this way she and Judy could talk and get to know each other better.

Bonnie had piled them and a few other daughters into a large bus then drove them over to the actual
town of Podunk, which was said to have the best dress shop in the Tri-Burrows. With the trip being a good two hours away in one direction, it would give the males time to make sure everything was set before the females got back. After sending Stu a text that they had arrived, Bonnie let her daughters loose. She didn’t even bother to try and control them, knowing from experience it was a futile effort. Besides, they were older and hopefully wiser than years past. She stuck with Judy and Skye, leading them from boutiques to dress shops then eventually to the store owned and operated by an old family friend, who was more than happy to help as well as let them use her employee discount. Bonnie would make suggestions and give her opinion on dresses. She found a couple she enjoyed, but every so often she would slip away to text or call the males, keeping them informed of what they were doing.

Taking one more look around Nick saw that, thanks to the hours of hard work, the largest of the Hopps’ storage barns was quickly becoming the scene for a grandiose ball. “Looking great, guys.” Nick said. “All we got to do now is add the finishing touches and make sure that Judy and the girls don’t come in here until it’s time for the prom.”

Stu shook his head at Nick’s words with a smile. While he had had reservations on the whole deal, Stu quickly discovered that Nick’s determination to pull this off had sparked an inferno in his many, many sons to see this through as well. With the help of Jaxon, Stu set the final brace to the stage’s legs so it could sustain the weight of the DJ equipment that his boys would soon retrieve from their bedrooms. Nick had compiled a list of songs that Michael, his eldest son, and a couple of others dreaming of producing their own music, were currently in the process of finding. “Nick, if you don’t stop giving them all compliments, I’ll lose my entire work force here on the farm when you leave.” Stu told the red fox tod. “You’re making me look like a slave driver.”

Ewan Hopps shouted. “Maybe if you learn a thing or two from him, we won’t complain as much.” To which a collective chorus of agreement followed. None of them ever actually complained, but their father was teasing Nick so they felt it was okay to tease him back in the fox’s stead.

Stu burst out laughing. “Fair point, but I’m not letting all of you pour water on yourselves because it’s hot.” Looking over at Ewan, Stu stated, “Especially you, Ewan. I’ve already got to turn enough does away at the door because of the last time you ‘accidentally’ lost your speedo that summer trying to impress that buck you were interested in.”

Ewan blushed as his brothers all snickered at the memory. Ewan’s husband, Lyle, full on laughed. It had been one of the funniest moments ever. Both of them had been far too afraid to just tell each other about their feelings for one another, so they’d always try to impress the other by doing stupid shit. That particular day, Ewan had decided to beat the swim champ at a race only to lose his swimwear midway through. He had been so embarrassed he took off running and almost got arrested before Lyle got there to explain the situation to the sheriff, going so far as to claim Ewan as his boyfriend for the first time, which is what jump-started their relationship. Only months later, the two were married (without the consent of Lyle’s parents) and Lyle ended up moving in with the Hopps family, though they were now required to pay rent in the form of manual labor. Their door had a plaque that read: If this door is locked, then assume Ewan and Lyle Buckland-Hopps are ‘busy’!!

Nick chuckled at their antics. Picking up the broom he had laid down while he doused himself, Nick got back to sweeping all the sawdust from the other projects. The final part they would have to complete was the dance floor. The storage building was set up on a large concrete foundation with a polished surface. They were going to lay temporary tile down in front of the stage where the dance floor would be. The tile was actually leftovers from when Gideon had built his shop and the pastry tod had offered to let them have it only requesting an invitation as neither he nor Travis had attended prom either. Nick agreed as long as Gideon also provided dessert to which the pastry tod had readily agreed.
Jaxon grabbed a bottle of water from the ice chest situated near the large sliding side door. The door was closed so that no one could see what was going on inside, but the drawback was that it prevented air from circulating well. Grabbing the front of his shirt, Jaxon popped a few buttons open to get some relief. “I’m used to heat, but this is ridiculous.”

Stu huffed in amusement. Turning to everyone, he shouted, “Alright, listen up. We’re all males here. So, if you need to remove your shirts to cool off for a moment, don’t be shy.” At that a good portion of them quickly removed their shirts. Turning to look at Nick, Stu (and everyone else) stared in disbelief at the sheer number of scars that the tod possessed.

Nick folded his shirt and set it down on a box near the standard door for the building. He turned to find Stu, Jaxon, Ewan, and another one of the Hopps boys surprisingly close to him. Nick quickly understood that they were looking at his scars. “Didn’t exactly have an easy life.” he stated, simply returning to his task.

Jaxon had yet to take off his shirt, but upon seeing Nick’s collection of scars, he decided to hurry up and remove it to show the few he himself had. On his left shoulder was the scar of where a bullet pierced him during a mission. His waist on his right side had a long one where he had been slashed with a knife wielded by a chinchilla high on drugs. The most prominent ones though were the eight down his back that Jaxon felt proud to have. They were from the first time he and Skye had mated together after the fight where they finally confessed their love for one another. ‘Confessed? Ha! We basically attacked each other from all the pent up sexual frustration.’ Jaxon thought. Skye’s reaction after waking up and seeing the wounds had been to break down in tears and apologize repeatedly, saying that she hadn’t even known that she had hurt him. Jaxon had spent hours calming her down enough to ask why she was so freaked out. When she told him the meaning behind the scars foxes made on their lifemates, he made love to her again. That had caused her to reopen the wounds, but he hadn’t cared. When they were done with that round, they talked it all over and that night she had proposed. Jaxon had never been so happy in his life. That night was tied for number one with finding out about his half-sister Judy.

Stu saw the eight prominent scars on Jaxon’s back and asked, “Cripes! What the hell happened to you, son?” Stu had called Jaxon ‘son’ quite a number of times over the past several days, but neither of them seemed bothered by it. Looking at the marks on Jaxon’s back had Stu wonder just what the hell the jackrabbit did for a living.

Nick, having heard Stu’s question, looked over to see Jaxon turned three quarters of the way around and saw the scars. He had to fight back his grin once he recognized what they were. Nick, being a fox, knew that during mating both tods and vixens would claw each other to twice to leave claiming scars. The first time was to open wounds necessary to infuse their musky secretions into the wounds during the second time. This made it clear that they were taken by another and off the market. Curious, Nick walked over and, catching Jaxon by surprise, lifted the jackrabbit’s chin up to see if he also had mating bites. Sure enough, on either side of Jaxon’s neck, were two puncture wounds were Skye’s two sets of front fangs had pierced his skin. “Those are claim markings.” Nick stated aloud for Stu to hear.

Knocking Nick’s paw away, Jaxon gave the tod a mischievous smile. “Yep. I’m a claimed jackrabbit.” he said. Casting a quick glance at Stu, he dropped his voice to a conspiratorial whisper, adding, “If Judy’s anything like me, she’ll be demanding the same things from you.”

Nick maintained a straight face while internally freaking the fuck out. Forcing a smirk, he whispered back, “Oh, believe me, I’m looking forward to it.” Checking his watch, Nick wondered if he could still contact Judy despite the distance. Quickly finishing up sweeping the floor, Nick set the broom aside and pressed the commlink button. “Hey, Fluff! Can you read me?” A second later, he got a
“Hey, Slick! What’s up?” Judy replied.

Nick smiled. “Nothing. Just thought I’d check in on you and the rest of the girls.”

“Well, we’re just about to head home.” Judy informed him. “We should be arriving in about two hours. I’m telling you, this has been one of the most bizarre dress shopping experiences ever and I hate dress shopping. Give me pants and a t-shirt any day.”

Chuckling, Nick said, “Can’t wait for you to get back, Carrots. Be safe, you hear?”

“I will, Red.” Judy responded. “Don’t cause too much trouble for everybody. I’ll be there soon.”

With that the transmission ended.

Nick quickly gave the crew the update which spurred them all into overdrive. Nick helped set the tile for the dancefloor, his mind racing at the thought of what Judy would think of the scars he would inevitably inflict upon her. He didn’t want to hurt her, but the instinctive drive to leave claim marks on his mate-to-be was slowly driving him insane. Out of nowhere, Nick remembered the letters he had discovered. ‘I’ll tell her about my scars tonight.’ he thought. ‘I’ll tell her, then ask about the letters.’ An hour and fifteen minutes later, they were done and started running for the burrow to get dressed for the evening.

<Meanwhile w/ the girls>

Judy sat with Skye in the far back of the bus as her mother drove them back home from the shopping excursion. Everyone had found dresses for the wedding and other occasions. Skye had helped Judy find three dresses. One for the wedding, one for formal events like the ZPD’s annual Donation Gala, and one for special events such as a potential date night. Judy looked at Skye and said, “Thanks for the help, Skye.”

Skye smiled. “It’s no problem, Judy. I don’t really like shopping and seeing as you don’t either, I was curious to find out what it would be like shopping with someone else like me.”

Judy laughed a bit. “I wonder what the boys have been up to?” she pondered.

“Probably swapping little tidbits about us.” Skye stated. “I’m sure Jaxon’s showed off the scars I’ve given him.”

Judy looked at Skye in shock. “You gave him scars?” she whispered loudly.

Skye looked at Judy for a moment then rolled her eyes, muttering, “Of course, he hasn’t told you.”

Putting her cellphone away, Skye said, “How much do you know about vulpine mating practices?”

Seeing Judy’s embarrassed expression, Skye sighed. “Normally, during mating, the tod and vixen use their claws to leave open scratches then repeat the process without the claws. Foxes tend to leave trace amounts of our scent on everything we touch due to oily secretions from our paws. Thanks to the open wounds from scratching we can leave traces of our musky oil secretions within the wounds which scar. This is just another way of staking our claim.”

Judy considered what she was just told. She had spent some of her free time reading The Complete Young Vulpine’s Guide to Maturity. She had read something about claim marks, but she hadn’t imagined that there were so many variations. From what she had read, mating marks was an umbrella term for a large range of things. To think that scars were another version triggered Judy’s heat at the thought of Nick leaving such a permanent mark of possession on her.
Skye’s nose alerted her to the shift in Judy’s scent. “Wow!” she exclaimed softly. “That got you really fired up, huh?”

Judy flushed so deep that she probably matched Nick’s fur. “Sorry!” she replied. “A doe’s first heat isn’t normally this bad, but I’m a lot older than most.”

Skye waved a paw dismissively. “I’m not complaining. I was just caught off guard.” A text notification signaled that she had a message from Jaxon. ‘Everything’s ready. Just missing our dates.’ It read. She texted back, ‘About forty-five minutes away. Tell Nick that Judy’s EXTREMELY excited at the thought of him claiming her.’ Silencing her phone, Skye began doing her best to convince Judy that she should wear the ‘Special Events’ dress to show Nick when they arrived back home.

When the Hopps females returned, they all quickly made their way to their rooms. Bonnie and Skye led Judy to the master bedroom. Once they got her into the dress, they quickly applied a minor amount of makeup. Judy kept struggling against them until Skye exerted her full strength to hold her still. By the time it was over, Judy saw that it was 5 p.m. Quickly putting on their own dresses, Bonnie and Skye moved Judy to the door.

Judy stood uncomfortably in front of the door to the master bedroom. Glaring at her mother and Skye, she asked, “Mind telling me what this is all about?” A knock soon sounded against the door. Seeing her mother and Skye motion for her to open the door, Judy did so slowly. Her breath caught in her chest at the sight before her.

Nick stared at Judy with wide eyes and maw dropped. She was stunning. Nick gulped audibly as he took in her appearance. She was wearing a floor-length emerald-green dress with red-orange and black accents with a fuchsia sash around her waist. It was both backless and strapless with a sweetheart design and a slit that showed off one of her legs. She also wore a necklace with a citrine carrot-shaped pendant that matched his fur, a tiny silver brooch in the shape of a fang, and a flower crown made of purple tulips. Nick had planned a little speech, but simply looking at her, he found that his tongue didn’t seem to be working. He also felt like his skin was on fire. “W-wow” was all he could get out.

Swallowing thickly, Judy whispered, “Y-yeah.” Looking at Nick in the full, five piece bluish-grey suit that was only one or two shades darker than an exact match of her own fur color, Judy wondered if it was at all possible that she had inexplicably opened a portal to the past. The suit itself looked like something she had seen in her old family albums. The jacket was double-breasted and had peaked lapels, one of which had the customary boutonniere, and coattails. The jacket pocket held his red kerchief he always carried. The sleeves had surgeon’s cuffs, which wasn’t seen much anymore. He even wore a waistcoat despite the fact he needn’t because of his double-breasted jacket. The dress pants he wore had a very clear crease in them. He even sported a classical wide brimmed fedora. Refocusing herself, Judy saw that in Nick’s paws was a corsage and a small bouquet of flowers just like what a female would expect of their date to the prom when he would come to collect her and escort her to the dance.

As Nick and Judy stared at one another, Jaxon popped out from behind Nick and made his way over to Skye, whose outfit matched well with his own. Taking her paw, he led her out of the burrow towards where they had set up. “Oh, what a night~” Jaxon sang, humorously.

Stu sidestepped Nick as well and took Bonnie’s paw. Leading her out, he stopped next to Nick and Judy, saying, “If I don’t see either of you in ten minutes…” He left the statement open as he led Bonnie away.

After several moments of drawn out silence, Nick remembered what he was supposed to do next.
“May I see your paw, please?” As soon as Judy raised her paw, he carefully extracted the corsage from its casing and placed it on her wrist. Offering her the bouquet, he asked, “Judith Laverne Hopps, will you be my date to the prom?”

Judy’s eyes widened to the max at his question. She felt her heart begin to beat like a drum at the realization of what was happening. Judy began putting the evidence together: her mom’s spontaneous desire to go dress shopping, Nick’s insistence this morning that she go with her, Skye’s choice of dresses, the fact that Nick was dressed the way a male normally would for such an occasion. Nick had managed to plan and put together a prom for her, in just a single day. She finally managed to squeak out a ‘Yes!’ before Nick extended his elbow for her to latch on to. Accompanying him to the largest of the farm’s storage buildings, Judy’s jaw dropped at the sight she beheld. There were twinkling Christmas lights in lieu of what would normally be used, a large tiled dance floor, a table covered in refreshments and food, a DJ booth and band equipment on stage, and miniature disco globes suspended from the rafters. Soft jazzy music filled the air [I’ve Got You Under My Skin]. Judy continued to look around until her eyes locked onto Nick’s.

Nick gave Judy a sheepish smile. “Your proms sucked and I never really got to go either of mine. I figured that if we had known each other back then, we’d have gone together.” He shrugged, adding, “Better late than never.”

Judy couldn’t stop the tears of happiness that spilled from her eyes as she wrapped her arms around Nick’s midsection. He returned the embrace and slowly started to sway to the music. Judy just swayed in place with him. Eventually, she collected herself enough to look up into his grinning face. “You’re a good tod, Mr. Wilde.” Judy whispered to him.

Nick hummed at her words. “I’ve got to be if I’m going to get your folks to approve of me. They still don’t know the full scope of our relationship.” he told her. “I mean, your dad took me aside and asked me what my intentions were.” Nick recalled the conversation from a few hours ago.

*Flashback*

“Hey, Nick? Can you come see me for a bit and talk?” Stu asked. He had a bottle of water in each of his paws. Giving one to Nick when the tod sat down, Stu asked, “You seem like a really good mammal and all, but can you tell me what your intentions are towards my daughter?”

Nick almost choked on his drink at Stu’s question. Coughing and pounding his chest, Nick asked, “Sir?” The look on the older buck’s face told Nick he hadn’t misheard. Clearing his throat, Nick said, “Well, I’m hoping to be her partner on the force, sir. I’m expected to report to the police academy in five weeks. Judy specifically requested that I enroll and become her partner.”

“Is that all?” Stu questioned. “You see, when Judy left for the city the first time, Bonnie and I decided to go through her things in case there was something she wanted us to send her. While we were, we found some very...suggestible things.”

Nick swallowed. “Uhm, such as?” he inquired. He had a sinking feeling in his gut. Were they actually aware of Judy’s erotica? Did they find something else? These were only two of the questions that bounced around inside of his skull.

Stu shifted rather uncomfortably. Sneaking a glance at his other children, he whispered, “We found a stash of predator-based pornographic magazines hidden throughout her room. Bonnie and I confiscated it and burned it all, but…” He trailed off not knowing what else to say.

Nick felt his racing heart slow in relief. He knew that Judy didn’t collect porn mags since she told him herself that she preferred smutty novels. Though it did intrigue him that there had been porn...
mags in her room. They probably belonged to her siblings. “I wouldn’t know about that, sir. Besides, how could you possibly be so sure those magazines were Judy’s.” It wasn’t technically a lie, but he still felt bad for it.

“Call me Stu, Nick.” Stu stated. “Look, I’m well aware that there is a possibility the magazines belong to some of my other kids. I have nothing against you, Nick, but I’m still a tad speciest. I’m making an effort not to be, but it’s hard to change. You seem to be a swell male. After all, you’re throwing a prom for my little girl. I’m just…” Shaking his head, Stu sighed. “I want to see my Jude with a fine buck who’ll be able to give her kits and make her a mother.” Giving Nick an almost sad smile, Stu put a paw on the tod’s shoulder. “You know, if you were a buck, I’d probably be on my paws and knees begging you to marry her right now. I hope that whatever buck does catch her eye is at least half the male you are. Whatever vixen you end up with is going to be a very lucky one.” Stu then walked off to finish helping Ewan set up the tables and chairs. He didn’t see Nick’s ears fold down flush with his head.

*Flashback Ends*

“Your dad confided to me that when you first left for the city, he and your mom wanted to be prepared in case you needed them to send you anything from home. While they were going through your room, they found a large assortment of predator-based pornagraphic magazines stashed in there.” Nick continued. “He also expressed that he’s hoping that whatever buck you take as your mate is half the mammal I am, after telling me that if I was a rabbit, he’d be begging me to marry you already. I think that even though they found that stash of pred-porn…”

“That wasn’t mine and you know it!” Judy whispered sharply, cutting him off. Her ears falling to hide the blush that began to appear. “I didn’t even own any back then. I only recently purchased some magazines that focused primarily on foxes. All of those had to have belonged to one or more of my siblings. What better place to hide it than in the room of the one they teased as ‘Jude the Prude’.” Judy blushed as she suddenly realized what she had just confessed and hid her face in Nick’s chest.

Nick smirked. “Oh? I thought you didn’t have any at all, and just the ones with foxes?” he teased.

Judy couldn’t bring herself to look Nick in the eye. “I...Maybe I managed to find and special order some limited edition magazines that featured both foxes and bunnies.” she whispered soft enough to be nothing more than a breath.

Nick however still caught her words. “I see.” he teased. The song changed [Only You] and Nick wondered if now was an appropriate time to bring up his scars. “Hey?” he asked Judy softly. “Want to hear the story behind my scars?”

Judy nodded slowly. Perking her ears to hear Nick better as he began to lead her into another dance, Judy wondered what had Nick willing to share. She heard him take a breath.

“Well,” Nick started. “It was roughly about a month after I kicked Skye out and met up with Finn. Finn had gotten arrested on a drunk and disorderly, so I didn’t have a partner for a while. That meant that I either had to run solo or find another source of income for a short period until Finn was released. I heard whispers of an underground fighting circuit, so I tried to find it. After a while of asking around, I was approached and given an opportunity to prove myself in the ring. I was given a date, time, and address, told to show up, and that I better not disappoint if I wanted in. I showed up on time and was immediately thrown in with a wolf who was apparently a five-year veteran of the circuit. Believe me, he didn’t go down easy.”

“After the fight, I was given a bundle of cash larger than I had ever seen at once as my reward for winning. Imagine what I thought at being given such a large amount of money for winning a fight at
roughly twenty years of age. I asked how to sign up for another fight and the next thing I know, I was part of a regular rotation. Within six months, I was put into the prestige bouts. Those are the ones that can make or break a career on the underground fighting circuit. Within another six months, I retired with a 21-0 winning streak.”

Judy looked at him in amazement. “How much prize money did you accumulate during that time? And why didn’t you defend us during the case if you’re that good?” It honestly didn’t make any sense to her at all.

Nick shifted uncomfortably, but never missed a beat. He waited for the song to end and the next one on the playlist [Your Song (piano cover)] to begin before answering. “Well, first let me say that it is very different to go into a fight you know is about to take place than one that you’re not prepared for.” Getting a nod of understanding, he continued. “As for the financial aspect, I won a grand total of 22.8 million.”

Judy gawked at the sum of cash Nick had acquired over his run. “Nick! If you had that much money, why the hell did you continue to hustle? You have enough money to live comfortably for years.”

“Honestly, I don’t know why.” Nick admitted. Then, he smiled down at her. “Maybe Fate himself chose to have me continue so that we could meet one another.”

Judy buried her face in his chest with her ears down her back in an attempt to hide her fiery blush. They danced to a few more songs and then Judy had to ask. “Nick? Why did you decide to offer all that up?”

Nick sighed heavily. “When you ran off after the incident with that buck, your mom had me wait in that tiny office not too far from the front entrance. While I was in there, I kind of stumbled across something.”

Judy stiffened in Nick’s arms at his confession. She had a very good feeling as to what it was he found. During the three months they had been apart, she hadn’t been in the best place either mentally or emotionally. One of her sisters told her it would be therapeutic to write letters even if she knew she couldn’t send them. Judy had written to him every single evening after that starting the second week. “Oh.” Judy whispered. Now, she understood. Nick was making amends for his invasion of her privacy, but in her mind, Judy saw no reason for him to. After all, she had told him ‘No secrets’. She waited for the song to end to guide him to one of the open tables. “Sit down, Slick. I need to tell you about those letters you found.”

The rest of the Hoppses continued to enjoy themselves. Gideon and Travis danced for a while until Gideon was tired and sore. Bonnie and Stu performed a four-step waltz. Jaxon and Skye twirled like a pair of professional dancers seen on television. During all that, Judy told Nick how she started to write the letters. Explained how every single evening, before she went to bed, she would write to him about her day, imagining what his reaction would be to what she’d written and his response to it. She even stated how, over time, she’d realized that she had developed feelings, though she hadn’t known she’d fallen in love with him until that morning she first went into heat. Nick sat silently as he listened to Judy’s every word.

Michael Hopps, who was DJing with the band, checked his watch. Seeing that it was 7:30 p.m. he started prepping the karaoke machine for the main event of the evening. Once everything was set, he announced, “Alright, everybody. Unlike the actual prom, most of us have a long day of work tomorrow. Therefore, we’re going to finish this evening up with a bit of karaoke. If you want to astonish us with your vocal talents, step right up and pick a song from the list.”

Judy smirked at Nick. She was feeling a lot lighter now that she no longer had to hide the existence
of the letters. She jumped to her feet saying, “What about it, Red? Want to have a sing-off?”

Nick got to his feet and closed the distance between them. “Well, let’s see. We both know we can play piano. I can also play, guitar, violin, drums, and the saxophone as well as sing. If we’re going to compete, I want to know what’s at stake.”

Judy thought about it for a bit. Finally, she got an idea. “If you win, I’ll tell my parents that we’re seeing each other. As you said, they don’t have any clue as to the true depth of this connection we’ve got. However, if I win than you’ll need to do something special for me. I’ll make a request, but how you do it is totally up to you.”

“Deal.” Nick stated. He walked over to stand in line for the karaoke contest. He had a very specific song he planned to sing. A part of him wondered what song Judy would choose to sing, but decided it didn’t matter.

Judy stood right behind Nick as she started to come up with what song she’d sing. She hadn’t sung since she was a young kit, but she would often try and run through exercises every now and again. As Nick handed her the track list, she discovered that a good number of them she recognized. Signing her name next to her choice, Judy waited for her turn.

As Nick and Judy awaited their turns, they enjoyed watching the performances of the other many of the Hopps kits who got onto the stage and gave it their all. Most of them did pretty awesome renditions of the songs they chose. Others were...not that great, but that didn’t stop them from having a blast. After each performance everyone would cheer as those up on stage finished and gave a bow.

When their turns came, Nick indicated for Judy to go first. She smirked and hopped onto the stage. She grabbed the microphone and nodded to Michael. The intro started, then Judy began to sing [All the Way Up]. Judy didn’t just sing, she performed. Dancing to the beat as she sang with a smile. Nick’s jaw dropped as he listened to Judy sing. He suddenly became slightly worried that he would lose their bet. Despite that, he couldn’t help but smile as Judy seemed to have the time of her life performing on stage. When she finished, Nick smiled at her as he approached her. “Great job, Fluff, but it’s my turn now.” Ascending the steps onto the stage, Nick looked out at the crowd of bunnies. Taking a deep breath, he let it out slowly. Nodding to Michael Hopps, Nick signaled for him to start the song [If].

Judy and the rest felt their jaws hit the floor as Nick sang and performed as if he had once been a world-renowned recording artist. Judy watched in utter astonishment as Nick made his way off stage and make his way directly to her as she realized that the song had looped. Judy felt Nick guide her back to the dance floor and soon they were dancing together as if they had done it for a lifetime. Everyone joined in falling into step with seemingly practiced ease.

The party lasted well into the night as Nick and Judy started taking turns performing more songs. Bonnie and Stu knew that tomorrow would need to be a mandatory day off for everyone, but they didn’t care. It wasn’t until approximately five in the morning that they all made their way back to their rooms in the burrow. Nick and Judy shared a swift, sweet kiss to each other’s cheeks when no one was looking then wished each other merry dreams with a promise to see each other first thing in the morning before entering their respective bedrooms and falling asleep.

Chapter End Notes
I've got you under my skin: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgxGmQmLfaQ

Only You: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzcpI2Yq69o

Your Song (piano cover): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xtr4TLTe4dM

All the Way Up: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvkC8Q0xmQ

If: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFn3BrKb4sE

Other songs that were cut:
Something Good: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYlCU1-2DdU
Loving the Sound: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKkAYqgIAXA4
You Get What You Give: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UR_wbeVq-o
Hold On: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0YtHgBxqTA
Chapter Nein: Transitions & Understandings

Chapter Summary

Title pretty much says it. Transitions will occur and understandings will take place for many.

Chapter Notes

First I want to once more apologize for being an a**. I'm not a person who deals well with guilt, regret, or remorse and it weighed heavily on me. I was actually so stressed I ended up with a migraine and got rushed to an emergency clinic due to anxiety attacks. But, I'm still here, I survived. I just hope that I still have readers. Those of you who posted comments on my original apology post, thank you again. They meant a great deal to me. I even saved them on a WPS document to preserve them since deleting a chapter also erases comments.

Thanks again to Fairlane302 for sticking with me and editing my mess of a chapter.

Anyway, that's enough rambling. On with the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Nein: Transitions & Understandings

ZPD Cybercrime Unit – Precinct One – Zootopia – Midafternoon

The Cybercrime Unit of the Zootopian Police Department was one of the greatest in the world. Second only to its primary counterpart in the Zoolympian Empire’s Imperial Capital of Zookuulantiapolis. Its secondary counterpart in Zootropolis was often used for things of a more ‘sensitive’ nature. The three cities were often referred to as the Triumvirate of the Zoolympian Empire.

The Head of ZPD Cybercrimes, an elephant named Ellen Tusker, was sitting at a workstation listening to the same recording for the tenth time. She really didn’t need to as she was gifted with an audiographic memory, but she was triple-checking everything, looking for anything that could have easily been missed, locating them, and then isolating them for further analysis. It seemed that every time she thought that she was done something new would pop up and she’d rerun the recording again. Her computer had already transcribed the dialogue, but each time she identified another anomaly, she’d add a note to them. The sound of someone approaching her station had Tusker looking up to find Chief Bogo and the Police Commissioner, Terry Catlin, an elderly bobcat, standing before her.

Receiving the gesture to take a seat, Chief Bogo and Commissioner Catlin sat down and each took a pair of Bluefang Beats that were synced to Tusker’s workstation. They had read the preliminary report, but they wanted to know exactly what had been discovered on the mobile phones found at the
scene of the assault of Detective Wolford. The first recording was done in a very police-like fashion. Hannibal gave the date and time, expressed what would soon take place, and then confessed that he had been tasked to commit five murders, by the same mammal who had broken him out. The recording then became silent until the voice of the late Wilbur Graham made its appearance. Both Bogo and Catlin listened intently to the words that were spoken. They grit their teeth at Graham’s confession to being a member of the Anti-Predator Movement and his continued confirmation of Hannibal’s accusations.

Listening as the recording quickly devolved into a physical confrontation, Bogo closed his eyes as the sound of a gunshot echoed. He surmised that it was Graham’s off duty revolver to which they had traced the bullets from Harrison to. It appeared that Hannibal used it to provide more proof to his claims as a forensic analysis on the bullets had linked the gun to a number of unsolved and previously unconnected crimes.

The Commissioner though had started to consider the fact that there were a lot more dirty cops as yet unaccounted for to deal with. As the second recording began, Comm. Catlin could hear the slight difference in Hannibal’s breathing. What was said confirmed Det. Wolford’s statement, but that all took place after Hannibal’s message, which sounded almost as if he were telling them all this directly. Hannibal’s third recording told them that he had given the compiled evidence against the five mammals he’d murdered to a young mammal to deliver to Chief Bogo. It would show the motive behind why his benefactor wanted them dead. Hannibal also identified his benefactor as a predator known only as ‘the Chancellor’. He gave a small profile to give them a bit of insight then explained that after he gave the mobile phones to Detective Wolford, he’d confront the Chancellor in battle though he doubted he himself would survive. From there was the conversation between Hannibal and Det. Wolford.

As the recording ended, the Chief and the Commissioner stood and thanked Ellen then walked out to the hallway elevator. Once inside, Bogo switched it off and turned to Catlin. “What do you think our next move should be, Commissioner?” Bogo asked.

Catlin leaned back against the elevator’s back wall. “I hate to say this, but a full IA investigation. Not just for your precinct either. I’ll also notify the ZIB of what we learned. I doubt we’re the only ones with sleepers in our ranks.” Sighing, the Commissioner added, “We also need to keep this under wraps for as long as we can. I’m not worried about predators, but when it comes to prey, I think I’m allowed to be properly paranoid.”

Bogo grunted in agreement, not taking any offense to the statement. “How do you want to do this then? We’ll need to form some kind of task force. That much is certain.”

The Commissioner covered his eyes with a paw. “I don’t know.” he admitted. “I’ll get back to you on it. I have to speak with a few mammals before answering that.” Switching the elevator back on, Catlin stated, “Give me until Monday. I have your answer by then. That gives you three days to do whatever you think needs to be done.” When the doors opened, the Commissioner walked out of the precinct towards Unity Plaza, where he and other officials had their offices.

Bogo went to his own office and sat down. He considered everything he could think of. Pulling out his phone, he also extracted the list of contacts he kept in his desk. Locating the one for Judy L. Hopps, Bogo dialed her number. ‘I hope this works.’

Zootopia General Hospital – Sahara Square – Zootopia – Late Evening

Zannah Fangmeyer stirred at the feeling of someone stroking her back. Blinking her eyes open, she remembered where she was. Looking up, she found Harrison smiling at her. “Hey,” she whispered. “Are you finally awake for real this time?” Harrison had faded in and out a number of times over the
past couple of hours.

Harrison nodded. “I have to admit, I was a bit surprised to find you here.” he stated. “Didn’t think you would come after this morning.”

Zannah frowned deeply at him. “Harrison Wolford, if you think for a single second that I’d leave you, you’re daft.” She placed her head back on his chest like it had been originally. In a voice as soft as a whisper, she said, “I ran into your mother and your ex when I arrived. They were here together.”

Harrison growled. He wished he could say he was surprised, but that’d be a lie. Harrison felt like he should have expected it. “How did that go?” he inquired.

Zannah shuddered at the memory. “Well,” she began. “there was a ton of shouting, derogatory slurs thrown around, and a few other things that I won’t mention. It was just about to get physical when your grandfather showed up.”

“Wait.” Harrison interjected. “My grandfather’s here?” Harrison often wondered what his grandfather would think of his relationship with Zannah. He was curious as to his grandfather’s assessment of her.

Zannah shook her head. “He’s not here at the moment. Something about having a meeting tomorrow he had to prepare for. Promised to swing by as soon as he was done though.” Looking up into Harrison’s eyes, she whispered, “He’s a really, really scary mammal.”

Harrison chuckled. “He really is.” he agreed. “His heart’s in the right place though, I promise. A couple of years before my siblings were kitnapped, when my parents didn’t know what to do with me, he took custody of me. After they escaped and I decided to be a cop, he was the one who started prepning me for the police academy.”

Studying him for a moment, Zannah stated, “You’re a lot like him, you know. Same look in your eyes, you two carry yourselves in the same manner, and you both seem to command a certain level of authority.”

Harrison couldn’t stop the smile that spread across his face. His grandfather had been his role model growing up. To hear that he was similar was a moment of pride. Harrison’s grin vanished as felt inclined to ask, “What happened after my grandfather arrived?”

Zannah sighed. Telling him the answer to this question wasn’t something she wanted to do, but he needed to hear it. “His presence broke them. He started by explaining how your father and your uncle Josiah had kept him informed on their activities.” She looked Harrison in the eyes. “They were slowly attempting to emotionally, behaviorally, and mentally condition you to prevent us from being together.”

Harrison was livid. After becoming an officer, he, like every other newly sworn officer he knew, ran background checks on his friends and family. He had discovered that his mother was once a founding member of the Purity Party, a group that was against crossbreeding. It had taken an Imperial Edict by the Emperor in the Imperial capital to end the damn war on crossbreeders. “She’s not my mother.” he stated simply. “She’s just the bitch who I was unlucky to have as my maternal influence.”

Zannah gave him a sad smile. “Well, be as it may, your grandfather not only defended me, but put them both in their rightful places. Your mother’s been stripped of the Wolford name and is now a wolf without a pack. As for your ex, she tried to stand up to him and in return your grandfather slashed at her face, claws extended, scarring her for life. She ran away crying.”
Harrison huffed in amusement. “She has reason to. Any she-wolf marked in such a manner is considered ‘shamed’. No one will ever want her for a mate now. The status is permanent.”

Zannah and Harrison stared into one another’s eyes. Zannah went to speak, but was stopped by Harrison pressing his lips to hers. She moaned into the kiss, but didn’t push for more. She wanted to talk about their relationship. When Harrison pulled away, she said, “Don’t try to distract me.”

Harrison sighed. “It was worth a try.” he mumbled. With a sweet, gentle smile, he said, “I’m not mad, you know. I thought about it a lot while I was under. I even had a few…”otherworldly experiences’ let’s say.” Stroking her cheek with a finger, he whispered, “I can still remember them all. In each and every one of them, it always turned out shitty. At least until the last one.”

“What was the last one?” Zannah asked. The look in his eyes as he recalled that one was mesmerizing.

Harrison moved his head to press his cheek against hers. “It was so real, Zannah. I saw our son. He told me that I needed to get going because you were waiting for me. So, I took off running to find you. That’s the first time I came to. After that, I was just fighting to wake up and stay awake, but the minute traces of anesthesia made it difficult.”

Zannah felt tears in her eyes. “I…I’m sorry, Harry.” she whispered. “I was so insecure and felt so scared that you’d decide to go back to your ex. I looked up your last I.C.E. contact and found out it was the waitress from our regular bar. It made me wonder if you kept insisting that we go there so that you could see her.”

Harrison shushed her. “I did go there to see her. That way I could show her that I had found someone else. Someone I loved more than I ever loved her.”

They laid there feeling comfort from one another until the sliding door to the room opened. Looking up, they saw the terrifyingly imposing figure of Harrison’s grandfather gracing them with a kind, fatherly smile. They situated themselves so that they were sitting up, then greeted him.

Fenrir Wolford looked at his grandson and the female he had chosen as his mate. He recalled how often Harrison would talk about her during their weekly dinners prior to the two of them moving in together. When he had learned of what Beth had been doing, he had wanted to shun her immediately. But, over time, he had seen how Harrison had never strayed from his chosen mate. Fenrir had wanted to laugh as it soon dawned on him that, though Beth and her bitch had been manipulating Harrison’s mind and heart, they had failed to dominate his soul. “It’s a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance, Ms. Fangmeyer. I’ve heard quite a lot about you from Harrison. My name’s Fenrir Wolford.”

The three soon fell into comfortable conversation. Harrison would share stories about him and Zannah on cases. Zannah would add a few things here and there. Fenrir listened and every once and awhile he’d tell Zannah an embarrassing story from Harrison’s younger years. They carried on without bothering to check the time, so when the nurse came to inform them that visiting hours were over, Fenrir apologized for the inconvenience and bade them farewell, promising to return after his meeting tomorrow. The nurse informed Zannah that as she was Harrison’s lifemate that she could remain overnight. Zannah graciously accepted the visitation permit and thanked the nurse.

Looking at Zannah confused, Harrison asked, “When did we become lifemates?” It wasn’t that he was complaining, but he was curious. Zannah didn’t seem like the type to lie about something like that.

Zannah flushed as she answered. “T-the second time you became minimally conscious, you were
asking where I was. When the doctors asked why you were so concerned about me……” She trailed off as a look of understanding slowly appeared on Harrison’s face.

“Oh.” Harrison whispered as he flattened his ears to hide his blush. That wasn’t what he had expected at all. Giving Zannah a shy smile, he asked, “D-do you want to make that official sometime? Maybe run down to the courthouse?”

Zannah snuggled into Harrison’s chest. “Yeah. We’ll do that. That way there won’t be too much hassle.” She felt him encircle his arms around her to hold her close. They laid there enjoying the warmth of the other and soon drifted to sleep.

**Shiregrove – An Abandoned Village Outside Zootopia’s Limits – Predawn**

It hadn’t been long, an hour or two at most, after his fight with Hannibal Hyector when the Chancellor stumbled into an old house located within the ghost town of Shiregrove that lies just beyond the limits of Zootopia. Falling to the floor, he gasped in pain. The wounds that he had sustained during his fight with Hannibal hadn’t seemed so serious at first, but now he was considering how badly he was injured. “Fucking scavenger!” the Chancellor cursed. Rolling over onto his back, he looked at the sky through the large hole in the ceiling. The stars were fading in the predawn light. “Another day has come.” he whispered. Closing his eyes, he soon heard ethereal screams just like every other time he tried to fall asleep within the old house. This time, however, instead of wordless hollers, he could hear someone screaming for him by his old name. Opening his eyes, he found himself in a burning house. Jumping to his hindpaws, he looked around and saw two females crying out for him. Rushing over, he tried to get to them. Not seeing a way through, he shouted, “Try to get out through the back. I’ll meet you there.”

“Jacen!! Daddy!!” the elder of the females cried, stopping him. “We won’t make it! The entire room’s engulfed in flames! Get out while you can!”

The Chancellor looked back at her furiously. “NO!!” he shouted. “I’M NOT GOING TO LEAVE YOU!! WE’RE GETTING OUT OF THIS…” The house’s roof started to collapse, cutting off his words. He rushed to try and force away the debris separating him from the two females, but it was futile. Tears started to stream down his face as he realized there was no way to get to them. He locked eyes with them just as the roof finally gave and caved in. “NOOOO!!!!”

The Chancellor’s eyes shot open as he awoke from the nightmare, still screaming. Breathing heavily, he forced himself into a sitting position with a pained grunt and looked around the room. He could almost see the ghostly images of the ones who’d lived here. He blamed Hannibal for the nightmare. The Chancellor hadn’t experienced one for years. Hearing Hannibal use that name had come as an unexpected shock. How the damn hyena had even heard of it was beyond him. ‘ No matter. He’s dead now. Both he and Jacen.’ Forcing himself to his feet, the Chancellor limped out of the burnt-out house. He made his way to the farthest edge of the village where a mass grave was located. Just beyond it were two grave markers. One had the name ‘Courtney’ and the other ‘Ana’. Falling to his knees before the two grave markers, the Chancellor stared at them. “I’m sorry, but I’m almost finished laying the groundwork. Just wait a little while longer then I’ll be with you always.”

**The Hopps Homestead – Bunnyburrow – The Tri-Burrows – Just after sunrise (5:45 am)**

Judy and Nick were packing up their things for their trip back to Zootopia. After receiving a phone call from the Chief late yesterday afternoon, informing them that Nick would need to report to the Police Academy earlier than expected, they had immediately began to gather their things. Bonnie and Stu had argued at first, but soon relented knowing that there was no way to stop either of them. Jaxon and Skye informed them that though they were not scheduled to report to their own superiors
until later that week, they had decided that with the current unrest, it would be best to report in earlier, and so they had offered to give Nick and Judy a ride into the city as well.

Throwing the last of her things into the luggage case Jameson had given her as well as another one she was now bringing from home, Judy went and knocked on the door in between her room and its expansion that Nick was using. “Nick? Are you almost ready? I want us to leave as soon as possible.”

Nick’s ears perked in the direction of the door the separated the two rooms. Closing his own luggage case, he opened the door with a smile. “Just now finished.” he stated. “Are your brother and his vixen ready to go?”

Judy shrugged. “No idea.” She handed him her luggage. “Take that and go to the front entrance. I’ll check on them and see if they’re ready. If so, we’ll head out.” Receiving a nod from him, she left the room for Jaxon and Skye’s guestroom. Knocking on the door, she said, “You two ready?”

Jaxon opened the door without a shirt on. Finding Judy standing on the other side dressed in a suit similar to those that he and Skye typically wore, Jaxon’s eyes widened for a moment. Choosing to ignore it, he said, “We’ll be ready in a minute. Skye’s ironing our shirts.” Turning to look at his fiancée, who was out of Judy’s view, he said, “For crying out loud, Skye. We’re not going directly to HQ. We have to stop by our new apartment first. You can do all this there.”

Judy’s ears swiveled in Skye’s general direction as the vixen groaned out, “Fine.” Judy then saw Jaxon’s shirt land on his head. Looking at her brother, she asked, “What exactly do the two of you do?”

Jaxon took his shirt off his head and started to put it on. “I’ll tell you and Nick once we’re in the car. Now, go grab us a few snacks for the trip. I only want to make one stop if necessary.” Watching Judy head to the kitchen, he asked Skye, “Think we should tell her the truth?”

Skye scoffed at the question. “You just found her. Do you want to lose her by keeping secrets?” She watched Jaxon sigh. “Jack.” she whispered softly. “Don’t overthink it. Do what feels right. If you feel like you should tell her then tell her. I personally think you should, but it’s ultimately your decision.”

Jaxon stared at Skye. She only ever called him ‘Jack’ when she wanted him to really listen to her. He knew every word she said had been carefully selected and they were all true. “I wonder what her reaction will be.” he murmured under his breath as he pulled on the rest of his suit. Buttoning up the jacket of his suit, Jaxon took a deep breath. Letting it out, he gave Skye a smug grin. “Ready to create some chaos?”

Skye smirked back at her fiancé. “Do you even need to ask?” Wearing her own suit, she grabbed their luggage and headed to the front entrance where Nick was currently located as he waited for Judy. Seeing his outfit, Skye’s eyes widened. “Holy crap!” she exclaimed soft as a whisper. Nick was wearing a formfitting black suit that accentuated his lithe build perfectly yet hid just how fit he truly was. Skye couldn’t help but think, ‘He looks like a model for an action film or a Special Operative like Jack and I.’

Hearing her soft exclamation, Nick looked over at her, noticed Skye’s attire and smirked. He went to say something when Judy and Jaxon arrived. Noticing the similarities between their outfits, Nick immediately made a connection. Pulling out his phone, he said, “Can I take a quick picture of you two standing side by side?”

Exchanging glances, Jaxon and Judy shrugged then got into position. Due to the minor height
difference, Judy had her arm around Jaxon’s waist like a sister would a brother while Jaxon threw his own arm around Judy’s shoulder. Once they heard the camera click, they separated and picked up their own bags.

Nick looked at the photo then sent it to his father with the caption ‘Something tells me you’ve got some explaining to do.’ Following the rest out, Nick loaded his and Judy’s bags into the canine-scaled SUV that looked like it could have been an ex-military vehicle. With Skye driving, Nick had Judy sit right behind her. Nick then climbed in behind Jaxon. The notification he got had him pull his phone out to see the message from his dad, which said, ‘Looks like I do. We’ll talk when you get here.’ Nick put his phone away and asked, “We’re going to stop somewhere and eat, right?”

Skye nodded. “There’s roughly 211 miles between here and Zootopia. This baby has got a full 8-gallon tank of diesel and gets 43 miles to the gallon highway. The speed limit is 65 mph. It should take us approximately a little over three hours. We’ll be stopping for breakfast in a few minutes. Until then, we’ve got snacks.” Starting the vehicle up, she put it in drive and took off.

Jaxon opened the glove compartment and extracted a Leporidae-sized tablet. Logging in, he opened a secured communications channel to he and Skye’s supervisor at the ZIB’s branch office in Zootopia. Sending a short message stating their impending arrival, Jaxon decided it was time to explain what he and Skye did to Judy and Nick. Pressing a button on the middle console, Jaxon made his seat change positions to where it was facing backwards towards their passengers. “Time for a confession.” he stated. “Skye and I are agents employed by the Zoolympian Investigative and Intelligence Bureau.”

Nick and Judy blinked. Nick figured it would be something like that from what he pieced together and wondered how his dad fit in. Judy’s thoughts were along the lines of ‘looks like we’re more similar than I first thought’. Both seeing Jaxon’s concerned face, Nick and Judy nodded to show their understanding and acceptance of his statement.

Jaxon let out a breath of relief seeing the ease at which they accepted his claim. “I should also tell you why we’ve been sent to Zootopia.” he began. “Skye and I have been…assigned to investigate the Anti-Predator Movement and how deep it probably runs through the city.” Judy finished for him. She had figured that multiple government agencies would take an interest in the case, but finding out that her half-brother had been the one chosen to represent the ZIB was a wonderful surprise. Not only had she learned that she had a brother she’d never knew existed, but he was a ZIB agent and he’d been assigned to the same case she was. In her mind, this could only improve their chances of solving the case.

Skye spoke up, saying, “Correct. Jaxon’s designation is active acting field agent. He’ll be the one who’ll be directly involved. My role is as his handler. My job is to make sure he has everything he’ll need in the field, be it information, gear, reinforcements, the whole nine yards.”

Skye and Jaxon answered the few questions that Judy and Nick asked as they continued to make their way to the city. At around 7 and only a couple of miles from Zootopia’s city limits, Skye pulled into a small establishment called ‘Ozwald’s Roadside Diner’. The four climbed out and entered the eatery to find a silver fox tod conversing with an ebony-furred bunny doe. The doe noticed them and smile gesturing to a table. The silver fox tod payed them no mind.

Sitting at the booth the doe indicated, Nick, Judy, Jaxon and Skye waited to be given menus. When the doe walked up, she said, “Hello. I’m Clara Ozwald.” Smiling pleasantly, Clara pointed at Skye. “Two cherry tarts with a sunny side up egg.” Pointing to Jaxon, she said, “Onigiri with spring rolls.” To Nick, Clara stated, “Two blueberry muffins, a tofu frittata, and buttered toast.” Finally landing on Judy, Clara tilted her head with a sly smile. “Mini carrot pancakes and…” Clara raised a brow. “…a
frittata with pepperoni, provolone, and kale.” Clara finished by saying, “Two coffees for the vulpines, one with blueberry flavoring, one with cherry, and two carrot flavored teas for the Leporidae.” Clara walked away, leaving the four staring after her with stunned expressions.

Hearing a soft chuckle, the four looked over to see the silver tod now sitting on a nearby stool tuning a guitar. “You’ll have to forgive her. She’s very perceptive.” he stated. He struck a few chords. Satisfied, he began to play [Fare Thee Well]. The soft tune filled the air creating a relaxing environment.

Nick cast a glance at Judy. “A frittata with pepperoni?” he asked, curiously. Normally, prey mammals didn’t eat those types of food, so Nick was curious as to why Judy’s order had it.

Judy shrugged. “Try everything,” she answered simply. “I mean, I’ve had pred food before on a dare that I really enjoyed. Used to sneak out sometimes to go eat with a buddy who’s a cougar, Bobby Catmull. He’s a recording folk artist now. He used to give me cricket chips occasionally during recess.”

Nick’s jaw dropped at Judy’s confession. “So, if I made a traditional vulpine meal for you, would you eat it?” His mind started putting together a special courting meal at the thought.

“Sure.” Judy confirmed. “Just don’t tell my parents about this. They’d probably have freakin’ heart attacks if they found out.”

Jaxon and Skye shared a glance at the idea of doing the same. Main problem for them though was Skye was a horrible cook. The only kitchen appliances she knew how to use were the toaster, microwave, and coffeemaker. Jaxon reprimanded himself once again for being far too polite about constantly cooking their meals. He knew that it was probably time to teach her at least some of the basics, but he had been putting it off for some time. Still, perhaps it was finally time to follow through, and actually teach her that way, he wasn’t the only one responsible for cooking their meals every night.

Judy felt her mobile buzz twice, signifying that she’d received two messages. Checking them, she found one from Chief Tobias Bogo stating that she was assigned to the Temp Instructor position at the police academy until he specifically told her otherwise. The second one was from Major Barbeara Friedkin informing her that she’d managed to secure a pair of adjoining rooms for her and Nick in the academy’s temporary housing complex on campus grounds. Sending both a thank you text, she put her mobile away as Clara returned with their meals.

Todd continued to play as the four ate. When Clara jumped up to sit on the counter next to him, he gave her a kiss which she returned, unseen by their customers. Pulling away, he finished the song and put the guitar down. “I’ve got to run. I’ll see you in a bit.” Walking out, he cast a glance at the four in the diner before sending Clara a wink and exiting the diner.

Finishing their meals, they thanked Clara, who told them not to worry about payment as it was on the house. Getting back into the SUV, they drove off. As they drove away, Nick could have sworn that the diner seemed to just fade out of existence instead of disappearing over the horizon. Casting a peek at Judy, he saw that she noticed it as well.

It wasn’t long after that that they reached Zootopia’s city limits. Nick asked that Skye and Jaxon drop the off at the ZPA to which they agreed. Making sure that they had everything, Nick asked, “So, where will you two be staying?”

Jaxon pulled out a business card with he and Skye’s contact info. Writing the address of their residence while in the city, he handed it to Nick. “Contact us if either of you need anything. We’ll
keep our phones on paw. We’ll call you when we’re settled in.” Waving goodbye as Skye drove them away, he wondered what was in store for them.

Nick and Judy grabbed their luggage and began making their way to the Academy’s administrative offices. Once inside, Judy asked the receptionist to tell Major Friedkin they had arrived. The polar bear drill instructor soon appeared with a smile.

“Nice of you two to come and visit.” Major teased. “Come on. I’ve got everything prepared for you.” She escorted them to the on campus temporary housing complex. When they reached the rooms assigned to the bunny and fox, Major began to explain a few things. “First off, I know Judy remembers the rules, therefore, I’m going to skip over that part. Secondly, I’ve made sure that both your rooms have everything you will need. There is a fully stocked kitchenette, a personal shower, and the usual accommodations you would find in a studio apartment.” Taking out two keycards, she said, “These are yours. Do NOT lose them.” Pawing them to the fox and bunny, she finished with, “Tomorrow, Foxtrot here will need to undergo the normal evaluative process. Be up and ready by 5:15 a.m.” Walking away, Major Friedkin added, “Enjoy the rest of your day.”

Nick scanned his keycard, unlocking the door, and walked inside. He cringed at how utterly bland it was. The walls were taupe with no decorations. There was a tiny television atop a chest of drawers in front of the bed. A small table with an ancient PC was in the corner. Entering the bathroom, he found that the shower was a two in one bath/shower combo, but it wasn’t in the best condition. All in all, Nick felt like he was back in his first apartment in Happytown. “I’m getting a sense of Déjà vu.”

Judy chuckled at Nick’s assessment. “I don’t blame you. This place is awful, but we take what we can get.” Closing the door behind her, she walked to the connecting doorway between their two rooms. Opening the door, she stepped into her own room which was almost an exact duplicate except for the fact that she had more up-to-date versions of everything in Nick’s. Setting her bags down, Judy asked, “We’ve got all day, Red. Let’s go walk around campus and I’ll give you a tour.” Nick agreed and soon followed her out the building as she began to tell him everything he’d need to know once he started training.

@ the apartment of Spencer Wolvenett – Zootopia - Midmorning

Spencer Wolvenett was cooking a small pot of beans when a knock on his door announced the arrival of a visitor. Checking the clock, he saw that it was 9:25. Cursing, he quickly took the pot off his stovetop and went to the door. Before him stood Regulus Wolford, his pack alpha and father of Harrison Wolford. “Alpha Regulus.” he greeted, stepping aside to allow entry.

Regulus Wolford walked in and gave Spencer a grateful bow. “I apologize for the intrusion Spencer, but I’m in need of a small favor.” Taking out a photograph of two wolves, he passed it to the younger wolf. “I’m sure you recognize those two from the Missing Mammals case. Their positions within their respective packs are currently in jeopardy. I’ve taken them on as new members, but as of now, I have nowhere to house them. As you currently live alone here in this spacious four-bedroom, I was wondering if I could house them here for a short time until I can find somewhere else.”

Spencer looked at the photo. He did indeed recognize them from the Missing Mammals case. Lawrence Howling and Gary Timberstein were their names. They had been indicted for their roles, but were acquitted based on evidence presented that they were merely hired-paws. From what else he could remember the two were foster siblings. Lawrence, or Larry, had been adopted by Gary’s folks when they thought they’d never have their own pups. Gary had been born three years later. “I don’t see why not Alpha Regulus. I’ll be pleased to aid them. If they don’t prove difficult, I see no reason they will have to be relocated.”

Regulus Wolford nodded in thanks. “I appreciate that. I must say that there is a slight issue with this
however. Lawrence is from Alpha Remus’s pack and Gary from Alpha Markus’s. Neither of whom are pleased with this development. It would appear that both alphas wish to grant asylum for their respective pack member, but due to Lawrence being of one pack and raised in another it is making things difficult. Alpha Remus is trying to extradite Lawrence, but Alpha Markus refuses to comply on the ground that Lawrence has been raised as a member of his pack due to his adoption.”

Spencer considered everything. “What do their parents say? Are they involved at all?”

Alpha Regulus shook his head sadly. “Both sets are deceased. That was the reason for Lawrence’s adoption in the first place. As for the Timbersteins, they died while both were in college. They’ve been living with one of Gary’s aunts, but she now refuses to harbor criminals.”

“They weren’t convicted though.” Spencer stated. “They were acquitted. Doesn’t that mean anything to her? They are family.”

Regulus Wolford sighed. “I wish it did. As far as she’s concerned, she has no relation to them. Alphas Remus and Markus are on the verge of a pack war over this. I stepped in to mediate, since a pack war is the last thing this city needs. All parties were agreeable to the arrangement.” Clapping Spencer’s shoulder, he said, “You have my thanks. I’ll have them here in two days’ time.” With a bow of leave, Regulus Wolford departed.

Spencer took another look at the photo as he sat down to eat his beans. The two in the photo had large smiles on their faces and had their arms thrown over each other’s shoulders. But Spencer seemed to find something odd about them that he couldn’t place. ‘Guess we’ll find out soon.’

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter (yes, the next chapter. I did promise this time would be a dual release update) is the transcripts of the recordings Hannibal left on the mobile phones at the scene of Harrison’s shooting. I honestly have no idea how they turned out. I may have written them, but that makes me biased.
Bonus Content: The Recording Transcripts

Chapter Summary

The promised secondary release.

Chapter Notes

As I'm sure many wished to know what was spoken during the murder of Poor Wilbur Graham, I typed up these transcripts for you all. Having no knowledge of how to type these up, I tried my best to emulate those seen on television. So, yeah, they're not the best.

Round of applause for Fairlane302, who helped edit this into a viable bonus content chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bonus Content: The Recording Transcripts

Test Recording

_Hannibal Hyector: Testing, testing._

Test Recording End

Recording One

_Hannibal: Greetings. This is Hannibal Hyector. Currently, I am sitting in the home of former criminal profiler Wilbur Graham, awaiting his return. It is mid to late evening, time unknown as there are no clocks and I don’t know how to use this newfangled technology other than it’s call and record functions. This will be a recording of my conversation with Wil for information about his role in the Anti-Predator Movement. While I wait for Wil to arrive, I’ll quickly go over the the events of the last day. Approximately 24 hours ago, I was broken out of the Nocturne Bedlam Maximum Security Penitentiary by a mammal who wished to retain my services. I was given the task of terminating five mammals whom he viewed as expendable and I have now completed said task. In the process of executing my task, I discovered that this mammal who broke me out was the leader of the Anti-Predator movement, and all of the targets were members of his group._
H: Ah, right on time, it would appear that Wil is arriving, I’ll have to go over the targets later.

(sound of lock disengaging, door opening then closing followed by the lock being reengaged. Shuffling of hooves.)

Wilbur Graham: I can’t believe he really let you out. What? Was I on the list? Or are you here for personal business?

H: Hello, Wil. How are you?

W: Answer my question first, Hannibal. Why are you here?

H: Personal Business. Tell me, how’s retirement treating you? I wish I could say I was surprised to discover you were forced into mandatory retirement, but that would be a lie.

W: State your business, Hannibal or so help me I’ll kill you for real this time.

H: So much anger Wil. Fine. Tell me about your part in the Anti-Predator Movement. How long you’ve been involved, what your assigned role was, everything, and I’ll be on my way. Let me warn you though, I’ll know if you’re lying. *sound of item hitting table* I’ve already compiled a great deal of information from Piggy Swinton and the other four that the Chancellor tasked me to murder.

*silence*

W: I joined the movement roughly twenty five years ago, maybe five years before I finally managed to capture you. I was given orders to use my skills as a profiler to identify the mammals on the force that were more likely to empathize with our cause as well as make sure that law enforcement remained unaware of our movements within the city. *silence* You killed Piggy Swinton? Tell me, did you imagine me when you did it?
H: No, Wil. I would never want to kill you. Now, tell me more. How did you misdirect investigations that were linked to this cult of yours?

W: First, we’re not a cult. Secondly, when I received word of the crime, I would be given a name. I then simply redirected the focus of the investigation towards that mammal. *silence* Why are you asking all this? What’s your reason?

H: You’re the profiler. You tell me. The chemist I murdered, he was creating something. What was it?

W: I don’t know. Everyone is autonomous. It’s not like we share information with one another. We simply answer to the Chancellor.

H: Tell me about him. I’m curious to know what your thoughts on him are. What was your evaluation of him?

W: In what capacity? He’s intelligent, insanely so. He’s been planning this for years. Judy Hopps taking down Bellwether was something that he hadn’t planned for though. He’s hypocritical though, a predator wishing for the extermination of predators. A psycho-sociopath. I don’t know how old he is, but his behavior leads me to believe that he’s in his late 30’s to early 40’s. He’s a loner, but not anti-social. Charismatic. Manipulative when he feels the need to be. Meticulous, methodical, though unorthodox, and somewhat militaristic. He commands through fear and respect. Those who fear him, respect him and those who respect him, fear him. He has no empathy, sympathy, or compassion.

H: No mammality. I got the same impression. The Chancellor is insane, but the difference is that he is aware of it. What about the others? *Sound of a paw patting something* As I said, I’ve already compiled a great deal of information, but I could always use more.

W: I wouldn’t know. As I told you, we don’t exchange information with each other. *silence* You’re going to betray us, aren’t you?

H: I’m a predator, Wil. While I’m more than ready to die, I don’t ever truly wish to see innocent predators perish. That was one of the reasons I only ever targeted guilty mammals. Besides, after what I’ve discovered, are you really going to tell me that prey aren’t just as capable of savagery?

W: I suppose not. Tell me, Hannibal. You learned that I was forced to accept mandatory retirement.
What else did you learn?

H: That you’ve been working as a professor of forensic psychology at Zootopia Center University. Your class was quite fascinating. I was quite flattered when you named me as ‘the most thrilling chase’ you’ve ever experienced.

W: Hmm. Did you by any chance see the two young hyenas in the front row? The ones who seemed both uncomfortable and proud?

H: What about them?

W: Would you like to know who they are? I’m sure you’ll find their parentage interesting.

H: Oh? Please, do tell.

W: Their mother is Jasiri Hyeckles. *pause* That’s right, Hannibal. They’re your children. They’re all either of them have left in this world.

H: You’re playing a very dangerous game, Wil.

W: I know I am. *cooking of a firearm* I just thought I do the courtesy of letting you know who and what you’re leaving behind. (a gunshot, howl of pain, continuous squeal, furniture breaking, sounds of a struggle, second gunshot, squeal ends.)

H: (heavy breathing) That was stupid of you, Wil. *cough* (heavy breathing continues. Third gunshot. Sound of body being dragged away. Prolonged silence. Sound of approach.)

Recording One Ends

Recording Two

H: This is my second recording. It has been a couple of hours since my ill-fated conversation with Wilbur Graham. I was sloppy in my advanced age. I should have been expecting it. I called in the
murder earlier and am now waiting to see who responds. (silence). Well, well, well. I seems fortune has smiled upon me. Harrison Wolford. I’ll just wait for him to finish. He’ll probably take a walk around the block. There’s a bus stop I can wait for him at.

Recording Two Ends

Recording Three

H: While I waited for Harry, met a rather pleasant young mammal, and offered him payment to deliver a number of files to the ZPD. These files contain a profile on my benefactor, A predator who calls himself the Chancellor. The files also contain details regarding the targets he had assigned to me, including why these mammals had been targeted. The young mammal offered to take pictures of all the documents, in order to back them up on my phone. I have no idea how it works, or what he did, but I am told that all the documents have been backed up on the phone’s ‘SD’ card, whatever that is. Regardless, I requested that the files still be delivered to the ZPD, as I originally requested, with strict orders to ensure that only the Chief of Police receives the files. I gave the mammal a hundred dollars, to incentivise him to actually make the delivery, though I doubt he will do so before tomorrow.

I don’t know when Harrison will show, so I’m going to take this time to say a few last words.

(Sound of throat being cleared)

H: I, Hannibal Hyector, hereby state that this is my last will and testament. To my children – I wish I could have known about you much sooner. I wonder what it would have been like to watch you grow up. I find myself feeling remorse and regret that I missed so much regarding you two. I’m not supposed to be able to experience either of those feelings yet I am. I bequeath to you my old family home in Sahara Square, if the city hasn’t demolished it. To Harrison Wolford – I want to thank you for being the one who was assigned to this case. I know that it was simply a serendipitous stroke of fortune, but all the same. I wish we could have had more time. I really found you intriguing and often wondered what it would have been like if you had been the one to catch me originally. But you already know that. Anyway, to Harrison Wolford, I bequeath my extensive private collection located in storage unit 221B Warehouse 13 in the Docks. You already know the code. It’s the whole reason for how I turned out only in numerical form. To Judith Hopps – I leave in your care the city of Zootopia. While I never got the chance to meet you myself, I heard a great deal about you in the few hours of freedom that I possessed. You truly are extraordinary. You changed this city. Do not fret over your mistake at the press conference. Often times it is necessary to tear something down in order to rebuild it better than before. To Nicholas Wilde, yes, I know who you are, or more specifically, who you’re related to. You have your father’s eyes and believe me when I say that he is the only mammal that I truly fear. To you, Nicholas, I request only one thing – protect Judith. You two are the incarnation of the east wind, bringing a storm that will change the destiny of Zootopia.
Now that that is out of the way, I should call for the ambulance. I wonder if it would be possible to make the call while still recording. (Incoherent mumblings) Yes? Hello, I’d like to make a report of shots fired. Location? The bus stop on the corner of Grazer Lane and... Fangly Street. No, ma’am. Goodbye. Now, to sit and wait. Shouldn’t be more than a few minutes.

(Silence)

_H: I can hear Harrison approaching. I’ve already called for an ambulance, it should be here soon. After this, I’ll make my way to where the Chancellor told me to meet him. I doubt that I’ll manage to do much damage, but I’ll certainly give it my best.

( Silence )

Harrison Wolford: Hannibal.

Hannibal: Hello, Harry. Have a seat. I’m not going to bite. I’m sure you have questions because I’ve got answers.”

Wolford: Back when I first started, I was assigned to the detail escorting you from the Moira Asylum for the Criminally Insane. You wondered what it would have been like if I had been the one who captured you. *silence* Wilbur was the one who caught you last time, wasn’t he?

_H: Indeed, he was. *light thud* Most of what you’ll need is on that. I had it recording the entire conversation Wilbur and I had. I think you’ll find it rather enlightening.

W: What’s your game, Hannibal? What are you playing at?

_H: I made a deal with the devil, Detective. You’ll get the answers to those two questions soon. I’ve already called for an ambulance. They’re responding to reports of gunshots.

*Gunshots*
Hannibal: I don’t know if you’re still capable of hearing me Harry, but if you can, I want you to know you won’t die. The city still needs you. Your partner should be here soon. She’s a lovely tigress, you should be proud. (pause) Promise me that you’ll find my children and keep them safe. You’re the only one I trust to do this. (Pawsteps and sirens in the distance) I must take my leave now, Harry. Be safe.

Recording Three Ends

Chapter End Notes

This will not be the only bonus content chapter. Others are also in the works, it's just they're still under construction. As is the second story arc.

I'm going to need some advice: Should I post the bonus chapters as their own work? Or should I include them here within the story?

Also, I may be able to post the prologue & premier chapter of The Zootopian Order sooner than I thought. Now for the fun part: Since I'm horrible at coming up with story titles, I want your ideas on what to retitle my Zootopia/StarWars crossover. Leave your suggestion in the comments! Thanks for staying tuned!
Chapter 10: Changes

Chapter Summary

Changes take place all the time, but not everyone likes to admit or accept them. We'll get to meet some of my OCs this chapter as well as meet some special guests stars.

Chapter Notes

So, here's Chapter 10. I spent the last 3 hours rereading it after going over the edits made by Fairlane302 (who I still consider a godsend).

If you all remember, my wife was ill, but we're healthy now. The doctors spouted a ton of med jargon at me (most which went over my head) and explained their findings from the blood work and panels. Her ailment is something I cannot spell, let alone pronounce. I can say that it wasn't as bad as we feared. Also, the babies are developing well.

liiwilliams08, here's Fatima Ara. I don't know if you'll find her the way you were expecting, but this is how she's pretty much been designed. She's only undergone minor changes, but nothing that's "in your face" obvious.

I should warn you all that this chapter, despite undergoing editing, is being posted prior to getting final approval from Fairlane302. However, if/when I need to make future edits, then I'll do it immediately.

Read the End Notes for further information.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Ten: Changes

City Council Chambers – City Hall – Zootopia – 10:30ish a.m.

Fatima Ara was alone within the chambers used by Zootopia’s city council as she looked out the window towards the city. Fatima was an Arabian mare in her 50s who had been on the city council for three terms equaling 12 years.

Fatima watched as, across the street, mammals took solace in each other’s company. The sight made her smile. That smile slowly became a frown at the dawning realizations that some of those mammals were filthy interspecies couples. She snorted as the term ‘interspecies’ replayed in her head. The term was used erroneously. The correct term was ‘inter-order’. Interspecies was simply another term for crossbreeds. Those Fatima could accept. In fact, she encouraged it. Inter-orders were different atrocities all together.
A strong supporter of crossbreeding, Fatima secretly funded multiple eugenics programs, including her own son’s, throughout the city’s medical research specifically for that purpose. It was simple, or at least it was to her. Crossbreeders passed their unique traits to their offspring. For instance, take a cheetah and a snow leopard. Their cub had the potential of possessing a cheetah’s speed and a snow leopard’s resistance to frigid temperatures.

Inter-order pairings, however, were aberrations against the Way of Nature. Seeing such unions utterly disgusted Fatima no end. It wasn’t as if she ever had a horrible experience with them. It was just something that she could not rationalize. Was it a viral pathogen? A mental disorder? What was it that caused mammals to feel sexually attracted to those outside their own order? Fatima couldn’t understand it at all. Obviously, there was a reason, but it escaped her.

In truth, Fatima honestly felt conflicted regarding the topic. If arguing that one can’t change nature, Fatima would counter with the fact that change is nature. But the real question, for her at least, was where would one draw the line? Didn’t the progeny of inter-order unions also have traits of both parents? How was that any different from crossbreeders? Why was she so against it in the first place? Was it species purity? That couldn’t be it, because crossbreeders weren’t pure.

Her eyes fell upon a nice young couple at the sidewalk café across the street. The male was a brown hyena, and a rather large one at that. His ‘date’ as it were, was a rather attractive female marmot. The sight was something of a rarity. Few in predator/prey relationships were open about it. Fatima felt a headache forming as she looked at them interacting with one another intimately. It was things like that which gave Fatima such mental anguish.

It defied Fatima’s understanding, her comprehension. Why was she so strongly against things such as that? Despite sifting through decades of memories and experiences, Fatima had yet to realize the answer. Feeling her headache start to worsen, she chose to turn her thoughts to something else: her campaign platform.

The nomination hadn’t actually struck Fatima as a surprise, but it had caught her somewhat off guard. Years of planning went into effect almost immediately. Fatima had expected a rather large number of supporters, but reality had been far less than expected. It hadn’t been until she looked over everything that Fatima understood why. When she discovered it, Fatima began to heavily berate herself. During her initial planning for this eventuality, those in cross- or inter-order relationships were only just starting to reveal themselves. At that time, there had been loads of controversy on the subject. Fatima had built her platform on the subject. Some of her promises included, but were not limited to, making those kinds of matrimony illegal and relocating those in that type of pairing into a special area, keeping them segregated from the rest of the city’s populace. Of course, as they say, hindsight is 20/20. Unable to change it now, Fatima had no other alternative than to power on with that platform, despite the difficulties she knew it would cause her.

A knock on the door drew Fatima from her thoughts, notifying her that she had company. “Enter.” The door opened to reveal a stallion wearing a suit. Fatima smiled as she looked at her husband, a Ferghana. “Li! What do I owe this pleasure?”

Li Ara, formerly known as Ma Li prior to his marriage, stood tall before his wife. “We have business that needs to be attended to. ADA Wolvenett has amassed many followers in a very short period. It is equal parts predators and prey of all species.”

Fatima frowned slightly. Her relationship with ADA Wolvenett was tumultuous at best. When she had been told of his nomination for Mayor, she hadn’t thought anything of it at the time. He was a predator and with the city’s view of them at an all-time low, she hadn’t expected him to garner any followers. Only a few hours after his nomination though, Fatima had discovered that most of the
citizens were conflicted over whether to support her or him. “His lead was previously a minor inconvenience. What are the new projections?”

“You were trailing behind by approximately 2,000. Now, you are behind by 5,500.” Li informed his wife, matter-of-factly. “He has done this without making any appearances as of yet. I have not discovered how.”

Fatima sighed. Her opponent was a crafty one, she’d give him that. A small part of her knew that there was a good chance that her campaign wouldn’t do much to garner favor with the public. Her image was not one viewed in a good light. “What do you propose, dear husband?”

Li frowned. “You already know my answer, Fatima. I don’t understand why you persist in trying to assert your values onto the populace. It is wrong. They are more than capable of determining their own desires, yet you continuously try to change their beliefs. Do you wish to alienate every citizen?”

Fatima frowned at her husband. “Li, you must understand. Many of our fellow mammals within the city have failed to see the problematic issues before them. Inter-order relationships go against the natural order. Who are we to try and change Mother Nature herself?”

Li’s frown deepened dramatically. During his many years of marriage to his wife, he had complied to her many strange desires. After the birth of their son Bahman, they had learned they wouldn’t be able to conceive again. Fatima had convinced him to breed other mares to expand their family, but it had always left him feeling used. Now, she wanted to eradicate all inter-order couples through legal proceedings and making it punishable by death to ‘cleanse’ the population. Li chose at this moment to end it. “I’m petitioning for divorce, Fatima.”

Fatima stared in shock at her husband. “What? Why?” she asked, unable to comprehend the reasoning behind his decision.

Li shrugged. “I simply choose to.” Turning away from his (to him anyway, now former) wife, Li stated, “I’m also filing for custody of all my children. Other than Bahman, none of them are yours and Bahman has even confided that he no longer sees you as his mother.”

Fatima felt like her heart had been ripped from her chest. Sitting down slowly, she said, “You can’t do this. We vowed to never part. If you leave me then…” Fatima trailed off, unable to say the rest.

Li looked over his shoulder at her. “That may be, but I see no other alternative. Goodbye, Fatima. I wish you well in your endeavors.” Taking his leave, Li didn’t look back even once as he heard Fatima cry out to him.

Zootopian Military Airfield – Meadowlands – Zootopia – High Noon

Chief Tobias Bogo stood by the armored police cruiser as he waited for the arrival of Supreme Commander Deego. As far as Bogo knew, the Supreme Commander had no last name. Bogo hadn’t been aware of Supreme Commander Deego’s impending arrival until only an hour ago. Bogo had immediately signed out an armored cruiser to transport the Supreme Commander to his temporary living quarters at Zootopia’s Armed Forces Command Base located Downtown. Hearing the sound of the plane on final approach, Bogo checked his dress blues to make sure nothing was out of place.

Once the plane had landed, the side hatch opened up and Supreme Commander Deego stepped out. A mixed breed with Pitbull, Boxer, and Great Dane heritage, Deego stood taller than most. However, in comparison to the cape buffalo, Chief Bogo, he stood at roughly the same height. “Chief Bogo.” S.C. Deego greeted extending his paw.
“Supreme Commander Deego.” Bogo replied returning the gesture. “I apologize for the lack of proper welcome. I was unaware that you were coming until approximately one hour ago.”

“That was the idea.” S.C. Deego informed. “The fewer that knew about my arrival, the better. The Emperor has tasked me with aiding you with your mammal hunt and I fully intend to do just that.”

Stepping into the armored transport, he waited for Chief Bogo to take his own seat before continuing. “The Emperor also wished to know of the status of Nicholas Piberius Wilde and his mate, Judith Laverne Hopps.”

Bogo’s eyebrows shot straight up. “May I ask as to the reason behind the Emperor’s inquiry?” Bogo didn’t know why the Emperor wanted to know about Wilde and Hopps, but he sure as hell wanted to.

S.C. Deego shook his head. “I’m afraid that even I myself have not been informed as to the reason behind why the Emperor wishes to know. I simply need something to tell him. Are they at least safe?”

Bogo nodded. “They are. Unfortunately, I am unable to give you their location. Due to developments made in the case, I, as well as Commissioner Catlin, believe that we may have intelligence leaks within the ZPD and other agencies. Until we are certain that we’ve identified all possible sleepers, all information is to remain compartmentalized.”

Deego nodded in approval. “I’ll inform the Emperor of their status at a later time. For now, we should focus on the more pressing issues. What can you tell me about this mammal known as ’The Chancellor’?”

Bogo began explaining how they didn’t have much information other than what Hannibal had managed to provide for them. He even played the recording to verify his statement. He did however confirm that the five mammals whose names and addresses Hannibal had given them had all had some connection to one another. The evidence Hannibal had compiled had generated more leads for them to follow, but it would take time to run them all down. Finally, Bogo informed him of the current state of the city’s affairs.

S.C. Deego listened intently to everything he was told. As Chief Bogo finished filling him in, he said, “Things are a lot worse than I was originally led to believe.” Folding his arms in front of him, S.C. Deego stated, “We have no way of knowing how deep this corruption goes or how far out it spreads. This ‘Chancellor’ has apparently spent a great deal of time planning all this. What concerns me the most is that whoever he is, he’s certainly intelligent, meticulous, and methodical yet unorthodox in how he operates. As this Hannibal Hyector stated, this ‘Chancellor’ is a hypocrite if he’s a predator who desires the extermination of all predators.”

Bogo nodded in agreement. “I’m currently in the process of forming a specialized task force. As of now, it consists of four officers, all predator. I do intend to select some prey mammals, but until they can be vetted, I’m holding off.”

“Wise.” S.C. Deego stated. Looking out the window of the vehicle, he watched the city pass by. Deego had never traveled this far from the Imperial Capital before, so the new scenery was a welcome sight. Watching the mass multitude of mammals going about their daily routines blissfully unaware of what was happening had him wonder what it would be like to remain here for an extended period. Knowing the impossibility didn’t mean he couldn’t request a temporary station at the military base here.

The transport soon arrived at its intended destination and the two disembarked. Guiding the Supreme Commander inside, Chief Bogo was flabbergasted to find his father waiting for them. “General.”
General Andreas Bogo nodded in greeting. “Son.” Looking at S.C. Deego, Andreas stated, “You’ve traveled a great distance to be here. I do hope that everything within the Capital will be alright in your absence.”

S.C. Deego studied the large cape buffalo. The way he carried himself was that of a retired war veteran. He also held an air of command. S.C. Deego deemed it necessary to respond respectfully. “I’m sure it will, Sir. My subordinates are well versed in maintaining order. I have faith in them.”

General Bogo nodded approvingly. “I merely wished to greet the Emperor’s military attaché. I’ll take my leave.” Heading out the door, he stopped to say, “And Tobias, your mother expects you at dinner tonight. No exceptions. She also wants you to bring that cheetah colleague of yours.” Exiting the building, Andreas Bogo made his way to meet with Jameson and the rest of the remaining SDF.

Chief Bogo and S.C. Deego made their way to S.C. Deego’s chambers. Once everything was settled, Bogo bid farewell leaving S.C. Deego to his own devices. Deego pulled out his commlink and opened a secure communications channel to the Imperial Data Centre in the Capital. “This is Supreme Commander Deego requesting permission to speak to the Minister of Intelligence and Emperor Dartz Valkorlycanidaeus. Authorization Code: Longardia.”

“ONE MOMENT PLEASE.” an electronic voice responded. “PERMISSION GRANTED.”

“Supreme Commander Deego.” a male voice stated. “I’m glad to learn that you’ve arrived safely. Tell me, have you learned the status of Nicholas and Judith as I requested?”

“They are safe your Imperial Excellency.” Deego informed. “I do not have their location, but Chief Tobias Bogo has informed me that they are indeed safe.”

“With the current state of affairs there, that is all I can ask for.” Emperor Dartz Valkorlycanidaeus stated. “Keep me apprised of any updates.”

“Supreme Commander Deego.” a female voice stated. “My name is Marion Mongussolini. I was recently appointed the new Minister of Intelligence shortly after your departure. I wish to inform you that the information you request is now in transit to your datapad. Please note that there wasn’t much to begin with. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“Please run a search for all information pertaining to my assignment.” Taking a seat on the bed, S.C. Deego clarified, “I was only given the basic information prior to my departure. I’m flying blind.”

“I’ll have it for you within the hour, sir.” Minister Mongussolini promised. The transmission then ended.

Wilde Manor – Wilde Familial Estate – Zootopia – 1:45 pm

Jameson Wilde (née Vulpin), Fenrir Wolford, Josef Wolverton, Carlos Jackael, and Andreas Bogo all sat around the large dining room table. There was one seat left open for their fallen comrade Bryan Jonathan ‘BJ’ Lapin, AKA Jonas Savage. After greeting one another, they all got down to business.

“We’re coming out of retirement.” Jameson announced, gravely. “My son, Nick, and his mate-to-be, Judy Hopps, are involved in a major investigation that, according to Andreas, has prompted the Emperor to send Supreme Commander Deego as an attaché. Whoever this mammal running the Anti-Predator Movement is has been doing so in the shadows for years. You all know the risk of Deego finding me, so we need to get this done as soon as possible.”

Fenrir nodded his agreement. “I concur. Whoever this ‘Chancellor’ is has been manipulating things
from the background for far too long. Whatever he hopes to achieve is still unknown, but I refuse to let him succeed.”

Carlos Jackael growled. “He seems to have infiltrated various governmental agencies. I hate to think how that will affect our efforts.”

Josef sighed deeply. “I suggest we determine our successors. Jameson and Fenrir already have theirs lined up.” Looking at the place BJ would have sat, he said, “Savage has two apparently. A son and a daughter, whom is the future mate of Jameson’s son. The rest of us don’t.”

Andreas huffed. “My son Tobias would make a fine choice if only he would be willing to stop being so strict. Though, I assume that’s my fault because of how I raised him.”

Jameson smirked at the old cape buffalo. “Your son’s a fine mammal, Andreas. You are correct thought, he wouldn’t fit well with the rest. Nick’s adaptable, Judy is too. I have no knowledge on BJ’s son, but I’d assume he’s capable. Fenrir’s grandson, Harrison, would no doubt fill his shoes without much trouble. Josef and Carlos still need to find suitable replacements. As it currently stands, we’re simply not ready.”

Carlos scowled. “Finding someone to succeed you is a monumental task. Whoever is chosen must meet every prerequisite. Very few do.” Josef nodded his agreement to Carlos’ statement but said nothing.

Fenrir considered the possibilities. “Maybe,” he began. “what we need isn’t to find successors to train one-on-one, but train them all simultaneously. We ourselves weren’t chosen by only one mammal. We were trained side by side with the help of multiple instructors. Harrison’s mate, and soon to be wife if I read them correctly, would make a fine addition to the team.”

Jameson hummed in thought. “Jaxon, BJ’s son, is engaged to a vixen. She could make a useful asset as well. I think she’s a former associate of my son from his time on the streets. That would mean that she already possesses not only some of the necessary skills we’d teach them, but she’s also an agent for the ZIB, so she’s already been trained in the basics as well.”

Andreas Bogo tapped a finger on the table as he considered his own possibilities. “All that could work, but the question is when will we begin. Jameson, your son is currently undergoing training at the ZPA ahead of schedule. His mate is there as a temp instructor to help oversee it. Fenrir’s grandson is recovering from his confrontation with Hannibal and I doubt that his mate will leave his side. Carlos and Josef still have to find their own trainees. As for myself, I have someone in mind, but I need to discuss it with them first.”

Carlos said, “If the rest of you can grant me a week, I can locate a promising recruit.” He had an idea for who he’d choose, but first he had to track her down.

Josef cracked his neck and popped a couple of joints. “I know of one myself, but it will take a little longer to convince him. There’s also the issue of travel. He lives in the Shadowlands of the Prey Nation’s province to the west.”

Andreas stated, “I’ll secure transportation for you. Just make sure that he is in no way connected to our immediate adversary.” Getting a nod, he pulled out his mobile and started messaging a contact.

“Tobias and I,” Jameson stated. “We’ll reconvene in one month. Stay vigilant, watch your six, and if something comes up contact one of the others immediately.” With that said, everyone bade farewell to each other. Once Jameson was alone, he looked at the light fixture hanging above the table and asked, “Did you get all that Ian?” The light flickered twice in response.
“Good, you know what to do.”

*The apartment of Andrew Bellwether – 2:30 pm*

Andrew Bellwether opened his eyes slowly as the hangover from his night of heavy drinking started to set in. Groaning, he sat up. It had been awhile since he and Parker Platys, the platypus, had parted ways after Parker left to find himself intimate company for the evening. Looking around his apartment, something seemed off, but he could identify what. Rolling out of bed, he looked down to see he was naked. “When the fuck did that happen?”

“Oh, right before you passed out.” Doug Ramses stated, startling Andrew. “As soon as I walked in, you stripped down and attacked me.” He informed the black-wooled ram. Picking up an empty beer bottle, he added. “The company that makes this brand tends to lace them with aphrodisiacs, you know.”

Andrew groaned. “Is that why my ass is sore?” he questioned. Now that he was no longer drunk, he could feel the pain radiating from his tailhole.

Doug chuckled. “Hey, mine hurts like a motherfucker, too. You sleptfucked me and you didn’t go easy.” Tossing the bottle away, he said, “We need to talk though. Predopurge’s going to come after me since I failed to complete my mission.”

Douglas Ramses took a seat on the edge of the bed. Immediately following the events at the Museum of Natural History, the white-wooled ram got rid of almost everything that tied him to it, including disposing of his mobile phone. One thing he couldn’t change though was his name. Luckily, the surname Ramses was very common for his species, and between that and the variations of ‘Doug’ there were somewhere around a hundred Doug Ramses living in Zootopia alone. He figured it would take some time for the police to go through them all. To Doug, one of his saving graces was, that until all this, the ZPD hadn’t even known about him. He had no criminal record, no warrants out for his arrest, and didn’t even have so much as a citation. Still, the biggest issue he now faced was his own associates. Having failed, Doug was sure they’d do the same thing to him that they did to Dawn. So, he in turn went to Andrew hoping to talk about how to proceed. Instead, he wound up having an impromptu rutting session. Doug didn’t complain. It had been a very long time since the last time he slept with anyone.

Andrew walked over to his restroom and returned with a small bundle. Unwrapping it, he took out a syringe and a miniature bottle of morphine. With a practiced hoof, he quickly filled the syringe, located a vein, and inserted the needle then pushed the plunger down. Sighing in relief, Andrew said, “No, they won’t. Your assignment was to extract the essence of the night howlers for us to use. You did your job.”

Doug looked at Andrew in concern. “Are you sure? You’re not trying to pacify me, are you?”

Andrew shot Doug an annoyed look. “No, I’m not trying to pacify you.” Disposing of the needle properly, Andrew got himself a glass of water and downed it. “Did you complete your second assigned task?”

Doug nodded once. “Prepped and ready. All that’s needed now is the signal.”

“Good.” Andrew stated. “It will be some time before we use them, but at least they’re ready when the time comes.” Fishing some clothes out of the load in the dryer, he asked, “Breakfast?” The two then walked out for a much-needed meal.

*Bucky and Pronk’s Apartment – Grand Pangolin Arms – Zootopia – 5:00 pm*
Bucky and Pronk were in the middle of cooking a small snack when a knock on their door told them that they had a visitor. Giving each other confused looks as they weren’t expecting anyone, Pronk took over finishing the meal so Bucky could answer the door. He heard quiet chatter and asked, “Who is it, Bucky?”

“It’s me.” Gazelle answered as she followed Bucky into the small kitchen. “Sorry for dropping in like this, but I was just in the mood to hang out with you two.”

Pronk rolled his eyes with a small grin. ‘Just like when we were younger.’ He thought as he plated the steamed and creamed vegetables. “How’re things going, Gisella?” he asked, using her actual name instead of her stage name.

“Not bad, but I just heard a rumour from a fan that Fatima Ara, the City Council’s representative, is campaigning on an anti-interspecies platform and is going through a divorce after nearly thirty years.” Gisella informed him as she thanked him for the offered meal.

“Pshaw.” Bucky said, hotly. “That old mare’s crazy. If she paid half as much attention as she says she does, she’d know that her husband advocates for interspecies relationships. Plus, isn’t her son one of the top five leading researchers in interspecies eugenics?”

Pronk nodded. “Yep. Dr. Bahman Ara is one of the leading authorities in the field.” Taking a bite, he grimaced. “Bucky,” he said, “you used way too much sodium in the creamed spinach.” Coughing, he walked to the fridge and got a bottle of water.

Bucky raised a brow and took a spoonful himself before nearly gagging. “Shit.” he coughed. “What a damn waste.” he said as he threw out the creamed spinach. Opening the cabinets, Bucky took out a can of cream of mushroom soup. “Looks like we’re having canned soup again.”

Gisella’s eyes widened at the use of ‘again’. “How many times has this happened?” she asked. Seeing their expressions, she knew it had been too many times for far too long.

“Seriously, Bucky, how is it you always put too much sodium?” Pronk asked. Pouring a, now open, can of cream of mushroom soup into a pot, he said, “I swear, it’s like you’re trying to kill us via high blood pressure.”

Gisella shook her head as the two steadily devolved into a shouting match. She had really missed doing this. Once the cream of mushroom soup was ready, they caught up as they ate. After having put the dishes away, the three sat and watched Comedy Center, enjoying the Beau Burnham marathon. She eventually pulled a nicotine patch out of her pocket and went to stick it to the underside of her wrist when Pronk grabbed her arm. Seeing the mixture of anger and confusion on his face, she decided to be honest with him. “I’m not a smoker, Pronk. I use the patches for the same reason though.”

Pronk considered it for a minute. Nicotine patches were manufactured to wean mammals off cigarettes. It was feasible that one could therefore use them for the same purpose one used cigarettes. Despite that, Pronk took the patch away and tossed it in the wastebasket. “Still isn’t healthy.” he grumbled.

“I know.” Gisella sighed. “I’m addicted to nicotine patches. The irony.”

Bucky chuckled. Noticing that night would fall soon, he asked, “Should I call you a cab?” He didn’t like the idea of Gisella walking home at this hour.

Gisella shook her head. “It’s okay. I told one of my backup dancers that I’d be leaving at around
8:45 anyway.” Standing to her feet, she said, “Sorry again for randomly dropping by. It was fun.” Pulling them into a group hug, she gathered her courage and quickly placed a peck on their cheeks before running out the door.

Bucky and Pronk stood frozen in place at the turn of events. Each place a hoof over where Gazelle/Gisella had laid a kiss on their cheek. Looking at each other, a grin slowly spread across their faces. They gave each other a suggestive look.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Pronk asked his husband. He already knew the answer, but he wanted to hear Bucky say it. The answer he received though, was much better.

Bucky took Pronk’s hoof and pressed it to his crotch, where his answer was obvious. “I don’t know. Am I?” he asked, reaching for Pronk’s crotch and grabbing the stiff erection there. “Well, it certainly seems like I am.”

The two of them didn’t bother wasting anymore time as they raced to their bedroom, stripping themselves of their clothing along the way. Later, they found themselves sitting naked, covered in their semen, with wide-eyes as the female armadillo property owner shouted their ears off about, ironically, noise levels.

**The Mess – Zootopian Police Academy – Zootopia – 10:05 pm**

Judy and Nick sat in the Mess eating a small pre-midnight snack. Judy had made it her mission to provide Nick with a complete tour of the Academy’s grounds. She hadn’t realized that it would take so long. Feeling that she had shown Nick the more important areas, Judy had decided to finish with a trip to the Mess.

The Mess was, in fact, the Academy’s food annex/cafeteria. It had been designed by Theodore Molesby, an architect only really known for three of his projects. One was the Zootopian Spire in City Central. The second was the Zoolympian Treasury branch office in Zootopia. The police academy’s Mess was the third.

Constructed out of 70% polished concrete and 30% glass, the Mess was an architectural wonder. Nick’s reaction to the building’s design had prompted Judy to tell him everything she knew, courtesy of her brother Rube. She explained that the glass was based on one-way mirrors. One inside could always see out, but due to the glass’s transitional properties it was difficult for someone outside to see in. Polished concrete pillars were set in intervallic positions between large panes of the glass. The concrete acted as a geothermal regulator keeping the building in a state of constant homeostasis. The polished concrete also kept the building warm in the winter and cool in the summer. The ceiling was also glass, held in place using clear hard plastic framework.

Nick’s amazement at the building was soon overshadowed by the knowledge of the fact that all the furniture within, the tables and chairs, were made entirely of pure aluminium [A/N: No, this is not a misspelling]. This information floored him as he saw an elephant sitting in one of the chairs without it so much a creaking under the elephant’s weight. He then followed Judy to the DIY line, where mammals could make quick snacks such as sandwiches for free.

Making their way to one of the open tables, Nick finally said, “This place is crazy.” He looked up at the glass ceiling to take in the sight of the stars just making their appearance. “How is it that no one’s made a replica of this building? It would make an awesome greenhouse for your folks.”

“It’s very expensive.” Judy replied. “Rube told me that it took roughly Z1.26 mil to construct this place. Give or take a few hundred grand, of course.” Chewing her garden burger, she looked at the few other mammals present. She recognized Sergeant Leopold, a lioness instructor tasked with
teaching cadets Special Weapons and Tactics procedures, reading a novel in a secluded corner. Another instructor she recognized was Captain Bullard, the ox instructor who taught Hostage Negotiations. Seeing them, Judy had a sense of déjà vu. “Feels weird being here and not being a student.”

“You’re not.” Nick pointed out as he chowed down on one of his three tofu dogs. “You’re a temporary instructor. Speaking of, have any idea what class you’ll be teaching?”

Judy shook her head. “I’ll probably be informed while you take your exams. I honestly don’t know what class I’ll be teaching. It could be anything.” She started nibbling on a carrot-fry as her mind started to figure out what class she’d been assigned to teach.

Nick scarfed down his third and final tofu dog then said, “We should head back to our rooms. I have to be up at 5:15 for my exams.” With a nod of agreement from Judy, they threw their things in the proper recycling bin and made their way back to the temporary housing complex. Standing in front of their respective doors, they quickly scanned the hallway. Seeing no one, they hugged each other and wished one another pleasant dreams.

Judy entered her room and quickly made for her private bathroom. While she had enjoyed the hug immensely, it had been a bad idea. Turning on only the cold water, she sighed in relative relief as she stepped into the path of the stream. She had taken a hormonal suppressant earlier, but it was starting to wear off. Her heat had flared from that simple embrace and been on its way to becoming a raging inferno. The cold water was a welcome relief. Just standing there, Judy wondered how Nick was faring.

Nick had done the exact same thing. While he was neither a buck nor in mating season, his brain had told him that a receptive female in heat had been present. Nick stood in his shower letting the ice-cold water soak his fur, providing him with mild relief. Resting his head against the wall of the shower before him, Nick wondered if Judy was alright.

They both still felt the itch despite the cold showers, but they didn’t act on it. Choosing instead to go to sleep, they climbed into their beds and grabbed the spare pillows. Nick closed his eyes and the pillow changed into a small gray form he curled around protectively. Judy’s, having been designed for a slightly larger mammal, morphed into a big, warm, and fluffy red form that she cuddled into. Oneiroi, the Divine Entity of the Dreamscape, blessed them with pleasant dreams of one another.

**In an alley within the city of Zootopia – 4:30 am**

Odafin ‘Finnick’ Fennixon was sitting in his van smoking a blunt for the last time. In his passenger’s seat was a freshly printed resumé for Kit Services. Finn had considered it before, but never went through with it, for a variety of personal reasons. He let out a sigh of smoke. Hopping into the back of his van, Finn laid down on the mattress he kept back there. Finn stared at the ceiling of his van, wondering if he should dress up for an interview, but he knew that there was a possibility they wouldn’t even consider hiring him. Closing his eyes for but a moment, Finn was awoken by the sound of his mobile’s alarm.

Thirty minutes later, Finn stood in front of the Kit Services building dressed in a pair of khaki pants and a (reasonably) nice dress shirt. With a deep breath to steady his nerves, Finn opened the door and walked inside. No one was seated at the reception desk, but Finn stood there waiting. He had promised himself that this would be the day he actually went through with this. The sound of a door opening caught his attention and soon he bore witness to the entrance of one of the most beautiful mammals he had ever seen.

Stacey Foxworth wasn’t your typical vixen. Her father had been a red fox tod and her mother had
been a cross between an arctic and a fennec. That being said, her fur coloration and markings were a unique blend of the three. She had black tipped ears, a white tipped tail, and her paws had a soft brown color due to a pigment disorder. Her main color was a light beige. A ten-year veteran of Kit Services, she had been told that a possible new hire would be arriving around this time, but she hadn’t been told the species as they hadn’t given one. So, to find a slightly larger than average fennec fox tod carrying what appeared to be a resumé was something Stacy considered a blessing, considering that she hadn’t really had much of a dating life in recent years. “Mr. Fennixon?” she inquired.

Finn nodded vigorously, but didn’t say anything being too afraid to say something stupid. He didn’t count on doing something stupid. As he offered her his resume, Finn saw that his paw was trembling. Subtly gulping, he sheepishly stated, “Sorry. Nerves.”

Stacey smiled. “It’s quite alright. I was nervous when I applied too.” Taking the offered resume, Stacey quickly scanned it. Noting the two arrests, she quirked her brow. “Did you really get arrested for drunk and disorderly while impersonating an infant?” she asked, trying not to laugh.

Finn managed not to blush. “I-I did.” he confessed. “It’s a long story. Short version is I used to be a hustler and my partner had me wear an elephant onesie for our scams.” Realizing what he just said, he groaned. “Why did I tell you that?”

Stacey bit back her laughter at the mental image of this fennec tod in an elephant onesie. “It’s okay. It isn’t going to affect anything.” Swiftly reading the rest of the resume, she was pleased to see that he had prior experience with kits, even if it was only in the form of a teenage kitsitter. “Okay. Come with me and we’ll head to your interview.” Stacy led Mr. Fennixon to Director Badgerheim’s office. Once there, she said, “Bit of advice: Don’t hide anything. Honesty earns you lots of points. Doesn’t matter what it’s about.”

Finn nodded to show he understood. Walking inside the office, he saw an elderly female badger diligently doing paperwork. Taking a seat in one of the chairs, he waited until she was done.

Director Badgerheim finished the document she was on then put it aside. Looking at the fennec tod sitting before her, she tilted her head. Something about him was far too familiar to her. Leaning forward, she studied his face. It was when she noticed the faded scar above his left eye she placed him. “Odafin Fennixon. Well, I’ll be. It’s been quite a while since I’ve seen you.”

Finn cringed. He had thought he recognized her, but had hoped that he was wrong. “Mrs. Badgerheim.” he replied casually, or as casually as one could while trying not to shit themselves when facing someone from their past.

“Looking for a job in Kit Services, I see.” Director Badgerheim stated. “Always said that you’d make a fine employee when you came of age. I can’t believe you made me wait this long.”

Finn gulped. “Well, I honestly hadn’t planned on it, but I’m in need of a job. My former line o’ work isn’t cutting it anymore.” He then added, “And I didn’t think ya’d still be working here.”

Director Badgerheim chuckled. “I’m going to die doing this job.” Standing, she walked over to a filing cabinet and withdrew a few forms. Pawing the forms to Finn, she said, “Fill those out and then go see Ms. Foxworth. She’s going to be training you.”

Finn quickly filled the forms out at hearing that the gorgeous vixen would be his trainer. All but throwing the forms on Director Badgerheim’s desk, he was out the door. Running to the door which Ms. Foxworth would be found behind, Finn slid to a halt in front of it to check his appearance. ‘Odafin,’ he thought. ‘You’re acting like a teenager again. Calm the hell down. Who knows, maybe
she’s got a thing for older men. Just have to make sure that your previous hookups know that they were all just flings. You’ll just have to take it like a male.’ Prepared as much as he could be, Finn stepped through the door and into a whole new world.

Chapter End Notes

So, yeah. That all just happened.

Supreme Commander Deego is not an OC, but an Easter Egg. The challenge is to find out his origin.

The Emperor's name is also an Easter Egg. Actually, it's two. Can you figure out from where?

We also have a couple of others hidden within. Remember, anyone who finds them, leave your answers in the comments and I'll get back to you about your reward(s). I still have a ton left undiscovered in the previous chapters. Some which I feel are rather obvious, but probably aren’t.

I know this was suppose to be a dual release, but with how things are going, that may/might be just slightly beyond my ability for right now. I do plan to eventually have a double chapter release though. It's a goal.

For those of you who are also reading SWZ (Star Wars: The Zootopian Saga), chapters 2 and 3 got written (actually written using a yellow legal pad and pencil) during our stay at the hospital, since electronics were not allowed. (To use any form of electronic equipment that wasn't medical technology one had to stand just past the fence approx. 0.8 km from the building.)

Last, but not least, I have to appear to a court hearing to fully claim my godson later today. I originally thought it was next Friday, but nope. Today at 2:30 p.m. I'm still unsure as to what happened to cause all this, but I should be getting answers at that time. I'll update these End Notes once I'm able, so stay tuned and check regularly every other hour after 2:30.
Chapter 11: Just Getting Started

Chapter Summary

I have no idea how to summarize this chapter.

Chapter Notes

*RACES ONTO ROOF, JUMPS ONTO LEDGE, RAISES FISTS AND SCREAMS* I'M BACK! I'M FINALLY, FUCKING BACK!! WHOO!! *DANCES ON LEDGE UNTIL FOOT SLIPS* OH, FUCK!! *FALLS TWO STORIES INTO WIFE'S ROSEBUSHES THEN GROANS* Damn that hurts. See End Notes for more info.

Oh, and please leave a comment. Even if it's just to leave a short, little one. I enjoy reading them immensely. Also, yes, I did delete the Cultural Bonus Content. I'm almost done typing up the full thing. It'll be posted soon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Eleven: Just Getting Started

Zootopian Police Academy – 5 am

Judy stood outside Nick’s room anxiously thumping her foot on the ground. Having been in the familiar environment of the ZPA, she had reverted to her old routine. Judy had woken up at 4 o’clock, gone for a jog, showered, and had breakfast already. It was now five and Nick had yet to appear. They hadn’t agreed on a time to meet, but she was getting worried that Nick would oversleep and miss his exam. Finally, unable to just stand there, Judy started banging on the door, shouting, “Slick, wake up or you’ll miss your entrance exams.” A door down the hall opened and Judy turned to see an ocelot cadet poke his head out.

“If you’re looking for that fox, he’s already headed out.” the ocelot stated only a slightly bit groggy. “He waited for you, but after I told him you went on a morning run, he asked me to pass that on when you came to collect him.” He then shut the door and the sound of something hitting the floor was heard.

“Hey, you’ll miss your entrance exams.” Judy turned to see an ocelot cadet poke his head out.

“Slick, wake up or you’ll miss your entrance exams.” the ocelot stated only a slightly bit groggy.

“If you’re looking for that fox, he’s already headed out.” the ocelot stated only a slightly bit groggy. “He waited for you, but after I told him you went on a morning run, he asked me to pass that on when you came to collect him.” He then shut the door and the sound of something hitting the floor was heard.

Judy blinked as the information she had just received registered in her brain. She then took off at breakneck speed for the exam hall located in the main building. Just as she turned the corner for the hall that led to the exam room, Judy was lifted into the air. Squeaking in surprise, she turned to find herself face to face with Major Barbeara Friedkin. “H-h ey, Major.”

Major Friedkin huffed with a tiny upwards quirk of her lips. “Hey, yourself, Hopps.” Setting the bunny down, she said, “Let’s go to my office to discuss your duties during your stay.” They headed
to her office and sat down. “First off, you’ll be in charge of teaching all the small-sized mammals combat due to the influx of smaller mammals who’ve applied. Lastly, you’ll also be teaching physical education as Lieutenant Kiara Catlahan will be going on maternity leave at the start of next month, and therefore, won’t be here when we begin training the new recruits. Any questions?” Receiving a shake of the head from Judy, she said, “Good. Now, your fox’s exam should be starting in five minutes. You can sit and observe, but that’s all.” Major watched as Judy vanished faster than her eyes could even register the movement.

Judy arrived at the examination classroom to see all sorts of mammals present. There were a few bunny bucks and does, other foxes (two of whom were vixens), a capybara, a chinchilla, two otters, and a bunch of larger mammals from lions and zebras to elephants and wolves. Spotting Nick seated in one of the chairs in the front, Judy also witnessed one of the vixens trying to flirt with him. Judy’s world took on a bloody red hue.

Nick’s ears, as well as those of the other mammals, turned angled towards a most unholy sound. Nick already knew the source and the reason behind it. Jumping off his chair, he swaggered over to Judy and knelt down in front of her. “A little jealous, are we?” he asked, teasingly. Yelping as Judy grabbed his tie and pulled him close, he said, “Hey now, Love. I promise you that I wasn’t even remotely interested in her or her attempts to seduce me.”

Judy narrowed her eyes. Leaning over slightly to look at the vixen that had been trying to flirt with her fox, she sent a glare that clearly expressed ‘He’s mine’ at her. Watching the vixen’s ears pin back and her tail tuck itself between her legs, Judy smiled then gave Nick a quick kiss on the cheek. “I’m surprised that there are so many people here this early.”

Nick, relieved that the situation was now resolved and that Judy had calmed, said, “The old puma that’s administering the exam stated that this is the largest group she’s ever had and that there’s still like a dozen more that are scheduled to show. She also told us that the exam this year is going to be a lot harder than those previously.”

Snorting, Judy asked, “Does this puma wear pink rimmed spectacles by any chance?” Getting a nod, she pulled Nick’s ear close and whispered, “That’s what she always says. It’s her way of mentally torturing you. Relax.”

Pulling away and frowning, Nick said, “That’s cruel and unusual punishment.” Smiling at Judy’s giggles, Nick said, “Besides, I already knew that.” Getting to his feet at the sound of the door in the front of the room opening as the female puma walked in, he whispered, “Wish me luck, Carrots.”

“You won’t need it, Slick. You’ve got this. I know you’ve been staying up late studying for this exam.” Judy said. “But…” She grabbed his tie again and yanked him down close enough to hide her act of giving a miniscule lick to his nose. “Good luck, Nick.” She then ran out of the room, around the corner to the right, and up the stairs to the galley to watch the examinees.

Nick stood there frozen for a minute until the old puma asked if he was going to take his seat. Rushing back to his chair, Nick placed a paw on his chest to feel his rapid heartbeat. Taking a deep, calming breath, Nick waited as the examiner explained what they needed to know about the test, such as how it curved and the way it was scored. Listening attentively, Nick was pleased to find that if a cadet scored high enough he or she was eligible to take advanced extra training courses. Feeling eyes on him, he looked up and to his left to see that there was a viewing gallery and that Judy was there watching him. A small grin spread across his muzzle.

The puma handed out the test packets to each cadet. Instructing them to fill out all the necessary information, she sat down behind the desk situated at the front of the room. Telling them that they had thirty minutes to complete the first section, she told them to begin. Sparing a peek at the galley,
the puma saw what the red fox tod had been looking at. Rolling her eyes, she pulled out the bookmarked novelette from her bag she had left here the first time she’d entered the room.

After the thirty minutes were over, the cadets were told that the second section would take thirty minutes and to begin. Once completed they were instructed that section three was estimated to take forty-five minutes and that after that there would be a short snack break. At the end of the third section, the puma examiner collected the test packets and told them they had fifteen minutes.

Nick raced out of the room to meet Judy. “How much longer will this take?” he asked, curiously. It had been almost two hours, but to Nick, it felt like the exam still had some ways to go.

“This is just the written exam.” Judy answered. “Once it’s over, you’ll have an hour to relax then you have to report for the fitness exam.” She stood there for a bit to watch all the new cadets file out of the room. When the two vixens walked out, she glared at them. She was pleased to see them take off running down the hall.

The other tod that was taking the entrance exam came up next to them with a slight smile. “Those two are asking for trouble.” he stated. Extending his paw out to Judy, he said, “I’m not trying to hit on you or anything like that. I’m positive your tod there would whup my ass if I tried. Name’s Rey Vulpes.”

“Judy Hopps.” Judy replied without returning the gesture. “What made you want to apply for the academy?” It was a legitimate question that she felt needed to be answered.

Rey shrugged. “Didn’t really have a reason. Just wanted to do something different. That vixen, not the one you gave the death glare to, the other one, is my girlfriend. She said she wanted to try it out, but she wanted me to come with. We’ve been courting for a couple of years, but it just isn’t the same anymore. Maybe I thought that doing this with her would, I don’t know, bring us closer.”

Nick knew what Rey was talking about. Normally, foxes courted one another to see how compatible they were. If at any time the two felt like they no longer complimented each other, they would either immediately part ways or make one last attempt to work it out. For Nick, it was both much more complicated and much simpler. Judy was his soulmate, a rarity in fox culture as it was said few were graced with one. As a result, courting wasn’t exactly necessary, but it was something he wanted to do. He had spent some free time planning out a series of dates, but with how things were currently, he had no clue as to when he’d be able to take her on any of them.

Smiling, Judy told Rey, “I’m sure it’ll get better. Just keep true and it should all work out.” Turning to Nick, she said, “Come on. We’ll go grab a quick snack out of one of the vending machines down the hall.” She led Nick to one of them asking, “What would you like?”

Nick was lost in his own head. He wanted to take Judy on a proper courting date. A fancy restaurant with sweet music followed by a walk in a park then escorting her home and to her door where he could kiss the back of her paw goodnight and until next time. He was brought back to reality by the feeling of a paw gently laid on his arm. Looking at Judy’s worried expression, he gave her a sad smile. “Sorry, Love. I was lost in my own mind for a second.” Selecting his snack of choice, they made their way back to the examination room for the last two parts of the written portion.

After the written examination was over, Nick and Judy decided to spend their hour of free time just walking around the grounds. Every so often, they would stop to look at the other cadets run their drills. Eventually, the hour was up and they made their way to the Academy’s gymnasium where the fitness exam was being held.

Major Friedkin stood waiting in the gymnasium for the cadets to assemble. She wasn’t the one
originally scheduled to administer this exam, but with the fact that Lieutenant Catlahan was now on maternity leave, she was now the one tasked with overseeing it. Looking up, she saw that out of the 60-something (she hadn’t bothered counting) cadets that had taken the written portion only 35 showed up, including Hopps and her fox. When the timer for the one-hour break reached zero, Major Friedkin closed and locked the door to the gymnasium. Any cadets not present were no longer applicants and would be notified of their failure at a later time. “Let’s begin.”

Over the next two hours, the cadets performed a series of physically exhausting exercises so that Major Friedkin could see their level of fitness. They ran an obstacle course twice, once for practice and the second time to see how fast they could complete it with the least amount of mistakes. A couple of cadets stopped and quit, requesting to be allowed to leave. Major Friedkin granted their request telling them she saw no need for mammals who couldn’t even do something this simple.

Nick never complained once. He did everything that Major Friedkin had he and the other cadets do. He watched as the vixen Judy had given a death glare at whine and complain then quit. ‘Good riddance.’ he thought. Nick saw Rey and his vixen struggle a bit every now and again, but then overcome whatever had caused it. Nick kept pushing himself to the utmost of his limitations only to discover that just as he hit it, he would surpass it.

Judy watched in amazement at Nick’s performance. To her, it seemed the longer Nick went, the more fluid and proficient he became. She felt so proud of him as he continuously excelled at the obstacles placed before him. ‘GO, NICK! GO! GO! GO!’ She cheered in her mind.

Major Friedkin didn’t know if Judy knew or not, but she saw the doe bouncing up and down in excitement. Shaking her head, Major Friedkin watched her favorite (yes, favorite) former cadet’s fox intently. A frown found its way across her face. ‘Something isn’t right.’ she thought. ‘Wilde doesn’t seem to be exhausting like one would expect him to. He’s actually improving as he goes on.’ Major decided that it was something she’d have to look into soon.

The fitness exam ended at the sound of a buzzer alerting everyone that the two hours were up. Nick remained on his feet even though the rest of the cadets all collapsed on the ground, but he was panting from the intense physical exertion. He saw Judy approach him with a bottle of water that had a label stating its increased electrolyte content. Quickly draining it, he graciously accepted the second bottle she offered him. “Thanks, Fluff.” Nick stated after he drained half of the second bottle, pouring the rest over himself.

“You’re welcome, Red.” Judy replied. She stood by him as he continued to pour the rest of the water from the bottle over himself. “That’s right. Foxes don’t sweat, do they.”

Nick nodded then shook the excess water from his fur. “That’s correct. Foxes don’t sweat, we, and other canids, pant to cool off. I just prefer to avoid doing so.” Nick accepted the cloth Judy offered next to wipe his face.

“You did good.” Judy told him. “I have no doubt you’ll have one of the higher scores. There are some things we’ll need to work on though.”

“Such as?” Nick queried as he wrapped the towel around his neck loosely. He knew there had been some areas that he needed to work on. Getting Judy’s advice would be a great place to start.

“This course wasn’t built for speed.” Judy pointed out. “She’s not timing you to see how fast you complete it, but for how long you can endure. Sure, completing it quickly is impressive, but it’s not the point. Officers tend to have to brave those types of obstacles for extended periods of time. Therefore, the longer you last the higher your resulting score.”
Nick nodded as he considered this. “I’ll make sure to remember that for next time.” He accepted another bottle of water from one of the other recruits with a grateful smile. “Anything else?”

“A question.” Judy stated. “How many ‘second winds’ did you experience?” It wasn’t that she lost count, but she was curious to know if Nick was aware of it.

“Seven.” Nick answered automatically. “I really wasn’t expecting any, to be honest. Every time I thought I hit my limit, I felt a surge of energy. It was quite a rush, if I do say so myself.”

“I guess your Izu Genes are beginning to awaken a bit faster now.” Judy told him. “I wouldn’t be surprised if you started to undergo the adaptive evolutionary process soon.”

As Judy had been speaking, Major walked towards them, but halted a few feet away as she heard snippets of their conversation. Certain words stuck out. Upon hearing the phrase ‘Izu Gene’, Major Friedkin made a mental note to look it up. She swore she had heard it somewhere before, but couldn’t remember where. Seeing Hopps and Wilde’s chat end, Major Friedkin walked up to them and said, “The results should be made available this coming Friday. So, you’ll have to be patient and wait for the next five days.”

Nick and Judy nodded their understanding. Getting the go-ahead from Major Friedkin, they headed for their rooms. Nick wondered if he should ask Judy to join him for a small meal. He had a fully stocked refrigerator and Judy’s admission that she enjoyed predator foods meant he could make a customary courting meal. Arriving at their doors, Nick made up his mind. “Hey, Judy?” Nick asked, catching her attention. “Would you have dinner with me tonight? I’ll make something special to commemorate today.”

Judy smiled at him. “Absolutely. Just knock on the connecting door when it’s ready.” Opening the door to her room, she said, “I’ll make something next week. I’ll give me a chance to try cooking predatory meals.” Closing her door, Judy started bouncing excitedly at knowing she and Nick would be having dinner together tonight. She had doubled up on her hormonal suppressants today as a precaution, but that didn’t mean she didn’t feel certain effects. As she hadn’t done anything last night to take care of herself, Judy felt that fire burn hotter now. She forced herself to resist, not wanting to end up missing the rest of the day with Nick.

Meanwhile, Nick was now laying on his bed staring at the ceiling, trying to decide which courting meal he would make for Judy when she came over. He still had a pawful of hours before dinnertime, but some of the meals required certain preparations in advance. Picking up his phone from where he placed it on his bedside table, Nick dialed his mom’s contact info. The line rang for only a short time before his mother answered with a ‘Hey, Nicky.”

“Hey, Mom.” Nick replied. “I was wondering if you could forward me some recipes for a courtship meal. Judy and I are having dinner together tonight and I’m cooking.”

“Of course, but all of them are more fit for predators so they’re made using meat. I guess there could be alternative ways of preparing them. Would Judy even be willing to try them?” Rory responded.

“Oh, yes.” Nick answered plainly. “I happen to know for a fact that she would be more than willing. She had a tofu frittata for breakfast yesterday, cricket chips for a snack on multiple occasions, and for dinner last night...” he paused for dramatic effect. “...she ate a double-decker buggaburger.”

The silence from the other end of the line ended with Rory’s shout of, “SERIOUSLY?”

Nick chuckled at his mother’s reaction. “Yep. Ate the whole damn thing.”
Rory was quiet for a moment more then said, “I’ll send you some recipes then. I want to hear what she thinks of them, do you understand me?”

“Yes, Mom.” Nick answered. He smiled as his mom said she loved him then ended the call. “I love you too, Mom.” he whispered despite the fact she was no longer on the phone. His cell pinged a minute later, telling him he had received the recipes. He browsed through the selection his mother had sent him and chose to go with the almond-crusted fish with saffron sauce. He made a list of what he would need and hoped that the staff of the Mess would agree to let him mooch what he’d need off them. Nick got everything that wasn’t food related ready for later then set his alarm and went to take a short nap. One hour later, Judy and Nick were sitting in a corner of the Mess just mammal watching and coming up with random stories about the other cadets.

“Come over at about 7.” Nick said, suddenly. “I should have dinner ready by then. I’m making a standard courtship meal for you, but I’m not telling you what it is.”

“Okay.” Judy replied. “I’ll be ready.”

They didn’t do much else for the rest of the day. Just hung out, talked a little, and enjoyed one another’s company. However, both felt nervously excited about tonight. There was also a small part of them that wondered what other developments had been made in the investigation into the Anti-Predator Movement.

ZPD Morgue – ZPD Precint One HQ – Zootopia

Chief Bogo stood near the wall by the door leading to the morgue of Precinct One. Dr. Loretta Pouncer stood on the other side of the room. In between them were the five bodies of the mammal’s the Chancellor had tasked Hannibal Hyector with killing. Loretta walked over to the first victim and pulled the cover back to reveal a sow.

“Ms. Piggy Swinton. Age 25. Younger sister of Councilsow Swinton. Out of the five of them, she’s the one found in the worst shape.” Loretta stated, crossing her arms in front of her chest. “He was ruthless, Tobias. She was alive and conscious the whole time Hannibal tortured her.” Walking to the second body, she revealed the body of a middle-aged, male goat. “William Goater. Age 38. He was a chemist at Manesley Pharmaceuticals.” The next body. “Harriette Squirrelton. Age 33. Mailmammal.” Next body. “Norman Batsley. Age 27. Accountant.” At the final body, Loretta hesitated. Pulling the cover off, she revealed the body of a young koala. “This was Jessie Koalé. Age 19. She was a freshman at the Zootopian Institute of Sociology.” Stepping away from the autopsy tables, Dr. Loretta put her paws in the pockets of her lab coat. “Hannibal broke them down systematically as if he were a hunter cleaning his kills. Apart from Piggy Swinton, none of the others showed any sign of extensive physical torture, but with Hyector being a former psychologist, I’m sure the others probably suffered mentally.” Staring at Jessie Koalé’s body, Dr. Loretta said, “He was kind with Jessie. She didn’t feel a thing. I found traces of potent sedatives in her system.”

Chief Bogo ran a hoof down his face. Each of the bodies had files that correlated to them with information that proved their association to the Anti-Predator Movement. The reveal that one of them was related to Councilsow Swinton was troubling. The councilswong always supported equal rights for both prey and predators. It raised questions, to say the least. “What can you tell me about his method?” he asked seriously.

Dr. Loretta scanned the bodies for a moment. “He was efficient. Piggy Swinton was killed slowly, taking his time. You said that he managed to do all this within 48 hours?” Getting a nod of confirmation, she frowned. “The amount of torture suggests otherwise. I would have sworn that it occurred over the span of a week.” Going from one body to the next, she examined each wound carefully. “His skills hadn’t diminished during his incarceration. They almost look as if though he has
improved.”

Bogo stepped closer to examine the bodies himself. “If Hannibal were still alive, I’d kill him myself regardless of the consequences.” A group of land surveyors working on the edge of Zootopia’s boundaries had stumbled across Hannibal’s corpse while they were surveying a plot of largely undeveloped land for a recently proposed subdivision. Hannibal’s head still bore the wicked smirk showing that, despite his death, he had had the last laugh. The surveyors had called the ZPD upon their discovery.

Dr. Loretta shook her head. “Don’t start that, Tobias. We need you here, not a prison cell.” She covered up the bodies. “Out in the Marshlands District, we hardly see things like this. I’ve had zooicides sure, but this? This is a whole other level of savagery and Hannibal was technically sane.”

Chief Bogo didn’t say anything as he watched Dr. Loretta cover the last body. He then followed her into and down the hall. “What would you guess about his methodology? Surely, you have some insight. Hannibal always had a reason for doing something in a specific way.”

Dr. Loretta stopped to consider her thoughts and words carefully. “I’d look through the files Hannibal left you. I’ll send you my reports on their autopsies to compare them to. I’m certain something is there. We just have to find it. But, to answer your question: He broke each of the victims down systematically, but used a different system for each. That’s important, but I have no idea why.”

Sighing, Chief Bogo thanked Dr. Loretta and headed to the elevator. Once inside, he selected the third floor and upon arriving, made his way to see Officer Delgato, who had been recently released from the hospital. The lion had been one of the officers involved and injured in the shootout during what they had thought was an attempt to rescue Dawn Bellwether. Bogo had sent him to the precinct’s infirmary to get the medical officer’s approval to return to duty. As he approached, the Chief could hear a heated discussion taking place. With a silent groan, he entered the room just as Officer Delgato gave his closing argument.

“Look, all I’re asking for is DESK DUTY!!!” Delgato shouted at the medical officer, a red panda. “I know I’m not 100%, but shit! At least approve me for desk duty. It’s better than sitting on my ass at home doing nothing. Not to mention, this way I can at least help.”

The medical officer looked at the lion with a bored expression for a moment then said, “Fine. I’ll approve you for desk duty, but only desk duty. If I hear even a whisper of you doing anything else, I’ll have you placed under medical house arrest. Understood?”

Delgato sighed in relief. “Yes, I understand. Thank you.” Standing with the help of a cane, he turned to leave and spotted the Chief looking at him with a raised eyebrow. A sheepish smile formed on the lion’s muzzle. “I, uh, I don’t like the idea of sitting at home all day when other officers are out there doing something while I could be helping. Even if it’s only desk duty and paperwork.”

Bogo nodded understandingly. He would do the same thing. “Good. I’ve got paperwork you can take care of for me. Nothing extravagant, but it needs to be done. Report to my office in ten. I’ve got to go see Clawhauser for a minute then I’ll be there.” Stepping aside to let the lion through, he asked his medical officer, “How’s he really doing?”

The red panda medical officer rolled his eyes. “He should be at home recuperating. He’s got a good deal of muscular damage to his legs and really shouldn’t be moving around all that much.” Pulling out the x-rays, he said, “He should eventually get better, but only if he doesn’t overexert himself. His legs need to regain their original musculature. The thing that bothers me is exactly how much muscle damage his legs have. He wasn’t out for even a single week, but the level of damage he has is
extensive, almost bordering on the beginnings of muscular atrophy.”

Bogo frowned deeply at the news. “Any ideas for the cause and if so what are they? Also, what do you suggest we do then? I need all the officers I can have on duty.”

The medical officer shrugged. “There are far too many causes that I can name. I took some blood samples. Those might give us a glimpse into what the issue is. If it isn’t anything too disconcerting, we can look into possible treatment plans that can help him. If it is, then we may have to confine him to a permanent desk position.”

Grunting, Chief Bogo gave a nod of acknowledgement and exited the infirmary. Heading down to the main reception area to see Clawhauser, Bogo stopped as he saw a buff male tiger talking to Ben, laughing and smiling. Bogo’s eye twitched at the sight. While Bogo had had a few girlfriends in the past, he had always been more attracted to males. His ‘relationship’ with Clawhauser had always been something he treasured, but he’d never outright stated that he wanted more. Walking up to the pair, Bogo forced himself to keep a straight face and not slam the male tiger’s head through the floor of his precinct. “Officer Clawhauser? A moment?”

Ben sat up straight, waiting for his next series of commands from his Chief. “Sir?”

“Please contact Detectives Wolford and Fangmeyer. I have a few things that I need to discuss with them.” Glancing at the tiger, he gave a minute nod. Finished with that, He walked upstairs to the second floor where his office was located to deal with Officer Delgado.

Ben watched the Chief walk away. Hearing chuckling, he turned to look at his friend, Tito Striptower, the male tiger he’d been conversing with when the Chief arrived. “Don’t say a word.” Ben stated in a surprisingly threatening tone.

Tito grinned teasingly. “You know he was jealous, right? That look in his eye when he gave me that shallow nod? Irritation, anger, hatred, stop me anytime here.”

Ben huffed in his own annoyance. “I’m so sure.” Sending Harrison and Zannah a quick text telling them the Chief wanted to see them asap, he said, “Even if it was, he won’t do anything and I certainly won’t either. Believe me, it’s not that I don’t want to, but I don’t want to risk our current relationship. You know better than anyone why that is.”

Tito gave Ben a sad smile. The two of them had been best buds until they took a chance and started dating. It was great for a long time, but soon things started to fall apart and neither of them knew when or why. Their friendship had simply become really strained. It was after the two went to audition for a spot as a backup dancer for Gazelle after one of her tigers fell ill that it finally all fell apart. Tito had been selected, but he had thought it was due to his dance skills. It had turned out that Tito had been selected due to his species first, and skill second. Later he learned that Ben had originally been their first choice, but when they saw Tito, they chose him over Ben, since Tito was a tiger, the same as the other three backups. “Yeah,” Tito stated softly. “I really do.”

Ben just shrugged. “Not like we can do anything about it now.” He put his phone away. “I’m glad you came to visit me and catch up though. I was starting to think you forgot about me being up there.”

Tito shook his head strongly. “Never. I just haven’t had too much free time. Now though, Gazelle’s trying to reconnect with old friends, so I’ve got a bit more time on my paws. No idea who they are, but they’re really important to her. I think there may even be something between them.”

Ben’s eyes lit up. “Really? Find out and let me know, will you? I’d love to be the first to hear about
it, before the media catches wind of it.”

Tito nodded once to show his agreement. “You’ll be the first one I call.” Looking at his watch, he said, “I’ve got to go. The other backups want to celebrate our first R&R period in six months. I’ll call you later to set up a meet for coffee.” Waving goodbye, he looked up at the second-floor landing to see the burly cape buffalo sending him a death glare. Tito gave a salute and tried to convey the message that Ben was all his. He knew his message was received when the Chief’s glare dissipated.

Ben, noticing Tito’s out of character actions, looked to see what it was that the tiger was looking at. Seeing the Chief’s malevolent glower at Tito, Ben smiled slightly. ‘Maybe, just maybe, the Chief will make the first move. After all, it seems every time I do, the relationship always ends.’

Home of Antonio de Medici-Borgia – TundraTown – Zootopia

Antonio de Medici-Borgia, also known in the underworld of Zootopia as Mr. Big, was having a small lunch with his daughter Fru-Fru and her daughter Little Judie. His polar bear bodyguards were positioned around the room, watching over them. Having chosen instead to use candles in lieu of electric lights, the dinner almost felt like formal dining. That was until the candles inexplicably went out.

Mr. Big and his most trusted bodyguard, Bearnard Kozlov, already knew why, but the others felt a strong sense of dread. No one moved or even breathed. Mr. Big softly whispered, “Business or Personal?”

Silence, then, “Both.” an eerie disembodied voice echoed softly throughout the residence.

Mr. Big waited to hear what else would be said, but nothing came. A single candle soon reignited. This one wasn’t one of theirs. Mr. Big kept white wax candles, this one was red, the molten wax looking like blood. Underneath was a file appropriately sized for polar bears. Motioning for Kozlov to grab it, Mr. Big waited to hear what Kozlov would find inside.

Kozlov set the red wax candle aside to pick up the file only to find a note that read ‘To: Antonio de Medici-Borgia, From: The Gravewalker’. Turning to look at his employer, Kozlov told the others, “Take Mistress Fru-Fru and Little Judie somewhere safer within the mansion.” He watched as the other polar bears quickly did as he asked.

Mr. Big reassured his daughter that everything would be fine. As soon as they were alone, he asked, “What is it, Kozlov?” He listened as Kozlov read the contents of the file out loud. When Kozlov was finished, Mr. Big stated, “Things are far more dire than I feared, my friend. We must make haste if we are to ensure that everything is ready. Have Fru-Fru and Little Judie relocated somewhere that is more secure. I, myself, will remain here. I refuse to run like a scared youngling. This is my home and my domain. I’ll defend it ‘til my dying breath.”

“As you say, sir.” Kozlov began to draw up the necessary preparations. He had a few of the younger bodyguards, including one of his own sons, relocate further into the district of Tundra Town where it was far colder and fewer would dare try to brave. He also called in some of the other enforcers throughout the city. While they were based out of TundraTown, Mr. Big had many employees spread within the city, many of whom whose families had served them for generations. Once stage one preparations were complete, Kozlov said, “Now, we wait.”

“Now, we wait.” Mr. Big repeated. Looking at the file Kozlov had left open near him, Mr. Big saw a photograph of a kithood Nicholas Wilde sitting atop the shoulders of the Gravewalker, who was smiling a true, genuine smile. Under the photo was the caption/order: “Protect my son, Tony. Otherwise, …” Mr. Big shivered and it wasn’t from the cold. ‘I should have guessed that long ago.’
he thought. ‘That’s why Nicky seemed so familiar. Don’t worry, Mr. Vulpin. He’s special to the godmother of my granddaughter. That makes him my family as well.’ Mr. Big then added, out loud, ‘You always do whatever it takes for family.’

The Apartment of Jaxon Lapin and Skye Wintory

Jaxon and Skye had reported in for duty an hour after dropping Judy and Nick off at the ZPA followed by getting their apartment situated. Their new Supervisory Special Agent, SSA Raoul Mauler, had been pleased by their early arrival. He told them that, for now, he wanted them to settle into their new apartment until he called on them. That had been a little over 48 hours ago.

Jaxon blinked as the alarm went off informing him that his hour-long nap had reached its end. Rolling out of the bed, he walked into the living room to see Skye performing a workout routine in time with the instructor on the television. He saw the open DVD case on the coffee table that was pushed off to the side. Grabbing a bottle of water from the refrigerator, he quietly sat himself on the couch behind her to take in the very pleasing view of her rear.

Skye could smell Jaxon’s arousal behind her. Smirking, she began to accentuate every motion teasingly. It wasn’t long before she felt Jaxon standing behind her with his erect cock grinding into her. “You’re already this horny from a little show?” she asked, flirtatiously. Jaxon’s reply was another grind to her ass. “Well, this video’s almost done. Think you can wait until then?”

Jaxon groaned loudly. “Fine, but when it is, I’m tearing off with you and this time I’ll show you how predatory I can be.” He stepped away just enough for her to have the full range of motion she’d need for the rest of her exercises. His eye twitched and foot thumped rapidly, each picking up speed as he watched Skye tease him mercilessly. A loud predator-like growl began to emanate from his chest as he impatiently waited for the video to reach its end.

Skye felt a thrill at Jaxon’s very convincing growl. If she hadn’t known it was him, she would have assumed that it was another predator, maybe a wolf, a bear, or a caracal. Skye felt her body react to the sensation of the obviously interested male in the vicinity. She could practically feel her womb spasm in anticipation. She resisted the urge to pant in lust just long enough for the video to come to an end. Before her brain could register it, Skye found herself on her back looking into the narrow eyes and devious smirk of her fiancée. ‘Oh, boy.’ She thought. ‘This is going to be good.’

Jaxon literally ripped Skye’s workout outfit from her body using his sharpened claws until she was down to only her panties. When Skye tried to say something, he cut her off with a fierce kiss. His ears picked up her heartbeat accelerate as her excitement grew.

Skye returned the kiss with equal force. She gripped his back and ran her claws down it, leaving behind red claw marks. After the first time they made love, she had freaked out and panicked. It was following their fifth time that she finally looked into how to round her claws just enough not to hurt Jaxon, but leave them sharp enough to use as weapons in the event of paw-to-paw combat.

The two of them soon found themselves desperately attacking each other, needing more of one another. At some point, Jaxon lost his pajama pants he had been wearing and Skye no longer had anything on, as Jaxon, somehow, had her panties on his head like a mask. The smell of her really shouldn’t have sparked the insane desire to breed her in Jaxon, but that’s exactly what it did. As for Skye, her mind was waging a war with itself for it sensed a powerful male predator in the room, but only registered Jaxon, who it identified as her prey. Nevertheless, both were now primed and ready for the main event. The sudden chime of both of their phones snapped them from the primal state of mind they were in.

Jaxon’s eyes, nose, and ears twitched in rage. He was literally vibrating in barely restrained fury. He
did his best to calm himself, but was finding it increasingly difficult.

Skye whined in displeasure of her own, but reached for her phone on the side table. Seeing the text from SSA Mauler, she sighed. “We’re being called in.” She yelped when Jaxon stopped her from getting up and took her phone.

Jaxon hit the call icon on the messaging screen and waited for the line to connect. Before SSA Mauler was capable of speaking, Jaxon snarled out, “You’re going to have to wait for us to finish what we started.” Disconnecting the call, he tossed the mobile across the room to the floor.

In his office, SSA Raoul Mauler sat frozen in fear with his cellphone on the ground. When he had been assigned a supervisory role to Agent Jaxon Lapin, codenamed Savage, and Agent Skye Wintory, he had been told not to piss off the jackrabbit. Based on the call he just received, he now understood why. The jackrabbit’s voice during that short phone call was more indicative of a larger predator, one capable of crushing him with ease. SSA Mauler decided that he would indeed wait for them to finish what they had started as he had no desire to learn more as to why the jackrabbit had been codenamed Savage.

It was approximately an hour later, at 4:20 p.m., that Jaxon and Skye walked into the ZIB’s Zootopia Office’s HQ, with pleasant looks on their muzzles. Some of the wolf agents registered the scent of sex on the two as well as the scent of the other on them. Both ignored the astounded looks of incredulousness and made their way to SSA Mauler’s office. Walking in, they noticed that he never once looked directly at Jaxon, much to their amusement.

“Glad you could make it.” SSA Mauler said, nervously. “I, uh, I was calling you in because we’ve learned that one of the most wanted mammals has offered to turn themselves in and help us in our investigation into the Anti-Predator Movement. However, in return, we must agree to a couple of conditions. One of them is Agent Savage.”

Jaxon cocked his head to the side in confusion. “I’m not sure I follow. Why would whoever this criminal is want me? Do they have a history with me?”

Mauler shrugged. “I honestly don’t know, but you are scheduled to meet them at 5 o’clock. So, you’ve got forty minutes to get everything you’ll need ready and get over to this location.” He pawed them a post-it with an address and watched the two exit his office then took out the file of the mammal they were scheduled to meet. The photograph was that of a red fox vixen with the name ‘Scarlett Reddington’. Mauler honestly had no idea why she had requested Agent Savage, but he knew there had to be a story there. ‘I hope this works.’ Mauler thought.

Temporary Housing Complex – ZPA – Zootopia – Midevening

Nick was pacing up and down his room nervously. ‘Calm down, Nick.’ he thought to himself. Checking on the food, Nick made sure that the presentation was still perfect, and that it had not cooled. Nick walked over to his bathroom to check his appearance in the mirror again and, like the last fifteen times, sighed as he saw that he didn’t even have a single strand of fur out of place. He went and sat on his bed and tried to calm himself down. “Okay, Nick. Focus. You’re having a nice meal with Judy, your future mate. That part’s already been agreed upon. All this is simply to get to know one another better. There are still things you need to tell her and she’ll tell you the things she’s ready to tell you. Just relax before you make a complete fool of yourself.”

Little did Nick know that Judy was in a similar state. She wasn’t sitting on her bed, she was at her desk reading The Complete Young Vulpine’s Guide to Maturity. After they returned from walking the grounds, Judy had decided to spend some time reading the text. She was fascinated by what she was reading. It was surprising to her that foxes were only ever physically affectionate with their
mates and kits. There was also a whole other level to how their culture worked. A knock on the door connecting her room to Nick’s had her look at the clock. It was 6:55, a little early, but not by much.

Nick opened the door connecting their rooms to spy Judy closing a drawer in her desk. “Y-you ready, Judy?” he asked, pensively. His heart rate slowed as she walked over dressed in laid back attire of pajama bottoms and a loose-fitting tee. “I made fish.” Nick stated as he closed the door. “I, uh, never really made it before so…” he trailed off a little embarrassed that he wasn’t sure how well his attempt at a proper courtship meal would be received.

Judy smiled at Nick upon seeing his ears tinge pink. “I’m sure it will be great, Nick.” She walked over to the table to see the two covered dishes and two small portions of crème brûlée. Sitting in one of the chairs, she leaned in to smell the fish. “Mm. It smells good.” Judy said, softly.

Nick grinned a tiny bit at Judy’s words. “A-as I said, I’ve never made this dish before, so I don’t know how good it will taste.” He pushed Judy’s chair in then with a small flourish took the cover off her dish to reveal the meal he had prepared. “I hope you like it.” Nick stated with a sheepish smile.

Judy picked up her fork and took a bite. The moment it hit her tongue, she moaned. “It’s so good.” Judy stated, happily. She gestured for Nick to sit down and partake in his own fish. “Don’t just stand there, Slick, eat.”

Nick sat down in his own seat and began to dig in himself. He was quite pleased with how well it had turned out. They ate in companionable silence for a little while until Nick asked, “Ready to hear a little more about my past?”

Judy stopped mid-chew and thought about it. Swallowing, she said, “Sure, but at some point I’m going to have to start telling you more about my own past, you know.” She finished her fish and slid the plate aside as she grabbed the crème brûlée, waiting for Nick to begin.

Clearing his throat, Nick said, “Shortly after my 23rd birthday is when I started working for Mr. Big. Nothing illegal mind you. He was in the process of trying to go legit at the time. My role was simply to provide what info I learned directly to either him or Kozlov.” Taking Judy’s plate along with his own to the sink, Nick started eating his own crème brûlée as he continued. “Only very rarely did he ask me to perform other jobs such as act as a courier. I was doing good until the skunk butt rug incident. Funnily enough, Finn was the one who acquired the rug in a card game with a couple of his other buddies. I merely took it to Mr. Big in hopes of remaining in his good graces. You know how that turned out.”

Judy surprised herself by keeping a straight face the entire time as Nick continued to tell her everything about his time in Mr. Big’s employment. As his tale came to an end, Judy found that she didn’t have any questions. Taking the cup of water that Nick offered her, she decided now was the time to make a confession of her own. “You are the first mammal that I’ve ever felt this way towards.”

Nick’s eyes widened a bit. He had known that Judy had had a rough time growing up, but this was something different. Nick had assumed that Judy would have at least had crushes while she was younger. To hear her say that he was the first overall wasn’t what he expected at all. Hoping for clarification, he asked, “First mammal you’ve ever fallen in love with?”

Judy gave him a small, sheepish smile. “That and more.” she whispered. “I was never popular when I was younger. Most steered clear of me so I didn’t have many friends. Lots of bucks preferred one, or more, of my sisters, like Missy, who had dates with someone different every night. I was a, if not the, pariah. Most of my siblings would gossip about what they would do with their ‘Crush of the Week’ if they ever got their paws on them, but I never had that. I was viewed as a freak because
what kind of doe doesn’t find anyone worth chasing after? So, I stuck to focusing on training for the ZPA.”

Nick was beside himself with a mixture of joy and disbelief. He was her first everything. Standing to his feet, he said, “Can you give me a minute? I’m going to get us some more drinks.” Receiving a nod, he made his way to the refrigerator and hid behind the door once he opened it. He placed a paw over his heart and felt how hard it was pounding. Selecting two mineral waters, he walked back to Judy, who now was messing with the small radio on the desk next to the fossilized PC. As he got closer, he heard music begin to play. The song [La vie en Rose] made him smile warmly. Setting the bottles down, he crept up behind her and swept her off her feet as he led her into a slow dance.

Judy giggled as Nick led her in a gently sway. She smiled up at him. “I like this.” Judy whispered to him.

Nick grinned at her adoringly. “That’s a good thing, Love. But, you should know that we’re just getting started.” With that he leaned down and kissed her on the lips for the first time.

Chapter End Notes

*Popping Excedrin like TicTacs* Hey, guys so this has taken so long to release, but life got in the way. Anyway, got my godson/nephew all set up to stay with us, wife's still got a month of antivirals, antibiotics, and other medications to go, kids all hyped up on sugar, driving me crazy, and I'm having to slowly return to dealing with clients since my wife can't go back to work just yet. Plus, the holidays.

Unfortunately, with the inclusion of my godson/nephew and my wife's inability to return to work, I'm the sole breadwinner right now. So, the original plans of updating and releasing a chapter every two to three weeks ain't gonna be entirely feasible. Technically, it's the same as updating once a month, BUT it's taken differently. Therefore, I'm going to say I'm probably only going to be able to update this story once a month. My wife should be returning to work at the beginning of next year, but no real telling. Preparing for the worst case scenario here. She's due by end of January, beginning of February, for birth. That could throw a left-handed monkey wrench into things, like have her laid off for taking to much time, even if there's a good reason for it. I really hate 'At Will' states where anyone can be terminated without need of explanation.

This was not my plan when starting this story, but there's not a lot I can do about it. I hate that it's come to this. I'm not dropping the story, but I'm having to slow it down considerably, which REALLY pisses me the fuck off. Again, I'm not going to apologize for any of this. It's out of my control, so anyone who has a problem with it and wants an apology you'd better be glad I can't reach you from here. Otherwise, you'd see why I'm still standing after years of having to defend myself from idiots who thought just cause I'm different looking that I'm an easy target. I don't necessarily have a rap sheet, but if I did, it probably be a few miles long and filled with charges of use of excessive force and use of a deadly weapon (my hands. why would I need a weapon when I have these? I still don't understand why people resort to anything else.) So, any of you who want to give me grief, I'm going to simply ignore your piddly ass whining to the best of my ability. I didn't ask for this situation and like it a lot less than you.
On a happier note, I'll also be releasing a chapter for Star Wars: The Zootopian Saga (SWZ) today. Yay! The first art contest for it is still open for participation, but, of course, it's not mandatory. There haven't been any entries yet; however, my godson, son, and I aren't expecting any. (Hard to be disappointed if you have no expectations). If any of you do chose to participate, see the corresponding chapter entry of SWZ.
Bonus Content & Update

Chapter Summary

A slightly revised breakdown of the infrastructure of my 'verse. Plus, a bit of an update on how my family and I are doing.

Chapter Notes

So, I'm alive, if only just. The holidays are usually hectic, but this year it was taken up to eleven. If you don't get that reference, I suggest you go watch Spinal Tap (the Motion Picture, not the medical procedure).

Anyway, this year my kids asked me about the circuit, which is an old family term for the road trip I used to make during the holiday season to visit all my relatives in one go. Needless to say, we decided to give it a try. I haven't made the Circuit in nearly a decade, so it was a challenge. We made it all the way to the final stop (my mother's), before it came to a cataclysmic halt.

Physically, I haven't always been in the best of health. Overexertion combined with my intermittent bronchitis and other health issues has left me in a sad, sorry state right now. Currently, my wife, kids, my godson/nephew, and I are still at my mother's house, awaiting her on-call physician to clear me. I'll be honest, I look like either a human pincushion or Hellraiser with all the needles going into me. I've got IVs feeding me intravenous nutritional supplements, antibiotics, antivirals, antiretrovirals, and a long, long list of other things I'm still trying to figure out.

I decided to post this to let you know I'm still alive. With all the meds being pumped into me, today is the first day I'm fully coherent since right before New Year's Eve. By that, I mean though I've been awake my mental clarity had been noticeably impaired (much to the amusement of my wife and children).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bonus Content: Societal, Cultural, and Governmental Structure of my 'verse.

First, we'll begin with stating that the infrastructure of the city is quite diversified. With so many different species and each having their own cultural norms, one shouldn’t be surprised to find overlap. For instance, family will always play a major role, no matter the species. Lions have prides, wolves have packs, hippos have bloats, foxes have skulks, lagomorphs have warrens, hyenas have a clan (or cackle), etcetera. The dynamics found within each may vary, yet are, overall, relatively the same. As Harrison plays a key role, we’ll focus a bit on the dynamics of wolf packs, ‘pack mentality’, and their social norms.
The size of a wolf pack can range from few in number to a couple of dozen familial units all under one reigning family. The name of one’s pack is decided by the reigning ‘Alpha’, who usually uses his own family name, example being Pack Wolford. It must be noted that while all wolves with the surname Wolford will belong to Pack Wolford, not all wolves in the pack will actually have the surname of Wolford, such as Larry and Gary. Also, the use of the term ‘Alpha’ signifies who is the current head of the reigning family. In reference to Fenrir, while he is the eldest of the Wolford family, he is not the Alpha of Pack Wolford, but the Elder, a very different position. A pack’s Elder is either a former Alpha above a certain age or a wolf that is the last of his generation within the pack. All species group dynamics have a similar setup to wolf packs.

Ranking orders within species groupings vary, but they can all equate to similar ranks of other groups, such as an Alpha Wolf and a Hyena Cackle’s Matriarch. We’ll stick to using wolf packs, since their easier to follow. The two highest positions of power are the Alpha (male) and his mate, the Luna (female). I’m sure some of you are confused by this, so let me explain: my wife read a lot of werewolf fiction, this one is on her. Betas act as the Alpha’s enforcers and are chosen by the Alpha himself. The Beta’s family is often viewed as the Second, or Branch, Family as they are often a sibling of the Alpha. Omega’s are everybody else and, though the term is viewed as demeaning in real life, is rarely used as a slur, such as dog or bitch.

Every species has a set of social conventions they follow on a daily basis. Also, each have punishments that are either universal or unique to their species. One of the universal punishments has already been touched upon: Shaming. As implied, a she-wolf, or even a male, who has been marked as shamed is essentially no longer eligible for lupine courtship, although other canine species can still make attempts. As Harrison explained to Zannah, the status is permanent, since the mark of a ‘Shamed One’ usually tends to be scars or a special brand. Shame marks are used by all species, and are given for all varieties of reasons.

Second focus point is the city of Zootopia itself. A shining beacon with the message ‘anyone can be anything’, Zootopia was built as the city in which everybody was meant to achieve their dreams. Unfortunately, as we all know, it has failed in this regard. The myriad of species that inhabit its limits, despite their prejudice towards others for whatever reason, work in a bizarre symbiosis. Through, typically indirect, interactions, the mammals that live within Zootopia all work together to make the city the way it is. Some would call this Chaos Theory, or the Butterfly Effect. Somehow, the actions of one mammal will always affect the populace. This can be done in so many ways that there are literally too many to list.

The city’s government is surprisingly simple. The head of government is the mayor, who within my ‘verse is more equivalent to the position of Governor. The mayor’s role is the executive branch of the city’s government. The city council, which is made of elected officials from every district, takes up the role of the legislative branch. The role of the judicial branch is played by the Attorney General, the only mammal with direct ties to the Imperial Capitol, Zookuulantiapolis, the seat of the Zoolympian Empire.

Zootopia itself, while a voluntary vassal of the Zoolympian Empire, is a city-state. Therefore, Zootopia is technically its own sovereign nation. Although subservient, Zootopia behaves much like any real-life country. Interestingly, Zootopia has a sister city: Zootropolis. The two cities reflect each other in a few different ways, both being city-states and voluntary vassals to the Zoolympian Empire, among other things.

The type of government utilized by the Zoolympian Empire, and by extension Zootopia and Zootropolis, is a Democratic Republic. Historically, in the real world, the Roman Empire was a democratic republic; therefore, it wouldn’t be the first time an empire had this type of government. Further breakdown of the government official positions for the Zoolympian Empire will take place
The third point of focus is Zootopia’s cultural structure. How is this different from societal you ask? Well, how is your culture different from, say, Che Guevara’s? Each species has their own culture, although there is slight overlap for some. All canids share certain customs, but in rare occurrences, there are other species that also share them. One example would be the moon, which has importance to lupines and lapines.

Cultural customs per species are often not allowed to be observed by outsiders, as many are considered sacred. The only universal custom shared by all species is the Divine Entities, though worship to them has largely fallen out of practice. The entity Fate is the Head of the Pantheon. The exact species of each of the Divine Entities is always a question of debate. Fate, however, is the only one among the Pantheon that everyone agrees transcends species and has no real form, being viewed instead as something more as The Force from Star Wars.

Fourth topic of discussion: the ‘verse’s world. The Zoolympian Empire is one of eight nations. Another is Animammalia, which is a sworn ally of the Zoolympian Empire. Of the eight nations, there are five major powers and three minor. The relationship between the five major powers is tumultuous at best. The Zoolympian Empire has held its power base since its inception, and has born witness to the rise and fall of countless other nations. Animammalia is the second longest surviving after it. The three minor nations behave much like Switzerland. The other three major powers are constantly at odds with one another, with the Zoolympian Empire and Animammalia remaining observant spectators. More information about each nation will be revealed as each comes into play later.

Finally, a few last words as to the quality of this entry. Admittedly, this version of the Bonus Content lacks something the original had. The reason for this is that after discussing it over with a relative during the holidays, it was brought to my attention that incorporating this information into the story would be more ideal if I could make it less…info-dumpy. Thankfully, my relative agreed to assist in further, in-depth research for the next inclusion. Regardless, this Bonus Content entry, to me, feels subpar and in need of more work. With the holiday season being so hectic, I was unable to fully flesh it out the way that I had hoped. Doing the family holiday circuit for the first time in nearly a decade hit me harder than I had anticipated. On top of that, with my health the way it currently is, the fact I managed to post this is an impressive achievement in my eyes. I will eventually revise this entry, but I won’t take it down. This one is here to stay.
that I'd take on some more clients before they were born, since she can't work right now. Life seems to have a way of saying 'F*** everybody, especially that sad little guy right...there. Yeah, him. Make his life hell'.

On the bright side, my parents and remaining siblings, who I've been at odds with for longer than I can recall (I don't even remember what the hell the argument we fell out over concerned), have decided to help us out. Christmas miracle indeed.

Also, I want to wish you all the best of fortune in your future endeavours this year. While I'm sure some of you are looking forward to seeing what this year has instore, for someone my age, we simply made another trip around the sun. I know that those two sentences sound oxymoronic, but that's just me saying its another year for me and that I hope this year is better for you all than last.

I'm losing the battle with the meds, so I'll cya later. Ciao.
Chapter Twelve: The Encounter

Chapter Summary

A series of seemingly unrelated encounters that will all eventually interconnect and make sense.

Chapter Notes

So, uh, hi. I was told by my uncle not to give my real name, so uh, call me Ian Moone. (I kinda stole that from a CSI episode. It's an anagram.)

Anyway, my uncle/godfather 0P3RaGh05T and my aunt have decided to sleep the day away to try and recuperate quicker. So, he had me tasked with posting this chapter for him.

I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Office of the Attorney General of Zootopia – City Central – Zootopia – 5:45 am

Spencer Wolvenett, Leodore Lionheart, Tobias Bogo, Fatima Ara, Li Ara, and Supreme Commander Deego all stood waiting to enter the chambers of the Attorney General of Zootopia. They didn’t know why the six of them had been called to meet with the Head of the Justice Department, but they all knew that whatever it was mandated their presence. Hearing the lock of the office door disengage, they all filed in one after another.

In all his years, Attorney General Hoover, an elderly Chinkara, had never had to deal with as much mayhem as he did within the last week or so. Glaring at everyone who entered with smoldering ire, he said, “We have much to discuss.” Looking directly at Fatima, he said, “I will not tolerate any interruptions. If I require your input, I will ask for it. Otherwise, DO NOT SPEAK!!”

Spencer, Tobias, and Deego were largely unfazed by A.G. Hoover's outburst, however, Fatima, Lionheart, and Li had all flinched back at the power of Hoover's shout. They all remained silent as they waited for him to begin the meeting.

A.G. Hoover sighed heavily. “First order of business: Polls for the election. We haven’t even had our first official campaign debate, and already there has been a drastic shift in the polls since the initial announcement of candidates. Mrs Ara’s base of support has rapidly shifted their loyalties over to Mr Wolvenett at a nearly unprecedented rate. This has happened before, but the occurrence is so rare that I tasked a private investigator to look into the situation, to try and find a potential cause.”
Turning his computer monitor around, he showed them an article that had been released on the web page of a well-known news outlet.

Spencer, Lionheart, and Fatima all leaned in to read the article. It wasn’t much, but it was damning. The article revealed a large amount of information that painted Fatima in a horrendous light. It detailed most of her most guarded secrets, such as her disdain for inter-order relationships. It also had a video of a short interview of Spencer’s from when his candidacy was announced.

1st Reporter on video: ADA Wolvenett! What do you think of your nomination for the Mayor’s office?

{Spencer: I’m honored. I don’t know who nominated me nor why they chose me as their nominee, but I’m grateful. Hopefully, I’ll live up to their expectations as well as those of Zootopia’s citizens.}

2nd Reporter: ADA Wolvenett! What will you do about inter-order relationships if you are elected mayor?

{Spencer: Doesn’t matter what I think. Inter-order relationships aren’t going to go away. I personally see no issue with them. It isn’t some virus or disease that we need to eradicate, but simply two or more mammals that found love where they least expected it. If I become mayor, I’ll do my best to provide my support for those openly in Inter-order relationships and grant them the right to marry without having to hide it.}

3rd Reporter: ADA Wolvenett! What do you think of Fatima Ara, the city councilmare who’s one of the other three candidates?

{Spencer: From what I know of her, she’s a strong mare. Fought a ton of opposition to get to where she is today. I bear her no ill will as we’ve never had any prior interactions. I don’t know much else. As for the other two, I’ve never heard of them, so I can’t say.}

1st reporter: You were formerly a cop and are currently an ADA. How will that affect your position as Mayor if you are elected?

{Spencer: … The cops of this city are often taken for granted, taken advantage of, belittled, defamed, or even insulted to their faces. If I am elected mayor, I guarantee that will come to an end. The inhabitants seem to forget that without the police force they would suffer far more than they do currently. The ZPD has protected more citizens than any of them care to admit. You, the media, are parasites that make it so. You spin stories of all the victims, give biased reports of cases, and influence the populace against them. As mayor, I fully intend to rectify that. Now, if you’ll excuse me.}

As the video ended, everyone sat in utter silence. A.G. Hoover pulled up another window showing the number of times that video was viewed on VidTube. The site showed that it had been viewed well over ten million times since its posting, and counting. Fatima’s face drained of blood. Li fought to keep a straight face, but the corners of his lips had the slightest upward quirk.

A.G. Hoover said, “I’ve taken a look at the projection for the final vote. As of the moment that this video hit 10.8 million views, nearly all of Fatima’s followers willingly ended up siding with Spencer. As it stands, 83% of the city’s inhabitants have settled in his camp, which is still gaining supporters.”

Lionheart’s heart swelled in pride. They had yet to officially make a public appearance and the number of Spencer’s supporters were growing exponentially. Lionheart wanted to run up to the roof and let loose a roar, but kept himself stockstill as they had yet to be dismissed.
A.G. Hoover then pulled out an early released copy of the Zootopian Times. He slammed it down on his desk with enough force that the desk bounced. “This also doesn’t help your cause, Fatima.”

Fatima picked up the paper and read the headline. ‘Fatima Ara: Her Secrets Revealed’ The newspaper hammered the final proverbial nail in her political coffin. It outlined everything she had worked so hard to keep hidden. From her insistence that her husband breed other mares to her financing Anti-Inter-order rallies throughout the city. At the very end of the article was the name of the author: Ma Li. Whirling on her husband, she went to scream at him only for her words to die in her throat at what he was doing.

Li had expected this reaction, so he had everything prepared. As soon as Fatima had turned around, Li had a legal envelope held out to her with the words ‘Divorce Papers’ printed on the front. He also had wedding band sitting on top of it, in full view of everyone. This was where he finally put his hoof down. “I own the controlling stocks for over half the city’s newspapers. Did you really think that I wasn’t prepared to do this if it came to it?”

Fatima felt the entire carefully built world she had constructed collapse and shatter around her. She was no longer capable of hiding behind denial. Slumping back into her seat, Fatima stared at the envelope. She still couldn’t believe this was actually happening. Fatima thought she had had everything planned out to the tiniest detail, but she had never anticipated that her mate would actually follow through on his statements from yesterday. Looking up at her husband, or more accurately, her soon-to-be former husband, Fatima asked, “W-what about the kids?”

“They’ll be coming with me.” Li stated bluntly. “After all, they are my colts and fillies. Only Bahman is yours and he is already old enough to make his own informed choices.”

A.G. Hoover, tired of the drama, shouted, “TAKE THIS INTO THE HALL!! OUT !! OUT !!” Once Li and Fatima left the room, A.G. Hoover looked at the others. “Now that that has been dealt with and out of the way. I want to know the progress of the investigation for this mammal known as ‘the Chancellor’.”

Chief Bogo stepped forward. “We’ve delved further into the backgrounds of the five mammals killed by Hannibal Hyector. Each of them were highly involved within the Anti-Predator Movement, which has been dubbed by the media as ‘Predopurge’. Ms. Piggy Swinton used her relation to Councilswig Swinton to open doors, figuratively. The chemist was being paid to manufacture some type of bioweapon, but from what we could discover upon searching his office, it was relocated. Ms. Koalé, the college freshman, used her knowledge of Social Psychology to subliminally manipulate others into joining their cause. The other two were expendables, nothing more than low ranking minions. They were responsible for identifying locations to incite riots.”

A.G. Hoover ran his hooves over his face. “Anything else I should know?” he asked seriously. Not getting a response, he leaned back in his seat. Looking out one of his office windows, he said, “My concern is what the hell we should expect now.”

Supreme Commander Deego cleared his throat. “If I may,” he began. “My role here is to coordinate with Zootopia’s military forces. If I could have your permission, as the current highest-ranking government official, to assemble them, I could begin my assigned duties ahead of schedule. Once I have everything in order, I can begin organizing a search for this ‘Chancellor’.”

A.G. Hoover looked at Supreme Commander Deego with appraising eyes. “How long would you need?” he asked. He had a bad feeling about this, but as it stood at that moment, he’d authorize almost anything. Almost.

“12 hours, maybe 18 at the most.” S.C. Deego answered. “Honestly, I wouldn’t know. I’ve yet to
see any of your military personnel. I’ve been told that Firebase White houses some of the Zoolumpyian Empire’s best. I’ve never been to the base, so I’ll need an escort so that I can oversee the mobilization of your forces.”

A.G. Hoover snorted. “Of course, you are aware of the bases’ ... unique nature though?” Seeing a blank look on the S.C.’s face, Hoover continued, “When it was originally being constructed, they chose a location that was a strategic anomaly. They built it in the middle of the most remote area of Tundratown, near Peak 15, in the Aleutsk Valley. The Valley contains a nigh-perpetual blizzard.” Sighing, he picked up his desk phone and dialed a number. “General? I need you to send a copter to pick up someone. ... That is correct. ... Yes. ... I’m more than well aware, General ... Understood.” Hanging up, he said, “A copter will pick you up in approximately one hour on the roof of City Hall. Do NOT miss it.”

Saluting, S.C. Deego took his leave followed by Chief Bogo, who decided to escort him. Deego used this time to inquire once more on the status of Nicholas Piberius Wilde and Judith Laverne Hopps. Getting the same answer as before, S.C. Deego decided to drop the matter entirely, choosing to tell the Emperor to trust the cape buffalo.

Spencer and Lionheart waited for A.G. Hoover to address them. They were surprised to see him give them a shooing motion. Leaving the A.G. Hoover’s office, they looked at each other for a moment before agreeing to meet around 4 in the afternoon to discuss their next move and parting ways.

ZIB safehouse – Unknown Location – Zootopia – 7:30 am

Skye sat on the sofa directly across from the red fox vixen, Scarlett Reddington, glaring daggers at her. Skye hadn’t been pleased to discover that she was the one they were scheduled to meet. Scarlett’s bored expression was pissing Skye off to the point of wanting to shoot her. However, her job was to protect Scarlett. Sparing a quick glance at the door Jaxon had disappeared through. Skye wondered what he was doing. She recentered her glare on Scarlett when the red fox vixen spoke.

“I’m pleased to know he has such a protective mate.” Scarlett stated. “True, I never thought he would take a vixen as a mate, but I can’t say I’m disappointed in his choice.” Checking her claws, she added, “I’m actually quite glad that he’s found someone like you.”

Skye felt an odd mix of emotions. Pride that this vixen knew that Jaxon was hers and seemed to have no intention of trying to take him from her. Confusion as to why she was pleased. Finally, she felt intrigued by her words. “What do you mean by that?” she asked.

Scarlett smiled pleasantly. “I never saw Jaxon as the type of mammal to settle down with someone. I saw what happened to his father when he couldn’t find his long-lost love. I expected him to avoid having any kind of serious relationship after going through all that.” Stretching, she finished with, “You’re truly special.”

Skye felt warmth spread through her. “May I ask how you knew him and his father?” She was curious as to what history there was between the three of them.

Scarlett’s face took on a sad smile. “His father and I, we used to play a game of ‘catch me if you can’. It was so funny how easy he seemed to make it. Of all the mammals that would come after me, Savage Sr. was the only one that could catch me without much difficulty. Jaxon, on the other paw, never knew who I was. His father asked me to look after him shortly before he passed away, but things came up that stalled my return for longer than I wanted.” Locking eyes with Skye, she stated, “I’ll readily admit to committing multiple heinous crimes, ranging from first degree murder to arms dealing and racketeering, but I always keep my promises.”
Nodding, Skye’s ear twerked in the direction of the door as she registered Jaxon re-enter the room. Looking over at him, she saw how tired he now appeared. “What is it, Jaxon?”

Jaxon shook his head then sighed, before gesturing for Skye to come closer. Whispering in Skye’s ear, he relayed his news, “SSA Mauler instructed us to go dark. There is a leak within the ZIB. They don’t know how many agents have been compromised, but as we only just reported in, our files haven’t been transferred yet. Therefore, as of approximately twenty minutes ago, you and I are on our own for the foreseeable future.” Shifting his gaze to Scarlett Reddington and speaking normally, he said, “How about you start explaining what you know about what is going on.”

Scarlett nodded and sat up straight. “You should take a seat. This will take a while.” Waiting for the pair to take a seat, she motioned for one of her wolf guards to bring her case over. Opening the briefcase, she pawed over a stack of files. “Those files are for a large number of compromised agents within the ZIB as well as other government agencies within Zootopia in general.” Closing the briefcase, she stated, “It’s not all of them, but those are the one for the more influential agents, including the Assistant Director for Counter-Terrorism.”

Skye’s jaw dropped as she looked through the files. She couldn’t believe what she was looking at. “All of these agents are conspiring with the Anti-Predator Movement?” Receiving a single nod from Scarlett, she gulped in fear. The number of agents compromised was roughly a third of the overall total, meaning the entirety of the prey agents.

Looking at the files intently, Jaxon grit his teeth. They were fighting overwhelming odds. “Okay, so, ZIB, ZSI, ZDD, and various other agencies have all been compromised with embedded sleepers. Is there any way of finding out how who we can trust?”

Scarlett grinned mischievously. “That’s why I’m here. Believe what you like, but most of the criminals that operate in and/or around the city consider themselves patriots. This wacko is threatening not only the lives of everyone in the city, but has managed to plaster a big ass target on himself that most other mammals like me are aiming for. I’ve been chosen as the representative for Zootopia’s criminal underworld to propose a temporary truce.”

Skye and Jaxon looked at Scarlett for a single heartbeat. “What do you and the others want in return?” they asked simultaneously. Neither one believed that the criminal elements of the city would do this entirely out of the goodness of their hearts.

Scarlett’s face took on a deathly serious expression. “We want the fucker dead. Not captured, dead. Six feet under, more if possible. After that, business as usual. I, personally, don’t have much time left. I’m dying. I’ve got access to the best doctors in their fields and they can’t do anything. This is my redemption and my last chance to keep my promises.”

Jaxon and Skye shared a look. “Okay, then. What do you require?”

**The Zootopian Skytree – City Center – Zootopia – 11:53 am**

Jameson, Fenrir, Josef, Carlos, and Andreas were all seated at a table in the restaurant of the Zootopian Sky Tree. Jameson had called an emergency meeting after Ian had forwarded his findings of corruption within various government agencies and Scarlett Reddington’s involvement. They were seated in a private, secluded section of the restaurant so that there would be no one could eavesdrop on their conversation, electronically or otherwise.

“The criminal underworld is mobilizing.” Andreas stated. “The Undercity and its inhabitants are gearing up. I find it mildly amusing that now we trust them when we can no longer trust our government.”
Fenrir snorted. “I’m not surprised in the least. All of us here, at one time or another, lived that life. We aren’t any better, we’re just far more proficient.”

“Be as it may, I now think that it is time to implement our plan.” Josef stated. “We’re lucky that it didn’t take Carlos or I as long as we expected to locate our successors. My successor will be in the city within the next 12 hours. Carlos’ will arrive tomorrow. We have no time to waste.”

Jameson shook his head. “As much as I agree, Nick and Judy are currently training at the ZPA. I have no intention of extracting them for this. The Chancellor, whomever he is, hasn’t actually acted yet. Until he does, we can do nothing. He’s obviously biding his time for something, but what is the real question.”

Andreas cleared his throat. “I may have a solution.” Seeing he had everyone’s attention, he began laying out his idea. “The ZPA has a specialized program that allows their cadets to undergo military training. Now, this will put Nick and Judy in the sights of Supreme Commander Deego, but it will also allow us to get them acquainted with our own recruits. The military's level of training makes that of the ZPA look like kid’s play. If we have them transferred into the program, we can accelerate our plans and have all of them prepared ahead of schedule. This will also allow Nick to graduate earlier.”

Everyone considered Andreas’ words. They could all agree that it was a high risk, high reward plan. But, did the reward outweigh the risk? After a brief moment of deliberation, they all collectively decided that yes, it did.

“Have them transferred.” Jameson stated. “I’ll handle the issue with Supreme Commander Deego myself. Maybe I can keep him occupied enough that he won’t notice them.” At that, everyone stood and made their way out of the establishment except Jameson and Fenrir.

“You’re really going to go through with this, Jameson?” Fenrir asked. “You know as well as I do that the Emperor and S.C. Deego are more than likely going to have you exfiltrated back to the Imperial Capital.”

Jameson nodded, but said nothing for a few minutes. When he did finally speak, he said, “A long time has passed since that incident, Fenrir. Other than the Emperor, S.C. Deego, the former Minister of Intelligence, and myself, you are the only one who knows the story. With as much time that has past, I wonder if the Emperor has come to realize what I once tried to tell him.”

“Maybe.” Fenrir whispered. “You need to tell Vanessa, Jameson. If you’re set on doing this then it’s time.”

Jameson nodded. “I’ll do that when I get home. I also need to tell Nick. If S.C. Deego grants me temporary reprieve then I’ll tell him, but if not…” Jameson locked eyes with Fenrir. “You are the one that will have to tell him. You, and you alone, are the only other mammal I trust to tell my son the truth.”

Fenrir stared at Jameson in shock. “Are…are you sure?” he asked, apprehensively. Receiving a nod, Fenrir stated, “As you wish. If, in the event that S.C. Deego has you extracted directly to the Capital, I will explain everything to your son.”

“Thank you, Fenrir.” Jameson stated with a grateful smile. Standing to his hindpaws, Jameson said, “Okay, time to face the music. I’ll see you whenever.” Leaving, he looked out the large window out into the city. Jameson couldn’t help but think how much he saw this place as his home instead of Zoookuulantiapolis. ‘I’ll do whatever it takes to keep this city safe. I’ll even face off with the Emperor if I must.’
Nick’s alarm went off waking him with a long groan. Hitting the dismiss option, Nick rolled over away from the wall to check his surroundings. The candle from last night was still burning and was now much shorter than originally. Looking at it, the memories of the previous night began to replay in Nick’s mind, causing him to smile. Getting up, Nick walked to his bathroom to go through his usual morning routine. Once he finished pissing, he turned on the shower and waited for the water to warm up. During the wait, Nick closed his eyes and relived the moment he and Judy finally shared a real kiss. He felt his sheath twitch and his cock begin to harden. Sighing, he opened his eyes to look down at himself. It really didn’t take much to get him this way when he thought of Judy. Testing the water in the shower, he was both happy and annoyed that the water was still cold. Taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly, he stepped into the path of the freezing water. Nick quickly pawed himself off so that he could get ready for the day, but the images and memories of last night made it difficult. Eventually, he hit his climax, shooting thick spurts of fox seed down the drain. After quickly, yet thoroughly, washing himself, Nick exited the shower. Drying himself with the furdryer, Nick wondered what Judy had planned for them today.

In her own room, Judy was freaking out. Her hormonal suppressants were becoming less and less effective. After returning to her room last night, she had suffered a strong heat spell even though she still had a couple of hours before having to take another pill. Judy had heard, that on rare occasions, the body could build up a resistance to the hormonal suppressants, but she hadn’t thought that she would so soon. Currently, Judy was trying to build up the courage to call Nick’s mom to see if she could do anything to help. The wall between her room and Nick’s wasn’t exactly thin, but she could hear him humming to himself as he wandered around his room. Knowing that she needed the help, she hit Rory’s contact info.

“Hello? Judy, are you there?” Dr. Vanessa ‘Rory’ Wilde asked over the line. “Judy, dear, are you okay?”

“I…I need your help.” Judy whispered. “My hormonal suppressants aren’t working.” She hoped that Rory would be able to help her.

“What?” Rory asked. “Your suppressants are no longer effective? Didn’t you just start them?” You could clearly hear the confusion in her voice.

“Yes, but last night…” Judy hesitated for a moment before continuing. “Last night, Nick and I had a date night. It was truly wonderful, but when I got back to my room, I started feeling hot despite the fact I had just taken a suppressant an hour prior to the date.”

Rory was silent for a brief moment. “I’ll run by the hospital and pick up a couple of injections then head your way. Don’t worry, dear, you’ll be fine. Just give me an hour or two so that I can run to the hospital. I’ll grab a few things then I’ll head that direction as soon as I’ve got everything. Also, while I’m at MTHZ, I’ll fax a prescription to the ZPA’s clinic, that way you’ll have access to the proper meds later.” The line then disconnected.

Judy laid there listening to Nick as he wandered around his room singing. She couldn’t make out what the lyrics were, but just from how gentle and soothing the tune was, Judy knew that it was a love song. Judy laughed softly as soon as she recognized what song it was [You Are So Beautiful]. She started singing along until it ended. Judy smiled as she lost herself in the sounds of Nick’s continued singing. Eventually getting out of bed, she walked into her bathroom to freshen herself up for the day. It was while she was putting on a change of clothes that there was a knock on the door to the hallway. Opening it, Judy found herself looking at Rory. “Come on in.” Judy told her.

Rory entered the room and looked around. To her, it almost looked like a collegiate dorm room,
which it was, but...well, more. Watching Judy sit on the bed, Rory walked over and deposited her bag next to the bunny before pulling out an injection. “Okay. This is Ahendophol.” Rory explained. “It’s a potent hormonal suppressant that typically lasts up to one month.”

Judy didn’t stop the vixen from giving her the injection. She was mildly surprised that it didn’t hurt. When Rory was finished, Judy asked, “Are there any major side effects I should be aware of?”

Rory shook her head. “Not really. The only thing you might notice is a major thirst for water.” Putting the syringe away, she sat down next to Judy upon the bed. “Do you mind going to the ZPA’s clinic at some point and have them send me a blood sample? I want to check something.”

“Not at all.” Judy answered. She held out the arm Rory had used to inject the hormone suppressant to put pressure on the cotton swab. Pressing down on it, Judy asked, “What are you going to be testing for, if I may ask?”

“The Izu Gene.” Rory replied. Looking at Judy, she explained, “I know Jameson told you a little about it, but you need to know a few more things. The Izu Gene is highly adaptable. That may be why your hormonal suppressants stopped working.”

“Just how adaptable is it?” Judy inquired. She knew from what Jameson had told her that mammals that possessed the Izu Gene often had much higher constitution, strength, dexterity, and longevity. But now, Judy wondered what other traits the Izu Gene improved.

“Extremely.” Rory stated, matter-of-factly. “From what Jameson’s told me, those with the Izu Gene gain adaptive metabolisms, regenerative durability, and a few other abilities. Basically, mammals with the Izu Gene possess a hypernatural physiology. They don’t have ‘superpowers’ or anything. It’s just that their natural abilities are far superior than normal.” She then added, “Of course, the mammal must possess awakened Izu Genes in order to have these traits.”

“You think that I have the Izu Gene and that they are starting to awaken?” Judy asked in amazement. If it was true, then what was the catalyst. Jameson had told her that in order for the Izu Gene to awaken, it needed a trigger. What catalyst had triggered her own Izu Genes to awaken if she did indeed possess the gene?

“I think that it is highly possible.” Rory explained. “I’m not 100% certain, of course, but I do believe that there is a high possibility that you possess the gene.” Giving Judy a label for the clinic’s staff member to use on the vial of Judy’s blood, Rory told her. “I’ll have your blood samples tested for it when I get them.” She stood, checked to make sure she wasn’t leaving anything behind, and grabbed her bag. “I’m going to head out. Remember to always have a bottle of water on paw.” Kissing Judy’s forehead, Rory got up and departed.

Judy put a paw to her forehead with a smile. Jumping off the bed, she walked to her refrigerator and took out a bottle of mineral water with a high electrolyte content. Taking a sip, she took out another bottle, just in case. Walking out of her room, she went next door and knocked. The moment Nick opened the door, Judy smiled. “Ready to start training, Red?”

Nick leaned against the door jamb and looked at Judy, taking in her attire. She was an all-black workout outfit consisting of a weighted compression crop top, compression flex leggings, weighted gloves, ankle and wrist weights, and a towel draped over her shoulder. If someone were to ask Nick to describe her in one word, it would be...”Ravishing.” Nick said aloud.

Judy smiled at Nick in response to his compliment. “Thanks, Slick. Now answer my question. Are you ready to start training?” Judy watched as he turned around and grabbed his duffel bag. “You going to change when we get to the gym?” she asked as Nick closed and locked the door to his
“Yep.” Nick answered. “Why? Is that going to be a problem?” he asked while following her out of the building. When they stepped outside, Nick pulled out his smartshades and put them on. He didn’t activate them, but with how bright it was outside, his eyes needed protection. As a naturally nocturnal mammal, his eyes weren’t really suited for daylight.

Judy shrugged with a teasing smile. “Maybe, maybe not. You’re going to find out soon though.” She led him to the ZPA’s multipurpose complex where the more extensive array of workout equipment was located. Once inside, Judy looked around to see who else was present and saw Rey. “Looks like you’re not the only fox here today, Red.” she told Nick, pointing to Rey.

Nick’s eyes followed the trajectory of Judy’s finger to see Rey lifting weights. “It sure looks that way.” Nick looked around for the changing area. Seeing the sign he was looking for, he walked towards the changing room. When he entered, Nick saw that the accommodations included a set of showers, bathroom stalls, lockers, sinks, and benches. Finding an available locker, Nick began changing into his workout outfit. It was just a tank top and jogging pants, nothing special, but it would do. Storing his duffel away, he grabbed a free towel and head back to the main area.

Once Nick had entered the changing area, Judy had wandered over to Rey as he did weight training. “Hey, Rey.” Judy greeted as she got closer. She watched as Rey dropped the weights and bent forward, paws on his knees, panting. “You okay?” she asked, concerned. Rey nodded, but didn’t answer. Judy was going to ask if he was sure, but then she heard Nick.

“Don’t you remember, Fluff? Foxes don’t normally sweat. Rey here has overheated himself.” Nick explained as he tossed a bottle of water he grabbed from one of the attendants of multipurpose complex to Rey, who accepted it gratefully. Nick looked at Judy and carried on his explanation. “If a fox overheats, it can lead to a ton of health issues. So, we normally try and remain within a specific temperature range. Excessive and strenuous workouts need to be done somewhere it’s cool.”

Judy tilted her head a bit as she considered Nick’s words. “But what about during…?” Judy stopped herself from finishing her question as it wasn’t something that they had talked about yet. But, of course, Nick knew exactly what her question was referring to.

Nick leaned in close to Judy’s ear and whispered, “It’s one of the main reasons canids have our mating season in winter, so that we don’t overheat.” Pulling away, he said, a little louder, “We’ll just lower the thermostat to the coldest setting.” As he started walking over to the mirrored wall, he called out, “I’ll be shadowboxing for a bit.”

Judy watched Nick walk away for a second before turning back to Rey, who was now breathing more normally. “Must be rough.” she voiced. Rey shrugged and started to resume his weight exercises again. Noting that Rey wasn’t as talkative as he was during their last meeting, Judy asked, “Is everything alright?”

Rey paused mid-motion for a moment then threw the weights to the ground. “No.” he ground out. “No, everything’s not alright.” Sitting on the ground. Rey put his face in his paws. “My girlfriend and I broke things off the morning. Or, more accurately, I did after I found her in bed with the other vixen that had enrolled with us. Learned that they had been using me as her beard the entire time.”

Judy’s ears drooped. “Th-that’s just not right. How could they do that to you? Stringing you along like that…” She shook her head vigorously. “She’d have to be a true vixen to do something like that.” Judy stated, angrily.

Rey started chuckling. “Yeah, she’d have to be.” Running a paw through his headfur, Rey said, “I
really should have seen the signs though.” Sighing, he then said, “Maybe I’m just destined to be alone.”

Stunned by Rey’s words, Judy stared at him. She hated the thought that such a nice mammal would end up alone for life. She placed a comforting paw on the tod’s shoulder and asked, “Have you considered the possibility that you’re looking in the wrong place?” Taking a risk, she added, “Or species?”

Rey looked at Judy and studying her for a moment. Turning to look off into the distance, he thought about it. He’d never considered the possibility of having a mate that wasn’t a vulpine. As a kit, his parents had instilled in him that it was fine to experiment outside the species, but when it came to selecting a mate, you *always* stayed within your own species. “Maybe…maybe you’re right.” Rey murmured as his eyes settled upon a female wolf, who was performing stretches.

Judy smiled as she clapped his shoulder. “That’s the spirit.” Getting up, she said, “I’m going to go exercise with my fox. See you around, Rey.” Walking over to Nick, who was in the middle of performing some kind of martial arts routine, Judy asked him, “Why do mammals do that?”

Nick stopped mid-routine and dispelled the mental image of his father he’d been shadowboxing. Focusing his attention on Judy, he asked, “Do what, Cottontail?” He watched as Judy got into position across from him and fell into his own ready stance. “I’m still a tad rusty, just so you know, but don’t think I’m going to hold back.”

“I wouldn’t want you to, Red. Perps won’t.” Judy replied. “As for my question, tell me why mammals are so cruel to each other.” She shot forward with a right cross, which Nick promptly blocked with his left paw then countered with one of his own causing Judy to jump back. “Rey’s girlfriend was just using him. She and that other vixen that was here were using him as a beard. He was emotionally invested, hoping to make it work, and he walked in on them fooling around in the same bed.” She jumped kicked at Nick’s head, which he ducked and the moment she landed he swept her legs out from under her. Kipping up the instant her back hits the ground, Judy jumped a reasonable distance away. “Why, Nick?”

“I don’t know, Love.” Nick told her. “I really, honestly don’t. The world’s just a cruel place. It’s paradoxical because the only way that it’s fair is that it’s equally unfair.” Lunging forward, open pawmed, Nick would have hit Judy square in the chest if she hadn’t crossed her arms in front of herself. Even so, the strike sent Judy sliding back a good couple of feet from the power behind it. “You just have to believe that, in the end, everything will balance out.”

Judy grunted in response. “I know this world is broken. That’s why I became a cop. To make the world a better place.” Rushing forward, Judy sent a barrage of punches, all of which Nick blocked before grabbing her wrists. The instant their eyes locked, Judy saw the sadness in Nick’s. Tearing up, Judy choked out, “N-Nick.” Breaking down into sobs, she felt Nick pull her into a strong embrace.

Nick held her as she cried into his chest. “I know, Love. I know.” He continued to hold her tight as she sobbed her little heart out. He knew from experience the world was full of sorrow, pain, and hate. “Echoes, Love.” Nick told her.

“W-what?” Judy choked out questioningly. Leaning back to look at him, she asked, “What did you say?” She didn’t understand what Nick meant. What was the importance of echoes?

“Echoes.” Nick repeated before explaining. “Every decision we make, no matter how big or how small, leaves some kind of lasting impression. Take the press conference from three months ago. The city will continue to experience the fallout from that in the future.” Feeling Judy shudder in his arms,
he said, “Don’t you dare blame yourself. You were manipulated. It isn’t your fault. If you hadn’t
done it, they would have gotten someone else. It was going to happen regardless.” He kept holding
her until she calmed down.

Finally managing to pull herself together, Judy pulled away and got back into a ready position.
“Come on, Slick. We’ve got to get you ready. I’ll need my partner by my side if I’m going to rectify
my mistake.” Once Nick fell into a ready position, Judy started bouncing from the pad of one
hindpaw to the other then back, “Ready? Go!”

**Zootopia General Hospital**

Dr. Vanessa ‘Rory’ Wilde hadn’t walked the halls of Zootopia General Hospital in years. She was
pleased to find not much had changed during that time, but she was a vixen on a mission. Jameson
had requested that she make a visit to examine Harrison Wolford, who had been gunned down by
Hannibal Hyector. Of course, after learning that he was the grandson of one of Jameson’s old
friends, Rory had wasted no time in contacting his current physician to discuss the wolf’s transfer to
Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia. Now, all she had to do was collect him.

Arriving at the recovery room, Rory walked inside to find the wolf and a tigress having a hushed
conversation. Clearing her throat to get their attention, she said, “Hello. I’m Dr. Rory Wilde.” She
watched as both of them nodded and waved in greeting. Looking at the copy of Harrison’s medical
file she had received upon her arrival, Rory said, “Shot five times in the chest. You’re either really
lucky or…no, you’ve just got to be really lucky.” Setting the file down, she walked over and climbed
up onto Harrison’s hospital bed. “Let’s take a looksie. Please reveal your chest to me.”

Harrison lifted his shirt. “You’re Nick’s mother.” It wasn’t a question. Harrison had all but
memorized Nick information when getting ready to escort them to Bunnyburrow. “I thought you
worked at MTHZ.”

Rory smiled. “I do. I’m the head of their Department of Diagnostic Medicine.” she explained as she
examined his chest wounds. “Your grandfather, Fenrir, is a friend of my husband and he requested
that I have you transferred into my care.” She carefully removed the bandage of one of the gunshot
wounds that appeared to be bleeding a bit. “This one has reopened. You haven’t done any strenuous
physical activity, have you?” she asked, with a stern expression.

Zannah watched as Harrison looked at her and smiled sheepishly. Rolling her eyes, she said, “Oh for
the love of…, we mated last night.” Seeing Dr. Wilde turn to her, Zannah continued. “It just…
happened. We hadn’t planned on it, but it happened.”

Smirking, Rory chuckled. “I see. Well, in that case…” Rory ripped off the bandage entirely, causing
Harrison to yelp in pain. “I need to clean it and redress it before an infection sets in.” she explained,
taking out antiseptic, a couple of sutures, and gauze. Quickly cleansing the wound, she performed a
‘Buried Suture’ then dressed it with the gauze. “There we go. All set.” Taking Harrison’s medical
file in paw once more, Rory asked, “Did they talk to you about your surgery?”

Zannah shook her head, answering, “No. He was extremely difficult to wake from the anesthesia.
We haven’t heard anything about it.” She shifted rather uncomfortably, worried that something was
wrong.

Rory nodded in understanding. After all, there were lots of mammals that had a hard time waking
from anesthetics. “Okay. First of all, none of the bullets were meant to kill you. After the first shot,
which incapacitated you, you were shot in areas that would make you bleed out at a calculated rate.
Secondly, the bullets fired into you are old. Like really, really old. They don’t even make them
anymore. While you were under and the surgeon was removing them, they discovered a few things
that had them worried. One was that you seem to have a dual-cardiopulmonary system.” Seeing the confusion on their faces, she pulled out the Nuclear Heart Scan in Harrison’s file and pawed it over to them.

Harrison had been in and out of hospital enough times to learn how to read these things. Taking a look at the image by holding it up to the light, he saw something that astounded him. The image showed he had not one, but TWO hearts. “Okay, that’s not normal.” Focusing his attention on Dr. Wilde, he asked, “Mind telling why the hell I got two hearts?”

Rory folded her arms in front of her chest. “You’ve got Izu Genes,” she explained. “My husband, Jameson, has them and he’s got two hearts as well. All mammals have the gene, but very few actually awaken them. The gene has three stages: Dormant, Passive, and Awakened. Dormant is the normal version that most mammals have. Think of Passive as a pre-awakened state. Awakened Izu Genes tend to be rare and grant those with them enhanced traits such as higher constitution, dexterity, and the like. Mammals born with Passive Izu Genes, like you, tend to awaken their genes after coming into contact with a catalyst. Your Passive Izu Genes is one of the reasons you’re the way you are.”

“What exactly does that entail?” Zannah inquired. “I mean, forgive me for being skeptical, but it really sounds farfetched. If he’s got these ‘Izu Genes’, then shouldn’t they be doing something? And what does the second heart have to do with it?” It all sounded something like something from a sci-fi cinematic film. It just was too out there to be true.

“Well,” Rory began. “Answer me this: ever wondered why you’re so much larger than the average male wolf? Or why you tend to recover more quickly than others? Or how you possess far superior attributes as compared to others of your own species?” She waited for them to consider her questions and Rory could see them start to connect the dots. “The Izu Genes are responsible for all of those things. He’s evolved beyond the norm because of his Izu Genes.”

Zannah and Harrison exchanged a look for a moment. While it still seemed too fantastical to believe, it made a ton of sense. Harrison passed the nuclear images to Zannah so she could take a good look at them. While she did that, Harrison thought back on all the times he’d been hospitalized previously. As a pup, he had never really fallen ill nor had he ever suffered any long-lasting injuries. He had also always recovered far faster than one of his kind normally would.

“As for the significance of his two hearts, I don’t know. Jameson, my husband, never told me the reason for it.” Rory stated. Not that she hadn’t asked. Jameson didn’t seem to know its purpose either except that it was essential for the survival of those with the gene. “Look, very little is actually known about the Izu Gene. Most of what I just told you, I learned from my husband.” Checking her watch, Rory saw that it was now almost 3:45. “I’ve got to go, but please consider letting me transfer you to MTHZ. I’ll be back tomorrow.” Leaving the room, Rory set forth for home.

**Home of Fatima Ara**

Fatima sat at her dinner table looking at the divorce papers that Li had given her earlier this morning. She couldn’t sign them. Despite everything, she still loved him. Hearing someone approach the table, she looked up to see Bahman taking a seat across from her having a bowl of Wheatley’s cereal. Fatima smiled sadly at the sight. All grown and he still enjoyed cereal. “So, your father served me divorce papers this morning.” Fatima told Bahman in effort to initiate conversation.

“Did he now?” Bahman replied. “I was wondering when he would get around to it. He’s been considering it for some time.” Continuing to eat his Wheatley’s, Bahman looked up and studied his mother. He could see the devastation in her eyes. “He told you, didn’t he?”
“That you no longer consider me your mother? Yes, he did.” Fatima answered. “May I ask why? What was it I did that resulted in this decision?”

Bahman stood and brought his bowl to the sink. “You really don’t know? Are you really that conceited?” Turning to glare at his mother, he said, “You think that everyone who doesn’t believe what you believe to be beneath you or that they are ignorant, incompetent, and misguided. You’re not perfect. You’re far from it. Trying to impose your will on the mammals of Zootopia? That make you no different from a dictator.” Walking past her to leave, he finished with, “You’re no better than Bellwether.”

As the front door was slammed shut, Fatima felt the tears fall from her eyes. Looking down at the divorce papers, she shakily raised her hoof, took a pen out of her breast pocket, and signed her name. Fatima’s world had crumbled around her, the price of her ambition. Putting the papers back in their envelope, she set it down on the dinner table then stood and grabbed a bottle of rum from the cabinet. Pouring herself a glass, she heard the front door open. Turning, she found herself staring at a mammal cloaked entirely in black whose face was hidden in the shadow of his cowl. “Who are you?” she questioned.

“The Chancellor.” the mammal stated as he pulled out a wakizashi. “I’m here to send a message to the mammals of Zootopia.” Lunging forward and impaling Fatima through her abdomen and twisting it, the Chancellor waited until she fell to her knees before severing her vocal cords so that she couldn’t scream. Gripping her muzzle tightly with his left paw, digging his claws in, the Chancellor made her look at him. “Tell them if they want to stop me they’ll have to kill me. Hannibal Hyector tried and failed. Send everything you’ve got at me, I’ll take it head on.” The Chancellor drew his right paw back, extending his claws, to drive it into her chest when the sound of glass shattering and the echo of back to back gunshots rang out. The first struck him in his lower back and the second blew out his right shoulder. Howling in excruciating pain, the Chancellor separated from Councilmare Ara and made a quick retreat.

Fatima slumped to the floor, bleeding out. She laid there, incapable of moving with a wakizashi in her gut, her vocal cords severed, and the bullet that blew out her attacker’s shoulder had been a through and through that entered her own body. As she just continued to lay there, Fatima saw someone approach and kneel before her. It was a fox with black fur and emerald green eyes that appeared to glow wearing full military battle armor. Across his back was a high-power sniper rifle. Fatima realized that this was the one who had shot her attacker. With her eyes, she pleaded for him to help her.

Jameson placed a comforting paw on Fatima’s head. “You’re going to be okay. Help’s on the way. Let’s see if I can’t perform some preliminary first aid before they get here.” It only took about eight minutes before the police and emergency medical mammals arrived. By that time Jameson had staunched the bleeding and departed. Taking up position on the rooftop of the building across the street, Jameson observed their movements. Using his earpiece, Jameson contacted his unit. “Target has been located and marked with a tracker. Andreas, read your boy in. Fenrir, until Josef and Carlos get back, it’s just you and me. You know what to do. Now, let’s get moving.” Closing the comm-channel, Jameson quickly withdrew from the area virtually undetected. As Jameson made his way home, he thought, “You had better hope I’m the one who catches you, kit. Because if my son gets to you first, you’re going to wish I did. If Nick gets to you, there is absolutely no way you’ll survive that encounter.”
So the song featured in this chapter is as follows:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGsQG7fOpU8

Also, the drug Ahendophol is, as far as I know, not a legitimate drug. Uncle took the term Ahendonism and attached 'phol' to make it seem legit.

From what I understand, it looks like we'll be free to head home on Saturday. My uncle told me that when we get home, he's taking Saturday and Sunday to finish fully recovering then diving back into it. I'm also pleased to announce that I will now be in charge of helping with the SWZ story. If any of you are also reading that, I hope I meet your expectation.

Cya later.
Chapter 13: The Chancellor's Broadcast

Chapter Summary

Things get interesting. Nick and Judy met a rather surprising mammal. The Chancellor broadcasts his first message. We get a bit of background on L & G. Oh, and a rather badly written explicit scene at the end!

Chapter Notes

*Fireworks going off* I, no, we've done it! Heyo everybody, I wanna thank Fairlane302 for making this possible. We're releasing two chapters today. This is the first.

I don't want to bore you before reading the chapter, so I'll make this short. The only thing that y'all need to know is that the family has only got 1 month, 1 week, and 5 days until we're graced with two new members!

Okay, on to the chapter.

Edited 1/26/18:
Hey, It's the editor here, I also want to note that there have been a few small changes made to Chapters 10 & 12 (AO3 Chapters 12 & 15)

In Chapter 10, (AO3 12) the scene at Andrew Bellwether's apartment was expanded somewhat, so as to explain what Doug has been up to prior to this scene (which is the first we see him)

In Chapter 12, (AO3 15) the name of the military base in Tundratown has been changed at my request. The old name was, frankly, silly; and I could no longer stand to look at it.
-Fairlane302

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Thirteen: The Broadcast

Shooting Gallery - Zootopian Police Academy - Evening

Nick set the firearm down as Judy pressed the button that brought the paper target closer. Once it was closer, Nick and Judy leaned over to inspect it. Nick had taken out the entire 5X portion in the center of the paper target. Judy took a pair of binoculars to examine the metal plate that had been positioned behind the target. She saw that every round was in an extremely tight grouping. Lowering the binoculars, she turned to Nick and said, “Good shooting, Red.”
“Thanks, Cottontail.” Nick replied as he looked at the paper target. “Glad to see that I still got it.” Folding the paper target, he set it down beside the pistol he had used. “Don’t know if I’m happy about that or not.” Nick disassembled the gun with expert efficiency and put the pieces back inside their container to turn back in. “Well, let’s go.”

Judy halted Nick and picked up the paper target. Pawing it to him, she said, “You need to sign it for the academy archives. They always keep very meticulous records.” Once Nick had signed it, they walked back to the front desk. Nick gave the box back to the faculty member, a female rhinoceros, while Judy turned in the paper target, saying, “Thanks, Steph.”

They exited the shooting gallery and made their way over to the Mess. The minute they stepped inside, Nick asked Judy, “What’re we doing next?” They had slept in until the afternoon, so to him it didn’t feel like they had really done much. The sun was just above the horizon and nightfall wasn’t far off. Despite their late start, Judy had managed to run him through a normal day at the academy from start to finish.

“Well,” Judy began. “There’s not really anything else. We finished doing everything that you’d normally do throughout a standard day here.” She sat down at the first open table and waited for him to join her. Judy watched as Nick wandered over to stand in line for food. She found herself wondering if Nick would share if she asked. When he made his way back to her, she saw that Nick had two plates of food.

Before sitting down, Nick placed the second plate of food before his bunny. For Judy, Nick had gotten a small salad, oven roasted beetles, and a bowl of mixed berries. For himself, he’d selected tuna tartare, a small bowl of blueberries, and scrambled eggs. Giving Judy a small grin, Nick said, “If you want some of my food, just let me know. Okay?”

“Then can we switch?” Judy asked. She smiled as Nick swapped their plates. Digging into the tuna tartare with gusto, Judy ignored Nick’s chuckles. It all tasted so good. She finished off the scrambled eggs and half the tartare before sending the rest Nick’s way, taking the salad and mixed berries in exchange. When she finished that, Judy let out a contented sigh. “So good.” she whispered.

Nick finished off the rest of the meal, picked up their plates and brought them to the window for dirty dishes. Returning to the table, Nick asked, “Since we’re done for the day, how about we head back to our rooms? You can give me a rundown of everything I’ll need to study.”

Judy nods, saying, “Sounds like a plan.” Sliding off her chair, Judy turns to head that way when she sees Major Friedkin walk in heading straight for her. “Something up, Major?” she inquired.

Nodding, Major Friedkin said, “I had your fox’s results fast-tracked. Take a seat and we can go over them.” Sitting across from Hopps and Cadet Wilde, Major said, “Normally, I would do this in my office, but…” She shrugged then opened the envelope containing Nick’s results. “Cadet Wilde, your scores show that you qualify for additional advanced training courses. Even without the results of the other applicants, I can tell that you’re in the top percentile.”

Judy had to restrain her excitement at the news. She boxed Nick’s shoulder, which made him look at her. Outwardly, Nick wasn’t expressing anything, but Judy could tell that he was excited by the look in his eyes. She gave him a brilliant smile, saying, “I knew you’d do it.”

Nick kept a straight face, but felt the corners of his mouth quirk up minutely. He focused his attention on Major Friedkin as she began to give him a comprehensive explanation of his results, her tone clearly impressed. Once she finished, she passed him the results sheet for him to look at. Nick looked at the results, fighting a smile. “Thank you, Major Friedkin.” Nick told the polar bear.
“You’re welcome.” Major stated. “Now, for the other reason that I’m here. Bogo wants to see you ASAP. He’s in the lecture hall. Get going.”

Judy and Nick raced out of the Mess at breakneck speed. Nick trailed just behind Judy as the lecture hall was one of the few places on the Academy’s grounds that they hadn’t been to yet. When they arrived at the door, the two of them suddenly felt nervous. Taking ahold of each other’s paw for support, they walked inside. What they found upon entering the room wasn’t what they expected to find. Without either of them knowing it, Nick and Judy shared the same thought, “Fuck!”

**Center for Contagious Pathogen Management – Zootopia - Evening**

Doug Ramses and Andrew Bellwether walked into the CCPM without any difficulty. Andrew scanned in his badge granting access to the upper floors. Doug scanned in his granting access to those underground. Making their way to their respective offices, they waved to their colleagues to maintain the illusion of normalcy. Once inside their offices, they opened a secured video call with one another.

“Andrew, I honestly think we should consider what we’re going to do if we’re caught.” Doug stated. Pulling on his lab coat, he started preparing the chemicals the company had given him for the project they had assigned him.

Andrew hummed in thought. “Liam is currently investigating the other members of the Twelve.” he explained. “If we start preparing an escape plan now, we would become targets. Just remain calm. Like I told you, you did your job. You aren’t in any danger.”

Doug sighed, exasperatedly. “I know, I know. I’m just concerned. What if the ZPD manage to piece whatever fragments of information they have just right, though?” It honestly wouldn’t take a genius to put the clues together. Doug hadn’t even attempted to use a false name during his assigned mission.

“You worry too much.” Andrew stated as he got his own chemicals ready. While he was higher on the corporate ladder and didn’t actually have to perform any experiments, Andrew was finishing the work started by William Goatier at Manesley Pharmaceuticals. William’s work for the cause had been to create a bioweapon with no known antidote. The Chancellor had ordered the project transferred to Andrew as he felt William a liability and had him killed. Andrew hadn’t questioned it until he read over William’s notes. Now, however, Andrew knew exactly how dangerous the weapon was. When released, the biological material would spread over the entire city similar to nuclear fallout. Predators were the intended target, but prey would also be affected by it. Andrew had spent the last three months trying to find a way to limit the effects to predators without avail, but he had managed to formulate a proto-cure. William had only recently been killed, but thanks to Andrew’s position, he had been able to access his digital records prior to the old Billy goat’s demise.

“No? Or am I properly paranoid?” Doug asked. His current project wasn’t something specifically for the Anti-Predator Movement, but it did have several applications that could be of use later. Mixing the chemicals together before he tentatively began to speak. “I also choose to see it as planning for the worst-case scenario.”

Andrew stopped working as Doug’s last few words registered. After everything that had happened, why wasn’t he himself being properly paranoid? Andrew started to wonder if it was due to prolonged exposure to the Chancellor’s madness. Taking a moment to reexamine everything that had happened over the last few months, Andrew suddenly let loose a shaky breath. “Oh, curds and whey!” he whispered, mildly panicked. “What the hell have we done?”

Doug, having heard Andrew’s words, looked at his monitor in concern. “Just now realizing it all,
“huh?” he asked. Doug had had his own moment of realization after managing to evade capture in the aftermath of the museum. “What are we going to do, Andrew? It isn’t like we can just vanish without a trace. We have no way out.”

Andrew ran his hooves over his face. “We’ll think of something. Right now, focus on what we can do. I may be able to talk to Parker, but Liam’s going to be much harder to deal with.” A variety of mental simulations ran through Andrew’s mind. Not even one of them seemed to end well. “I’ll run by Parker’s after work and see how we can do this.” Little did either of them know that it would be a lot harder than they hoped.

@ the apartment of Parker Platyss - Predawn

Parker rolled over feeling sore. Letting out a groan, he attempted to get out of bed only to find himself tangled in his sheets and hit the floor with a resounding thud. He let out a louder groan then heard the sound of someone approaching. Cracking open an eye, Parker found Liam looking at him with a smug smile and a cocked eyebrow. “Stop it before I somehow manage to drag you down here with me and have an encore of last night’s performance.”

Liam laughed merrily. “It truly was a wonderful experience if I do say so myself.” Laying on the floor next to Parker, Liam gave the platypus a deep kiss, drawing an aroused moan for him. Pulling away just a bit, Liam said, “I’d love an encore, if you’re up for it.”

Parker hauled him in for another passionate kiss, silencing his partner. He still couldn’t believe that this arctic hare was his. Parker had never thought of himself as an inter, but ever since that first night he had realized that the arctic hare was the only mammal outside his own species that he wanted to fuck. Parker knew that whatever this was wasn’t destined to last long, but he’d enjoy it for as long as he could.

Liam managed to help the platypus untangle himself from the bedsheets and was then thrown onto the bed laughing. Parker’s appearance over him had Liam smile pleasantly before tugging him close enough to start kissing him deeply once more. Liam could feel Parker’s erect prick poking at his tailhole. Moaning, he wrapped his legs around Parker’s hips and proceeded to line it up just right to force it inside himself.

Parker felt his tip of his dick hit Liam’s tight pucker and without waiting thrust himself deep inside, all the way to the hilt. He felt Liam’s own cock twitch in pleasure from the action. Thinking about it, Parker was moderately surprised that this was their dynamic. One would almost expect Liam, who was always so cold and collected, to be the one in Parker’s current position, but it wasn’t so. Pounding into Liam, Parker could feel him squeezing around his cock tightly.

Liam’s eyes rolled into the back of his head as Parker just slammed himself into his ass without mercy. In what was left of his logistical mind, Liam could recall their first night together. It hadn’t been planned, but it had been fun. Liam and Parker had run into each other randomly in a bar in Sahara Square. They had started by taking about their careers and home lives while they drank. By maybe their sixth drinks, both were inebriated to the point of lunacy. In response to a challenge by Parker, Liam had kissed him and it had ignited something between them.

Over the next couple of weeks, the two had met up multiple times to explore what had formed between them. They had fucked while high, drunk, and even called in prostitutes to enhance the experience. They had roleplayed various scenarios, tortured one another sexually to the point that they almost broke each other’s minds. The things they did were things that neither of them ever thought they would do with someone else.

Liam gasped as he felt Parker fill him and slowly leak out. Panting, Liam’s mind slowly roused itself
from its hazy state. He felt something within himself wake. He had felt it before, but it was now that his brain finally registered what it was: Love. The epiphany had him use his hindpaws to send Parker hurtling through the air into the far wall. Hearing the loud slam and subsequent groan, Liam muttered, “No, no, no, no, no!” Tugging at his ears, Liam cursed himself.

Parker stood to his hindpaws a little disoriented from the impact of being slammed into the wall. “Dude, what the fuckin’…” Parker stopped midway through his question at the sight he beheld before him. To see Liam in the state he was in wasn’t something Parker ever thought he would witness. “Liam, what’s wrong?”

Liam looked at Parker with eyes filled with fear. It wasn’t an emotion that he was used to feeling, which only made it worse. “I-it’s complicated.” Liam mumbled. Swallowing, he said, “Lapines can get pretty attached. At some point during our…experiments, I started getting attached to you.”

Parker frowned for a moment as he processed Liam’s words. As realization dawned on him, Parker asked in a whisper, “Are you saying you’ve fallen in love with me?” Seeing Liam nod, Parker blinked. After staring for a few seconds, Parker walked into the living room and started pacing. He heard Liam come to watch him. “How? When? Weren’t we just…”

“I don’t know the answers to those questions.” Liam replied honestly. “I truly don’t, but it’s far too late to change things. I’ve fallen in love with you, whether you like it or not.”

“THAT’S NOT THE PROBLEM, LIAM!!” Parker shouted. Taking a deep breath to calm himself, Parker said, “I…I love what we have, but what will happen to me if you meet someone else? What will happen to you if I find someone else?”

Liam put himself in front of Parker to stop him from pacing. “If you find someone else, then I hope they’re open-minded enough to accept that you and I are a package deal. As for me meeting someone, I’m not exactly what you would call a sociable mammal. The odds of me finding someone new are far less likely than either of us winning the lottery.” Placing his paws on Parker’s shoulders, Liam stated, “I won’t leave you, no matter what.”

Parker deflated as the tension left him. “I feel like I should be proposing,” he confessed. “We’ve been together for who knows how long and we practically know everything about one another, so why shouldn’t I?”

“Because it isn’t the right time.” Liam answered. Stepping away, he said, “After I clean house, we can talk about it. Until then, we’ll keep this to ourselves.”

Watching as Liam got ready to finish his self-assigned task, Parker wondered if they would really talk about it later. “So, I’m guessing you’ve found out who among the other of the Twelve are more likely to turn on us?” he asked. He stood to straighten Liam’s jacket and dust of his shoulders.

“I have, but…” Liam hesitated for the span of a heartbeat. “Can I be totally honest with you? I know it’s a stupid question, but humor me.” Receiving a nod from Parker, Liam said, “I’m not sure if I can continue to follow the Chancellor much further.”

Parker paused in his actions for a split second before resuming. “I’ve been thinking the same thing myself, but I’m not sure what to do.” Finished with what he was doing, Parker said, “What are you thinking we should do?”

Liam pulled Parker in for another kiss. Parting, he whispered, “I don’t know, but we’ll think of something.” Walking to the door, Liam stopped before exiting the apartment and turned to look at Parker. “Get some rest because when I get back, we’re going to fuck like crazy.” Shutting the door,
he listened until he heard a loud ‘FFFUUUCCCKKK!!!’ come from inside. Chuckling, Liam left the vicinity.

A Housing Unit of the Wolford Pack - Wolford Pack Compound - Predawn

Gary Timberstein and Lawrence Howling sat down on the floor in the main hallway of Alpha Regulus Wolford’s Pack House. After all the shit that had befallen them, they had hoped beyond hope that it was over. As luck would have it, it turned out that it was only getting worse. As they sat there, each wondered what they should expect in the future, but they both knew that no matter what they wouldn’t leave one another.

The two of them had been inseparable growing up, treating one another like blood brothers. Larry and Gary had always watched each other’s backs. It had been strange in the beginning when Gary first confessed to Larry his love for him. Larry had been a bit taken aback, stating that they were brothers until Gary reminded him that they weren’t related by blood and that he was adopted. Their relationship had slowly, but surely, begun to change from that point onward.

It had started out rather innocent at first. Gary sneaking peeks at Larry in the shared showers or Larry pretending to be asleep in the bed next to Gary as Gary masturbated using some of Larry’s underwear. As time went on, they both got a little more confident in how they approached the other. Slapping each other on the ass or stealthily fondling the other’s sheath and balls, but never going any further without getting some sign that it was okay to go further.

Their first time had been carefully planned. It hadn’t gone off without a hitch, but they had managed to keep it a secret. Neither of them had been ‘of age’ at the time, both younger than 18. Larry had been 17 and Gary himself a few days away from his 16th birthday. Gary’s parents, who were Larry’s foster parents, had explained that they were going to travel out of Zootopia to visit some distant relatives for a while, leaving them alone in the house until their return. Larry, as the eldest, had been put in charge. The Timbersteins had departed that Thursday evening as planned and Larry and Gary had immediately put their plan into action.

Gary had snuck out one night and managed to purchase a collection of porn videos from an old weasel who called himself the ‘Duke of Bootleg’. Larry had taken care of setting up their parents’ bedroom just like they’d planned. They had stripped nude and sat down to watch the first film titled, ‘Wolf Pile’. It really hadn’t taken long for them to feel aroused as they watched the movie. Every so often, they would peek at one another’s sheath then look away as they saw the erection grow.

The two of them watched movie after movie getting hotter and hornier with each one. Larry had ended up raiding their dad’s booze stash and they had bought a couple of joints from a packmate at school earlier in the week to help take the edge off for that night. Soon, they felt looser and freer. It hadn’t taken long before they shared their first kiss and for that to lead to sharing their first time with each other.

Despite the weed and the alcohol, when they came to the next morning, they could remember the events of the previous night in vivid detail. Gary had woken up first, looking at Larry to find him still asleep with a contented smile on his muzzle, making Gary smile too. That was until Gary realized that he was still knotted to his lover/mate. Not willing to try and pull it out, possibly hurting Larry, Gary just laid back down and waited for Larry to wake up.

Larry’s awakening had been rather endearing. He had gone to yawn and smack his lips only to still taste Gary’s cum in his mouth. Feeling the pressure in his ass, he had wriggled it causing Gary to grunt as he let out another load. The feeling of being filled had Larry moan in bliss. When Gary’s knot had finally gone down enough to remove it. Larry launched a surprise attack and kissed him saying it was his turn now. An hour later their positions were reversed with Larry’s knot locked
inside Gary’s ass and Gary enjoying the lingering taste of Larry’s cum in his throat.

Over the next couple of days prior to their parents’ return, Larry and Gary experienced their first mating frenzy. They fucked everywhere in the house, whether it was in the kitchen, on the dining room table, in the shower, or their parents’ bed again. They had even fucked each other outside on the upstairs balcony. When their parents had come back from their trip, Larry and Gary became more careful with their activities. It had been when prime mating season hit that things became much more difficult.

The season had an effect on them that they never anticipated. They had difficulties keeping their paws off each other. Their overwhelming desire for one another nearly resulted in them getting caught having sex in public on multiple occasions. Well, they actually had gotten caught, but just the one time. It was by a young Doberman, who, much to their relief, hadn’t called the cops. Instead, he had paid them to let him watch. That had sparked a whole new kink for them and they started making amateur, at-home porn videos.

After Larry’s graduation from high school, their parents had him apply for dorm housing at the university he was going to attend. He hadn’t wanted to leave home, but hadn’t been given any alternatives. Gary didn’t take the news well at all. Their parents had teased them saying it was as if they were mates, not realizing just how on the nose they actually were. Larry promised to visit as often as he could and Gary promised the same and that he would do his best to get a scholarship to the same university as Larry. Gary had driven Larry to the ZTA monorail station to bid a final farewell. They had kissed in full view of the public, but they didn’t care as there was hardly a chance in hell that someone they knew was there.

A year later, Gary had gotten his acceptance letter to the same university as Larry and called him up, excitedly telling him the news. Larry had cheered and jumped up and down on the couch in his dorm room, surprising his two roommates. A week later, Larry had rushed to meet Gary at the ZTA monorail station, both excited and frightened. Gary was going to be there soon, but Larry had a confession he had to make. Running right to each other out of baser instincts, they kissed passionately and almost made out right in front of everyone there. Larry then led Gary to an on-campus deli not too far from the station to make his confession. Larry explained how he had engaged in a one-time affair, to which Gary felt slightly betrayed. Gary had almost walked away until he saw the utter pain in Larry’s eyes. When Gary had asked Larry if he had knotted the other wolf or taken the other wolf’s knot, Larry’s reaction put Gary at ease as Larry had slammed the table so hard its glass top shattered, growling out that the only mammal he’d ever done either of those things with was him.

Their lives as collegiate academics were filled with fun, laughter, lots of studying, and tons of making up for lost time and intimacy. They had kept their relation under wraps, but eventually it somehow came out. Many of their friends found it slightly strange but didn’t see any problem with it as they weren’t blood relatives. Others were disgusted and broke ties with them saying how they would burn in the deepest pit of the Underworld for their sins. Of course, the news eventually made its way to the ears of their parents. Their first reaction had been shock, then denial, then they finally settled on acceptance. That had been the end of it for a long while.

After some time had passed, Larry and Gary both enrolled in the university’s military programs. They quickly climbed through the ranks and found themselves in charge of their own squads. They were approached by a scout for a paramilitary firm during their final year. Gary had topped out of a few classes and as a result the institution viewed him as the same year as Larry, meaning they would be graduating together. Following their graduation, Larry and Gary purchased a small single bedroom house of their own and began working for the paramilitary firm. Three years into their contracts with only two more to go, they were hired by the then Mayor Leodore Lionheart. Soon
after, however, is when everything spiraled down the shitter.

All that led to their current predicament. The alpha of Larry’s original pack was trying to extradite him back to their pack to face multiple charges. The alpha of Gary’s pack, also Larry’s current one, refused on the grounds that Larry and Gary were a mated pair. Tensions had been on the verge of breaking when Alpha Regulus stepped in and took total custody of them. Neither Alpha Remus nor Alpha Markus were crazy enough to defy Alpha Regulus. Alpha Regulus adopted them into his pack without delay, granting them far more protection than they ever had. With their parents gone, having been killed in a botched home invasion, Larry and Gary were thankful to have a sense of family again beyond each other. The only issue had been living arrangements.

“We’ve got roughly half an hour left.” Gary stated, breaking the silence, looking at the timepiece their father had given him for his thirteenth birthday. “Don’t you think we should start making our way to Alpha Regulus’ residence? I mean, it is clear across the compound. Not to mention it would look proper for us to arrive slightly early.”

Larry scratched his head. “Yeah, let’s do that. I’ll go grab our luggage.” Standing to his feet, he helped Gary up then gave him a deep kiss ending with a lick to Gary’s nose and both cheeks. “You go on ahead. I’ll meet you there.” Watching Gary nod and walk off, Larry pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket. It was an adoption form. He and Gary had talked about it previously, but Larry had struggled with the idea until recently. He had picked up the form yesterday to see what would be required, but hadn’t filled any of it out as he felt Gary should be there doing that together with him, not that they would be ready for it anytime soon. Sighing, Larry put the form in his pocket and ran back to the room they were currently staying in to grab their luggage. As he exited, he found Marigold Wolford, Alpha Regulus’ eldest daughter, waiting for him out in the hall. Bowing, Larry said, “Lady Marigold.”

“How many times have I told you to just call me ‘Mary’?” Marigold Wolford asked, hotly. “You know what? Never mind. I was just coming to see you and your mate off, but looks like I missed him.”

Larry gave her a fond smile. “Aye, you did. Not more than five minutes ago, too.” When they were pups, he had often played with Marigold, and due to the type of personality the she-wolf had, he’d always seen her as something of a little sister, despite being six months her junior. “It’s the thought that counts though, so thank you.”

Marigold smiled kindly at Larry. “It’s not going to be as much fun without you two around here.” she said. “Promise me you won’t drive Spencer noots. Do you understand?”

Larry laughed at Marigold’s use of the word ‘noots’. The word ‘nuts’ was something she honestly couldn’t pronounce correctly for the life of her no matter how hard she tried. “I’ll do my best, but you know Gary and me.”

Marigold rolled her eyes then gave him a stern look. “I mean it, Larry. Spencer’s got a lot on his plate right now. Running for mayor, his job as an ADA isn’t being put on hold for it, and then there’s everything that’s going on in the city as well. You two need to behave yourselves and find a way to help him.”

Larry nodded. “I promise, Gary and I will do whatever we can to assist him.” Turning away, he stopped and looked back at her. “You’re not in love with Spencer, are you?”

Marigold snorted. “Not exactly. Spencer’s…how do I put this? His father was one of my father’s best friends who married one of my aunts. My aunt was sterile and therefore she couldn’t have children of her own. So, when Spencer was born, my father gave him to his sister and her mate. My
aunt then died and Mr. Wolvenett raised him all on his own. So, Spencer’s my brother/step-cousin.”

Larry cocked a brow. “Well, then that explains…nothing. But, that doesn’t matter.” With one more bow, Larry said, “I’ll be seeing you around Mary. Take care of yourself.” Larry then bolted out the pack house towards the main house. The entire way, he wondered how Spencer would react upon learning of he and Gary’s relationship.

**Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia - Around Noon**

Harrison was sprinting on a treadmill in the Physical Therapy room of MTHZ. He’d gotten himself transferred only a pawful of hours ago. It hadn’t taken long for him to accept Dr. Wilde’s offer. After thinking about it, Harrison chose to since she was caring for the officers that had been wounded during the extraction of Dawn Bellwether. Zannah had agreed that was a good point and cosigned the documents needed to get him transferred. It hadn’t even been half of an hour before Harrison ended up in the Physical Therapy room.

Reaching the end of the treadmill’s program, Harrison got off and grabbed the bottle of water he had brought with him. Guzzling it down, he wiped his maw. Hearing the sound of pawsteps approaching him from behind, Harrison looked over his shoulder to see Officer Cheetara. “Well look at you. How’re you feeling, Lillian?”

Lillian Cheetara huffed in annoyance. “I wish I could get out of here.” Looking down at her right leg, she let out a growl of frustration. The GSW had been worse than the doctors and surgeons had thought. The impact hadn’t just shattered her femur, but it had inflicted a ton of muscular and nerve damage. She was still expected to make a full recovery, but she was limited to how much she could do for the time being. “I hate this. I really, really hate this. Delgato managed to get approved for desk duty. Me? ‘Not until your leg is fully healed’ the medical officer said.”

Harrison shook his head hearing her complaints. Lillian was known for being one of the more outspoken officers on the force. She was one of the officers that had openly been against Judy being assigned to Precinct One let alone being allowed to be an officer. It had been during a temp stint at the Academy, when she’d been assisting Major Friedkin teach the combat course, that Lillian saw a video Major recorded of Judy KO’ing a rhino that she changed her tune. “You’ll get there. Remember, Patience is the key to any battle.”

“How in the hell are you already recovered?” Lillian all but shouted, drawing the attention of everyone in the vicinity. Seeing this, she said, “Sorry.” Turning back to Harrison, she asked, “How are you already recovered?”

Harrison saw no reason to tell her about the fact he possessed the Izu Gene, so he shrugged, saying, “I’ve always recovered at an abnormal rate. It really isn’t anything new. Most of those at the precinct know it already. It once took me only an hour to recover from a bullet to my shoulder.” He stepped up on the treadclimber next to her and started it up to match her pace. “You’ve been at the precinct for a while. Surely you’ve heard about my inmammal recovery rate.”

“I always thought it was an exaggeration.” Lillian stated, dumbfounded that the wolf next to her had
not only recovered from being shot five times in the chest, but simply survived. “You’re a godsdamn monster, Harrison.” she muttered. She maintained a steady gait for a couple of minutes before she pulled out her earbuds and hooked them up to her phone. “You want to see something cool?” she asked.

Harrison glanced at her. Seeing her select a track on her phone [I’m So Excited], he watched as she started dancing on the still functioning treadmill. He wouldn’t have thought it possible until at that very moment. Chuckling, Harrison deftly swiped one of her Bluefang earbuds and put it in his own ear. Getting the rhythm, he started dancing on his own treadmill.

Neither were aware that both Dr. Wilde and Zannah walked in and began videoing their antics on their phones. Zannah had to fight hard to suppress a laugh. Dr. Wilde smirked and silently circled the two, videoing the whole time. When Harrison and Lillian were finished, they blanched then blushed as Dr. Wilde and Zannah clapped and whistled.

“Nice moves, Harry.” Zannah teased. “Didn’t know you knew any dance moves besides those for our horizontal dance.” Yeah, she knew that she just revealed to Lillian that she and Harry were together, but she didn’t care. Lillian may be the most outspoken mammal at the precinct, but she wasn’t the most sociable. Zannah saw Lillian’s eyes shoot wide open at her words. “Yeah, that’s right. Harrison’s mine.”

Lillian pinned her ears back. She hadn’t been aware of Zannah and Harrison’s relationship. Lillian wouldn’t admit it, but she had often tried to gather the courage to approach Harrison to ask him out on a date. “Sorry.” she mumbled. ‘ Swell. There go my chances of experiencing knotting.’ Lillian thought to herself. She wasn’t an inter, but her sister was and was mated to a canid. Lillian often had to listen to her sister go on and on and on about how utterly mind-blowing it was to get knotted to her freaking golden jackal mate. It had gotten to the point that Lillian found herself wondering what if it really was that amazing. Although most canid species would mate for life, Lillian had actually met a couple that took on multiple partners and knotted them.

Dr. Wilde decided that it was time to get down to business. “Harrison. Zannah. I’m sure you wish to check on your brothers and sisters in blue. If you’d follow me. Lillian, please continue your physical therapy. I’ll have Dr. Wolfstein come and check on you in a few. Okay?” Getting a nod, she led Harrison and Zannah first to the room Harrison would be staying in for the rest of the week so that he knew where it was located. Then, she led them to the common area where Officers Grizzoli, McHorn, Snarlov, and Pennington were watching an episode of Criminal Psyche. “You’ve got a visitor and a new addition.” Dr. Wilde announced.

Everyone turned to see Dr. Wilde escorting Zannah dressed in casual clothing and Harrison wearing hospital scrubs. “Why does Harrison get scrubs and we get stuck wearing these fricking gowns?” Grizzoli asked, playfully. Personally, Grizzoli didn’t mind the gowns as he lived a naturalist style at home. Francine Pennington smacked him upside the back of his head causing everyone to laugh before waving. Snarlov shook her head with an eye-roll muttering ‘ I swear, they’re kits ’ and returning her attention to the tele. McHorn gave them a nod then went back to watching television as well.

Harrison sat down next to Henry Grizzoli, the arctic wolf. Zannah took a seat on Henry’s other side, which was the last available seat. They all watched the television until the Criminal Psyche marathon was interrupted. On the screen was the silhouette of an unknown mammal. Everyone leaned forward with serious expressions.

“Citizens of Zootopia.” the silhouette stated. “The Zootopian Police Department has been keeping a secret from you. Not too long ago, Fatima Ara was assaulted and killed in her home by a savage
Everyone stared at the television in shock. Dr. Wilde snorted drawing their attention away. Seeing the vixen shake her head, Harrison asked, “What? Do you know something?”

Dr. Wilde shook her head. “I can’t tell you.” Noting their expressions, she rolled her eyes. “I can’t tell you.” she repeated, emphasizing the word ‘can’t’. This time the hidden meaning seemed to register. The officers turned their attentions back to the screen.

“This assault was my doing.” the silhouette informed. “You may call me the Chancellor. Many of you are asking why I attacked Fatima Ara. Well, simply put, it was to send a message to you all, civilian and law enforcement alike. I want predators out of my city.” the tone of the silhouette was icy, grave. “I will give you adequate time to force them out before I do it for you. I have more than enough Night Howler at my disposal to remind prey exactly why predators are nothing more than savage beasts masquerading as civil mammals.”

The screen changed to black, showing a date and time in white. “This is your deadline. If by that time the countdown reaches zero predators still remain within the city of Zootopia, I will consider it an act of war and respond accordingly. To those of you who are prey, I wish you to remember this: predators, in the olden days, massacred hundreds of thousands of innocents. They used their claws, their fangs, whatever they had to tear apart whoever they chose as their next meal. They cared not for your lives nor the lives of those close to you. A city full of predators, exposed to the extracted essence of Night Howler? It’ll be a bloodbath unlike any you have ever seen.”

The screen returned to its previous state, with the only difference being that one corner had the date and time at which all predators were to leave Zootopia. The silhouette said, “I won’t hesitate to expose every single predator to Night Howler to ensure that my city will be predator-free. Voice changing to a clearly threatening tone, the Chancellor ordered, “Rid my city of predators, or suffer the consequences.” The screen then switched back to the previously scheduled programming.

By the time the broadcast was over, they all knew that the city was going to experience riots. Harrison and Zannah exchanged a look of concern. The ZPD wasn’t back to full strength. Even if it was, there wasn’t enough officers to take on the entire city. The sounds of heavy hoofsteps alerted them to the arrival of Chief Bogo.

Chief Bogo entered the common area to find not only the officers involved in the firefight of Bellwether’s escape, but Harrison and Zannah as well. “I’m going to assume you all are aware of the situation.” It wasn’t a question, but he still got nods of confirmation. “Good. I’m here for two reasons. First, we’ve got the support of Supreme Commander Deego, the Leader of the Empire’s Imperial Guard. He’s currently coordinating with the commander at Firebase White. They’ll be assisting us once everything has been approved. Second, Fatima Ara is not dead. She’s alive and undergoing surgery. Her estranged husband, Ma Li, has asked that I provide some protection. Officers Snarlov, Grizzoli, Pennington, I’m assigning you three to protective detail. Fatima Ara and Ma Li are on the sixth floor. Get moving.”

Once the three officers had left, Dr. Wilde looked at Chief Bogo. “Officer Cheetara will be able to return to light duty in a week. Officer McHorn can return to full duty tomorrow after getting a physical exam.” She then looked at Harrison, stating, “Officer Wolford needs an extensive examination before I can sign off on his release, but otherwise he’ll be fit for full duty as well.”

Nodding, Bogo said, “Good. Officer Fangmeyer, I need you to follow me please.” Exiting the room with Zannah in tow, he didn’t stop until they were at the window at the end of the hallway. “Officer Fangmeyer, I’ve reviewed your statement concerning the events of Officer Wolford’s assault. You did good work. I also forgot to mention that Hannibal Hyector’s mangled carcass was found just
outside the city limits yesterday. I felt that he should hear it from you.”

Shock, rage, and relief battled within Zannah’s mind. She hadn’t expected Hannibal’s death, but was enraged that she wasn’t able to kill him herself. The relief she felt though was from knowing that he was no longer a danger to anyone. “Thank you, sir. I’ll let Harrison know. Is there anything else?”

“There is actually.” Bogo stated, pulling out a cassette player. “This is a duplicate of the recordings from the cellphones discovered at the scene. Both you and Harrison need to listen to it. Please bear in mind that everything on this cassette is the final words of a dying mammal.” Giving her the tape player, he walked away.

Zannah stared at the Chief’s retreating form then down at the cassette player. She tried to understand the reason behind his words. Pressing the play button, she listened to the recording. Her eyes widened as the tape played. Zannah found herself wanting to vomit as she listened to one of the most respected members of the ZPD confirm his involvement with Predopurge, the Anti-Predator Movement. At the mention of Hannibal’s children, she froze. Hannibal’s request that Harrison care for them felt like a blow to the stomach, but at the same time, Zannah knew that she couldn’t judge them based on their father. Ultimately, she knew that Harrison would do everything he could to care for them. That was who he was and she loved him for it. Rewinding the tape, she made her way back to Harrison. ‘Looks like you’re going to end up a father earlier than we expected Harry.’

**Home of Ian and the late Walter Wilde**

Ian was staring at his multiple computer screens. Approximately an hour ago, he’d gotten a notification that someone outside the system was attempting to gain access to the files for both Judy and Nick. The extra security he had put in place was doing its job and giving the other hacker hell. Ian sat back and gauged their progress. A chirp from his phone pulled his eyes from the screens to see who was texting him.

*Uncle J: You tried to get ahold of me?*

*IAN: Someone’s attempting to access Nick and Judy’s files. The extra security I installed is trying to trace their location.*

*Uncle J: Okay. Do you have an estimate for how long that will be?*

*IAN: Not really. It depends on their level of cybersecurity. Could be 15 minutes to 1 hour. Once I find out, I’ll shoot you the location.*

Ian’s computer beeped returning his attention to his screen. He blinked when he saw that his software program had already gotten a location. He sent it to his Uncle Jameson, ignoring the ‘Okay’ text. He then ran a search of what could be found at that location. He growled once he saw the result: The Yliaster Group. He shot a text to his uncle.

*IAN: It’s coming from The Yliaster Group. What do you want me to do?*

*Uncle J: Find out who specifically. Once you’ve identified them, send me the information. Other than that, can you spike their system?*

*IAN: It’ll take some time, but yeah. It may take a while to navigate their system to locate who’s trying to access Nick and Judy’s file. You’ll know the moment I know.*

Putting his phone down, Ian cracked his knuckles. *They just couldn’t leave well enough alone, could they?* Ian thought to himself. Wasting no time, knowing the time sensitivity of the situation, Ian began to type at high-speed acquired from years of practice.
The Oryx-Antlerson Apartment - Late Evening

Pronk hurt all over. He had woken up feeling sluggish, sore, and warm. It hadn’t taken him long to know that he had fallen ill. Glancing at the clock, he groaned. It was late and he was scheduled to work tomorrow, but he still felt like shit. In a hoarse voice, he hollered, “BUCKY!”

Bucky looked over at Pronk through the bedroom doorway from where he sat on the small couch. “Hmm?” he hummed questioningly. Since this morning, Bucky had had to listen to Pronk complain about how awful he felt. It wasn’t anything new, but Bucky wasn’t the medically inclined one, so he didn’t have any idea of what to do.

“Can you call Dr. Wilde and tell her that I’m unwell?” Pronk asked, raspingly. “I’m supposed to go back to work tomorrow, but I don’t see that happening.” He felt wretched and was sure he looked worse.

“Sure.” Bucky answered, getting up to use their landline. “Anything else? Soup, maybe?”

“No.” Pronk coughed. “Just call Dr. Wilde and explain. I’m going to try and go back to sleep.” The second he spoke the words, he was out like a light.

Bucky shook his head. Dialing the number for Dr. Wilde, which was written next to the phone, Bucky waited for the call to go through. Once it picked up, he explained the situation. Bucky was grateful for how understanding Dr. Wilde was and thanked her. Ending the call, Bucky got an idea. Dialing Gazelle’s number, Bucky spoke quickly when the call connected, telling her his idea. Coming to an agreement, Bucky and Gazelle hung up and got ready.

An hour or so later, Gazelle quietly knocked on the door to let Bucky know of her arrival. In the crook of one elbow, she held a container of the same soup that their parents would so often make for them when they fell ill. Only difference was that she had made this batch herself. Her thoughts flashed through memories of when they were younger. Pronk had always been more susceptible to illness than they had been, but after he started studying medicine, he hadn’t fallen ill as often.

Bucky opened the door to find an unusual sight. Standing before his doorway was a mammal wearing sunglasses, a tall top hat, baggy jeans, and a hoodie. Cocking his head to the side, Bucky asked, “Can I help you?”

“It’s me, Bucky.” Gazelle whispered. “This was the only way to avoid the media. Now let me in or it’ll all be for naught.”

Acting on impulse, Bucky’s hoof shot to Gazelle’s wrist and pulled her inside. “Geez, Gisella. Send a photo ahead next time.” Bucky whispered. Closing and locking the door, he motioned to the small kitchenette. “Go ahead and do whatever you need to do. I’m gonna go wake Pronk up.”

Gazelle set the container of soup down and opened it. There were a few last-minute things that needed to go in that couldn’t be put in earlier. One of those things was a small dollop of herb butter to enhance the flavor. Putting the herb butter in, she poured some soup into a small bowl then put it in the microwave. She heard Pronk complaining that he didn’t want to get up and Bucky telling him to stop being such a whiny-ass. Gazelle was just pulling the soup out of the microwave when Bucky finally dragged Pronk from the small bedroom.

“Gisella?” Pronk coughed out. “What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be getting ready for a performance or something?”

Gazelle snorted. “Neither of you saw the news broadcast, did you? The city is on the verge of panic.
While I would love to be out there doing something, it’s far too dangerous right now. Besides, Bucky called and told me you weren’t feeling well, so I made you soup.” Placing the soup down in front of him as he sat at the small table, she poured a glass of ice water to counterbalance the soup’s heat.

Pronk tentatively ate a spoonful of soup then let out an appreciative moan. “It’s the soup our parents would make when we were sick.” he mumbled, happily. Now shoveling the soup into his mouth, Pronk found himself full of energy. The ‘CLICK’ of the spoon hitting the bottom of the bowl told them when he had eaten it all. “That was so good.”

Placing more into Pronk’s bowl, Gazelle asked, “Do you mind if I stay here for the night? Just until daybreak, at least. I don’t feel safe walking through the city at night while it’s on the verge of rioting.” She watched as Bucky pulled out the convertible sofa into its bed form in lieu of answering. “Thanks.”

“No problem. Stay as long as you want.” Bucky said with a smile. The sound of snoring brought both his attention and Gazelle’s to Pronk’s passed out figure. Shaking his head, Bucky carried Pronk to the bed and tucked him in. Placing a kiss to his husband’s forehead, he went and joined Gazelle on the sofa-bed. “By the way, I’m going to hafta sleep with you. That way I don’t get sick as well.”

“That’s fine.” Gazelle replied with a blush. She watched as Bucky placed some spare pillows in-between them then walk to the door. “Where are you going?”

“We don’t have our own bathroom.” Bucky explained. “We share a communal one down the hall. I’m just running to take a piss then I’ll be right back. You just get comfortable.” With that he left the apartment.

Gazelle stripped off all her clothes with the exception of her panties, as she hadn’t brought any pajamas or spare clothing. Slipping under the covers, she prayed that Bucky didn’t notice. A darker, more perverted part of her mind hoped he did though. She closed her eyes and let herself slowly drift to sleep.

When Bucky returned, the first thing he noticed was that Pronk’s snoring had gotten louder. So loud in fact, that if he were to slam the door, it probably would have been drowned out by the sound of Pronk’s snoring. Locking the door, he carefully made his way to the convertible sofa. Bucky looked at Gisella’s sleeping face. Back when they were younger, Gisella had always been the heaviest sleeper. He and Pronk used to tease her by saying that she could sleep through a tornado unfazed. Stripping down to his boxers, he circled around to the other side of the mattress and slipped underneath the covers. He had closed his eyes and was comfortably relaxing when Gisella shifted, jostling the sleeper, and skewing the sheets, revealing her naked form.

Bucky stared at the nude form of Gisella in wonder. He felt himself slowly begin to harden at the sight. Dark, perverse thoughts invaded his mind, and he couldn’t help but wonder it this was a dream. As silently as he could, he leaned down next to her ear and, in a voice just slightly louder than normal, asked. “Gisella? Are you awake?” Not receiving an answer, he watched as she rolled over onto her stomach. With Gisella’s ass in full view, Bucky couldn’t fight it anymore. Knowing from when they were younger that Gisella was a heavy and deep a sleeper, Bucky carefully positioned himself on his knees behind her.

Stroking himself to full hardness, Bucky slipped his other hoof between Gisella’s legs to play with her pussy, gathering some wetness. Switching hoofs, Bucky used his newly dampened hoof to stroke himself while he slowly inserted his middle finger into Gisella’s puckered asshole. He pushed it in and pulled it out in a steady rhythm, working it in as deep as he could. Bucky kept a constant ear out for any sign that she was waking up. Inserting a second finger, he repeated the motion until he could
insert a third. Soon, Bucky was fisting her deep.

Pulling his arm out of Gisella’s, now gaping, ass, Bucky collected some more of her pussy juices to slick his stiff erection. Thinking he was slick enough, Bucky lined himself up and slowly pushed himself into Gisella’s ass. He had to hold back a moan at the feeling. He worked his way in slowly until his hips met hers. Letting out a long, slow breath, Bucky began to pull himself out until just his tip was inside and started all over again. He picked up speed at a sloth’s pace to make sure she didn’t wake up. He heard her moan his name and froze. When she didn’t say anything more, he sighed knowing that she had spoken in her sleep. He got back into rhythm quickly feeling himself ready to pump his jizz deep into her ass.

The moment that he hit his peak, Bucky thrust forward as deep into her ass as he could and let it out. He heard Gisella let out a moan of ecstasy as she hit her own climax. With her legs spread wide and his knees directly in line with her pussy, Bucky felt her squirt onto him. Pulling out, Bucky watched with childish glee as his spunk oozed out of Giselle’s asshole. He repositioned himself and started to clean her up by eating her ass out. It tasted wonderfully divine to him. Once he was sure she was clean, Bucky covered her up and got on his side of the convertible sofa. He closed his eyes and wondered how Gisella would react if she ever found out what he’d just done. He also wondered if next time he and Pronk could double team her. ‘Oh, we are going to have so much fun.’ Bucky thought wickedly as he drifted to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Before anyone freaks out, that last scene (Gazelle/Bucky) is a dream sequence. There are a few subtle clues meant to clue you in: Gazelle’s panties are still on prior to the sheets going askew is one clue that what’s happening isn’t really happening. Transitioning into dream sequences isn’t one of my best writing skills.
Chapter 14: A Hailstorm of Bullets

Chapter Summary

I'm curious to see
Who can come up with a summary
No, seriously
Make one up and send it to me

Chapter Notes

*Fireworks start dying down* Thanks again to Fairlane302 for making this possible. Somehow we've managed to go one step beyond my hopes. We pushed out THREE chapters this month. One right after New Year's and two today. Wowza!

Edited 1/26/18:
Hey, It's the editor here, I also want to note that there have been a few small changes made to Chapters 10 & 12 (AO3 Chapters 12 & 15)

In Chapter 10, (AO3 12) the scene at Andrew Bellwether's apartment was expanded somewhat, so as to explain what Doug has been up to prior to this scene (which is the first we see him)

In Chapter 12, (AO3 15) the name of the military base in Tundratown has been changed at my request. The old name was, frankly, silly; and I could no longer stand to look at it.
-Fairlane302

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 14: A Hailstorm of Bullets

Zootopian Police Academy - Evening

Nick and Judy entered the lecture hall expecting to meet Chief Bogo, only to find a much more intimidating cape buffalo wearing full military honors. While Chief Bogo was by no means a small mammal, the one before them put him to shame. The amount of muscle on this one was easily 120% more than that of the Chief. Neither Nick nor Judy felt comfortable speaking first and as such remained silent until the cape buffalo spoke.

“Nicholas Piberius Wilde. Age 25. High school dropout. No collegiate education. No criminal record. Notable skills include, but are not limited to: keen observation, ambidexterity, fluency in several languages, pickpocketing, and competency in various forms of martial arts.” Andreas Bogo listed. “Also, it says here that during your freshman year of high school, your guidance counselor had you take the Mensa Exam, on which you scored an IQ of 230. There’s also documentation that
shows you have a condition known as panmnesia. There’s paperwork showing that you possess a concealed weapon permit as well.” He never once looked up while reciting this information. Setting Nick’s dossier down, Andreas picked up Judy’s and started anew.

“Judith Laverne Hopps. Age 24. Bunnyburrow High School Alumnus. Valedictorian of your graduating class. Spent one semester at Bunnyburrow Community College before transferring to the Tri-Burrow Area University. Thanks to dual enrollment classes you took in high school, you graduated with a Master’s degree in Criminalistics and a Bachelor’s degree in Paralegal Studies within less than five years. Graduated Summa Cum Laude on top of Valedictorian. No criminal record. You were also given an IQ Test, though not the Mensa Exam, and scored 197, the highest recorded in the Tri-Burrow Area. There’s also documentation that indicates you hold a blackbelt in two martial arts styles, specifically Karate and Baritsu.” Setting down Judy’s dossier, Andreas picked up another. This time he pulled out two appropriately sized forms, attached them to a clipboard, then gave one to the fox and the other to the bunny. “Read those over and, if you find them agreeable, sign them.”

Nick and Judy looked over the documentation on the clipboards carefully. There were three forms in total. The first was a fairly standard military application form and the second a basic questionnaire, but it was the third that drew their attention. It was incredibly light on details, but it was clearly a non-disclosure agreement regarding something titled ‘Project Vanguardian’.

Unsure about where this was heading, the pair shared a glance with one another, before giving a subtle nod, then began to fill out and complete the forms. Once finished, they gave the forms back to the enormous cape buffalo and, at his nonverbal indication, took their seats.

After scrutinizing over the documents to ensure that all the forms were indeed completed and signed, the cape buffalo placed the forms into a folder, and set them on the desk. Clasping his hooves before him, he said, “Now, for pleasantries. I’m sure that you two have a fairly good assumption of who I am, but I’m going to introduce myself anyway. My name is General Andreas Bogo, Chief Tobias Bogo is my son and your future boss. I’m also well acquainted with both your fathers. In your case, Ms. Hopps, I speak of your biological father, Bryan Jonathan Lapins, or, as I knew him, Jonas Savage. I, along with those two and three others, were a unit of elite, highly trained mammals known as the Special Defense Force, or SDF. Unofficially, each of us were designated as cipher agents, meaning that, as far as the government was concerned, we did not exist. We did everything from assassination to exfiltration and even deep cover espionage. We possess top secret clearance that even the Director of the Zootopian Defense Department did not have.”

Nick and Judy stared wide eyed at General Bogo’s words. It all made sense. Nick’s father having the massive stockpile of weapons, gear, and equipment didn’t seem so bizarre anymore. It also addressed the sudden disappearance of Judy’s biological father and to an extent, Jaxon. They had a multitude of questions they wanted to ask, but held off until the General was finished.

“At the end of the last government crisis, thirty odd years ago, we received orders to deactivate. We went our own separate ways, starting new lives, taking care to keep low-profiles. I rejoined the military, BJ Lapins joined the ZIB, Carlos Jackael retired and started a gunsmith shop, Josef Wolverin runs a mechanic shop over in Tundra Town, and Fenrir Wolford does freelance private security. Jameson … he became the most feared mammal in the criminal underworld, under the alias of Gravewalker. The first time I heard from him after we disbanded was when I received this.” Andreas pulled out his wallet and extracted a small folded piece of paper which he pawed to them.

Nick looked at the piece of paper and realized it was a wedding invitation. His heart nearly stopped as he read the contents out loud. “It is our pleasure to inform you that you’re invited to celebrate the marital union of Vanessa Aurora Wilde and Jameson Dorgengoa Vulpin on November 30th at 5 pm.
We hope to see you there.” Nick’s paws were shaking as he reread his father’s name repeatedly. He tensed at the feeling of a paw on his leg. Looking to see Judy staring at him worriedly, he swallowed. “I…I’ll tell you tonight. I promise. It’s just that I’ve learned something I never imagined in my wildest fantasies.”

Judy gave him a soft, warm smile and nodded. Judy then scooted closer to Nick until she was pressed up to his side. She felt his tail wrap itself around her waist. Tapping his shoulder, she pulled him in for a tender kiss. Pulling away, she whispered, “You don’t have to tell me anything until you’re ready. Maybe this way I can catch up and tell you a couple of things.”

Nick gave her a swift kiss then returned the wedding invitation to the General. “You realize you just kissed me in front of an audience, right?” he asked. Not that he minded, but Judy’s action had surprised him.

Judy nodded with a grin. The two then refocused their attention on the General, who had a bored expression on his face. “If you two are done, I’d like to get to the point of this meeting.” the General stated. Getting nods of confirmation from the two, he said, “With the current threat we’re facing, I, along with Jameson and the others, have decided it’s time to come out of retirement and reactivate ourselves. The problem is that Josef, Carlos, and I aren’t as young as we used to be. Jameson, Fenrir, and the late BJ Lapins were the only ones in our unit that possessed awakened Izu Genes, therefore they’re still in their prime.”

“Not to seem rude, sir,” Judy interrupted. “But what exactly does that have to do with Nick and I?” She didn’t like interrupting those in a higher position of power, but sometimes it was necessary. The glower sent her way didn’t affect her the way she thought it would.

“Jameson wants to train you two, as well as a few select others.” Andreas replied. “Basically, you and the others selected will become the new members of Cipher Squad. Your training will take place during your stay here at the Academy under the guise of extracurricular classes. The forms I just had you sign were for consent. Your fellow initiates will be arriving in due time. Their sponsors, Josef and Carlos, are picking them up. Fenrir is collecting his grandson, Harrison and his partner, Zannah, as his recruits. Jameson is doing the same with your half-brother, Jaxon, and his mate-to-be, Skye. The two of them have gone dark due to intelligence leaks within the ZIB, but Jameson will find them and bring both them and the mammal in their custody, one Ms. Scarlett Reddington, here for training as well.”

“Who will be our instructor?” Nick inquired. “I somewhat doubt that anyone besides any of you all are capable of teaching us the necessary skills we’ll need.” Even as he said this, Nick was quite aware that there was a distinct possibility that someone else was qualified to instruct them.

Andreas’s face took on a rather nefarious grin. “Oh, you’re going to enjoy this.” he told them as he stood up and walked to the door. “You can come in now.” He then turned to enjoy the looks of dread that passed over their faces.

Nick and Judy watched as Jameson walked in. Jameson was wearing casual clothing, which was a first for Nick as he’d never seen his father wear casual clothes. Nick gulped and Judy’s nose twitched nervously. They watched as Jameson approached them slowly, the pressure of his mere presence bearing down on them heavily. Neither of them said anything as Jameson stopped directly in front of them, saying, “Well, then. Let’s get started, shall we?”

_The Oryx-Antlerson Apartment – Break of Dawn_

Gazelle slowly cracked her eyes open. Blinking a couple of times to get her eyes to adjust, Gazelle stared at the ceiling. The erotic dream from last night was still fresh in her mind. She brought her
hoof down to her crotch underneath the sheets. Gazelle let out a soft sigh at feeling her panties still in place, albeit a little damp. She closed her eyes and let her head list to the side to get a few more minutes of sleep. Not a hoofful of seconds later, the sound of a preset alarm rang throughout the apartment.

Bucky opened his eyes at the sound of the alarm blaring. Groaning, he shifted to find himself within mere inches of Gisella. In his panic, Bucky fell off the convertible sofa with a rather loud ‘THUD’. “Ow!” he cried. Apparently, this was all it took to fully wake Gisella from her slumber.

“You okay, Bucky?” Gazelle asked, looking at him over the edge of the mattress. She found herself looking at his nude form. which was sporting a stiff erection pointed skyward. She had seen it before when they were younger, but never like this. Gazelle pushed her thoughts on how it would feel away and she asked him, “Did you hurt yourself?” She noticed his stare and asked, “What?”

Bucky slowly got himself into a sitting position and took a careful look at Gisella. He noticed that she was wearing panties and let himself fall back with a sigh of relief. “Nothing. I’m fine. I just had a … nightmare.” It was a lie, but Bucky didn’t want to tell her that he’d had an erotic dream about fucking her in her ass while she was sleeping.

Gazelle looked skeptical, but shrugged, saying, “Alright.” Getting off the sleeper sofa, Gazelle stretched, letting out appreciative moans. “That things not comfortable at all. I’m surprised I even fell asleep on it.”

‘Well, you’re such a deep and heavy sleeper you didn’t even wake up when I fucked your ass on it last night.’ Bucky thought before slapping himself in the forehead. “Yeah, it’s really bad. Pronk and I have talked about buying a new one when we have enough cash to splurge.” He went to sit up again only to find … he didn’t have anything on and his member looked like a flagpole. He blushed realizing that Gisella had just seen him buck naked. “Uh, Gisella?” he asked. Hearing her questioning hum, he asked, “Did you, by any chance, not see me au naturel?” He watched her look at him over her shoulder and wink. Groaning, he let himself fall back onto the floor. “So embarrassing.”

Gazelle laughed. “What? It’s not like we haven’t seen each other naked before.” she explained, as she continued to walk the small apartment wearing nothing but her panties. She opened the fridge to reheat some more soup. Gazelle had made enough for the three of them to last a couple of days.

“Yeah. When we were younger, Gisella.” Bucky stated, getting up himself. “Back then none of us were interested in…” he didn’t finish, simply trailing off. He didn’t hear Gisella approach, but felt her kiss his cheek. His cheeks burned in response.

Gisella walked into Pronk and Bucky’s bedroom to wake Pronk up. “Pronk, get up. I’m warming up some more soup.”

As if she had spoken the magic words, Pronk shot into a sitting position only for his eyes to widen at her attire. “Uh, G? Where are the rest of your clothes? You and Bucky didn’t do anything without me, did you?”

“NO!!” Bucky hollered. “SHUT UP, YOU MORON!!”

“NO!! YOU SHUT UP!! IT’S A LEGITIMATE QUESTION CONSIDERING WHAT I JUST WOKE UP TO!!!”

“SHUT UP, PRONK!! WE DIDN’T DO ANYTHING!!! WE JUST SLEPT TOGETHER!!!”
“SO, YOU DID DO SOMETHING WITHOUT ME!!!”

“NO!!! ALL WE DID WAS SLEEP ON THE DAMN SLEEPER SOFA!!! I DIDN’T WANT TO GET SICK, SO I SLEPT NEXT TO HER!!”

“ENOUGH!!! BOTH OF YOU SHUT UP!!!” Gazelle shouted, effectively silencing them, ending their little spat. Grabbing Pronk by his antlers, she led him to the table and shoved him into a chair then did the same with Bucky. Pushing their chairs together, she grabbed onto an antler on each of them. “Let me make this clear. Last night, after Bucky put you in bed, he and I fell asleep on the sleeper sofa next to one another. That is all that happened. Although, judging from Bucky’s reaction earlier, he may have had an erotic dream about us.” She said that last bit with a glare causing Bucky to blush, though she blushed as she recalled her own. “Now, while I’ll admit I’d very much like to have my way with you two, it isn’t the right time for that.” Letting go of their antlers, she straightened up. “I’m reheating some soup. You apologize to each other right now, or no soup for either of you.”

“Sorry.” “I’m sorry.” Bucky and Pronk said to one another. They then leaned in for a tender kiss and heard the tell-tale ‘THUNK’ of a soup bowls being placed before them. The two immediately started shoveling soup into their mouths.

Gazelle rolled her eyes. The two of them really hadn’t changed at all in her opinion. Setting down her own bowl of soup, she started eating as she watched them start trying to steal spoonful after spoonful from each other’s bowls. “Slow down, you two. You only get a bowl for breakfast and dinner remember.” Gazelle told them, reciting the same words their parents had given them when they were younger. She could still recall how often they stayed at one another’s houses when they were little. It had gotten to the point that they referred to each other’s parents as their own.

Pronk and Bucky sighed then simultaneously said, “Yes, ma’am.” They slowed down how fast they ate to savor the taste until dinner. When they were done, Gazelle switched on the television to get a news update. So far, nothing had really changed except for a few protests throughout the city. Gazelle shook her head at some of the interviews. “They don’t get it. This mammal’s using fear the same way Bellwether did. He’s going to tear the city apart.”

Bucky and Pronk didn’t say a word as they watched the television. They both knew Gisella was right. After a while, a thought struck Bucky. “What do you two say about starting a rally?” Bucky asked them. “We could show our support for the ZPD and maybe even help. Plus, having ‘Gazelle’ with us would go a long way towards garnering a ton of followers.”

Gazelle and Pronk looked at each other for a brief moment then smiled. “Let’s do it.” They started making phone calls to whoever they could think of, hoping to get them to join. Gazelle called her agent to set up an impromptu mini-concert to promote their new group. Pronk, still not feeling 100%, but determined to do something, called the hospital to see if they could arrange for a single ambulance to be present at Gazelle’s show. Bucky was talking to his buddy at the comic book store to see about fliers and signs. Within an hour, everything was set in motion. “Alright, let’s get ourselves moving.” Gazelle stated.

**Firebase White - Peak 15, Aleutsk Valley, Tundratown - Mid-afternoon**

Supreme Commander Deego had never, in his 60+ years of life, ever had to deal with such a stubborn excuse for a base commander. Base Commanders Colonel Willow, a bunny, and Lt. Colonel Oxford, a musk-ox, in turn could say the same. Neither party were willing to give quarter or compromise. That was until the broadcast. The instant Willow and Oxford caught wind of the broadcast, they turned over command of their forces to Deego, who named them both his seconds in command.
Ordering immediate mobilization, Deego began making rounds to inspect the troops. “These mammals are impressive, Base Commanders.” Deego stated as he watched the troops begin gearing up. “I’ve seen some impressive troops in my time, but I’m pleased to see that the rumors aren’t just rumors.”

“Thank you, sir.” Willow replied. “We try our best.” He watched as one of his polar bear troops assisted a timber wolf get his gear on. “Our mammals are trained to withstand any environment regardless of what they’re used to. We’ve had polar bear troops stay in Sahara Square for weeks just to make sure that they’re tough enough.”

Deego gave an approving grunt. “How long until we’re ready to move out? I want us to be prepared for the worst. If riots breakout across the city then I want us there when it happens.”

“Not much longer now.” Oxford answered. “I estimate approximately one hour at the most. This ‘Chancellor’ mammal made the mistake of attacking our company’s home. As a result, he’s ’really pissed them off. It is never a good thing when you piss off trained killers.”

Deego, Willow, and Oxford made their way to the base’s Communications Room. Upon entering, Deego requested, “Open a channel to Chief Tobias Bogo and one to A.G. Hoover, please.” He watched as the Comm Officer rushed to complete the actions. A short while later a still shot of both parties was on screen with a sound wave bar underneath. “Chief Bogo? A.G. Hoover? This is Supreme Commander Deego. Expect full military presence within the hour.”

“Acknowledged.” Chief Bogo stated. “I’ll inform my officers of your impending arrival. When you return, there is something that I must discuss with you.”

“I would like to once again reiterate our thanks for your assistance, Supreme Commander.” A.G. Hoover added. “Col. Willow and Lt. Col. Oxford, as the Base’s Commanders, what are your evaluations of your troops? I want an honest opinion, not one that’s biased.”

Willow and Oxford both shifted uncomfortably before Willow answered. “Sir, with all due respect, it has been years since my troops last saw battle. The newest of recruits have never seen battle. While I’m well aware that we have yet to begin war, I cannot, in good faith, say that our men are ready for that.”

Supreme Commander Deego huffed silently with an almost imperceptible shake of his head. He knew what was happening, and he understood why. Willow was letting his fears cloud his judgement. There’s a very real difference between military drills and live combat. Not many of the ‘Old Guard’ who were responsible for the fearsome reputation of these troops were left, and most of the current troops are untested in actual battle. The commanders knew this and were concerned about the risk to the younger troops. As a result, while they were confident that their troops would be successful, Willow and Oxford couldn’t bring themselves to admit they were ready. Deego on the other paw, had the advantage of an outside eye. He was sure that the troops were not only ready but that the troops wanted to prove themselves to their commanders.

Oxford then spoke up. “Sirs, We’re more than willing to do whatever it takes, but there is a clear difference between knowing how to do something and actually doing that something. Everyone stationed at our base knows that unless this madmammal is captured and/or killed, then a war is an inevitability.”

There was silence for the span of almost a full five minutes as everyone present considered the words of both Col. Willow and Lt. Col. Oxford. The words did ring true. Most of the troops outside had joined to serve and protect Zootopia, but, although trained, they would be considered greenhorns compared to those left over from the ‘Old Guard’. It wouldn’t be that much of a stretch to imagine
they wouldn’t survive if they did end up going to war.

Supreme Commander Deego broke the quiet by saying, “That just means we’ll have to do everything within our abilities to capture or kill the mammal known as ‘the Chancellor’ before that can happen.” He looked at the two base commanders with an expression of understanding. He knew quite well from his own experience what the bunny and musk-ox were probably thinking. Returning his attention to the screen, S.C. Deego stated, “Again, we’ll be arriving within the hour.” Deego gave the Comm Officer an across the neck gesture indicating to close the channel then he, Col. Willow, and Lt. Col. Oxford marched out to begin their departure.

Sahara Square Branch Office of Kit Services - Approximately 6:53 A.M.

Odafin Fennixon entered the building with a thermos of black coffee and bags under his eyes. He had stayed up late last night studying the Policies & Procedures Handbook Ms. Foxworth had given him before leaving yesterday. When he had managed to fall asleep, Finn had found himself dreaming of plowing the vixen so hard that the orgasm he experienced actually woke him up. Shuffling to the desk he’d been assigned, Finn set his thermos down and climbed into his chair before resting his head on the desk.

Stacey Foxworth arrived a bit later than normal. In one paw was a cup of tea while the other held a box of assorted donuts. She was having a difficult time ridding her mind of the dream she had last night. While she wasn’t a stranger to erotic dreams, this one had been different because it involved a much older male, specifically her new coworker Odafin Fennixon. Seeing him resting his head against his desk, Stacey approached cautiously and set the box of donuts down. “Morning, Odafin,” she greeted him.

“Call me ‘Finn’, Stacey.” Finn mumbled, head still flat against his new desk. “I prefer that over my actual name.” Raising his head, Finn had to blink. At first, he didn’t register any clothing on her, due to his dreams last night. After he had, Finn could see that she was wearing a nice flowing floral dress. “Morning, by the way.” He gratefully accepted a donut and took a large bite.

“You look tired. Did you not sleep well last night?” Stacey was a tad concerned. She could see the bags under Finn’s eyes.

Finn didn’t show it, but he felt uncomfortable. He didn’t like the idea of telling her that she was the reason he hadn’t really slept last night. “Stayed up too late reviewing the Policies & Procedures Handbook.” Finn answered. It was technically the truth, if only half of it.

“Oh, I see.” Stacey replied with a smile. A part of her felt that he was hiding something, but she knew it was not her place to pry. “Well, I’m glad. You and I have rounds to make. We’ll be leaving in ten minutes. So, eat up, finish your coffee, use the restroom, and meet me at the car.” She headed to get the clipboard with the list of places they were to check then made her way to the car. While she was waiting for Finn, Stacey went over the list. The name at the top had her pause: Harold Fennixon. She checked the car’s clock and saw she still had a bit of time. Pulling out her mobile, she ran a search on Harold Fennixon. There wasn’t much, but she did find an image of Harold, his wife, and a daughter, who was holding a newborn kit. She closed the browser at the sound of the passenger door opening.

Finn climbed into the car and buckled up. “Where’s our first stop?” he asked. Not getting an immediate answer, he cast a glance Stacey’s way. “Stace? Stace?”

Shaking her head, Stacey said, “Sorry. Uh, our first stop is at 129 Desert Parkway here in Sahara Square.” She started the car, put it in drive, and drove towards the destination. Stacey didn’t hear a thing from Finn the entire ride and kept taking peeks in his direction to see his expression set as hard
The moment they arrived, Finn grumbled, “I picked a hell of a time to stop smoking weed.” Looking at the old place, Finn started getting flashbacks of all the horrible things that had happened to him here. “I’m definitely going to need a drink tonight.” He started walking up to the door with Stacey not far behind. Finn didn’t knock, he beat the door, shouting, “Kit Services! Open the hell up, ya old bastard!”

Stacey gulped as she heard the sound of pawsteps approaching with the aid of a cane. When the door opened, she saw the old fennec fox tod from the photo she found. He was older obviously with a lot more gray in his fur as a result. He had his cane in his left paw and a bottle of beer in the other. His face took on a malicious grin as he took notice of Finn causing a shiver of dread to travel through Stacey’s spine.

“Well, well, well. If it isn’t my little grandson, Odafin.” Harold Fennixon said with an almost unnoticeable slur. “What’re you doing here? Did you come back because you finally missed the feeling of my big, fat cock shoved up your ass?” Harold didn’t even see the punch coming. He only found himself flat on his back staring up at the ceiling. Standing himself back up on shaky legs, Harold spit out some blood. “Heh. You’ve got a better punch then your mother does. Do you want to see her? I can go untie her from the bed. You interrupted me just as I was about to fuck her like the whore she is.” This time the punch sent him flying.

Finn let out a threatening growl. “Stacey, call the cops. After I check to see if he’s telling the truth, I’m going to fuckin’ kill the old bastard.” He then ran upstairs, leaving Stacey alone with his unconscious (grand)father.

Stacey had to fight hard to hold back the tears and vomit that threatened to spill. She had had a good idea of who the kit in the photo was, but now she had confirmation. Stacey dialed 911 and reported what took place. As soon as she hung up, she heard the sobs coming from upstairs. Checking to see if Harold was still knocked out, Stacey went upstairs to see Finn cradling an older fennec vixen who was in tears, shushing her. “T-the police are on their way. Harold’s still out like a lightbulb.” She listened as the older fennec vixen repeatedly whispered, ‘thank you’.

Finn looked at Stacey with a murderous expression and said, “Watch her for a bit.” He raced out of the room just in time to see Harold regaining consciousness. Grabbing him by his shirt, Finn stated, “You’d better hope the cops get here soon or I’m gonna fuckin’ beat you to death.” Tossing him into the wall with such force that the decorations fell to the floor, Finn picked up Harold’s cane. “This has been a long time coming, you shitty old muthafuckin’ bastard.” Raising the cane up, Finn brought it down onto Harold with so much force that upon contact there was a sickening crack. Finn began to beat Harold viciously with his own cane. Losing track of time, he only stopped when a paw grabbed his wrist. Whirling to attack, Finn froze as his eyes locked with Stacey’s own. Finn dropped the cane then spit on Harold’s blood covered body.

Minutes later, Stacey, Finn, and Finn’s mom were all seated in the back of an ambulance as Ms. Fennixon got checked out. She kept fussing that she only needed to be with her son for a while and she’d be okay only for Finn to tell her to shut up and let the EMT do her job. After that was taken care of, Finn was pulled away by an officer and Stacey watched as two other officers carried a body bag out of the home. Harold had died shortly after she’d stopped Finn from continuing to assault him.

“My father was a bastard.” a feminine voice said from beside Stacey forcing her to turn and find Ms. Fennixon standing there. “He deserved a lot worse than what he got.” Looking at Stacey, Ms. Fennixon gave her a tiny, sad smile. “The first time he raped me, I had just entered my first mating
cycle. I was so ... traumatized that I didn’t bother going out of the house. That was when things got worse and he started getting his buddies involved. I was repeatedly raped for years. When I found out I was pregnant, I, of course, told my mother, but she didn’t believe me. When I finally did convince her to bring me to the hospital and learned that I was, she became distraught. She began interrogating me about who the father was. The sad part was I honestly didn’t know. After I gave birth, there was a paternity test. The results showed that the child was born of an incestual union. We hadn’t done the test at a hospital or clinic, so the authorities weren’t ever informed. My father waited until Odafin was just old enough for his liking then started using him as his own personal fuck-toy. Odafin eventually managed to escape. I was left there, but I was happy knowing that as long as my father was using me, he wasn’t chasing Odafin. I never expected for this to happen, but I’m grateful it did.”

Stacey stared at Ms. Fennixon in bewilderment. This fennec vixen had survived such a horrible life of repeated sexual abuse and didn’t show any of the standard signs of PTSD. In fact, she seemed almost more alive than only a short while ago. “I already know the answer, but would you like me to give you a number you can call for counseling?”

Ms. Fennixon laughed, shaking her head. “No. I’m good.” she stated. “Believe it or not, I’m better just knowing the fucker’s dead and that my son’s okay. I promise that I’ll talk to someone though if it’ll make you feel better.” Patting Stacey’s arm, Ms. Fennixon walked over to where her son was now in pawcuffs.

Stacey watched the older fennec vixen walk off. Turning to look back at the body bag, she saw Chief Bogo staring at her. Swallowing, she made her way over to the cape buffalo. “Chief Bogo.”

The cape buffalo looked down at Ms. Foxworth. They had had a number of encounters over the years, under somewhat similar circumstances. “Ms. Foxworth. Care to explain what happened here?” He listened and wrote down her statement, but stopped when she told him the history behind it all. “I see.” Bogo stated, gravely. This was the first time that he was aware of such a thing occurring. Considering everything, Bogo knew that no judge in the city would be willing to even try the case. In the eyes of the city, Odafin Fennixon’s actions were justifiable. While the law was clear on this, it wouldn’t stop any judge from acquitting him. With a deep sigh, Bogo said, “What a mess.” Rubbing his right temple, Bogo stated, “We’ll hold Mr. Odafin Fennixon for the max of 48 hours. During that time, my officers will perform a thorough investigation. We’ll then turn in all the evidence to the courts. Hopefully, that’ll be all it takes to have the charges against him dropped.”

“Thank you.” Stacey whispered. Receiving a nod from Chief Bogo, they walked away. She went straight to Finn to check on him. “The charges against you may be dropped, but they still need to hold you for 48 hours.” Getting a grunt in response, Stacey added, “I’m going to call Director Badgerheim. Let her know what happened.”

Finn didn’t say a single word. He just kept looking forward, ignoring everything around him. He felt neither guilt, regret, nor remorse about his actions. The pawcuffs on his wrists simply reminded him that the old fucker was finally dead. His conscience was clear. When he heard the door close, cutting him off from his mother and Stacey, Finn looked at the cop in the driver’s seat through the rearview mirror. “If you got something to say, then fuckin’ say it.” The cop however didn’t say anything, simply started driving to the precinct. ‘ Only your second day on the job and you’ve already fucked up, Finn. That’s a new record. ’ His thoughts drifted to Stacey and he wondered what she thought of him now. He hoped beyond all hope that she would still give him a chance. For the first time in as long as he could remember, Odafin Fennixon let a single tear escape and fall.

The Yliaster Group - Early Afternoon
Slamming his hooves down in frustration, Christopher Deering stared at his computer screen. After hours of trying to gain access to the files for Nicholas P. Wilde and Judith L. Hopps, he still hadn’t gotten anywhere. Letting out a shout of aggravation, Christopher gripped his antlers. ‘Why the hell are these files so hard to access?’ he thought to himself. Never before had Christopher had such a difficult time getting access to any digital file. A ‘BLEEP’ brought his focus back to his computer screen to find a message box that read: I found you.

Christopher froze. Then he watched as the sender began to remotely control his computer. Rushing to try and halt whoever it was, Christopher Deering began to rapidly type computer code in what he quickly realized was a futile attempt. He watched helplessly as the cyberattack made quick work of their firewall and cybersecurity. “NO!! NO!! NO!! NOO!!” He shouted, but it was too late. His attacker had attained full access and remote control of The Yliaster Groups’ secure network.

Christopher Deering stared at his screen in abject horror. He couldn’t believe what had just happened. It seemed utterly inconceivable to him that he had been beaten. The message box popped up again with a new message: Hello, Mr. Deering. You seem a little…perplexed.

Deering: Who the fucking hell are you? Why are you protecting that filth? What’re you planning?

?: So many questions, Mr. Deering. It’ll take me some time to answer them in their entirety. As for who I am, you can call me ‘the Red Baron’. Why am I protecting these two? It’s simple. I want to. What am I planning? Don’t know yet. Maybe I’ll bring The Yliaster Group to their knees. I have yet to decide.

Deering: You want to protect them? Do you have any idea who Nicholas P. Wilde is? Do you have any clue what he’s done?

The Red Baron: Of course, I do. I know who he is and what he’s done quite well. I’m curious. Do you?

Deering: What’s that supposed to mean. Of course, I do. That’s why I’m trying to gain access to his file. So that I can release it to the public.

The Red Baron: You stupid little prick. You have no idea. If you knew anything about him, you’d leave him well enough alone. Let me give you some advice: Leave Nicholas Wilde alone if you want to live.

Deering: Is that a threat? I’m a member of the fuckin’ Yliaster Group, you moron. I’m not scared of anything.

The security alarms in the building went off. Christopher Deering’s eyes widened as The Red Baron showed him a security feed showing his fellow members being gunned down from somewhere out of sight of the camera. Once the gunfire ended, he saw as a team of polar bears appeared on screen led by the infamous Bearnard Kozlov. The Red Baron sent another message: How about now?

The door behind Christopher flew off its hinges revealing Bearnard Kozlov carrying Antoine de Medici-Borgia. Christopher gulped thickly as they ominously approached. “M-Mr. B-Bi-Big, s-sir.” he stuttered.

Mr. Big glowered down from where he sat in Kozlov’s paw. “You are Christopher Deering, yes?” he asked the reindeer. Once he received a nod, Mr. Big said, “You’ve made a grave error, Mr. Deering. You’ve threatened the safety of the godfather of my granddaughter and his mate, who is also my granddaughter’s godmother. You’ve also angered someone far more terrifying than I.” Narrowing his eyes even more than they already were, he spoke in a much graver voice. “For
threatening his son, the Gravewalker has issued an order for your termination. Kozlov.”

Bearnard Kozlov drew his firearm and with practiced ease shot Mr. Deering between his eyes, creating a very pretty pink mist. Setting Mr. Big’s chair down, he tossed Mr. Deering’s corpse to the others for disposal. Opening a message box, Kozlov contacted the Red Baron, saying: Greetings, Ian. Now, instruct me in what to do.

Ian: Greetings, Kozlov. Here’s what I need you to do. Take the USB I had sent to you and connect it to the port. I’ll need you to copy everything on the main terminal’s hard drive, as I can’t perform the task remotely using mine.


Ian: Is the blue light flashing on it? If not, we can’t go any further until then.

Kozlov: It is.

Ian: Good. Select the icon at the bottom of the screen in the shape of a file. Click on it. Once it has opened, right-click on the USB drive icon and open a second window.

Kozlov: I have done so.

Ian: Go to the first window and right-click the C Drive. That contains all information that I will require. Copy the drive and paste it into the USB’s window. Then eject the drive.

Kozlov: I’ve got a password request.

Ian: One moment.

A series of dots appeared in the text box, then promptly disappeared. This repeated a couple of times before the password request disappeared.

Ian: There. Now try again.

Kozlov: Tasks complete. I will have it sent to you shortly.

Ian: Thank you, Kozlov.

Ian has signed out.

Kozlov placed the USB Drive inside the breast pocket of his shirt. Picking up Mr. Big, Kozlov said, “The Yliaster Group will retaliate. We must be ready.”

Mr. Big hummed in thought. “Kozlov? Mr. Deering workstation was their mainframe, was it not?” Getting an affirmative hum, Mr. Big said, “In that case, prime it.”

Kozlov order his men to prep the room for detonation. As he carried Mr. Big outside, he asked, “Back to the mansion, sir?” Not getting a response, he looked at his arctic shrew employer. “Sir?”

“Sorry, Kozlov.” Mr. Big answered. “I was lost in thought. Take me to the ZPD. It’s time to negotiate.”

**Serengeti Plaza – Savannah Central – Zootopia - Just before Noon**

Spencer Wolvenett stood off to the side and just behind the stage that had been set up at the rally. Larry and Gary were standing beside him, acting as his bodyguards. Sighing, Spencer thought back
to late yesterday evening, when they met each other for the first time outside the courtroom.

Alpha Wolford had shown up at the courthouse with the pair in tow just as Spencer had been finishing up the days affairs. After the introductions were made, Alpha Wolford had departed, leaving Spencer with Larry and Gary. Heading back to his own residence, Spencer had helped them get situated within the guest bedroom. The three then sat at the table to discuss separation of household chores, even going so far as to make a chart.

Within an hour, the three of them had gone to bed. It was when Spencer woke up that he entered his kitchen to find Larry and Gary fully dressed in paramilitary tactical armour. Larry had then informed him that he and Gary would be his bodyguards. Spencer had tried to argue against it, but both Larry and Gary were adamant.

Throughout the morning, they went about their usual routines. Despite having just settled in the night before, Larry and Gary didn’t miss a beat. Moving in sync with each other, the only adjustment they had to make was Spencer’s involvement.

By the time they had to leave for the rally, Larry and Gary had outfitted Spencer with a bulletproof vest that was easily hidden under his shirt and jacket. Spencer didn’t even bother trying to stop them, knowing it wouldn’t do any good. It had been right before they left that word reached them about the assault of Fatima Ara and the Chancellor’s broadcast.

With news of the attack on Fatima Ara, as well as the threats made by the Chancellor and the chaos that had ensued, both Larry and Gary made it even more clear that he was under their protection, not that he was going to turn it down now. A tinge of paranoia had entered Spencer’s mind after learning of what had happened. He was suddenly thankful that he had Larry and Gary watching his six.

The rally they were at had been put together by Lionheart in an effort to pacify Zootopia’s populace. There was a strong police presence, and Spencer had been informed only moments ago that there would soon be a strong military presence as well.

Sighing, Spencer peeked passed the curtain separating them from the crowd. “Geez.” he whispered. “There’s more than I thought there would be in attendance.” He felt a paw on each shoulder and turned to see Larry and Gary giving him tiny smiles of comfort. “I’m so nervous. I’m used to public speaking in a courtroom, but this…” He shook his head. “This is much different.”

“Don’t worry, Spence. We’re right here with you.” Larry promised. “Isn’t that right, Gary?”

“Yep.” Gary confirmed, checking his weapon. “We’ve got your back.” Holstering his gun, Gary took his own peek passed the curtain. “We’ll protect you. You just focus on your part.”

Spencer took a calming breath. “Right. Just have to focus on my part.” His ear twitched as he heard someone else approach. Turning to see who it was, his jaw dropped as he saw Gazelle walking toward him. “Uhm, hello.”

Gazelle smiled. “Hello, Mr. Wolvenett. I’m here to show my support. I’ve also got a few friends here as well. You’ll find them easily by their signs promoting you and supporting the ZPD.”

Spencer stared, stunned, at Gazelle. When Lionheart poked his head out, Spencer looked at him and saw that it was his turn on stage. Feeling flustered, he walked out on stage. He looked out across the large crowd and saw the signs Gazelle spoke about. Seeing those gave him the strength to begin. “Mammals of Zootopia, our home is under siege. I know you’re all frightened. Honestly, I am as well. But, we will not let this madmammal, whoever he is, to terrify us into submission. We will not bow down to his whim. The attack on Fatima Ara, and the threats against our society will not go
unpunished. Whatever happens now, we must stand united against this menace.” The crowd clapped thunderously. Lionheart nodded his approval. By all appearances, the rally was going well. Naturally then, that is when the attack was initiated.

When the first shot rang out, no one thought anything of it, perhaps believing it to be a peal of thunder, or some other natural phenomenon. The second shot, a few moments later, was nearly universally disregarded as well. However, the staccato report of an assault rifle that followed, echoing across the plaza, could not be ignored, nor could the screams of pain and panic that ensued. The crowd reacted, and mass panic erupted as civilians began to rush away from the scene as quickly as their legs could carry them.

As the rifle began to fire, Larry and Gary, realizing what was happening, rushed out, tackling Spencer to the ground. Lionheart raced to pull Gazelle under the stage for cover. Bucky and Pronk, who were in the crowd, took off in the direction of an open store. The rapid, but unsteady gunfire continued for several minutes before eventually dying out.

As silence slowly fell over the plaza, Spencer raised his head from underneath Larry and Gary to survey the scene. His heart broke at the sight before him. There were multiple wounded mammals, their moans the only sound to be heard. A number of mammals were also clearly dead. Spencer felt his eyes filling with tears, but dashed them away. Tapping Larry and Gary, he stated, “Off! Now!” Getting up once they had done so, Spencer let out a deep growl of fury. “Now it’s personal.”

Larry and Gary watched as Spencer stripped his jacket off and jump down from the stage. They jumped down after him and waited to see what his next action would be. When he turned around, they knew what he was about to do just by the look in his eyes. They readied themselves then let out a long powerful war howl signaling to the other wolves to prepare for battle.

Shiregrove - Immediately following the shooting at Serengeti Plaza

The Chancellor opened his eyes as the sound of a war howl reached his ears. A grim smile took over his face. Standing to his hindpaws, he released a maniacal laugh. He bolted towards his vantage point that overlooked the city. His eyes gleamed viciously as he looked at the city. “Not much longer now.”

“Oh? Is that so, Jacen.” the ethereal voice of Hannibal stated within the Chancellor’s mind.

Whirling around, the Chancellor found himself muzzle-to-muzzle with the ghostly apparition of Hannibal Hyector. “What the hell?” he muttered. “How?”

Vanishing then reappearing beside the Chancellor, the specter of Hannibal asked, “What’s the matter Jacen? You look as if you’ve seen a ghost.” Disappearing as the Chancellor lashed out, Hannibal then reappeared behind him. “You can’t kill me, Jacen. I’m in your head, a figment of your imagination.”

The Chancellor turned to face the apparition slowly. “I’m not Jacen Carno anymore.” he stated, angrily. “Jacen Carno is dead! He died when Shiregrove was destroyed and his daughters were burned to death before his eyes.” He stood directly in front of mental image of Hannibal his mind had created. “I. AM. THE CHANCELLOR!!”

Hannibal disappeared, but an ethereal voice whispered, “For now.” It was then that memories of the Chancellor’s time as Jacen Carno bombarded his mind. “Remember, remember.” the voice whispered repeatedly as the memories flooded the Chancellor’s mind.

Screaming in mental anguish, the Chancellor began to claw at his own head as if to rip the memories
out by force. He didn’t want to remember the pain, the agony, or even remember any of it to even the slightest degree. Letting out a savage cry, the Chancellor yelled, “ENOUGH!!” With that, the memories faded away. Heaving, the Chancellor made his way back to Shiregrove. He could still hear Hannibal’s voice whispering in his ear within the confines of his mind. ‘*Even dead he’s screwing with me. Godsdamned scavenger.*’ The Chancellor then disappeared back into the woods.

**MTHZ - Midafternoon**

Fatima Ara’s eyes fluttered open. Despite not having a clue where she was, Fatima thought that the constant beeping indicated that she was in a hospital. Slowly shifting her head to take in her surroundings, Fatima was surprised to find Li passed out on the couch. “L-Li?” she asked, hoarsely. “How are you feeling? Do you want me to get a doctor?”

“No.” Fatima croaked. “Water.” She watched as Li got a cup of water with a straw and brought it over to her. Taking slow, tentative sips, Fatima drained the cup. When she was done, Fatima whispered, “Why are you here?”

Li frowned and pulled a chair bedside to sit down. “Whether you believe it or not, I still love you.” he told her. “That and I’m still your Emergency contact. When they called me, I thought my heart stopped and rushed here as fast as I could.” He placed his hoof on hers. “You gave me a scare, Fatima. I thought you’d died. The police even issued a statement to that effect, though now, I’m sure that it’s a ploy to make the bastard who did this think he succeeded.”

“What…” Fatima coughed a couple times then continued. “What about the mammal that saved me? The black-furred fox tod.” She could vividly remember the black-furred fox that stopped her from bleeding out before medics arrived. “Where is he? I need to thank him.”

Li looked at Fatima in confusion. “What are you talking about, Fatima?” He hadn’t been told anything about a fox tod with black fur being present when they arrived.

Fatima’s brows furrowed in thought. ‘*He left before the medical technicians arrived then.*’ she thought. ‘*B-before my assailant could kill me, he was shot twice in the back. After he ran off, a fox with black fur came and stopped me from bleeding out long enough for the medical technicians to get there. I guess that he left before they arrived.*’

Stunned, Li decided to ask about that later. “I’ll ask, but no promises.” he told her. “I’m going to go find a doctor to come check on you. I’ll be right back.” Getting up, he walked out of the room to see the three officers that were assigned to their protective detail. “Can one of you find a doctor, please. Fatima’s awake.” The arctic wolf, Henri Grizzoli, if he wasn’t mistaken, went to find one. Turning to the others, he asked, “Do either of you know the details about how she was found?”

Officers Francine Pennington and Oksana Snarlov shook their heads in reply. They hadn’t been told the circumstances of how Fatima Ara had been discovered. Francine didn’t like the sad expression that passed over Ma Li’s face, so she said, “As her husband, you could request a copy of the report.”

Li blinked. ‘*That’s right. Our divorce hasn’t been finalized yet. Even if she’s signed the documents, they won’t go into effect until we appear before a judge.*’ Thanking Officer Pennington, Li reentered Fatima’s patient room. “I’ve sent one of the officers assigned to your protection detail to find a doctor. Just rest for a while.”

Fatima closed her eyes and nodded slowly. She soon fell aslep. Fatima didn’t know why, but for the first time in a long while, she slept more soundly than ever.
So, the a hailstorm of bullets have rained down upon a rally, innocent mammals have died, and we're just getting started.

What follows is an excerpt that got cut from the final draft:

After the first shot, no one moves. Mammals are puzzled. Everyone's reaction is to look for a source of the sound. After the second shot, it takes the average mammal one and a half seconds to cognitively process that they're in a potentially life-threatening situation. It takes another .7 seconds for a physical response to kick in. By which time the third shot has already been fired.

Originally, this was in an autobiography of a former military police officer-turned-civilian cop. The Criminal Minds episode 'Final Shot' took the original phrasing and rewrote it for the episode. I swapped a few words for the chapter, but cut it since the chances of anyone wanting to read something so technical was minimal.
Chapter XV: Learnings

Chapter Summary

Learnings. Every character will be learning something, though it might not be clear what it is they learn.

Chapter Notes

And here we are! The next chapter. Thanks again to Fairlane302 for editing and assisting me in maintaining some semblance of sanity (for the time being).

A few things to say before we get into the chapter:
1. Yes, I know this is all kind of moving fast pace. This is partially due to The Chancellor being a control freak losing control, and partially my fault due to having no real sense of time either in real life or in story.
2. There is a scene where the relationship between Finn and Stacey seems like they're moving fast. There is a reason for this. Reason being it's sorta loosely based on a real life moment of mine concerning my second fiancee. This will be dealt with and explained later.
3. I've had a couple of comments on my writing style (thx by the way, I'm glad y'all enjoy it, despite how bad it is). As I stated a while ago, I've been out of the penmanship game for approximately 15 years. What you're reading is a newer style that I now possess as I try my hardest to regain as close to my former one as possible.
4. HOLY FUCKING HELL! So, we're a little more than a week away from two new family members joining our ranks. All my attempts to remain calm have been thrown out the window. I'm posting this chapter now for two reasons. One, my wife has convinced her obgyn to let her remain in a inpatient room until it is time, so no outside computers allowed. Two, I don't know when the next time I'll have access to the internet besides my mobile (yes, I actually use the term mobile in real life, sue me if you think you can) and all the chapters are saved to my laptop's HardDrive. We're leaving for the hospital around 2:15, so yeah. I don't care which Supreme Deity you pray to, but prayers be needed. I'm not religious, but my in-laws are, so I'm grovelling for it.

Read End Notes for more.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter XV: Learnings

Zootopian Police Academy - Prior to Midnight

Nick and Judy laid side by side gasping for breath. Neither of them could recall a time when they felt so worn out. Catching his breath, Nick sat up to look at the others. They were all in a similar state.
He sensed Judy shifting beside him and glanced at her. “How’re you holding up, Cottontail?” he asked.

“Other than being worn out, I’m fine.” Judy answered as she observed the others. “How about you? You alright?”

“Tired, but otherwise, I’m good too.” Nick replied. Standing up, he helped Judy to her hindpaws. “Let’s go check on them.” They walked paw-in-paw over to the others, who were all laying down spread-eagled. They went from one of their fellow initiates to another to see how they were faring. None seemed to be recovering as quickly as they had.

Jameson was watching them all from the observation booth overhead. He took note that Nick and Judy had bounced back far quicker than expected. Looking at the others, Jameson thought about what he’d been told about them. He already knew a good deal about Harrison Wolford and Zannah Fangmeyer, but the others were a bit of a mystery.

Jaxon Lapins, Jameson knew, was the son of his old associate Bryan Jonathan ‘BJ’ Lapins, aka Jonas Savage. Just from observation, Jameson could see a lot of BJ in Jaxon. Same personality, same way of thinking, and same fighting style. The only discernible difference was Jaxon didn’t have his father’s lack of fear. Of course, it was understandable seeing as he’d basically grown up without a family. The fact that he had one now frightened him because there was no guarantee he’d survive.

Skye Wintory was a puzzle. Jameson hadn’t been able to find much on her. He had managed to find her parents, but neither of them shared any of her more dominant traits, leading him to believe that there was a possibility she was adopted. Skye was intelligent, capable of figuring out the solution to complex problems rather quickly. She also showed great skill when it came to mechanics. After having spoken with her parents, Jameson was aware that she was self-sufficient, but also became attached easily. Her relationship with Jaxon could be viewed as a blessing and a curse. While she worked well with him, she had a difficult time functioning without some form of contact, whether directly or indirectly.

Jameson brought his focus to Shay Morrigan, the painted wolf who was Josef Wolverin’s chosen successor. Shay was young, roughly 29 years of age, but he’d been trained to be an assassin practically since birth. Events had led him to betraying his comrades leaving him without a single connection to his former life. Now, Shay was a wayward wanderer without a home. Compared to the others, Shay was far more experienced. The only drawback the painted wolf had was the dark personality born of his equally dark past.

Madge ‘Honey’ Badger, Carlos’ successor, was...bizarre to say the least, and that was putting it kindly. Honey was, in fact, a honey badger and a rather odd one at that. She easily lost track of time, tended to tinker constantly, and held the belief that sheep were conspiring to conquer the world by having everyone join ‘The Flock’ as she called it. When asked to display her ingenuity, Honey had made a bomb out of a stick of chewing gum. Jameson had to admit he was rather impressed by that.

Overall, Jameson found himself intrigued by the fact that the eight of them had nigh-instantly taken to each other. They meshed well and had no issues working together. Shay had challenged Nick immediately, but Nick clearly outclassed the painted wolf, and he had lost the match almost as soon as it had started. His swift defeat at Nick’s paws had prompted him to swear fealty to Nick, saying that he’d be honored to serve him. Shay had even taken to instructing Nick in some of his custom designed techniques. Honey and Skye had bonded over the chewing gum bomb, becoming fast friends. Jaxon, Harrison, and Zannah had clicked thanks to their similar perspectives. Judy, interestingly, was really only close to Nick, Jaxon and Skye, likely because they had her full trust. She was also clearly keeping a close eye on Shay; with his prior profession, that was no surprise.
Judy was mostly just being professional with Harrison, Zannah, and Honey. Her attitude towards the wolf and tigress could easily be explained as a form of trust that they could handle themselves, and being police officers, were no threat to Judy. Honey the Honey Badger was the exception; Judy's professional, no-nonsense attitude towards Honey was a mystery to Jameson.

Jameson’s ear twitched at the sound of hoofsteps approaching him from behind. “It’s only been a couple of hours and they already function well as a team.” Turning to look at Andreas Bogo, he added, “I’m looking forward to see how well they do later down the line. Aren’t you?”

Andreas grunted, then said, “We have a problem. There was a shooting at a rally in Serengeti Plaza a short while ago. Mass casualties, though mostly wounded with only a few dead.” He looked out to observe the initiates. “Things are progressing faster than anticipated.”

Jameson sighed and ran a paw down his muzzle. Indicating to the group below them, he said, “We need to let them rest. They’ve been up for far longer than they should’ve been. If we push them now, they’ll crash and burn.”

“I agree wholeheartedly.” Andreas replied. “Send them to bed, but inform them that in 24 hours they are to report back for additional night training.” He started to walk out of the observation booth then stopped in the doorway. “They’ll be fine Jameson. After all, you’re the one training them. Do whatever you think is necessary.” With that, Andreas left.

Jameson looked at Nick, Judy, and the others. ‘Whatever I think is necessary, huh?’ he thought to himself. ‘In that case, looks like it’s time to go back to the beginning.’ He pulled out his mobile phone and dialed a number he never thought he’d call again. When the line connected, he said, “Hey, it’s me. I need a favor.”

@ the apartment of Andrew Bellwether - Before Daybreak

Andrew and Doug sat on the couch in the living room on their laptops combing through the research of William Goatier. After Andrew’s epiphany, he had started to work on trying to figure a way to counteract the biological material that would be used in the bio-bombs that were to be planted around the city. Both he and Doug had been at this since they returned to his apartment after work. That had been approximately nine hours ago.

“Anything?” Andrew asked. He was starting to become more concerned that they wouldn’t find a means to neutralize the biomaterial. Despite waiting for an answer, Andrew never took his eyes off his screen nor did he halt in his typing.

“Not yet.” Doug answered. “The biomaterial is a mutated strain of something, yet I can’t determine what. I’m running a search through our database remotely to see if I can identify it. Hopefully, that will provide us a starting point.” He didn’t think it wise to add that the search had been running for the past two hours.

“Great.” Andrew replied, sarcastically. “That’s just great. Over a hundred thousand samples plus each of their derivatives. That’ll take no time at all.” He was about to say more when a knock on his door alerted them that Liam and Parker had arrived. “ENTER!” he shouted.

Liam and Parker walked in and took in the sight of the mess before them. They both knew that Andrew like to keep his apartment clean so this was a shock. Liam walked toward the kitchen to grab a drink while Parker carefully made his way to the other sofa. Parker exchanged a brief glance with Doug to which the white-wooled ram shrugged. Parker then looked at Andrew and asked, “Mind filling us in on why you called us here?”
Without stopping what he was doing, Andrew answered, “Trying to rectify my mistake. Think about what we’ve done, what we’re trying to accomplish. Can you really tell me that we couldn’t have reached our goal without having to resort to taking the measures we have? We haven’t just killed predators, we’ve killed innocent prey as well.” Images from the news broadcast on the rally in Serengeti Plaza flashed through his mind. All the dead prey wiped out from the shooting.

Liam realized that Andrew was having an emotional and mental crisis. “Andrew,” he began softly. “Listen to me. I agree with you. We needn’t achieve our goal in this manner, but it’s too late to stop it now. If we are to try and stop the Chancellor, we need to do it intelligently, through subterfuge. Parker and I are already in the process of planning how to do this. We’ve even identified those who’d side with us among the Twelve. Now, we must be patient and bide our time.”

Parker added, “Besides, I think we can all agree that not every single predator deserves to die. Yes, some do, but there are plenty of them that haven’t done a single thing against prey. Predators are necessary to maintain balance.”

Andrew kept tapping away at his laptop keyboard. “You’re right, but if we don’t find a way to nullify the effects of the biomaterial that’s being used in the bio-bombs throughout the city, there won’t be any predators left.” He was no longer panicking as badly as earlier for their words had soothed him. However, there was still the issue of finding a way to counteract the biomaterial.

The blood drained from Parker and Liam’s faces. They had not been aware that bioweapons were to be used. Parker struggled to maintain his composure, but Liam kept a level head and asked, “These bio-weapons, are they limited specifically to predators? Or are prey in danger as well?”

“Everyone is in danger.” Andrew answered, gravely. Even after building upon the months of research compiled between the two, neither William Goatier nor himself had managed to find a way to limit the bio-weapon to exclusively target predators. It was a sickening feeling to know that all your hard work could possibly wipe out generations of innocent mammals simply because you were too stupid to consider the consequences of your actions.

“I see.” Liam stated. After a bit of thought, an idea formed in his mind, but it was risky, very risky. “Andrew, Doug. We’re going to fake your deaths.” This finally did cause Andrew to stop what he was doing to look at Liam in shock. “Hear me out.” Liam said before Andrew could say anything. “We fake your death so that you can turn yourself in. That way, the ZPD and its allies can get a handle on the situation and plan accordingly. Later, we’ll ‘resurrect’ you and provide the Chancellor with false information. We’ll tell him that the ZPD managed to find evidence that connected you to Predopurge and pulled you in for questioning. You’ll say you gave them false information, when in reality you’ll have told them the truth. That should lure the Chancellor into a false sense of security. Meanwhile, the ZPD and their allies will begin preparing the necessary countermeasures.”

It was a good plan, risky as hell, but a good plan that yielded good rewards. It only took a hoofful of seconds for Andrew to consider the implications and consequences of the plan. Andrew stared at Liam and asked, “Well then, what are we waiting for? When do we get started?”

_Holding Cells – ZPD Precinct One - Dawn_

Odafin ‘Finnick’ Fennixon laid on the bottom bunk in the holding cell of Precinct One. It had been little more than 36 hours since his arrest and he still had 12 to go. The officers had all trodden carefully around him, as if walking on eggshells, since they learned of the motive behind his assault of Harold Fennixon, who was both his father and grandfather. The sound of the cell door opening caused his ear to twitch and for him to turn his head to see who his visitor was. Finn honestly felt shocked to see Stacey enter the cell without an officer with her. “What’re you doing here?” he asked, harshly.
The tan vixen glared at Finn, which caused him to flinch. “I’m here to make sure that you’re okay.” she stated. Stacey deflated a little at the sight of him. The bags under his eyes were more pronounced now. “I can tell you’re having trouble sleeping. Will you please just talk to me, Finn? I want to help you.” When he didn’t answer, she sighed. “Your mom’s been staying at my place.” Stacey said, in an attempt to get him to talk.

Finn sat up and looked at Stacey as if she’d grown another head. “My mom’s been staying with you? What? That doesn’t make any sense. Why the hell is she staying with you?” It really didn’t make any sense to him why his mother was staying with Stacey at her place.

Fighting back the smile that threatened to appear on her face, Stacey walked over and sat down next to Finn. “I offered. She didn’t have any other place to go and I sure as hell wasn’t going to have her live out of your van.” Seeing the distraught expression on Finn’s muzzle, Stacey said, “Yeah, I know that you’re living out of that old rust-bucket of a van you own. I didn’t think you’d want your mother to know so I told her you and I were roommates. She expects you to tell her how you hooked up with me when you get released. Also, Director Badgerheim told me to tell you that she expects you back to work the day after tomorrow. She doesn’t care what the regulations say about criminal records, your ass belongs to her now.”

Finn bust out laughing for the first time since that bunny cop pulled one over on Nick. It wasn’t a normal laugh either, but a deep, throaty belly laugh that echoed off the walls of Finn’s holding cell. He actually laughed so hard that tears began to fall from his eyes. Wiping them away, Finn said, “That old badger’s crazy.” His laughter dying down, he looked at Stacey and said, “Thanks. Means a lot.”

“Don’t mention it.” Stacey told him with a smile. “I heard from that bubbly cheetah at the reception desk that the case against you seems to be unravelling quickly. The prosecutor doesn’t even want to bring you to court, but the system demands it. They’re scheduled to bring you to the courthouse in half an hour.”

Grunting, Finn said, “Well at least I won’t be staring at the bottom of the top bunk anymore.” He shifted to sit facing the door. “Do we know who the presiding judge will be?” he asked.

“The honorable Judge Charles L. Buller.” Stacey answered. “He’s an elephant. Apparently, he took the case because your good friends with his daughter, Nangi.” She heard Finn let out a long groan. “What?”

Finn shook his head, answering, “Nangi is this yoga instructor at Mystic Spring Oasis. We…dated…for a while.” He felt sick to his stomach. Yes, he and Nangi had dated way back when, but that wasn’t all they did. They had mated as well, but Finn never knotted the female elephant, preferring not to get tied down.

Stacey wilted a bit upon catching his double meaning. “Oh. I…I see.” she said, softly. “She must have been quite something for you to knot her, huh?” The next thing she knew, she was on her back with Finn staring down at her with fire in his eyes.

“I. Have. Never. Knotted. Anyone.” Finn snarled out. Slowly releasing his grip from Stacey’s blouse, Finn sat back down on the edge of the prison cot. “I’ve been around, but I’ve never knotted anyone. Never wanted to be tied down to someone.” He turned his head to look at Stacey before adding, “Until now anyway.” Finn refocused his attention on the door. “Nangi was my last fling. Broke up, oh, a little over a month ago. It ended because she lost interest. Good thing, because I was ‘bout to dump her sorry ass for the same reason. She just beat me to the punch.”

Stacey sat back up. “How many?” she asked. “I won’t judge. It’s just that, well…” She couldn’t
finish because it would require explaining that despite being in her mid-20’s, she was still a virgin.

“You want the total of male lovers or female?” Finn asked in return. He was ashamed to admit it, but he wasn’t exactly sure of how many mammals he had rutted. There were even fewer that he could put names to.

Stacey’s heart faltered. Her ears folded down as she considered what her next words should be. “Uh, ballpark it?” It came out as a question, but it was meant as a suggestion.

“Definitely more than a ballpark.” Finn answered without humor. He felt his own heart breaking at the sound of Stacey’s sharp intake of air. “As I said, I’ve been around.” The sound of mammals approaching reached his ears. “Looks like their collecting me early.” He went to slide off the bed when Stacey’s paw grabbed his arm. Turning his head to look at her, Finn found himself silenced by her lips on his own.

Stacey held the kiss for as long as she could. Pulling away, she whispered, “I…I still want to try.” Stacey stared into Finn’s wide eyes, pleadingly. “I…I may not be as…as experienced, but I’d like to give us a try.” Her voice was so quiet, even to her, that she couldn’t be certain that Finn heard her.

Finn pulled Stacey close and kissed her again, surprising her. They melted into the kiss, enjoyed the taste of one another. At the sound of the door opening, the two separated. “Wait for me?” Finn asked.

Stacey nodded then watched as the two officers walked Finn out of the cell. She followed until she was stopped by the bubbly cheetah. “I hate this.” Stacey whispered to herself.

“He’ll be fine.” Clawhauser told Stacey. “No judge would find him guilty after the defense attorney presents the evidence. He’ll walk out of there with a heartfelt apology that no one did anything sooner. Which reminds me, why were you two there in the first place?”

Gulping, Stacey pulled out the paperwork that had been turned in to Kit Services responsible for their presence there. The paperwork was an application to turn the house into a registered foster home. Signed by one Harold Fennixon. “That…that sick motherfucker wanted to register himself as a foster.” Stacey found herself filled with rage, loathing, and malice as she reread the form, which led to her use of profanity. Everything about the form checked out. If not for she and Finn, some poor kit would have suffered the same fate.

Benjamin Clawhauser gasped in shock at what Stacey said. Ben came around his desk and pulled the vixen into a hug. He just held her as she began to bawl her eyes out. “There, there. It’s okay now. He won’t ever hurt another kit again. It’s all okay. Hush now.” They stated like that until Stacey cried herself to sleep. Ben then picked her up and brought her to the nap room, leaving a note not to disturb her. ‘Rest now. I’ll have your tod come and get you when he’s through.’

Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia - Mid-morning

Dr. Vanessa ‘Rory’ Wilde stood looking at Officer Lillian Cheetara the same way a mother would their misbehaving kit. “Do you mind explaining to me why you did the one thing I told you not to do and stress your leg?” Rory asked disapprovingly. She watched as Officer Cheetara squirmed uncomfortably under her glare.

Lillian folded her ears down in shame. “I…I just wanted to get discharged sooner. I want to be out there helping them investigate.” the female cheetah answered meekly. She knew she had screwed up. By pushing herself beyond her current limitations, Lillian had set back her recovery time by at least a month. The surgeons had had to go back in to reset the breaks and now she was on strict bed rest.
The doctors had even strapped her down like she was a nutcase. “I hate being so...so...useless.”

Rory sighed as she looked at the remorseful expression on the cheetah’s muzzle. “I told you to take it easy, to let your body mend on its own. I told you the risks of forcing it, but you didn’t listen and now you’re stuck here for a lot longer than either of us wanted. I hope your proud of yourself.” Without saying anything more, Rory exited the room to leave Officer Cheetara alone with her thoughts.

Officers Grizzoli and Snarlov saw as Dr. Wilde approached Fatima Ara’s room. The vixen veterinarian was one of only three doctors allowed into the Arabian mare’s room. They stepped aside to let her enter. When they got a smile from her, they smiled back because the vixen had taken good care of them. She had their gratitude.

Entering Fatima Ara’s room, Rory saw Ma Li sitting in the same spot she always found him, right next to Fatima’s bedside. “Good afternoon, you two. How are we feeling today?” She walked up the small set of steps that had been brought in for her to reach bed level to look Fatima in the eye. “Are we doing well?”

“S...Still a...little...hoarse.” Fatima whispered out, “O-Otherwise...I’m...fine.” Her voice was rougher than when she first regained consciousness. Having nothing else to do, Fatima had practiced speeches. This had, in turn, exacerbated the condition of her vocal cords. The damage done to them now was severe enough that Fatima had been informed there was a very distinct possibility she’d never get full use back, especially if she didn’t let them rest. Not that she cared. Not being able to talk had taught her to listen to those around her better.

“Good.” Rory said smiling. “I come bearing good news. There’s an experimental procedure that could repair your vocal cords, but the drawback is that the success rate is only 35% as well as the usual possibility of death during surgery.” Frowning, she added, “I also come bearing interesting news.” Pulling out an x-ray of Fatima’s abdomen, she held it up in between Fatima’s face and the overhead light. “You see that malformation in the center?” she asked, getting a nod from Fatima. “Well, we wondered what it was. So, when we administered a potent sedative to help you sleep through the worst of the pain, we asked your son Bahman to come and take a biopsy. You see, it was directly in the path of the wakizashi that your assailant impaled you with. Bahman came and ran some tests.” Rory’s face took on a very serious expression. “Were you aware that you are pregnant?”

Ma Li’s heart stopped. “W...wha-what?” he choked out. He couldn’t have heard right. It was impossible. They had been told that it was nearly impossible to have another foal. ‘Nearly impossible means there’s still the tiniest of chances.’ a small voice in his head expressed. Tears began to fall from his eyes as he recalled the last time they had made love.

Fatima stared at the image expressionless. “No.” she whispered. It took a few impossibly long seconds, but Fatima’s mind ground to a halt as it registered that Dr. Wilde had spoken using the present tense. Staring at the vixen, Fatima asked, “Are? Not was?”

This was where Rory smiled. “Are.” she confirmed. “The wakizashi didn’t harm them in the slightest. It passed clean between the two fetuses. The surgeons managed to save them. They’re fine.” The loud ‘THUD’ drew both her attentions and Fatima’s to Li, who had passed out. Chuckling, Rory said, “I’ll go request one of the authorized nurses to come help him.” Pulling out a clearer copy of the image, she added, “This is for you until we can get a sonogram. I’ve got to go check on my other patients, but I’ll be back later.” Rory left the room thinking, ‘I love delivering good news. Now, if we could only end this crazy madmammal we’ll be set.’
Attorney General Hoover was sitting at his desk looking at the incident report from the rally shooting. Setting it down, he rubbed his eyes then looked at Chief Bogo, Supreme Commander Deego, Former Mayor Lionheart, and ADA Wolvenett. “Do any of you have anything to add to the report that wasn’t put in it?”

Chief Bogo exchanged a glance with Lionheart before saying, “Sir, with all due respect, I think we should wait until the mammal I’m waiting on arrives. He was currently in the middle of his own investigation when I called, but his investigation was connected to ours.” Bogo was not a mammal that was easily intimidated, but the glare sent his way by the A.G. had his ear twitch. Thankfully, the door opened to reveal SSA Mauler.

“So sorry I’m late.” SSA Mauler stated as he rushed into the room. “Things got out of paw rather quickly.” Straightening his suit, he said, “Name’s Raoul Mauler, Supervisory Special Agent with the Zootopia branch office of the Zoolympian Intelligence and Investigation Bureau. Pleasure to make your acquaintances.”

A.G. Hoover glared at the grizzly bear forcing him to take a step back. “Sitrep. Now.” He didn’t feel like waiting any longer for an answer to his question. When SSA Mauler didn’t begin, he hollered, “NOW, DAMNIT!”

Mauler jumped then flew into action. “Right. Sorry.” Pulling out a set of files, he passed them to the chinkara. “These files were given to us by a trustworthy source, whose name I cannot divulge due to the agreement required to get them. They contain the names of sleepers within both the ZIB and the ZPD as well as other governmental agencies. I managed to identify the shooters of the rally as Agents Ramos and Senner. They’re both on the run, but we’re tracking them down.”

A.G. Hoover looked at the stack of files in his hooves then appeared to weigh them. “There has to be more than fifty files here.” he observed. “Are you telling me that we’ve had fifty sleepers hiding in plain sight all this time?” Looking at the grizzly, A.G. Hoover noted the hesitant expression on his muzzle. “What are you leaving out?” he asked, coldly.

Licking his lips nervously, Mauler cleared his throat. “That’s not…all…of the files, sir. There’s more. Our source provided those to prove the legitimacy of her claim. The ZIB agents that we managed to capture didn’t deny the accusations against them. One even admitted that they’ve been embedded for years.”

Setting the files down, A.G. Hoover leaned back in his chair. “Years.” he repeated. Closing his eyes, he muttered, “What in the name of all the Divine Entities are we dealing with?” It was quiet for a while as they all tried to come to terms with the fact that the Chancellor had been planning this for so long. Opening his eyes, A.G. Hoover said, “I’m initiating Directive 66.”

Chief Bogo and Supreme Commander Deego stood to their hindlimbs immediately and headed out the door. SSA Mauler sat in one of the newly available chairs. Lionheart and Wolvenett looked confused.

“Sir?” Wolvenett asked apprehensively. “If I may inquire, what is Directive 66?”

A.G. Hoover leaned forward and rested his elbows on his desk. “Simply put, Directive 66 is an emergency order. Once in effect, the city is put on complete lockdown. Emergency Evacuation Services will assist getting the citizens to safe havens as far away from the city as possible. The city will be placed under quarantine. No one, with exception of military troops, will be allowed in or out. Those who want to remain can, but otherwise it is imperative that we get as many out as possible before we must shut down all modes of transport. That means all railways, airports, major highways, everything.”
Lionheart could feel his heart begin to race in terror. “You mean that we’ll be isolated.” he whispered, horrified. “How long do we have to get out of the city?” He started trying to plan what he’d need to bring with him.

“Approximately one week.” Hoover stated. “After that, anyone still within the city is stuck here. The military will be responsible for food, water, and other supplies as well as increased security throughout the city. The ZPD will continue to focus on the investigation.” Phone starting to ring, he answered, “Hello?”

Lionheart stood quickly and bade a quick farewell to Spencer and the Attorney General then raced out of the room. Spencer studied A.G. Hoover’s face as the chinkara listened to whoever was speaking on the other end of the phone call. The moment A.G. Hoover hung up, Spencer knew that things got a whole lot worse.

A.G. Hoover licked his lips then said, “Spencer, I suggest you go prepare yourself and your brethren for war. That was Commissioner Catlin. He’s just received word that one of the Chancellor’s collaborators surrendered. The conspirator, Andrew Bellwether, older brother of Dawn Bellwether, just revealed that there are bioweapons hidden throughout the city. I’m raising the terror alert to EMERGCON.” Seeing Spencer still sitting there, he shouted, “GET MOVING!!” Once Spencer bolted from the room at full sprint, A.G. Hoover looked up and whispered, “Fate? If you can hear me, I know it’s been a long ass time, but please protect us all in this time of need.”

The Mess – Zootopia Police Academy - Early Afternoon

Harrison, Zannah, and Honey stared in wide-eyed, open-mawed befuddlement as they witnessed Judy ravenously devour an entire turkey leg. Nick, Jaxon, and Skye paid it no mind having watched her scarf down the frittata with pepperoni on their way back from Bunnyburrow. Shay didn’t see anything bizarre about it, saying, “Meh.”

Judy tossed the bone of the turkey leg she had been eating and grab another one. Taking a bite, she grabbed her water bottle and chugged it down before returning to the leg. As much as she wanted to blame the hormonal suppressant injection Rory had given her, Judy knew it wasn’t the case. She chose to ignore the incredulous stares she was receiving from those around her and focus on her meal.

Nick smiled as he watched Judy eat. “Slow down, Fluff. It ain’t going anywhere.” he told her. Picking up one of his blueberries, he tossed it in the air and caught it in his maw. He noticed the looks of disbelief Judy was getting. He didn’t like it at all. “I know my dad gave us the rest of the day off, but I doubt you want to spend it on an empty stomach.” Nick was pleased that his words caused them to resume eating their own meals.

“Hey, Nick?” Jaxon asked. “I think we need to discuss sleeping arrangements.” Jameson had informed he, Nick, Judy, and Skye that they’d be bunking up together during their stay here. Scarlett Reddington was being detained in another room down the hall from their own. The red fox vixen hadn’t even tried to escape so Jaxon didn’t bother asking for armed guards to watch her.

Skye spoke up. “I’m going to suggest that Judy and I stay together in her room. That leaves you and Nick to share his.” From her position next to Nick, she leaned close to his ear and whispered, “I know you’ve got questions you’re dying to ask.”

Nick was thankful that his fur was already a rich crimson so that his blush wasn’t nearly as visible as it could be. Nodding, he said, “I can accept that.” He looked at the others then asked, “Where are you all staying?” He knew they were staying at the academy, but not where. Nick was curious because, though he had just met them, he felt as if they were his pack.
Surprisingly to everyone, Shay was the one who answered. “The same temp housing complex as you. We’re just one floor up. We’ve already been assigned who we’re roomed with. Harrison and I are in room 12B, Honey and Zannah are in 11B.” Finishing his bug-steak, Shay picked up his plate and deposited it through the opening to the washroom then headed out.

Honey followed Shay with her eyes. “That’s the most I’ve ever heard him speak since meeting him.” she murmured. Finishing her own meal, she picked up her plate and deposited it through the washeteria window. “I’m heading to the room. I need sleep. I’ll catch up with y’all later.”

Watching as Honey left, Harrison and Zannah both stood and repeated the actions, saying they would see them later before departing towards the academy’s multipurpose complex. Now alone with one another, Jaxon, Skye, Nick, and Judy exchanged glances. Judy finished the last of her turkey legs and polished off her mixed berry salad then said, “Well, since everyone’s going to rest, we might as well do the same.”

Nick nodded then grabbed Judy’s dishes to take them to the washeteria window. Jaxon did the same for Skye’s. Once that was done, the four of them walked back to their rooms. Nick gave Judy a brief kiss before he and Jaxon entered their room. Closing the door behind Jaxon, Nick locked both it and the door connecting theirs to Skye and Judy’s. His ear twitched as he heard bedsprings compress. Turning, he found Jaxon pulling out the sofa-bed hidden within the couch.

Jaxon stripped down to his boxer briefs then hopped up on the mattress of the sleeper sofa. Seeing Nick’s expression, he asked, “Something up?” Jaxon watched as Nick approached and sat on the edge. It seemed that Nick was trying to work himself up for something. “You know, you can ask me anything, right? You’re going to be my brother-in-law at some point.”

Nick let out a strained chuckle. “I, uh, I wanted to ask you for advice.” he replied. “I mean, I want to abide by both vulpine and lagomorph courtship laws, but I have no knowledge of how bunnies court one another.” Nick had tried researching it. He had even tried asking one of Judy’s other brothers while at the farm. Ewan and Michael both did their best to explain, but Nick only ended up with more questions than answers.

Scratching his head, Jaxon said, “Well, I can tell you a few things. First thing you need to know is that does often box their prospective mates. I’ve seen Judy do that numerous times to you, so you’re good there. When it comes to bucks, we normally try and impress the doe of our fancy by gifting things like flowers, produce, or even clothing.”

“Tods often gift puzzles to the vixen they’re courting.” Nick told Jaxon. “I could gift her some puzzles. Flowers, too. Are there specific flowers that bucks gift?” Nick started trying to come up with a list of flowers he thought Judy would like.

“Hold on now, Nick.” Jaxon ordered. Once Nick looked at him again, Jaxon said, “Flowers hold a very important place in Leporidae culture. There’s a whole language based on them. Yes, roses mean love, but so do other flowers.” Jaxon frowned in thought. “You have melianthus, primrose, myrtles, tulips, lilacs, forget-me-nots, and plenty of others that all mean ‘love’ or some variation of it. There are flowers that say ‘friendship’, ‘trust’, ‘faithfulness’, and many, many other meanings as well.”

Nick was floored by the information. “Is…is there a book or something that I could read so I can memorize all of it?” he asked. He wanted to make sure that the bouquet that he gave Judy always said exactly what he wanted it to say. He felt a small grin appear on his face as he watched Jaxon’s light up.

“There is actually.” Jaxon confirmed. “I’ll get you a copy. Also, you need to understand that does will eat the bouquet given to them by a buck. This shows that they accept them as their suitor. There
are a ton of special flowers that can only be used at a specific time, but we’ll cross that bridge when
the time comes.”

Nick’s thoughts suddenly went to Emmitt Otterton, Mr. Big’s florist. He felt it was safe to assume
that the otter would know what flowers would make the best bouquet for what he wanted to tell
Judy. He continued to listen as Jaxon explained the various steps to lagomorph courtship while at the
same time wondering what Judy and Skye were doing.

<MEANWHILE W/ JUDY AND SKYE>

The moment Nick and Jaxon entered their room and closed the door, Judy and Skye entered their
own, repeating the process. Judy went to use the restroom, letting Skye get comfortable. Skye looked
around the room, slightly saddened that Judy hadn’t done anything with it. At the same time the
vixen understood why Judy hadn’t. They wouldn’t be here for but a few months at the most.

Skye moved over to the desk and sat down. She noticed a drawer was ajar by an almost
imperceptible amount. Opening the drawer, her eyes widened by what she discovered. Flipping
through the text, Skye saw that small notes had been placed in the margins. Her ear twitched at the
sound of the toilet flushing. Peering in that direction, she saw Judy walk out.

“So, what do you want to…” Judy froze as she saw what Skye was looking at. They locked gazes in
a silent standstill. Without warning, Judy lunged at the vixen, knocking them to the ground. “Give
me that!” Judy whisper-shouted. She continued to struggle, trying to get the book away from Skye.
“Seriously, Skye. Give.”

Skye yelped in surprise at Judy’s strength. She tossed the book towards the bed which caused Judy
to leap for it. However, Skye quickly grabbed one of Judy’s hindpaws, pulling the doe to her chest.
“Hold on, Judy.” Skye was attempting to apologize for invading her privacy, but Judy was in a state
of panic. “Judy. Stop for a sec.”

Judy’s anxiety triggered an instinctive response causing her to kick. The action sent Skye flying as
Judy rushed to the book and held it tightly to her chest, whimpering. She felt so utterly embarrassed
and humiliated that Skye had found it. Judy wanted to crawl into a pit and stay there for the rest of
her life. As much as she hated the nickname of ‘Jude the Prude’, Judy knew that there was truth in it.

Skye managed to crawl over to Judy and wrap her in a hug. “Hey. Hush now. There’s nothing
wrong with wanting to hide something like that.” Skye continued to whisper soothing words to the
doe until Judy calmed down.

“I…I’m sorry, S-Skye.” Judy stuttered out. Wiping away the beginnings of the tears that had
threatened to fall, Judy took a deep calming breath. “I was just embarrassed.” She lowered her ears
over her eyes as if to hide herself.

Chuckling softly, Skye said, “You’ve got no reason to apologize. I’m the one at fault. I shouldn’t
have been digging.” She patted Judy’s back comfortingly. “Do you want to talk about it? After all, I
do know a thing or two.” Skye had no issue talking about her life before Jaxon, it was her private
time with him that was off limits.

Judy sniffled a little. “Y-you’d really do that for me?” she asked. The sound of Skye’s confirming
hum relaxed her. Moving her ears around so that they went down her back, Judy whispered, “I’d like
that. Thank you.”

“No problem, Judy.” Skye told her. Getting up and moving to the bed, she patted the spot next to her
to indicate to Judy were to sit. Once Judy was seated next to her, Skye asked, “Alright, where would
you like to start?”

Opening the book to the chapter on fox courtship, Judy said, “Tell me what’s expected of the vixen during courtship. This book has a lot of terminology I don’t really understand.” She passed the book to the vixen, opened to the spot that she’d dogeared.

Taking the book, Skye said, “Well, how about this? You tell me what you know then I’ll fill in anything you missed.” To her great amusement, Skye actually found herself with a pen and a pad of paper, taking notes. “Slow down a bit please. I can only write so fast.” Skye said with a laugh.

“Sorry.” Judy replied sheepishly. She’d all but memorized *The Complete Young Vulpine’s Guide to Maturity* within the few days home in Bunnyburrow. Judy gave her a sad smile. “I… I just want to do this right, Skye. I’ve never done any of this before. It’s all new to me.”

Skye studied Judy for a second. She saw no deception in Judy’s words or body language. Skye pulled Judy close. “It’ll be okay.” she whispered. She found herself feeling protective of the doe. It pained her to see Judy like this. Skye promised herself that she’d do everything she could to help Judy with this.

Judy sighed. “I know it will.” She relaxed in Skye’s embrace. “Skye? Can I ask you something?”

Judy asked, quietly. She felt the vixen nod. “Can… can you tell me what you know about soulmates?” Judy felt Skye tense up next to her.

Swallowing thickly, Skye asked, “Are you telling me that Nick’s told you that you and he are soulmates?” For foxes, soulmates weren’t something you spoke of lightly. “Judy? Did Nick tell you that you’re his soulmate?”

“No, exactly.” Judy confessed. “Nick’s father only mentioned their importance.” She could still recall what Jameson had told her back then. Knowing that, Judy had asked Jameson for the book to help her court Nick properly. She wanted to do this to prove to herself that she could do it.

“Well,” Skye began. “Soulmates are rare, and we only ever get one. It’s said that when a fox finds their soulmate, they won’t know it at first. There isn’t anything we wouldn’t do, nothing we wouldn’t be for them, no lengths we wouldn’t go. They are our everything, our whole reason for living.” Skye’s thoughts drifted to Jaxon as she continued to relay what she’d grown up being told about soulmates. She wholeheartedly believed that Jaxon was her soulmate, there was no doubt in her mind of that fact.

Judy chuckled softly. “Jameson said almost the exact same thing.” she whispered. Judy felt fatigue start to take over. She hadn’t slept since the night before last. “Skye?” Judy heard the vixen hum questioningly. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Judy.” Skye whispered. “Rest now. You need it.” It didn’t take long for the sound of Judy’s soft snoring to reach Skye’s ears. She picked Judy up the same way one would a kit and set her down on the bed, tucking her in. “Sleep tight.”

*<MEANWHILE W/ JAMESON>*

Jameson walked into the auxiliary office Andreas was using at the ZPA. He found the gigantic cape buffalo leaning forward with his right fist pressed to his forehead, right elbow resting on the desk acting as a brace. “I guess you’ve been informed then.” Jameson stated in a serious tone. The only response he got in return was a single grunt. Taking a glance at the clock just behind and to the right of Andreas, Jameson saw that it was only a couple of seconds past midnight. “I’ve texted everyone to tell them they have until the day after tomorrow off. After that, an old friend of mine will be here
to exfil us to a more remote and secure location to train them.”

Andreas leaned back to study Jameson. “I see. What of Fenrir, Josef, and Carlos?” They had agreed that they would all assist in teaching the new initiates. “Will you be having them extracted as well to wherever you’re having the initiates taken?”

“I am.” Jameson answered with a nod. “I’m here to tell you that where they are going isn’t someplace you’ll find on any map. It’s a privately owned black site outside Zootopia in an area most wouldn’t dare adventure. It’s a dead zone.” He lobbed a communicator at the General. “That’s the only way you’ll be able to contact them. Do NOT lose it.”

Andreas Bogo examined the communicator. It seemed far more advanced than those he’d seen before. Carefully putting it in the breast pocket of his uniform, he said, “I won’t.” He and Jameson locked eyes. Neither wanted to say what had to be said, but thankfully they both already knew. ‘Be careful, watch your six, and don’t you dare die.’ Andreas watched as Jameson made to leave, but before the fox could, Andreas asked, “Did you talk to Deego?”

Jameson froze, tail bristled. “No, and I don’t plan to anytime soon.” Jameson looked at Andreas over his shoulder. “I know I must at some point, but now is not the time.”

Andreas continued to study the black-furred tod for a minute before saying, “You can’t keep running away from this Jameson. You’ll have to face it eventually. After all, Nick deserves to know the truth.”

Returning the focus of his gaze in front of him, Jameson walked out of the office, whispering, “I know. I just don’t know how the fuck to tell him something of such magnitude. How do you tell your only kit they aren’t even supposed to exist.”

Chapter End Notes

So, last time we had kids, my wife proved that human beings can go savage as well. I’ve still got the faint scar marks where she bit my forearm from back then.

Why do I tell you this? Simple. This is a warning for all the male readers. If you’re married and your wife is about to have y’alls first child naturally, be prepared. They will revert to savages. Pain triggers something far scarier in them than death.

‘Ian’ is holding off posting the next chapter of SWZ until we return home. So, two or three weeks. He claims there are a couple of things that he needs to fix first. Also, he’s excited about the results of the Lightsaber Colour Poll. There’ve been a lot of in-depth submissions. Some colours have been decided, but we still have a few that need TBD.

Lastly, a belated Valentine’s Day to you all. My family did a small gift exchange similarly to Christmas. I’ll admit I squealed in jubilation when I got Dynasty Warriors 9 for PS4 from my wife. I hadn’t even known they were making it. Plus it got released the day before (2/13). I spent a ton of time playing it with my kids (godson/nephew included) we had a ball. I got my wife the book series she’s been wanting for forever (Legend of Drizzt). I wonder why we never by anything for ourselves in my family? I mean, we make enough for it, but we never do.

Anyway, I'm signing off. Until next chapter release. Do svidaniya!
Chapter Sixteen: Awakenings

Chapter Summary

Wakey-wakey.

Chapter Notes

Setting: An old graveyard in the dead of night. Distant thunder rumbling.

Out of one grave a fist breaks through the surface followed by its counterpart.

Pulling itself out of the grave, the creature releases an echoing wail as its body begins to reconstitute itself.

After it's over, the cryptid stares at the observer, and grins maniacally.

"I'M BACK!!!"

See End Notes for the continuation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Sixteen: Awakenings

Temporary Housing Complex – ZPA - Early Morning - Prior to Evacuation Announcement

Nick shot up with a gasp. Breathing heavily, he rolled out of bed and stumbled into the bathroom. Gripping the counter tightly to help himself remain upright, Nick closed his eyes. Taking deep breaths to calm himself, Nick raised his head level to the mirror and opened his eyes. He found himself staring into the eyes of a wild, primitive fox. Nick examined his eyes carefully. They really appeared to be those of a primeval vulpine, slit pupils and all. Stepping away from the counter, he looked down to see that he was instinctively standing only on the pads of his hindpaws, also reminiscent of a feral vulpine. When he tried to set the rest of his hindpaws back on the ground, Nick found that it didn’t feel normal anymore. He resigned himself to this new natural stance. Looking at the mirror once more, Nick saw his eyes hadn't reverted back. His ear twitched as a sound reached his ears. Placing his paw on his chest, from where the sound emanated. Closing his eyes, Nick counted the beats. 1,2,3,4. 1,2,3,4. 1,2,3,4.

Jaxon woke as his subconscious mind registered a disturbance in his physical surroundings. Cracking opening an eye slightly, he saw dim light radiate from the bathroom door. Getting off the sleeper sofa’s mattress, he approached and peered inside to find Nick with a paw on his chest. Jaxon’s ears honed in to try and listen to Nick’s heartbeat. The last remnants of sleep evaporated as he realized what it was that woke him. As a Leporidae, Jaxon had a heightened sense of hearing. He had, on
rare occasions, been able to hear the heartbeats of mammals and knew that it was normally stylized like a four-step waltz: ba-dum, ba-dum, repeat. Nick’s right now was: ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum, repeat. To Jaxon, it almost sounded as if Nick had two hearts.

Nick opened his eyes to look at Jaxon, who he had heard enter the bathroom. Nick saw Jaxon flinch when he saw his eyes, but relaxed immediately afterwards. Nick tentatively approached Jaxon saying, “I think...my Izu Genes are awakening.” Jameson had tested them all for the gene within minutes of everyone’s arrival. He hadn’t tested Nick due to having him tested at birth, so he had spent the time further explaining the gene to him. Nick had paid rapt attention to his father’s explanation.

A small smile spread across Jaxon’s face at the news. He recalled what they’d been told after getting tested for the gene. “That’s great, Nick.” Jaxon stated. An expression of curiosity soon replaced his smile. “I wonder how it will affect the rest of us.” Jameson had told them that those with the gene’s non-awakened form had a higher chance of beginning to awaken their own when those around them did.

“I have no idea.” Nick replied. “We’ll just have to wait and see.” Glancing at the clock, Nick saw that it was almost 5 in the morning. He walked to his bedside table and picked up his phone, selecting his mom’s contact info. His mom was always up and moving by 4:30, so Nick hoped that she’d answer. Thankfully, she did. “Morning, Mom. I know it’s early, but I needed to ask you a question.”

“Morning to you too, Nicky.” Rory answered. “How can I help? I’m getting ready to go to work, so you’ll need to be quick.”

“I was wondering if you were privy to the status of Emmitt Otterton.” Nick explained. “You know, the otter that sparked the Missing Mammals case Judy and I solved. I need his assistance with something, but I don’t know if he’s been cured yet.”

“I know exactly who you’re talking about.” Rory told her son. “He’s due to be released today. I’m actually on my way there to perform the final examination prior to letting him sign out.”

“Awesome.” Nick exclaimed, making him mom chuckle. “Look, I wanted to know because I would like to place an order for a bouquet of flowers for Judy. I was going to call his shop, but if he wasn’t there, I didn’t want to impose.”

“Don’t worry, Nicky. When I get there I’ll tell him about how you and Judy saved him. You just call his shop if you have the number and place your order.” Rory replied in a soft, sweet voice. “Okay, I’ve got to go. I’ll talk to you later, ‘kay?” She didn’t wait for an answer before hanging up.

Nick quirked his ear towards the bathroom. Hearing the shower running, he dialed the number for Otterton’s shop. He was expecting to get an answering machine. Instead, the line connected, and a feminine voice said, “Otterton’s Floral Emporium, where you can purchase any sample of the world’s flora. This is Kris Otterton, how can I help you?”

“Oh,” Nick answered. “Sorry, I...I was kind of expecting to leave a message on the answering machine.”

Kris giggled a bit. “It’s okay. No one’s normally up around this time anyway, so I thought it would be funny to freak you out. My bad.” She giggled a little more before asking, “So, how can I help you? Are you looking to place an order?”

“I am, actually.” Nick responded. “I’m looking for just the right combination of flowers that will tell
my girlfriend what she means to me. I’ve been told that there’s an entire language based on flowers and I want to make sure that I the bouquet conveys the message just the right way.”

“Aw, you’re so sweet.” Kris gushed. “I’m not that well versed in floriography, but my dad’s getting released from the hospital today and he’s a genius in it. Tell me what you’re wanting to tell her, so I can write it down for him.”

“I want it to say…” Nick didn’t know what words to use. “I don’t know. There’s so much and I honestly have no idea what words would be best. I want it to say I love her, that she’s my heart and soul, that no one could possibly replace her.” Nick sat on the edge of his bed. “I really don’t know how to describe what she means to me.”

There was silence on the other end of the line for a good bit. Finally, Kris asked, in a soft voice, “Can you trust me? I have a concept of what you’re trying to say, but can you trust me enough to let me try?”

“Heh, I’ll trust you. But, please, don’t mess this up.” Nick told her. “My gal, she’s more special than you could possibly ever imagine.”

“I got it. Believe me, I got it.” Kris said softly. “I’ll get the order form ready. Do you want us to deliver? Or do you want to pick it up?”

“I’ll have my mom pick it up. If you don’t mind, that is.” Nick replied. “Thank you, Kris.”

“No prob. I’ll get your order processed. It shouldn’t take too long. Once my dad gets back, I’ll make sure yours is first. Have a nice day. OH! Name! I, uh, need a name for your order.”

Nick thought about it. He didn’t want to draw unwanted attention, so he chose an old alias. “Nicholas Redd Hood.” Nicholas because it was his actual name. Redd because it was one of Judy’s nicknames for him. Hood? Well, when Nick was a kit, his parents always told him that they were direct descendants of the legendary Robin Hood. “My mother, Marion Hood, will be the one picking up the bouquet.”

“Alright. I’ll make a note. Have a nice day.” Kris then hung up.

Nick shot a quick text to his mother to let her know the arrangement. The instant the message was sent, Nick convulsed and collapsed. He felt as if his nerves were overloaded live wires. He suppressed his screams and whines, enduring the pain. Unable to completely suppress making any noise, Nick let out a hiss of pain.

Judy woke with a gasp. She bolted for the door connecting her rooms to Nick’s and kicked it in. Her heart clenched at the sight she beheld. Rushing to Nick’s side, she whispered, “I’m here, Nick. I’m right here.” She held Nick’s head to her chest as he continued to convulse.

Jaxon walked out of the bathroom to find Judy holding Nick tight as the tod convulsed on the floor. “What the hell?” he exclaimed. Seeing Judy’s expression, Jaxon said, “I’ll go get Jameson.” He sprinted out of the room.

“Nick?” Judy whimpered. Tears began to spill from her eyes. Seeing Nick like this tore her apart. Unable to stop herself, Judy leaned in and gave Nick a kiss on the forehead in between his eyes. The moment her lips made contact, Judy felt Nick’s convulsions lessen then cease. Pulling away, she whispered, “Nick?”

Nick’s eyes shot open revealing that his eyes were still those of a primal fox. Sitting up, he looked at Judy and locked eyes. Leaning down, he captured her lips in a kiss, which he growled into. He
separated after only a few seconds to whisper, “Sorry for worrying you, Love.”

“You...you’re okay?” Judy asked, worriedly. She studied Nick’s face, looking for any micro-expressions of deception. She saw none however as Nick nodded. “You’re sure?” Judy had to make sure.

Leaning in to kiss her once more, Nick whispered, “I’m fine. I promise.” The kiss starting tender and loving, but soon devolved into one of passion. Nick pulled away, licking Judy’s nose as he heard his father and Jaxon approach. He pulled Judy into his lap, wrapping her in his tail. When his father and Jaxon entered the room, Nick looked at them with a grin. “Hey. How’re you doing?”

Seeing Nick’s eyes, Jameson smiled then shifted his own to match. “Looks like you’re finally awakened, Kit.” Letting his eyes revert to normal, Jameson stated, “Since you’ve awakened, Judy and the others shouldn’t be too far behind.” As he began to leave, Jameson paused. “You two should go visit Rory at MTHZ. If I’m not mistaken, Rory still wants a sample of Judy’s blood. Now would be the best time to do it. You already have today off, but take tomorrow off as well. Make sure you two get enough rest, because we’ll be hitting the ground running once the real training starts.”

Jaxon watched as Jameson left the room. Turning to look at Nick and Judy, he said, “Well, if you two are going to stay in here, I’m going to join Skye in the other room.” He didn’t wait for a reply. Wandering into Judy and Skye’s room, Jaxon joined Skye on the pull-out couch. Cuddling up, he sighed contentedly. He heard Skye murmur ‘I love you, Jack’ in her sleep, kissed her, then joined her in dream land.

Nick and Judy continued to sit there gazing at each other. Judy reached up to stroke his muzzle. “Your eyes,” she murmured. “They look sexy.” She blushed realizing that she had said that aloud. Judy watched as Nick smirked, displaying his fangs. She shivered in arousal at the sight and the sensation of his claws combing through her fur. “N-Nick.” she whimpered.

Nick’s smirk became a soft, tender smile. “Sorry, Love. Didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.” He held her tight to his chest and stood. Walking over to the bed, he laid her down then did the same, curling around her.

“It’s okay.” Judy told him cuddling into his chest. “Besides, I...I like it.” she admitted, quietly. Judy both heard and felt Nick rumble, causing her to grin. She snuggled deeper, enjoying the moment. After a while, she pondered, “I wonder when I’ll awaken. Your dad said the rest of us shouldn’t be too far behind.”

“Don’t know, but I hope I get to take you on a date before you do.” Nick replied. With the knowledge that they had roughly two days off, Nick had begun planning a nice evening for them. “Rest a little longer, Love. I’ve got plans for us later today.” It didn’t take long for Judy to fall back asleep. Nick curled tighter around her protectively before he too fell back asleep.

**The Cage – Zootopia - Just prior to noon**

Andrew Bellwether sat in his cell awaiting the arrival of the prison guard that was to escort him to the warden’s office. After faking his death with the assistance of Liam, Parker, and Doug, Andrew had surrendered himself to the ZPD. They read him the Patriot Act, effectively labelling him as a terrorist. He hadn’t argued. Hearing the prison guard open the slot in his cell door, Andrew turned his back and stuck his hooves through so that the guard could cuff him. Once that was done and the door opened, Andrew followed the guard to his destination.

Police Chief Tobias Bogo sat in the visiting area waiting for the guard to secure Andrew to the table. Looking down at the file in his hooves, Bogo read, “Andrew Bellwether. Older brother of Dawn
Bellwether. Biochemical engineer.” Peering up at the black-wooled ram before him, Bogo said nothing as he waited to see what Andrew would say.

“I don’t know where the bio-bombs are located.” Andrew stated. “I only helped create the biomaterial being used in them.” He had turned over all his research at the time of his surrender. “Look, I would work on one payload at a time. After finishing one, I would leave it out so that another member of Predopurge could collect it.”

Bogo frowned deeply. Reading through the file, he said, “When you surrendered, you agreed to serve a life sentence without parole. In exchange, you’re going to provide us with all the information you know.” Setting the folder down, Bogo crossed his arms. “Anything you want to add before I get up and leave?”

Shaking his head, Andrew said, “Not at this time.” He watched as Bogo waved the guard back inside. Before following the guard out of the room, Andrew asked, “By the way, did you receive my note?” He got a nod in response, “Well?” he inquired. He received another nod in response. Nodding back, Andrew followed the guard back to his cell. Once inside, he moved to his prison cot. All he could do now was wait for Liam, Doug, and Parker to do take care of their parts. Laying down, Andrew closed his eyes and took a nap.

**Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia - Just before noon**

Pronk power-walked down the various hallways of MTHZ. After the shooting at the rally, Pronk had raced to the hospital so that he could help. Although he still wasn’t feeling 100%, Pronk knew that he was no longer contagious. That didn’t mean he didn’t take precautions though. Quickly making rounds, he checked those wounded during the shooting. Once he was finished, Pronk made his way to the office where he met up with the rest of Dr. Wilde’s team.

Dr. Viktor Wolfenstein, Olly Clawfrey, and a new member, Douglas Howlser, who liked to be called ‘Doogie’. Doogie was a 15-year-old coywolf wunderkind who had scored top marks on his MCAT. He had been assigned to Dr. Wilde’s team due to his young age and his personality issues. Though young, Doogie didn’t show any of the typical behavioral traits associated with those his age, often acting like a much older adult instead. Pronk took a seat next to Doogie with a polite nod.

The team had been running around the hospital aiding other teams as well as treating their own patients. The shooting had thrown the hospital into near chaos with the large influx of wounded. They had been informed of the activation of Directive 66 earlier that day and, as medical professionals, that meant that they were to remain in the city to care for the impending casualties. Due to the temporary relocations as a result of the impending evacuations, the team had decided to reside within the hospital. Each had already contacted their families to make them aware of this decision, and give them some peace of mind.

Doogie didn’t mind in the slightest. He had a job to do and, by the will of the Divine Entities, he was going to do it. The file he held in his paws, however, had him worried. The name of the patient was the same as one he’d heard in passing from Dr. Wilde when talking of her son and his future mate. Doogie was waiting for Dr. Wilde’s arrival to discuss the case. The moment she walked through the door, Doogie approached, asking, “May I speak to you in private for a minute?”

Rory hadn’t anticipated Doogie’s serious tone that accompanied his question. She did however nod, lead him into her office the next room over, and close the door, locking it behind them. “What is it?” she inquired. Taking the file that Doogie offered, she studied it for a second before looking at the name attached. Rory stared at it for a bit in thought before speaking. “Okay,” she whispered, quietly. “Do me a favor. Let me handle this. You can assist, since it’s unethical to treat one’s family as a patient.”
Sitting on the examination table, Judy wondered if she’d be lucky enough to get Rory. She watched as Nick studied the different images that adorned the wall of the examination room. Judy had gotten top scores in all her classes, both high school and collegiate. However, the detail on these put those in her old books to shame.

‘I hate hospitals.’ Nick thought to himself as he pretended to study one of the images on the wall of the examination room, having seen such things countless times in his mother’s various textbooks she kept at home. However, Nick understood why Judy had insisted they visit his mother. After all, Judy had confirmed what his father said about his mother having requested a sample of her blood. Still, Nick had never, ever, been a fan of hospitals. Hospitals were always far too clean in his mind. With how sterile the janitorial staff kept them, hospitals were constantly left smelling of nothing but chemicals. Still, better to be too clean than unsanitary Nick supposed, especially in places such as hospitals.

“So, after this, what’re we going to do?” Nick asked as he turned to Judy. The doe had an expression that told him she was thinking it over carefully. “We could go grab something to eat real quick and go on a short tour of the city.” he offered after a minute or two.

Grinning, Judy looked at Nick. “Yeah. We could do that.” Seeing him in the outfit he was wearing, Judy had to admit he looked really good, like, really good.

Nick’s outfit consisted of black jeans, a vintage t-shirt with the logo of an old video-game she didn’t know, a biker jacket similar to that movie about the Spectre of Retribution, complete with those metal spikes. Nick was also wearing the smarts shades his father had given them to hide his eyes, which hadn’t yet reverted to their normal state. He looked like one of the models in her Knotty Tod magazines.

“You are on a hormonal suppressant, right?” Nick inquired when the scent of Judy’s arousal struck his nose. He saw Judy squeeze her thighs together, and released a huff of amusement. “It’s alright, Cottontail. I rather like your scent. I just don’t want anyone else with a sensitive nose getting a whiff of something that is meant for me alone.”

Closing her eyes, Judy prayed that the veterinarian would hurry up and arrive. She felt relief when the door opened to reveal Rory and a young coywolf enter. “Hey, Rory. Nick and I decided to come by so that you could draw that blood sample you wanted.”

Giving Judy a knowing look, Rory said, “So I see. Doogie, be a dear and close the door please.” Taking a seat in front of Judy, the vixen asked, “So, judging on that smell of arousal the Ahendophol isn’t working.” Crossing her arms and drumming the claws of her right paw on the upper arm of her left, Rory pondered aloud, “I don’t…” Her eyes shot wide when the realization of why it wasn’t working anymore hit her.

The same moment Rory figured it out, Judy began to feel weird. Suddenly, the most agonizing pain she could imagine ran rampant through her body. Beginning to convulse, she slipped off the examination table towards the ground. Before she made impact, something caught her. Judy knew that it was Nick, because his scent was suddenly all around and enveloping her.

Nick had noticed it the instant it happened, that subtle shift in Judy’s scent. It clearly hadn’t been the scent of her arousal, that much he knew. He had come to know that scent after identifying it the first morning at his parents’ place, though he hadn’t known what it was at that time. That had a light floral and earthy smell with an underlying hint of spice. This scent was something totally different, and he didn’t know how to describe it. Instinctively, Nick bolted to Judy’s side catching her before she hit the ground and held her tightly to his chest. Judy’s convulsions intensified forcing him to hold onto her tighter. Having gone through the same experience himself just that same morning, Nick knew
Judy had started to undergo her own awakening. He kept her in his powerful embrace, nose positioned in between her ears.

As for Judy, she felt as if her whole body was on fire and had molten lava coursing through her veins instead of blood. She wondered if this was what Nick had felt earlier that morning. Judy could hear Nick whispering softly into her ears, telling her things like ‘I’m here’, ‘You’re okay’, ‘Everything’s going to be alright’, and ‘Just let it happen, Love’. Judy trusted him and endured it. She never once screamed throughout the process, not wanting others to think that something terrible was happening to her. She didn’t know how much time had passed, but Judy knew it was taking longer than it had for Nick, as he had been slowly awakening for months or years. Finally, Judy felt relief as the sensations faded away. Fatigue set in as the process had drained all her energy. She fell asleep in Nick’s embrace.

Rory watched as Nick switched the way he held Judy to a bridal carry. After quickly collecting the blood sample from Judy, which was the reason for their visit, Rory ordered, “Take her back, Nicky. She’ll need to rest and recuperate. I’ll check on her when I drop off that stuff you requested.” She stepped close and laid a peck on Judy’s exposed cheek. “Sleep well, Judy.” Rory then ordered Doogie to deliver Judy’s blood vial to the lab while she walked Nick to the hospital entrance.

Nick bade his mother farewell, laid Judy in the passenger’s seat of the vehicle they were allowed to borrow from the ZPA, then got into the driver’s seat and took off back towards the Temp Housing Complex. When he pulled up, Nick saw his father was waiting for them, figuring his mother had informed him of the situation. For reasons unknown to Nick, Shay was also there, wearing nothing more than a pair of workout pants. Nick stepped out of the vehicle and walked around to collect Judy. Carrying her bridal style, Nick approached his father.

Jameson watched as Nick closed the distance between them as he carried Judy. “I must admit, this is quite a bit sooner than I expected.” Jameson told his son. He placed a paw on Judy’s head. “She’s going to be fine, Nick. She just needs plenty of rest.” Turning to Shay, Jameson said, “Collect the others. You all may have the day off from training, but there are things that need to be done.” As Shay nodded and left, Jameson told Nick, “Bring her to your room and stay with her. I’ll come and check on you two later.” Once Nick departed for his room, Jameson pulled out his phone and dialed the number for his contact who was supposed to extract them. “Hey. I need you to wait one more day. … No, my son’s mate has just awakened. … Great. Thanks, M.”

<MEANWHILE>

Scarlett Reddington sat in her room at the ZPA’s Temp Housing Complex reading a romance novel that she had loved since she was young. Skye Wintory was seated on the other end of the couch staring at her. Scarlett wanted to roll her eyes at the intensity of Skye’s stare, but refrained. Looking at her, Scarlett said, “Whatever it is that’s bothering you, could you please just voice it already.”

Skye frowned. “I’m just trying to figure out why you seem so familiar to me.” she explained, tersely. “I feel like I know you from somewhere, but I can’t remember. I don’t recall ever meeting you before you turned yourself in.”

An unusual mixture of fear and excitement filled Scarlett at Skye’s words, but she kept a straight face. “I don’t know what to tell you, Agent Skye.” Scarlett lied. “Maybe I’m just one of those mammals.” In truth, Scarlett knew exactly why Skye felt that way. Returning her gaze to her book, Scarlett’s right paw repositioned itself onto her chest, over the locket she kept hidden under her suit. Inside it was a picture of her daughter the day she took her home. Due to her dangerous lifestyle, Scarlett had entrusted the safety of her daughter to her best friend and confidant, an arctic tod named Gabriel, who was also her daughter’s paternal uncle.
Scarlett and her daughter’s father had never meant for it to happen, but the moment it had, they both knew that they didn’t want anyone else. They hadn’t knotted that first time, but every subsequent time they had. It had been after their sixth that Scarlett had realized she was pregnant. Fear had gripped her heart then, for if her adversaries became aware of the existence of her offspring, her daughter would be in grave danger. It hadn’t been long after that that her mate had been murdered before her eyes. Vengeance had stopped her from dying of her broken heart, along with knowing that she still carried a piece of him inside her. After birthing her daughter, Scarlett gave her to Gabriel for protection and embarked on a warpath. It took more than a decade to exterminate those who took her mate from her. By the time she finished, Scarlett learned that Gabriel and his family, including her daughter, had disappeared. It had taken another three years for her to track them down and by then, her daughter was nearly grown. Scarlett remained out of sight, but kept a close eye on her daughter, observing as she completed her transition into full adulthood, eventually gaining employment with the ZIB. When the Savage Mammals Case started, Scarlett contacted her mammals in the city to get as much info as possible, knowing that her daughter would more than likely be assigned to the case, and she had been right.

“Maybe,” Skye mumbled. “But I don’t think that’s it.” She got up off the couch and walked to the window. Growing up, Skye had always had a difficult time. It had been on her fifteenth birthday that one of her older brothers had gotten drunk and let slip that she was adopted. Learning that had broken her heart. Her father had beaten Austin in a righteous, and justified, fury for revealing the information. He then took her aside, explaining that it was more complicated than that. Her father had told her he was, in reality, her paternal uncle and that her father had been murdered while trying to protect her mother. After Skye was born, her mother had entrusted the safety of her daughter to him while she got revenge.

Skye often sat at the window, anxiously awaiting the day her mom would come and get her; but that day never came. Eventually, Skye ran away, ending up in Happytown and falling into drugs, booze, and prostitution. Later down the line, she met Nicholas Wilde, who came along, got her clean, and turned her life around, if only a bit. While they were roommates, Skye made a fool of herself by taking his kindness as more than what it was. She knew now that what she felt back then wasn’t love, but a form of hero-worship. After he kicked her out, she moved to Foxhollow, where her uncle had relocated and met Jaxon.

Now, she had a family of her own, but it always felt like it was missing something: her mother. Skye’s sole dream was to one day meet her mother, to listen to her explain why she never came back. There was only three things Skye knew about her mother. First: she was a red fox vixen, not an arctic vixen. Second: she had a scar from the caesarean section. Third: her mother possessed a small locket that held a picture of her as a newborn kit.

A knock on the door drew the attention of the two vixens. The door opened to reveal a young fox tod wearing a cadet outfit. He walked up to Scarlett and pawed her an envelope before leaving the room. Both vixens looked at one another and quirked a brow in response to the tod’s actions.

Scarlett opened the envelope and read the letter. Sighing, she tossed it aside. “My mammals here in Zootopia have been wiped out thanks to personal prejudice. Wonderful.” she grumbled. Scarlett got off the couch and started to pace, thinking.

Skye picked up the letter, reading the contents. The letter was signed ‘Cordially yours, B’. It was short, to the point, and written in calligraphy. The letter explained that The Yliaster Group had been wiped out and their base of operations had been destroyed in an explosion. Skye had heard about The Yliaster Group, the ZIB had often requested information from them when needed, but she hadn’t been aware that Scarlett Reddington was the mammal who ran them. Their elimination was both a blessing and a curse. Skye heard Scarlett mumbling to herself and simply waited to see what
would happen next.

Scarlett stopped pacing and sighed deeply. Things were going to be a lot harder now. She turned to look at Skye for a moment before heading towards the bed saying, “I’m going to get some sleep. You can stay if you want, but please don’t disturb my slumber. I’ll need to be well rested if I’m going to find a solution to this new complication.” Scarlett divested herself of her suit jacket, dress shirt, and pants, leaving only her bra, panties, and locket on before crawling into her bed.

Watching as the red fox vixen undressed herself, Skye noticed a large number of crisscross scars on her back. She couldn’t understand what kind of toad would fall for a vixen like Scarlett Reddington, but then again, she didn’t know what type of mammal Scarlett was prior to her ascension to Crime Lady.

As soon as Scarlett was encased in the covers of her bedding, Skye exited the room, locking the door behind her. Swiftly making her way to her own room, Skye pondered if she should dig into the vixen’s background for clues. Ultimately, she decided against it. When Skye reached her room, she found Jaxon trying to solve a Rubik’s Cube. She leaned against the door jamb, watching as he struggled and eventually tossing it aside with an irritated huff. “What’re you doing, Tiger?” she asked with a teasing smirk across her muzzle.

Jaxon rolled his head along with his eyes. “Nick had me go purchase a shitload of puzzle games like that bloody cube for Judy. I thought to give it a try, but I’ve been sitting here for almost a full hour without coming close to solving the bugger.” Folding his arms, he grumbled, “I swear, I’m gonna have a bloody migraine in the morning thanks to damn thing.”

Skye chuckled as she picked up the Rubik’s Cube and sat down next to her buck. “Well,” she drawled, quickly solving it with ease before pawing it over to him. “Guess it just goes to show which of us has the brains, doesn’t it?” She guffawed at the incredulous face Jaxon had as he stared at the solved cube. She heard Jaxon grumble some more then suddenly Skye found herself on her back staring up into his eyes as he smirked down at her.

“You may be the smarter one out of the two of us, but I know something that I’m far better at than you.” Jaxon told her in an amorous voice. He felt Skye shiver underneath him then leaned down and kissed her passionately. Even after the countless hours of sex they had had over the past couple of years, Jaxon could never get over just how wonderful it was to kiss her like this. His ears heard her heartrate pick up tremendously, making him smirk into the kiss.

Squirming underneath Jaxon, Skye could feel her pussy begin to leak. She moaned as Jaxon began to grind his erect cock into her. Skye swiftly removed both her pants and Jaxon’s, leaving his shirt on. She could feel Jaxon making quick work of unbuttoning her shirt before he used his blunt claws to rake through her chest fur.

This was like a dance between the two. Sometimes, Jaxon would lead, other times it would be Skye. When it was Jaxon, he always made her feel as if she was the queen of the animal kingdom. He’d take his time, lavishing her with affection, but always following her subtle direction and never dragging things out any longer than she wished him to. When Skye was in control, she would tease him mercilessly and, being a lagomorph, Jaxon often didn’t stand a chance. This time, however, the jackrabbit wasn’t taking his time being affectionate. He was simply toying with her, making her shudder with anxious anticipation. He was savagely teasing her, something he didn’t do often, but when he did, he did it well.

Jaxon pulled away from the overheated kiss, lowering himself to her chest and suckling her right nipple. Skye’s back arched at the pleasurable sensation. She encircled him with her paws, pulling him closer. Jaxon dragged his dull claws down her sides until they hooked her panties and slowly
dragged them down. He gave a powerful suck then, with an audible pop, withdrew his mouth from her nipple. Skye’s autonomous response was to spread her inner thighs at the action, giving Jaxon the opening he needed. Jaxon slowly inserted a finger into Skye’s moist cavern, swirling it around inside, making Skye shudder. Jaxon fought back the lewd smirk that threatened to overtake his muzzle at how wet she was.

Skye hated Jaxon right now. Teasing him like this was her job. It was she who was supposed to tease him until he reached his limit. He was supposed to be slow, sensual. To have him act like this, to tease her in this manner, was maddening in oh so many ways. She was so wet that she could hear the sound of Jaxon’s paw moving in and out of her. Her brain was screaming at her to tell him to get on with it, but the kithish face Jaxon was making had her biting her tongue. However, Skye did use her hindpaws to lower his boxers, freeing his hardened member. The sight of it so close to her gaping, sopping cunt was almost too much. Her mind went on autopilot, thinking of all the lewd, perverse things she could do with that, by bunny standards, thick rod of meat. Skye’s head fell back onto the mattress as Jaxon gave a tiny thrust, just grazing his tip across the lips of her pussy. A whine escaped her throat before she could stop it.

The whine caused Jaxon to smirk wickedly and repeat the motion again and again. Each time he did it, Skye’s body would spasm deliciously. He licked his lips similarly to how Skye would when she was in his position. Jaxon pulled his dick away, lowering it to her anus and poking its entrance lightly. He watched as Skye arched her back more than he’d ever seen her do it before. Anal sex was the only kind they hadn’t yet tried. The instant Skye’s back fell flush once again with the mattress, Jaxon pulled away entirely to let Skye catch her breath.

Skye felt so flustered. She could literally feel the juices of her pussy leak out, down, and over her tailhole, preparing it for what Jaxon was about to do. Shivering as Jaxon collected some of the juices onto his paw to lube up his cock, Skye somehow managed to roll over onto her stomach. With her head down, ass up, and tail swishing from side to side in anticipation, Skye lustfully whispered, “Well, you going to keep me waiting? Or are you gonna remind me why you’re called savage by rutting my virgin asshole?” Though, she had been a prostitute when she was younger, she’d only ever done oral and PIV. This? This was special, for Jaxon was the first and only mammal that would ever get to ravage her ass.

Jaxon hummed for a second as if in thought. He leaned in close to her ass and took a whiff. He caught the scent of her body wash shower gel, ‘Winter’s Chill’. He smirked, knowing how thorough Skye would always wash herself, as if to get the grime of her past out of her fur. Jaxon pressed his nose to Skye’s quivering pucker and took an even deeper sniff. ‘She really is thorough.’ Jaxon thought to himself. Extending his tongue, Jaxon rimmed her puckered tailhole, smacking his lips every time. The taste wasn’t bad, in fact, he found that he enjoyed it greatly.

Skye’s eyes rolled back in her head and her tongue lolled out of her mouth as she drooled from pure hedonistic pleasure. When Jaxon thrust his tongue into her tailhole, her muscles clenched like a vice and she climaxed, squirting all over Jaxon and the mattress. Because of how she was positioned, Skye didn’t move with the exception of her tail wrapping itself around Jaxon’s head to pull him closer. She whimpered and whined in desperate need.

Despite being a lagomorph, Jaxon hadn’t hit his peak yet. All his intense mating sessions with his vixen had trained him on how to cum when he chose. Of course, that didn’t mean that he wasn’t leaking copious amounts of precum like crazy. The smell of their combined pheromones was driving the two insane with lust and desire. Jaxon, unable to reason with himself anymore, repositioned himself so that he was standing on Skye’s calves, prick perfectly lined up with her anus. He carefully inserted one, two, three fingers and began to make piano-like movements with his fingers to stretch her out.
Skye was panting madly by this point. She had been panting for a good length of time, but now it was almost like she was hyperventilating or had just run an ultramarathon. She need him to put it in already. She needed to feel him inside her, pounding her senseless. Just as she was about to tell him that, it happened. Skye felt Jaxon plunge his cock into her ass all the way to the point their hips met. The sensation had her release a mating shriek that echoed off the walls of the room.

Taking that as his go signal, Jaxon began to thrust himself in and out of Skye’s ass like a jackhammer. He let loose a short spurt of cum to act as more lube, better smoothing things along. He felt her ass clench again as she hit her peak once more. It always surprised him how amorous Skye could be outside of winter, her natural mating season. Of course, during that time, she was nearly insatiable, making them stay in bed for hours on end for days. There had been one or two times they had stayed in bed for an entire week, just rutting each other’s brains out. He’d never get used to it, but then again, he didn’t want to. It wasn’t long before his body told him that it could no longer hold back its impending climax. Jaxon thrust forward with such ferocity that the smack nearly drowned out the knock on the door.

Skye let out another mating shriek as Jaxon poured what she could only imagine was a gallon of cum into her ass. It, in turn, forced her to hit her third climax, completely drenching both of them and the bed in her cum. Her legs, which had been holding her up the entire time, finally gave out and she fell into the mattress with a wet smack. Jaxon fell onto her back as he continued to pump even more cum up her tailhole. There were a few seconds of silence before there was another knock on the door. Brain still fritzing out, Skye said, “Enter.”

Shay opened the door to find Jaxon and Skye in what one would normally call a compromising position. Luckily for them, the painted wolf didn’t give a fuck. “You have ten minutes to make yourselves presentable. Jameson wants to see us.” Before he closed the door, he added, “Make sure you take a shower. Otherwise, you’re liable to freak the less sensible mammals around here out.” Closing the door, Shay made his way out as he had already informed Harrison, Zannah, and Honey.

Jaxon gently rolled Skye over onto her back while still lodged inside her spasming, puckered tailhole. They shared a tender kiss then Skye propped herself up on her elbows as Jaxon withdrew himself. There was a loud sound of suction as Jaxon popped out. They watched in dumbstruck fascination as a torrent of cum came gushing out of her gaping tailhole. Skye collected some, then, in full view of Jaxon, poured it into her open maw and swallowed, savoring the flavor. She winked at him then the two of them headed for the shower.

**ZPD Precinct One HQ - Early Afternoon**

Officer Leon Delgato was both elated and disheartened as he sat in Chief Bogo’s office. Elated because the Chief had just finished commending him for his exceptional service in spite of his injuries. Disheartening due to the deathly grave expression that fell over the Chief’s face when he finished with the commendations. Delgato felt terrified of what the Chief would soon tell him.

Tobias Bogo was many things: A hard-ass, a stickler for the rules, a no-nonsense mammal on the job, and a reasonable authority figure overall. There was one thing, however, that no one would or could ever accuse Bogo of being: heartless. Chief Bogo looked at his lion officer with eyes that held both great sadness and fiery anger as he held the file containing the results of the blood analysis the precinct’s medical officer had delivered to him. “Leon,” Bogo began slowly, causing the lion’s ears to perk attentively. “I need you to understand that as hard as this will be to hear, it’ll be just as hard for me to tell you.” He pulled out the sheet of paper with the results from the file and hoofed it over to his officer. “You have feline leukemia.”

Delgato’s brain stopped, trying to work out the punchline for the joke. Laughing nervously, the lion
said, “That’s, uh, I’m not sure I get the joke, sir.” He smiled, but it was forced. Leon had known that his chances for the virus had always been high. His father and both grandfathers had had it, and managed to survive, but his mum’s mum had died from it. Taking the offered sheet of paper, Leon read over it. The nervous smile faded, and tears began to spill from his eyes as his paws shook. There in big, bold red letters were the words: Subject Tested Positive for Feline Leukemia.

Watching as one of his toughest officers broke down in tears, Bogo suppressed the urge to shed a tear of his own. He remembered when the lion first came to Precinct One. Delgato hadn’t had the mane he did now, it had just been a tuff at the time. Delgato’s work ethic had been a bit questionable, but soon Bogo had learned that the lion chose to be a bit of a prankster to lighten the dreary mood that often fell over the department. Bogo’s first impression of him had been marginally erroneous. He had viewed the lion as an attention whore, but it soon became clear that Delgato merely wanted nothing more than to ease mammals through wit. Not that it always worked, of course, but he did it regardless. Managing to keep his voice even, Bogo said, “I’m sorry.”

Leon Delgato nodded in thanks then promptly ripped the results sheet into confetti. He looked Chief Bogo in the eye and said, “I won’t accept mandatory retirement. If I’m going to die, it’s going to be while I’m on duty. I’ll fight you if necessary.” He didn’t know what his expression was, but Bogo’s was a poker face. Delgato waited to hear what the Chief had to say.

“Officer Delgato, I’ve been made aware that you often did well with public speaking in both high school and college.” Bogo stated. “I’m in need of a media liaison. If it is agreeable to you, I’d like you to take up the position. You’ll get a raise as well as better benefits. I only ask that you please visit an oncologist in return.”

Delgato didn’t even have to waste any time considering the offer. “I accept, but I’d like to have the rest of the day off. I need to visit my folks and inform them of the news.” Getting the go ahead from Chief Bogo, Delgato walked out of the Chief’s office. Making his way to reception, Delgato found Clawhauser talking to that tiger that had visited previously. His ears caught words and phrases like ‘You and Toby’, ‘tomorrow night’, and ‘dinner plans’ being thrown between the two. Ignoring it, he headed to the underground parking garage for his motorcycle. Once geared up and out of the parking garage, he gunned it, speeding out towards his cubhood home where his parents still lived.

Mr. Delgato was sitting on the front porch when he saw the only son amongst his progeny of five cubs pull up on his bike. His father and father-in-law were seated with him, drinking unsweetened iced tea. The three watched as Leon approached them cautiously and joined them, sitting in one of the open deckchairs. The senior Delgato males exchanged concerned looks at Leon’s dire expression, hoping that he wasn’t there to tell them what they feared to hear.

Leon sucked in a deep lungful of breath. “I’ve got Feline Leukemia.” He heard as his elders dropped their beverages onto the ground. It was deathly silent until the door opened to reveal his mother exiting the house to see what had caused the noise. Leon couldn’t bring himself to look at his mother. He listened as she asked them what was going on. When she didn’t get an answer from the others, he heard her pawsteps closing in on him. He avoided making eye contact with her for as long as he could before she forced him to. The moment it happened, his resolved shattered and he broke down in tears again. “I…Mom, I’ve got Feline Leukemia.”

Mrs. Delgato, for her part, kept her composure. Her heart broke hearing her son tell her the words that had haunted her as nightmares for years. She pulled her only son into a tender, motherly embrace, letting him cry in the secured comfort of her arms. Out of all her cubs, Leon had always been the one that they treasured the most. He was their youngest, their only boy, as well as the last she and her husband would ever have. They had always known that the chances of him getting the same affliction was higher than their daughters.
Leon’s sisters came outside, having heard the sobs, to find Leon crying in their mother’s arms. They looked at their father and grandparents. The expressions told them all they needed to know. They took Leon from their mother and held him tight, crying with him. All of them went inside. Mr. Delgato called his oncologist, who graciously accepted Leon as a patient, saying he’d do everything within his ability to increase Leon’s chances. The two older Delgato males started calling friends for financial support, getting nearly a quarter of a million right off the bat from the members of their pride.

Leon Delgato was thankful for all the support, but was too emotionally drained to verbally express this and fell asleep on the couch. His family left him alone, not wanting to cause any undue stress. Leon continued to sleep, reliving the highs and lows of his life in his dreams. He hoped that he, like his father and grandfathers, would manage to survive this ordeal.

Home of Doug Ramses - Midafternoon

It wasn’t really a home. Not to Doug anyway. It was just a four-walled building that served as a place of temporary residence for him. Still, it was serving a purpose. Doug, Liam, and Parker were sifting through all of the paperwork they had managed to gather on the biomaterials the Chancellor had chosen to use for the bioweapons scattered throughout Zootopia. Liam had contacted Randolf Reines, A fellow member of the Twelve, for assistance. At first, Randolf was on the verge of refusing, but the moment bioweapons had been mentioned he fell in line.

Currently housed within Doug’s so-called home were Doug, Liam, Parker, Randolf, and Zebrina. Randolf and Zebrina were in the middle of conversing with their contacts over the phone. The five of them had to be very careful with their activities to make certain that what they were doing didn’t reach the Chancellor. If he got wind of what they were up to, it was curtains for them.

“AH-HA!!” Liam shouted, drawing everyone’s attention to him. “I’ve found it!” He waved the sheet of paper that held the info that held the closest match to the biological materials being weaponized. “Now, there have been a few differences from what the Chancellor’s weapons have, but this is it.” The buck began to read aloud, “Pneumonic Yersinia Pestis. Damn, the Chancellor isn’t holding anything back.” He pawed it over to Doug.

Doug took the sheet and looked it over. “Fucking hell. Let me see the paperwork for the one being used.” Parker passed it over to him. Comparing the two, Doug began marking the dissimilarities. Upon finishing, Doug researched the points of interest. When he was done, the ram dragged a hoof over his snout. “We’re in trouble. Like ‘up shit creek without a paddle’ trouble. He’s had this genetically altered to be far more virulent. It’s also been redesigned to be resistant to antivirals.”

“I thought Yersinia Pestis was a bacterium.” Parker replied, a tad bit confused. “Doesn’t Yersinia Pestis mean plague? Plagues are bacterial, aren’t they? Not viruses. It’s why they’re easier to transmit, isn’t it?”

Nodding in confirmation, Doug said, “Normally, that’s true. However, viral plagues do exist. They’re just extremely rare. This?” He gestured to the info sheet. “This is a synthetically created mammal-made viral plague designed to emulate the natural occurring Pneumonic Yersinia Pestis, only more lethal. That’s why we had such a difficult time identifying it. Viruses are also easier to mutate. This one has been, making it easier to transmit and allowing it to ignore the species barrier.”

As the severity of this information sank in, the others began to understand just how deranged the Chancellor truly was. Randolf’s attention was brought back to his phone as his contact called his name. “Yes, I’m still here. … Uh-huh. … I see, thank you.” Hanging up, the reindeer turned to those with him. “We’ve got a problem. Attorney General Hoover has put the entire city under EMERGCON. They’ll be evacuating the city within the week. There’s going to be an increase in
both police and military presence. If we’re going to do anything, it has to be soon or never.”

Zebrina let out a loud drawn-out groan. “We’ve been working towards the end of Zootopia without ever realizing it.” she grumbled. Picking up her phone, she dialed the number to one of her contacts. When the call connected, the zebra wasted no time in issuing a series of commands. The exact instant she was done listing her orders, Zebrina disconnected the call. “That should buy us a little bit of time, but no guarantees. Doug, can you synthesize a cure? Or at least a treatment?”

Doug nodded. “I can. I just need the proper equipment. As far as I know, there is only one place in Zootopia that definitely has what I’d need: the Institute of Disease Research. Now, theoretically, the Center for Contagious Pathogen Management should probably also have the necessary equipment needed. but the chances are minimal. Even if they do, I don’t know if I even possess a high enough security clearance required to be granted permission to use any of it. At any rate, I highly doubt that either facility would allow me access to the materials, or the additional equipment I would need to keep it viable.”

Parker huffed in annoyance. “How’re we going to get this done then?” the platypus asked, irritably. “We need to manufacture a cure or treatment as soon as mammally possible. If we don’t, tons of innocents are going to die.” A lightbulb went off in his mind. “Wait, I’ve got an idea. Doug, you said there’s a chance the CCPM has some of the equipment, right? And, that you might have the security clearance needed to use it?” Getting a nod from the ram, Parker grinned. “Then all we need to do is get you the materials you’d need, as well as that extra equipment. Liam, can you fabricate a court order to have the materials delivered to his office from the I.D.R.?”

Liam cackled. “Parker, old boy, have you forgotten who I am? I’m Liam Bucksworth. Besides being the one of the most successful lawyers in the Meadowlands District. I’m also, in certain circles, its most notorious forger. It'll be easy-peasy.” The buck started the process of getting the necessary materials to forge the court order.

“Let’s not forget Andrew, shall we?” Randolf reminded them. “According to his last phone call from prison, everything on his end is set up. All we need now is the signal.” The reindeer had his mammals on standby for the moment they got Andrew’s ‘go’ signal. His mammals would ‘break’ Andrew out of prison then deliver the black-wooled ram to the Chancellor’s meeting spot upon the flattop stone for phase two. The other six of the Twelve were being kept in the dark because the six of them didn’t know who they could trust. There was also the fact that Sahar Humpback was an officer for Precinct Two in Sahara Square. The camel was a firm believer in the Chancellor and would follow him anywhere, even Hell itself. Everyone present was thankful that Sahar wasn’t involved with the investigation into Predopurge.

“We won’t.” Doug stated strongly. “Also, I have a plan to get rid of Sahar and the other six of the Twelve, or at least make sure they don’t interfere. Liam? You ready?” The ram received a nod from the arctic hare in response. “Alright then, you all know what to do. Let’s roll.”

**ZPA - Shortly after nightfall**

Nick sat on the floor beside Judy’s bed, waiting for her to wake up. It had been a pawful of hours since Judy’s Izu Genes had awakened, and she had yet to regain consciousness. Nick hadn’t moved from her bedside since then. A knock on the door drew his attention away from his doe. Standing, he slowly approached. “Who is it?” he asked.

“It’s me, Nicky.” answered the voice of his mom. “I’ve got the stuff you requested. Care to let me in?”

Nick opened the door slowly, revealing his mother standing there with the bouquet he had ordered as
“well as the puzzles he had asked Jaxon to purchase. Smiling, he let his mom enter the room, closing the door behind her. Gesturing to Judy’s unconscious form on the bed, he whispered, “She…hasn’t woken up yet.”

Rory set the bouquet of flowers down on the desk and the bag of puzzles on the ground next to it. “Do you want me to examine her?” she inquired. At Nick’s nod, Rory walked over to the bed to check on Judy. After only a couple of moments, Rory said, “She’s fine. It simply took more energy than expected. She should awake relatively soon though.” She made her way to Nick and gave him a peck on the cheek. “Stay close to her. I’m sure she’ll love seeing your muzzle as the first thing she sees when she wakes.”

Watching as his mom departed, Nick returned to his position at Judy’s bedside. He tenderly caressed her cheek, gazing at her lovingly. When she stirred, Nick grinned. “You waking up, Love?” he asked in a hushed whisper. Her answer was a fluttering of the eyes before she opened them fully to gaze back into his own. Smiling at her, Nick softly said, “There’s my two precious gemstones.”

“Mm.” Judy hummed. “You charmer.” They gazed at each other for a short while before Nick crawled up and curled himself around her. Judy sighed in contentment at the action. “How long was I out?” she asked.

“You’ve been unconscious for a pawful of hours.” Nick answered. “Mom did collect a blood sample while you were unconscious. Afterwards, I brought you back to our quarters at her orders. She said you’d need plenty of rest to replenish the energy expended during your awakening.” Being this close to Judy, Nick encircled her with his arms, drawing her close to him. He started to groom her with his tongue, seemingly on instinct.

Judy relished Nick’s ministration, enjoying the intimate display of affection. She went to breath in to sigh happily when a scent reached her nose. Opening her eyes to survey the room, Judy saw the bouquet on the desk. “Oh, Nick. Those flowers are beautiful.” Her words had him pull away and climb off the bed to grab them and present them to her.

“I’m glad you like them. They’re for you, after all.” Nick told her with a smile. In truth, he didn’t have a clue what any of the flowers were, but that didn’t matter right now. It was the message they were meant to express that was important. “I’ll be honest. I had the florist select the flowers for me. I didn’t know which flowers to pick to make sure you understood what I wanted them to tell you.”

Judy took the bouquet in wonder as she identified the various flowers. There were purple tulips, alstroemeria, white carnations, dodecatheon, honeysuckle, ivy, justicia, and peach blossoms. Judy had grown up having to learn the language of flowers, but to see the bouquet Nick had requested for her, knowing what the message was, Judy teared up. “O-oh, Nick.” she whispered. Judy found herself conflicted. The custom was for the doe to eat the presented bouquet, but Nick’s was so lovely, Judy didn’t want to.

Seeing the conflicting emotions within Judy’s pretty eyes, Nick said, “You can eat them if you wish. I’ll simply buy you another one. I’ll buy as many as you want, whenever you want. I’ll even build you a greenhouse to grow them in when I construct our den.” His words made Judy smile which, in turn, made him smile. Nick watched as Judy devoured the bouquet with fervor, his smile never fading. When Judy was finished, Nick extracted one of the puzzles from the bag. “This is part of fox courtship.” Nick explained. “Tods normally gift puzzles to the vixen they are interested in courting.” He then gave her a hanayama labyrinth puzzle. “This is just the first one.”

Taking the puzzle, Judy asked, “Are they all going to be like this? Or will I get puzzle books as well?” She quickly solved the puzzle and pawed it back to him. Judy smiled as Nick expressed his shock then giggled. She solved every puzzle he gave her in little to no time at all. Eventually, Nick
ran out of puzzles for her. “That’s all?” she asked, mildly disappointed.

“Sorry, Love. I’ll get you some more later.” Nick crawled back up onto the bed and curled himself around her. “I have plans for us tomorrow. You and I are going to go on our first date.” He laid a kiss on her cheek then whispered, “Go to sleep, Love. You’ll need to be well rested for tomorrow.” He purred as Judy snuggled into his chest and lay a kiss on it. Soon, the two were fast asleep, embraced in each other’s arms.

Chapter End Notes

0P3RaGh05T dusts himself off and waves at the readers.

"Hey! How y'all doing? Good? Good." (Pops joints) "Well, in the last few days, I've endured another trip around the sun with my wife. Our anniversary was last Saturday. Five years. We now have five kids, Including 'Ian'." (Takes a seat on headstone) "My wife has fully recovered and has resumed her reign. So, I've been granted a little more freedom. However, a dark cloud is on the horizon." (Peal of distant thunder is heard and 0P3RaGh05T waves it off) "I don't know when, but the agreement binding me and my editor, Fairlane302, is reaching its end. We still have a short bit of time, but at some point in the future, I'll be issuing an advertisement for another."

(Crackling of lightning)

Rolling eyes, 0P3RaGh05T says, "Oh, do shut up already." (Lightning bolt strikes right next to 0P3RaGh05T) "For someone whose supposedly omnipotent, you sure have horrendous aim." Returns focus to reader. "Anyway, there'll be a few changes coming at a later, yet undetermined, date."

(Angels suddenly surround 0P3RaGh05T)

Eye twitching, 0P3RaGh05T states, "Oh, for the love of..." Snaps fingers, summoning shades. "How many times have we been over this?" Sighing, 0P3RaGh05T looks directly at reader. "I've got to go. It would appear my elders have deemed it necessary to give me grief. I hope you enjoyed the chapter, even if it's a tad unorthodox in design. Until next we meet."
Chapter Summary

Make sure to read both Author’s Notes. The information they contain is extremely important.

Chapter Notes

What's this? A new chapter released on a Saturday? One week from the last time?

Actually, I had every intention of releasing this chapter yesterday, but real life got in the way. Speaking of which, I have good news and bad news.

Bad news: either due to poor cooperative planning or lack of knowledge about how the program's application worked last time, joint editing with my (former) editor, Fairlane302, has discontinued. I don't know exactly what happened to cause it, but that's the gist of it. It would appear after transferring ownership of the Google Drive file to me, the program disconnected us once the docs were closed. So, this chapter isn't edited all that well, and I'm in need of a new editor. My advertisement is in the End Notes.

Good news: If anyone remembers, I previously had an Original Work I was forced to put on indefinite hiatus due to the inspiration (my grandfather) passing away. There's a saying about how inspiration comes in many forms. Well, a new inspiration revealed itself, and the story has been resurrected.

Which brings me to some more bad news [sorry]. Ian will still release one chapter a month on Thursdays. Which Thursday is up to him. However, I will be alternating between this story and my Original Work, which will have it's prologue posted in three weeks’ time.

Enough of that though. You're here to read about my version of Nick and Judy's first date. Let's get on with it already. Also, see the track list in the end notes for urls.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 17: Their First Date

Zootopia Police Academy

Judy felt so safe and warm that she didn’t want to get up. However, Nick’s words last night about taking her on their first date today had Judy rouse herself, fully refreshed, from her slumber. The first thing she noticed was that Nick’s arms were still wrapped around her, securing her to his chest, and his tail draped over her like a blanket. She carefully extracted herself from Nick’s arms and headed to
the bathroom. Upon glancing at herself in the mirror, Judy paused to examine her reflection closely. She noticed that, like Nick, she had undergone a few changes. For one, she was taller now and her musculature was leaner. Judy turned to examine her back in the mirror as well. There wasn’t much difference, but as her cousin Bob used to say, ‘pays to be thorough’.

Turning on the shower, Judy waited for the water to heat up. Remembering those old films her dad used to watch, Judy struck a couple of muscle poses in the mirror, stifling her laughter. When the shower started to steam, she stepped inside. Judy sighed as the heat of the water relaxed her muscles, which were tense from the physical alterations she underwent due to the awakening of her Izu Genes. Being that this was Nick’s room’s bathroom shower, Judy didn’t have any of her usual body wash or fur conditioner. She hoped Nick didn’t mind if she used his.

Nick slowly woke from his slumber as he heard the sound of his shower running. He could still smell Judy’s scent coming from where she had slept next to him. A smile stretched across his muzzle as he inhaled it deeply. Rolling out of bed, Nick walked over to the kitchenette so he could start preparing the two of them breakfast. He opened the refrigerator to scan the contents. As Nick looked inside, he also started wondering what he should make for dinner as well. He did plan on taking Judy on a true courtship date today, but certain things would require minor alterations in order to fit the lapine version. Namely, the duration of the date. Vulpines often only spent one or two hours per date. Bunnies, on the other paw, according to what Jaxon had explained to him, ranged from anywhere between five hours to an entire day and ended with a nice meal, whether at a restaurant or a home-cooked one.

Home-cooked meals were an essential part of vulpine courtship. Tods were supposed to provide for their vixen, be it food, clothing, shelter. It was the thought of that last one had Nick pause, paw halfway through the action of reaching out for the Pacific Saury he intended to use for the courtship meal tonight. Nick still needed to start drawing designs for he and Judy’s future den. Grabbing the Pacific Saury, Nick got the rest of the ingredients that he had on paw and would need for tonight then started prepping. The meal he had chosen needed to be prepped well in advance, so now was the perfect opportunity. He’d have to see if the kitchen staff at the Mess would grace him with the rest of what he needed. Once the initial preparations were completed, he called his mom, asking her to bring a few puzzle books and some draft paper.

As Nick finally started cooking breakfast, just some simple breakfast tacos with egg and cheese filling, he heard the shower shut off. Nick turned to watch as Judy stepped out from the bathroom and was astonished to see the difference. Quickly plating the breakfast tacos, he walked over to Judy. Originally, her head had been equal to just below the center of his chest. Now, Judy’s head came up to the point that he could easily rest his muzzle between her ears without having to bend down. Nick also noticed that Judy hadn’t just grown taller, but everything about her body had adjusted appropriately to her new size.

Judy smiled pleasantly at Nick’s stunned expression. Very carefully, she brought her paw up under his maw and closed it then began to scratch. She watched as his eyelids fluttered in bliss and a dopey grin stretch across his muzzle. Judy continued as she waited to see in Nick would figure out the other difference she had discovered while in the shower. As she expected, it didn’t take long at all.

Nick pulled his head away from Judy’s ministration and grabbed her paw to inspect it closely. Upon closer examination, Nick saw that her claws, normally blunt, were now much sharper. He looked at her and smiled tenderly. “You were dangerous before, but now you’re down right deadly.” he teased.

Snorting, Judy shook her head and walked to the small little dining table where Nick had placed their breakfast. “What do you have planned for us today, Slick?” she asked, taking a bite of her breakfast.
taco. She let out an appreciative groan as the flavor of butter, eggs, and cheese hit her tongue.

Nick picked up his own breakfast taco and took a bite. “Well, we’ll have to go shopping, since I doubt that your wardrobe barely fits you anymore. Other than that, I thought a full tour of the city’s more spectacular sights would be a nice start. I’m thinking Melody Hall in City Center would be a good place for us to begin. After the Great Megamall of Zootopia, of course.”

Judy cocked her head to the side. “Isn’t Melody Hall where the that author got the inspiration for his novel *The Phantasm of the Opera*?” Nick’s nod of confirmation got her excited. “Oh, I can’t wait to go see it. I read the book in high school. I thought it was so romantic.” The story, though admittedly a bit dark, wasn’t normally what one would typically consider a romance novel, but Judy herself considered it one of the best.

“Alrighty, Melody Hall followed by the Zootopia Skytree. After that, we can go grab some lunch at this little bistro downtown near Precinct Two in Sahara Square. Then, we can go visit the Zootopian Institute of Fine Arts.” Nick told Judy, laying out their itinerary. He had to fight the goofy grin that threatened to split his face as each location caused Judy to bounce with excitement.

“Ooh, I’m so excited.” Judy all but shouted. She quickly finished her breakfast taco then bounded to her small assortment of clothing. Nick had been right when he said that she barely fit into any of it anymore. *Thank goodness we’re going shopping first.* Judy thought to herself as she dressed in the only shirt and jeans that still semi-fit.

As for Nick, he had a plan to tease Judy with his own outfit. Prior to their departure from Bunnyburrow, Nick had managed to find some of Judy’s fox porn magazines and smuggled a couple out. One of the mags had a few dogeared pages to which he took special note and paid careful attention. Now, Nick planned to dress up in similar attire to some of the foxes from those photos. They took turns dressing and getting ready in the bathroom. When Judy came out, Nick stepped inside and double-checked that he had everything.

Stripping out of the clothes he had slept in, Nick picked up the black jockstrap, putting them on. He had never worn a jockstrap before, but a quick glance in the mirror had him seriously consider making a permanent switch. Next, Nick picked up the black jeans, tugging them on as well. Third was the sleeveless black t-shirt. Nick checked himself in the mirror, admiring the outfit.

The image hadn’t been the most ‘provocative’ one, but it had been the most teasing, which is why Nick chose it in the first place. The clothes he was wearing were a tad tighter fitting than normal. His pants gave a subtle hint of exactly what, and how much, he was packing. The sleeveless t-shirt was basically skin tight, showing his lean musculature. The fact it didn’t have sleeves only gave more to the image as well as the fact that it was a V-neck which exposed the top of his chest ruff.

Nick put on the smartshades and gave himself two thumbs up. There were only two things missing necessary to complete the image: a motorcycle and the full-length riding jacket. While Nick did own a bike, it was currently in storage at a long-term storage facility in Tundra Town. *I need to see if Mr. Big will have it delivered here.* Nick thought to himself as he exited the bathroom.

Judy’s ears swiveled in the direction of the bathroom as she heard Nick come out. Turning her head to look at him, Judy’s eyes bulged. Her heart rate skyrocketed, and she felt herself become very, very aroused as she took in the sight of Nick’s attire. Judy could see, quite clearly, the bulge of his huge sheath and balls through his tight pants. The contours of his lithe yet muscular frame was also visible thanks to the tightness of his shirt. Judy, through pure willpower alone, managed to refocus her attention on Nick’s face. Swallowing, she asked, “You ready to go?”

Fighting a smirk, Nick said, “Yep. Let’s head out.” He stepped out of the room first holding the door
open for Judy, then closed and locked it behind her. He let Judy lead from there as he had no knowledge of how to get to the ZPA’s bus terminal. As soon as they stepped outside, however, they ran into Major Friedkin. “Major.” the two greeted.

The corner of her maw twitched upward as Major took in their clothing. “Morning. I’m glad I caught you two. I have a couple of things that need to be dealt with.” Giving both envelopes, she continued. “We recently learned that we’re getting three new instructors. That means that Hopps won’t have to deal with teaching any of the new recruits, but she still needs to teach a class to remain a temp instructor. Hopps, that envelope contain the information of the class you’re to teach starting next month, when the term starts. Wilde, your envelope contains your schedule as well as the syllabi for your classes and a list of things you’ll need.” Walking away, she said, “Hope you enjoy your day.”

Judy stuffed her envelope into her back pocket. Nick did the same. They made their way to the front entrance to the ZPA to wait for the bus. After a couple of minutes, Nick had to ask, “If the Academy doesn’t start until next month, why are there so many mammals here?” The large number of mammals present, even though the term hadn’t begun, was odd to him.

Shrugging, Judy answered, saying, “According to Major, they normally let a number of recruits stay here after they take their entrance exams if they choose to remain here until term starts. They hold entrance exams twice a month, even if it’s in the middle of term.” Her ears rotated to the side as she heard the bus approach. “Also, you remember all those mammals that took the exam with you?” Getting a nod from Nick, she continued. “Those are only a few of the mammals that you’ll be training with.”

Nick conceded to that as those statements made good sense. As the bus pulled up, he let Judy climb in first. Their trip to the Great Megamall of Zootopia required them to switch bus routes three times before they were within walking distance. Along the way, Nick would point out minor landmarks, such as the statue of Sir Ignotus, one of the three founders of the city, and the Church of the Divines, where Sir Ignotus and his brothers, the city’s other founders, were said to be buried.

Finally reaching their destination, Judy’s eyes widened as Nick presented the ginormous, multistory building to her with the words, ‘Welcome to the Great Megamall of Zootopia, the city’s premier one-stop shopping center’. ‘This place is huge!’ she thought to herself as she looked at the building. Judy followed closely behind Nick as they entered.

The interior seemed a lot larger than it appeared on the outside. Various shops, kiosks, and vendors could be seen up, down, and all around the inside of the building. All varieties of mammals were going from one store to another, shopping for clothing, electronics, and all sorts of items available for purchase on premises. The smell of food saturated the air since they had entered near the food court.

Nick led Judy around the mall, taking her from one clothing store to another, purchasing whatever clothes she wanted. He wasn’t concerned about keeping to a budget. He had more than enough money to spend on whatever Judy wanted, regardless of cost. He hadn’t told her yet, but, in truth, his finances were far more lucrative than the Z22.8 mil from his prestige bouts. Nick was a member of Zootopia’s 0.1%ers, thanks not only to high interest rates from the multiple bank accounts he possessed, but also the trust fund that his parents had set up for him at a young age.

As they wandered the mall shopping, Judy would look into the different stores to see what they sold. One particular store caught her eye, a small little boutique. “Hey, Red? If you want to go buy yourself a few things, we can meet back up at the food court in ten.” Judy was thankful when Nick agreed then made her way to the store. Walking in, embarrassment nearly overwhelmed her until she saw that there were a bunch of other mammals examining the products. Judy almost jumped right out of her pelt when she heard a voice come from behind her.
“Can I help you, dearie?” the dress-clad lion asked in a sultry tone. “Oh, dearie. I’m so sorry if I frightened you. First time in one of these shops, I reckon.” Smiling brightly, he said, “Well, don’t you worry ‘bout a thing. I’ll make sure you’re well provided with whatever it is you desire. Take your time looking around and, when you’re ready, tell me about that male, or female, that gets your motor running hot.”

Judy stared wide-eyed at the, clearly, very effeminate male lion with a voice that sounded like the character right out of the motion picture ‘Sordid Lives’. “Uh, I, um, I’m just browsing. I’ve only got 10 mins before I’m meeting my fox at the food court.” The instant she finished, Judy slapped a paw over her maw as she watched the lion’s muzzle split into an almost maniacal grin over her use of the phrase ‘my fox’.

“Oh, I’ve got a ton of items you are just gonna love.” the lion stated. Like an unstoppable whirlwind, the lion went around leading Judy through the shop, collecting items, and throwing them in a basket. Once finished, he presented the selection to the bunny doe. “Don’t you worry, doll. I didn’t grab anything that’ll really embarrass you. Take a look.”

At the end of her allotted ten minutes, Judy walked out with a pair of small tote bags containing a few items that the lion had, somehow, talked her into purchasing. She felt embarrassed, but for a different reason than before. Making her way to the food court, Judy wondered what Nick would think if he knew the contents of her two bags. She found him sitting down reading a book. Judy couldn’t tell what it was as the dust jacket cover was missing, but something was telling her that she knew what it was.

Hearing the chair across from him, Nick looked up and smiled as Judy sat down. “You find whatever it was you wanted from Vixie’s, Fluff?” he asked, with a teasing smirk. His smirk faded as an expression of embarrassed fury came over her face. Gulping, he set the book he’d been reading down then slide it across to her.

Judy looked down at the book’s front cover and her rage died immediately. The book that Nick had been reading was ‘The Leporidae Cultural Guidebook’. It was basically the bunny version of The Young Vulpine’s Guide to Maturity. Raising her head to lock eyes with him, she could see in her peripheral that his ears were burning, and his smile was sheepish. “I’ll let you slide this time, Fox. Don’t do it again.”

“Yes’m.” was Nick’s immediate response as he retook possession of his book. He still felt like a bloody prick though. A waitress came to their table to take their order. Nick simply ordered a peanut butter sandwich and an herbal tea. Judy’s was for a V8 V-Fusion with a garden salad. Once the waitress walked away, Nick said, “I’m sorry. That…that was inappropriate of me.”

Sighing, Judy said, “It’s okay, Nick. It’s…it’s just embarrassing. I mean, I’m a bunny. We’re supposed to be very…open…about sex, and mating, but I’m not.” She started to wring one of her ears nervously. “I’m the eldest out of almost 300 kits. I’ve help some of my sisters get boyfriends when we were all younger, but I’ve never…” Judy trailed off.

Nick had a pretty good idea what she was going to say, and he didn’t want her to force herself. “It’s okay. You don’t have to continue.” He reached across and offered her his paw to hold, which she readily accepted. Nick gave her an affectionate squeeze accompanied by a warm smile. The sound of a disgusted scoff had them both glance over at a nearby table, where an aardwolf was looking at them in abhorrence. “Do you have a problem, buddy?” Nick asked, hotly.

The aardwolf sneered at them. “As a matter of fact, I do. Why is it that freaks like you can’t just do us a favor and kill yourselves? We don’t need fuckers like you polluting the world.” Of course, he said all this loud enough to draw attention to the situation, attracting a crowd. Standing up, the
aardwolf cracked his neck, popped his knuckles, and readied himself for a fight. “I guess I’ll just do us all a favor by doing it myself.”

The crowd broke into two groups, either siding with the aardwolf or with Nick and Judy by standing behind their party of choice. One of the mall’s security officers called the ZPD, after seeing who those involved were. The crowd on the aardwolf’s side was chanting ‘Fight! Fight! Fight!’ repeatedly, but those on Nick and Judy’s side remained silent, which was far more impactful.

Nick exchanged a glance with Judy, wanting to know her thoughts on the situation in which they now found themselves. Getting a shrug, he let out a breath then stood up cracking his own neck and popping his joints. The aardwolf wasn’t that much larger than him, maybe 2 lbs heavier at most. Casting another glance at Judy, Nick pulled off his shirt tossing it to her before facing his opponent.

The aardwolf got into a fighting stance that was reminiscent to that of a boxer. He could see individuals in the crowd making bets. Returning his focus to the fox in front of him, the aardwolf could see multitude of scars that covered the fox’s torso. A tiny voice in the back of his mind was screaming at him to run like hell, but he chose to ignore it. He didn’t bother waiting for the fox to get himself ready, and lunged.

Instead of taking a step back, like most other mammals would, Nick stepped directly into the aardwolf’s attack range. Now much closer, Nick countered with a palm strike to the aardwolf’s solar plexus, effectively knocking the wind out of him, sending him to his knees. Nick watched as the aardwolf doubled over in pain and released a long, high whine, before walking away, back towards Judy. Reclaiming his shirt, Nick put it on and sat down. “We might as well wait for the police to arrive.”

Seeing as it was already over, the crowd dispersed, leaving Nick and Judy alone. Their waitress walked up, placing their orders in front of them. Looking over at the aardwolf, who was still whimpering in pain, she rolled her eyes, “Ya just had to say something, didn’t ya, Carl? Ya stupid, stupid bastard.” She placed their drinks down, saying, “Sorry about Carl. Don’t bother denying that he did anything. I ain’t no idiot. Carl always gives my interspecies customers hell.” Judy and Nick gave each other a look then thanked their waitress. They then watched her drag the aardwolf’s ass to a table by his tail and berate him.

Judy stifled a giggle. She dug into her food, wondering if an officer would indeed show up and, if one did, who it would be. They didn’t have that long of a wait to find out the answer. For almost eight minutes later, Officer Beshte Higgins lumbered up to them. They were made aware of the fact by his heavy steps, as well as their waitress, who screamed, “Dammit, Carl!”

Higgins looked over the scene, a bit confused, then asked, “I was told there was an altercation. Am I missing something?” He received an answer when the waitress threw Carl the aardwolf directly at him saying ‘keep that no-good, sack-of-shit in prison this time’. Getting shrugs from both Nick and Judy, Higgins requested a rundown of what had happened. After hearing their report, Higgins walked off carrying the whimpering aardwolf back to his cruisers and promising both he’d explain it all to Chief Bogo.

Leaving a rather generous tip for their waitress, who was still grumbling about Carl, Nick and Judy started wandering around the mall for a little while longer. Nick’s phone vibrated which had him pull it out to check his messages. It was a confirmation text notification of a delivery set for later tonight. Nick grinned as he put his phone away, looking forward to the evening. An hour later, the two of them left the Great Megamall of Zootopia, each carrying three bags per paw, plus Judy’s new rucksack on her back.

“That was fun.” Judy stated with a smile and a slight bounce in her step. “However, I don’t think we
should do that too often. It was nice to see Higgins though. I just hope that he doesn’t put anything that could cause problems for anyone in his report.”

“I doubt it, Sweetheart. I think he’s a good mammal.” Nick told her. Looking at his watch, he said, “It’s almost high noon, Carrots. If we’re going to visit Melody Hall, we’ll need to hurry.” They hailed a taxi to their destination and, while en route, Nick started to text Finn to see how he was doing. What he got in response was a rather lengthy explanation of the fennec tod’s most recent run-in with the law.

Nick sighed sadly as he read the text. He had probably been the only mammal, that he knew of anyway, in which Finn had confided about his past. Knowing that that particular part of Finn’s past had come to a close was...wonderfully liberating, for both of he and Finn. Nick congratulated Finn, telling him to enjoy his newfound freedom. He put his phone away as they reached Melody Hall. Getting out, Nick helped Judy down then grabbed their items and guided her inside.

Melody Hall was an age-old, historical landmark for the city. It could be found used in many works, such as Gaston Leloup’s ‘The Phantasm of the Opera’ and the theatre performance of ‘Korvus the Trickster’. The ownership of Melody Hall had changed paws many, many times over the decades until it finally settled into the paws of one ‘Sir Titus’, a descendant of Ignotus, and as far as Nick knew, one of his own ancestors. It was now owned by the city and funded by the Artists for the Arts Foundation of Zootopia.

“Here we are. Melody Hall, in all its glory.” Nick announced. “Still holds shows to this day. Everything from operas to theatre performances and even magic shows.” He set his bags down, putting his paws in his pockets. “I used to come here when I could spare the time. I did a couple of magic shows, sang a few songs for charity events held here. Never under my own name though.” Nick’s began to relive the memories then clicked his tongue. “Good times. Not the best, but good.”

Judy looked at the building in wonder as she listened to Nick. It was a lovely. A mixture of various architectural styles that one would never imagine worked so well together. Vintage posters lined the outer walls, showing the history. The mixtures of tans, browns, and creams gave it a wonderful warmth and a natural feel. There were a couple of reds mixed in, but only for aesthetics. “Sweet Cheese and Crackers, Nick. It’s gorgeous.”

Nick turned to look at Judy to find her eyes glimmering like stars and smiled at her. “Not as gorgeous as you, Love.” His words caused his ears to flush, droop forward, and cover her eyes in embarrassment. “Hey,” he whispered. “Don’t do that. Don’t hide yourself from me.” Nick smiled warmly as Judy peeked at him through her ears. “Now you’re just being cute.” His smile grew when she giggled and boxed his arm. Catching her wrist before she could pull it back, Nick tugged her close and placed a tender kiss onto her lips.

When they separated, Judy teasingly told him, “Aren’t you a bold one? Kissing me in broad daylight where others could see the fox passionately attacking the bunny.” Having said that, she looked around to find that the area didn’t have much pedestrian traffic. “Where is everyone? Shouldn’t there be more mammals here?”

Shrugging, Nick stood, keeping hold of Judy’s paw in his own. “Melody Hall doesn’t have a performance scheduled today, so this is about right.” He grabbed his bags and led her inside. As they got further inside, the sound of voices became clearer. Nick recognized a few, including Tori, Lexi, and Kaci Vulpa, Melody Hall’s star vixen songstresses and his old friends. Coming around the corner, Nick led Judy to the stage, calling out, “Oh, ladies.”

Tori Vulpa spun around to look at who had called out to them and her eyes landed on the one and only Nick P. Wilde. Smiling, she noticed that he wasn’t alone, holding paws with a bunny doe. This
had her smile shrink somewhat for a moment, but after seeing his tail wrapping itself around the
doe’s ankles, it grew again. “Nick Wilde. Look at you. It’s been a while. Who’s this?”

Repositioning Judy in front of him, Nick said, “This is Judy, my courtee. Judy, these are Tori, Lexi,
and Kaci Vulpa. They’re known as the Vulpa Triplets.” He picked Judy up, setting her on the stage,
then climbed up behind her. “We’re on our first date. Melody Hall seemed like a nice starting point.”
Seeing the various instruments prepped, Nick went over and sat at the piano. Tuning it, he began to
play [Listen to Your Heart].

Judy slowly began swaying to the tune Nick was playing. She heard humming from close by and
turned just as Tori, Lexi, and Kaci began to sing. Judy felt as if she were listening to the Angels of
Music accompanied by an ethereal choir. She could almost hear the backup singers even though they
were the only three present. As the song came to its finale, Judy whispered, “Wow.”

Lexi grinned and bowed, saying, “Thank you.” Straightening herself, she asked, “Do you want to
sing a song? I’m sure Nick would be glad to play for you. How about it?”

The vixens watched as Judy picked up the guitar and brought it over to Nick before sitting down
next to him on the piano bench. They were curious when Judy whispered into Nick’s ear, but let it
go as Nick’s tail started to wag. When Nick began strumming the guitar chords, they knew which
song would soon fill their ears.

As Nick began to play [Moon River: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uirBWk-qd9A] for her,
Judy began to sing. Having closed her eyes, the doe wasn’t aware of the expressions of complete
disbelief which came over the muzzles of the three vixens, nor Nick’s proud grin that he directed at
her. When Nick finished, Judy reopened eyes to see their expressions. Giving them a sheepish grin,
Judy shrugged, saying, “I’m an old soul.”

Nick wrapped an arm around Judy’s shoulders, pulling her close. “You and me both, Darling.” He
kissed her cheek, which was now easier to reach thanks due to her growth, and smiled as she boxed
him in his side. “Well, since you four each had your shot, I’d say it’s my turn now.” Shifting back
into position to play the piano, he tapped a few buttons, changing it to a synthesized version. Testing
a few keys to make sure it was tuned correctly, he started to play and sing [I Feel for You].

Judy and the vixens had each heard Nick sing before, but this time was different. He put all his past
performances to shame. Tori, Lexi, and Kaci knew that this performance was meant only for Judy,
but it hurt as the three of them had always felt something special for him. Judy, on the other paw,
was entranced by the fact that kept his eyes remained locked onto hers the entire time he performed,
causing her to smile at him. The four applauded when Nick finished, and Judy gave him a kiss,
which he purred into.

“You’ve improved since last time I saw you.” Tori said. She prayed that no one saw the pain in her
eyes. “I’m impressed. I kinda wish you hadn’t disappeared on us way back when. We could have
used you a couple of times.” She took the guitar back and placed it on its stand. “There were a few
times we didn’t know if we’d make our quota.”

“Sorry, gals. I, uh, fell into a bad crowd, and a bad way of life. Didn’t want to drag you all down
with me.” Nick apologized. “How did you manage it, if I may ask?”

“Your parents.” Lexi answered, bluntly. “Your mom and dad always deposited money into our
funds whenever we needed it. All they asked for in return was free admission to shows.” It had been
a blessing. There had really been far too many close calls. Too many for her comfort. “I always sent
them Christmas cards as my way of saying ‘Thank You’.”
The five of them continued to converse for almost two hours before Nick and Judy bid the Vega Triplets farewell, promising to return sometime soon. It was nearly three by the time they reached the Zootopia Skytree. They didn’t stay long as there were too many mammals going in and out. Plus, it was lunchtime, and the meals they ate at the mall had been small. They hailed a cab to the Giza Bistro, where they were awarded the sight of seeing Clawhauser and Bogo together on a shared break.

“Hey, Chief! What are you doing this far from Precinct One?” Judy inquired as she bounded over to them, saluting. To run into Chief Bogo was, in Judy’s opinion, a stroke of luck. This was her chance to learn if there were any further developments within the investigation.

Bogo was a bit surprised to see Hopps and Wilde at the Giza Bistro. Setting down his Garden Burger, Bogo wiped his maw. “I was visiting Precinct Two to make sure they were getting prepared. With the new developments, the entire ZPD will more than likely have to mobilize soon. We’ve also received military assistance, though they’re being discreet.”

“What new developments?” Nick asked. Neither he nor Judy had been informed of anything new in the investigation, so they had no knowledge of what was occurring. “We haven’t heard anything from anyone.”

Bogo looked as Clawhauser with a frown, as it was the cheetah who he had assigned with the duty of keeping them informed. Ben visibly cringed making him sigh. Looking around to make certain that no one was eavesdropping on their conversation, he lowered his voice to a whisper. “I’ll fax everything we know to Major Friedkin for you later. But, you should be made aware that the city’s going to undergo emergency evacuation procedures starting next week.”

Judy stood in stunned silence as her brain processed Chief Bogo’s words. “S-Sir?” she stuttered out weakly. For the entire city to undergo full evacuation, whatever they had learned had to be big.

“As I told you, I’ll send you the information.” Bogo stated. Taking a swig of his coffee, he mumbled, “I need you two to be careful. You were heavily involved in bringing this case to light. The targets on your backs aren’t going away until we find Jacen Carno, the mammal behind this whole thing.”

Nick’s ears perked up at the mention of Jacen Carno. His mind went into overdrive as it started sifting through his memory archive catalog. When it came across when, where, and how he knew the name, Nick said, “Isn’t Jacen Carno supposed to be dead? If I’m not mistaking, Shiregrove was burnt to ashes years ago, leaving no survivors.”

A little caught off guard by Wilde’s knowledge, Bogo said, in a low voice, “Yes. However, we’ve received viable information that Mr. Carno is not only alive and well, but the mammal behind Predopurge. He’s supposedly even has sleepers within the ZPD, ZIB, and various other governmental agencies. As of a few hours ago, the ZIB is no longer a functioning organization. We’re also waiting to hear from liaisons from other agencies about their statuses.” Taking on a grave tone, he added, “Be careful. We don’t know how far this corruption goes.”

A waiter came by to see if Bogo and Clawhauser needed refills and upon seeing Nick and Judy asked if they wished to order anything. Jotting down their order, he made his way to the kitchen. Once he was out of sight, he shot a text to his boss, Camela Sandifur, of the news. He had been excited to see two of the city’s heroes present. The text he received in return had his blood freeze. It was an order to poison their food.

Judy, Nick, Ben, and Tobias were all in the middle of a discussion when the waiter came back to deliver their drinks. He saved Nick’s for last, but the instant he placed it down, he held that position for a discernible moment longer than necessary before leaving to deal with other customers. The four
Nick slid his glass and peered into the glass. The water acted as a magnifying glass, bringing into focus the words written on the makeshift coaster: *Staff has been ordered by the owner to poison you and Officer Hopps. You must leave now*. Looking up at Bogo, Nick whispered, “Stop eating. There’s a possibility that your food has been tampered with some type of poison. We need to leave immediately and organize a raid.”

Clawhauser and Bogo both slowly lowered their meals. The four slowly got up and headed to exit, stopping to pay for their meals. Their waiter was the one at the register and waved them off. Nick, however, gave him a Z100 to keep appearances. The bill also had a short note telling him to get out ASAP. When they stepped outside, the four walked a good distance away before Bogo called into Precinct Two for backup. “Hopps. Wilde. I suggest you head back to the ZPA as soon as you possibly can. I apologize if this was supposed to be a date, but with the way things are going…” Bogo trailed off, not know how to continue.

“I’ll drive them, Chief.” Clawhauser stated. He escorted Nick and Judy to the cruiser he and the chief had used. Opening the front door, Ben said, “In you go.” Closing the door behind them, walking around the vehicle, and getting into the driver’s seat, Ben sighed. Resting his head against the headrest, Ben muttered, “So much for that.” Starting the cruiser, Ben began to drive towards the ZPA. “By the way, sorry for not keeping you two up-to-date. Things have been a little more hectic than we anticipated.”

“It’s fine, Ben. We aren’t upset.” Nick stated. “Can you tell us what’s happening though? I mean, yeah, we’ll be getting the info from Bogo later via fax machine, but I’d still like to hear it.” Judy nodded in agreement to his statement.

“Well, first off, I’ll start by explaining that one of the conspirators, Andrew Bellwether, surrendered.” Clawhauser began. “Before you ask, yes. He is the older brother of Dawn Bellwether. He’s a biochemical engineer for the CCPM. Andrew came in and informed us that there are bio-bombs placed strategically throughout the city. When he turned himself in, he requested a deal that’s rather well-thought out. In return for assisting us, he gets life in prison instead of the death penalty.”

“With biological weapons involved, I’m no longer surprised that we’re evacuating the city.” Judy replied. Bioweapons had been outlawed since the Third Great Schism, which took place over two centuries ago. “What else did we learn?”

“Was getting to that.” Ben answered. “Secondly, there was the attack on Fatima Ara. Officially, the ZPD has issued a statement saying that she died as a direct result of the injuries she sustained. Unofficially, she’s being treated and cared for at MTHZ. Thirdly, the ZIB, ZDD, ZPD, and ZSI are all under internal investigations. Last I heard from Bogo, over 129 sleeper agents have been identified, arrested, and shipped to the Office of Internal Affairs for advanced interrogation sessions. OIA is rather unique because they’re an all predator agency, which means there is no chance that they’ve been infiltrated. Finally, and this is important, Mr. Big has offered a temporary truce plus assistance. Jacen Carno has made some scarily powerful and influential enemies.”

Nick and Judy quickly exchanged a quick glance with one another. Mr. Big’s involvement made things a little more…interesting, to say the least. Judy was about to say something when her phone started to ring. She answered it while Nick and Ben continued to discuss all the new developments. “Hello?”

“Judy! Oh, thank the Divine Entities!” Bonnie exclaimed. “We heard that Zootopia’s going to be undergoing evacuation soon. Your father and I were afraid something horrible had happened. Tell me you and Nick safe and that everything is okay.”
Cringing, Judy said, “Yes. I’m fine and so is Nick. There’s simply a few things happening which have led to announcing an evacuation. Just to be clear, the evacuation is strictly a precaution given the current set of circumstances. I can’t tell you any more than that right now. I’ll have someone who’s permitted to discuss it with you call later. Okay?”

An audible sigh came over the line. “Yes, that’s fine. I was just worried. Gideon’s been in a fit over the whole thing. Apparently, he was due to visit Zootopia the day after tomorrow so he could look into locations for a new bakery. He’s how we learned about the evacuation.”

Nick plucked Judy’s phone from her paw, much to his doe’s surprise, and started speaking to Bonnie. “Mrs. Hopps, everything is fine. Like Judy told you, the evacuation is merely a precaution. You don’t need to fret. Judy and I are on our way back to the ZPA right now to see what we can do to help. We’ll call you and keep you updated when we can.” He then hung up, passing Judy’s phone back to her. “Spots, I need you to drive us to the residence of Mr. Big as fast as you can.” He and Judy were then smooshed back against their seat as Ben shot forward.

It was little less than an hour later when they arrived at Mr. Big’s home, where they were greeted by the polar bears Raymond and Kevin, who escorted them to Mr. Big’s inner sanctum office. Ben was clearly nervous, but Judy and Nick were eerily calm. As they entered, they were surprised to see a red fox tod sitting in a wheelchair with a laptop on his legs. Nick had a grim smile as he called out, “Hello, cousin.”

Ian Wilde looked up to see Nick approaching. “Hello yourself.” Ian stated. Turning to Mr. Big, Ian bade farewell then proceeded to roll himself out of the room towards the exit. He had work to do.

Antonio de Medici-Borgia, who went by the alias Mr. Big, gave his newly arrived guests a tiny smile as they came closer. “Judith. Nicholas. How do you fare? Is there something I can do for you?” He had been wondering when the two would visit him. There were things that needed to be discussed.

“We’re fine, Mr. Big.” Judy answered. “Is Fru-Fru around? What about Little Judie? I had heard that she went into labor not long after we left following Duke Weaselton’s near icing.”

“They have been relocated somewhere much safer than here.” Mr. Big answered, politely. “After certain…discoveries were made, it was imperative to do so for their protection. Now, I assume that you’re here for business, yes?”

“Correct.” Nick replied. “I would like to have my bike be delivered by Kozlov to the ZPA. Judy and I will need transportation sooner rather than later. Also, may I ask what my cousin was doing here?”

“Paying me for services rendered.” Mr. Big had been instructed by Ian not to inform Nick of the truth. But, while Ian was a client, Nicholas was family. “The Yliaster Group was attempting to access both you and Judith’s files on the ZPD’s secure network. Ian’s security software allowed him to halt their attempts and locate the one responsible. The culprit was one Christopher Dearing. Once he was out of the way, Ian had us download everything from their mainframe for him to sift through.”

Nick’s eyes narrowed, and his ears lowered. The Yliaster Group had been one of his former employers back when he was younger. The Yliaster Group had hired him as a knowledge broker, since his panmnesia basically equvalated him as the ‘analog’ form of their database. Nick had no idea who Christopher Dearing was, but knew that it had to either do with his time in their employ, or the death of Ian’s father, Nick’s Uncle Walter. “Any idea what he’s searching for with it?”

“None.” Mr. Big answered. “However, I did have a secondary copy made and delivered to Chief Bogo as a show of good faith. Some of that information goes back well over half a millennium. I
have no clue what it is that your cousin is looking for, nor do I think I want to know.” Snapping his fingers to summon some other guards, he told them, “Please help Kozlov deliver Nicky’s motorcycle to the ZPA. Oh, and have someone contact Medved. We’re going to need his help.”

Judy and Nick thanked Mr. Big for his hospitality then Nick got serious. “Mr. Big, I know you and I have had our issues, but I need to ask a favor. Please don’t let yourself get killed. I don’t fancy having to try and establish a relationship with another mafia don. Plus, you’ve been like a second father to me. Besides, I also don’t think Fru-Fru could withstand the emotional trauma of your untimely demise.”

Mr. Big pursed his lips as if in thought, but it was simply a playful trick. “Hmm.” Mr. Big hummed. He could see Nick fighting the urge to squirm. Having had his fun, Mr. Big answered, “You needn’t worry, Nicholas. The reason I’ve survived and remained in my position of power this long is due to always staying a step ahead of my opposition.” Watching Nick sigh in relief, Mr. Big said, “Nick, I want you to know that I’ve forgiven you for your past transgressions. Now, both of you get out of here and take care of each other.”

Nick and Judy regrouped with Clawhauser, who been brought to the kitchen and was currently eating ice cream, courtesy of the snow leopard employed as the chef. They told Clawhauser it was time to go then the three went back to the cruiser. As they pulled away from the property towards the ZPA, Nick got a text from the staff at the Mess saying that everything was ready for when he returned. ‘At least dinner isn’t being cancelled.’ he thought. ‘Every date should always end with a nice dinner.’

Ben dropped them off at the front entrance of the Temp Housing Complex a little over an hour later. Nick hadn’t considered until right then how ironic it was that the ZPA was within an hour or so drive from the residence of one of Zootopia’s most powerful mafia dons. Instead of entering the building, Nick led her to the Mess, where everything he need for tonight was waiting. Upon entering the Mess, Nick was impressed with how well they managed to decorate the table he had selected in the corner. “Wait here, I have to get something then we can go back to our rooms.” he told Judy.

Judy watched as Nick disappeared into the kitchen area and waited for his return. The table Nick had her wait at was lovely, which caused her to wonder why they were going to go back to their rooms to eat. She looked up to see Nick rolling out a food cart. “Slick? What’re you doing?” She wasn’t awarded with an answer. Instead what she got was a ‘shushing’ gesture as he placed two of the four covered dishes on the cart onto the table.

“This is my thank you to your brother for helping me.” Nick explained. He then added, “It’s also a traditional vulpine dish to kick Skye’s ass into gear to learn how to cook. Apparently, she’s horrible at it.” This drew a chuckle from Judy, making him smile. “Come on. It wouldn’t be romantic for them if they find us here.” He led her out of the Mess then back to their rooms, passing Jaxon on the way there, who told them Skye was visiting their detainee before joining him, and thanking Nick for his services. Telling Jaxon not to mention it, Nick opened the door to his room for Judy followed by guiding the food cart inside. Nick relit the candles from last time for mood lighting and hooked his phone up to the speaker, selecting a magical melody [So Close].

Judy, however, caught sight of three notebooks on Nick’s bed. Walking over, she jumped up and sat down, opening one to find it full of paw-written notes. There was a small note from Jameson stating, ‘I’ve filled these with a few exercises for you and Judy. They’ll help you obtain greater command and control of your Izu Genes. The exercises can be done within the privacy of your rooms. J.’ Judy flipped through a couple of pages as Nick began to cook. The first exercise was labelled ‘Inner Sense’. Reading the instructions, Judy saw that the exercise was meant to strengthen things such as a mammal’s self-preservation. The ‘Inner Sense’ mentioned was essentially a combination of one’s
intuition and instincts.

Nick was too focused on preparing their meals to pay attention to what Judy was doing. The preliminary prep had thankfully been done by him prior to their departure that morning, and the followup prep by the Mess’s staff as it had to be done at least 1 to 2 hours prior to cooking. The dish that Nick was going to prepare was called ‘Ojiya-Style Pacific Saury Takikomi Gohan’. The dish was one of the more difficult courtship meals to prepare. Nick had to pay close attention to its preparation, for if even a single mistake was made it would ruin the whole dish. Nick felt that he was fortunate for he managed to prepare the dish without incident. Setting the plates down on the table, Nick turned his attention to Judy, who nose was buried into a notebook. “Fluff? Dinner’s ready.”

“Give me a second, Slick.” Judy told him. “I’m reading these notes your dad left us.” She didn’t raise her head to look at him until she was finished. “We need to look over all of this when we’re done eating. These exercises are designed to help us gain greater mastery over our Izu Genes.” Judy passed a notebook over to Nick so that he could read over a snippet. “I just finished reading up on how to improve our ‘Inner Sense’. I believe that it would be in our best interest to do these exercises during our free time. Thankfully, we can do them alone in our rooms, away from any prying eyes.”

Skimming through some of the text, Nick find himself agreeing to Judy’s assessment. His father did an excellent job of explaining the purpose of each exercise in great detail. “We’ll look through them after dinner. For now, though, let’s eat.” He guided Judy to the table and presented the dish. “Voila, Ojiya-Style Pacific Saury Takikomi Gohan.” He watched Judy’s face light up in joy then proceed to dig in. ‘I don’t think I’ll ever truly get used to the idea that Judy enjoys predator meals.’ Nick thought to himself. ‘Not that I’m complaining, but still.’ Giving a small prayer, Nick began to partake of his own meal. He wasn’t very religious, but it had dawned on Nick that it would probably be a good idea to thank whoever was watching over him for Judy coming into his life.

Judy started to slow down her consumption as a question from earlier came back to mind. “Nick? What’s the Yliaster Group?” The doe had seen how the mention of it had affected Nick and Judy wanted to know what had triggered such a reaction in her fox. “Were they a group of bad mammals? Or did you just have a bad run-in with them?”

Nick frowned as he tried to formulate a way to answer Judy’s questions. He wasn’t going to lie to her or leave anything out, but certain topics had to be addressed carefully. The Yliaster Group was one such topic. Setting his fork down, he took a sip of his V8 Fusion.

“The Yliaster Group is an expansive network of mammals whose job is to gather, verify, and sell information. Basically, information or knowledge brokers. Their agents are typically known as informants, and they come from all walks of life. Be it hackers, prostitutes, or law enforcement officials and even judges. At one point, I was once employed by them as the ‘analog’ version of their database. When I previously said, ‘I know everybody’, I wasn’t lying. I don’t ‘know them’ know them, but I know of them and information on them. For instance, Chief Bogo’s mother used to be a political campaign manager before she gave birth to him. She’s still a major force to be reckoned with in the world of politics. Our cheetah buddy, Benjamin Clawhauser, was a former sharpshooter for SWAT prior to an accident that damaged his eyesight. It doesn’t affect his day-to-day life, but he can’t be behind a scope while in the field anymore. My mind is basically a neuro-vault filled with terabytes upon terabytes of information on a lot of Zootopia’s most influential mammals.”

“But is the Yliaster Group for the law? Or, are they against it?” Judy asked. “Do they side with law enforcement? Or do they give the information to criminals?” She had a hard time trying to rationalize just how much damage these mammals could potentially create with their extensive knowledge on those in power. It was daunting to think of it.
“Neither.” Nick answered honestly. “They side with whoever pays them the most for whatever information is in their possession. They usually auction the information off to the highest bidder. Sometimes, if a mammal wants specific data, they are required to pay a certain percentage beforepaw, as if placing a deposit.” Taking a bite of his food, Nick continued. “When I worked with them, my job was to gather intel, verify it, and sell it. As I said earlier, I was the analog equivalent to their database. So, I was a walking treasure trove of information. When I wanted out, I threatened to use what I knew to take them down unless they cut me loose.”

“So, if I asked you to give me the 411 on anyone in Zootopia, you could give it to me without issue?” Judy asked, getting a nod in response. “That’s...that’s both an amazing and terrifying thing.” Again, Nick nodded in agreement to her assessment. Judy took a couple of more bites, deep in thought. “What do you think your cousin is looking for?”

“I honestly don’t know.” Nick confessed. “However, Ian has always been a little more...obsessive. Especially when it tends to concern his father’s case.” Nick recalled when he learned about his Uncle Walter’s death. Both Ian and Walter had gotten rushed to Tundratown Medical following an major vehicular accident. They had both been raced into emergency surgery. Nick’s mom had driven both he and his father there to check on them, but by the time they arrived Uncle Walter had already been declared deceased. Ian, however, was stubborn, fighting to survive, and succeeded. According to Ian, his father, Walter, had gotten spooked by something, causing him to panic, lose control of their vehicle, and crash. During a moment of lucidity, Ian recalled that someone had supposedly approached their vehicle and checked to make sure that his father had no chance of survival.

After Ian had gotten discharged from the hospital, he threw himself into investigating his father’s death. It took a couple of months, but he managed to get a lead, followed it, and discovered that his old tod had been involved with some rather shady characters. He had forwarded everything he found to the ZPD, who arrested those involved. Only, none of them claimed to know anything about Walter Wilde’s death. A month later, one asked to speak to an investigator, wishing to confess, but the mammal was murdered in his cell before he could be interrogated.

“Ian’s been trying to find out who wanted his father dead for a long time. I guess he finally found a reason to take out the Yliaster Group’s office here when they tried to get information on us. We really should thank him. Not for having Mr. Big involved, but for protecting us.”

Judy pursed her lips. “What about Ian’s mother? Where is she? I’m not trying to pry, but he’s family and I want to know as much as I can.” Judy felt that if she were going to be a real member of Nick’s family then it would help to know as much as she could about all the current members. She knew a good deal about Rory, and as much about Jameson as the older tod allow to be known about him. Plus, she was slowly getting to know more about Nick, but she was sure that there were others that she needed to know about, like Ian’s mother.

“Aunt Vicky died in childbirth.” Nick stated, softly. “It had always been just Ian and Uncle Walter for as long as I can remember. Uncle Walter raised Ian all on his own. Taught Ian everything he knew about computers and the like. Uncle Walter kind of locked the two of them away from the outside world, isolating them. That is, at least, until Ian was old enough to go to school, which didn’t last long. Ian’s extremely antisocial. He has very few acquaintances that are willing to even tolerate him. Mr. Big’s one of the rarer ones who actually enjoy his company. Ian and I used to play video games together every once and a while when we were younger. Except that ended shortly after Uncle Walter died. Ian became a recluse, refusing any unnecessary outside interactions of any kind at all.”

Sadness coursed through Judy at the thought of Ian never knowing a mother’s love. “That’s so sad.” she whispered. “I couldn’t imagine what my life would be like had I not had my mom there for me.
Nor do I want to.” She wondered however what kind of mammals Ian’s parents had been. Judy chose to shelve those thoughts for now. It was neither the time nor the place for them. “So, if the Yliaster Group’s Zootopia office has been destroyed, do you think that they’ll retaliate?”

“Nope.” Nick said with certainty. “They’re smarter than that. Most likely, they’ll just reopen shop somewhere else within the city. Retaliating against a mafia boss wouldn’t be in their favor, after all. Plus, Mr. Big is far more dangerous if he’s expecting trouble, and they know that. No, the Yliaster Group won’t even bother making an attempt.” Finishing his meal, Nick went to put his dish in the sink. “Anything else you want to know?”

No questions came to mind, so Judy replied, “Not at the moment.” Finishing her own meal, Judy placed her dish in the sink as well. “We should start reading your dad’s notebooks.” The two of them then sat down on Nick’s bed, looking through the notebooks that Jameson had left them. It wasn’t until much later, when there was a knock on the door, that they looked at the clock on Nick’s bedside table to see it was nearly 2300. Releasing a long sigh, Judy got off Nick’s bed to let Jaxon in. “Sweet dreams, Nick.”

“Sweet dreams, Cottontail.” Nick replied as Judy exited and Jaxon entered. Nick put the notebooks in the drawer of his bedside table. “How was dinner, Stripes?” Nick asked as Jaxon pulled out the sleeper sofa. He watched as Jaxon slipped into pajamas without answering. “Stripes? Something wrong?”

Groaning, Jaxon shook his head. “No. Not exactly. Skye’s…she’s trying to find out how she knows our detainee. According to her, she knows Scarlett from somewhere, but doesn’t know where. The food was great by the way.” Crawling under the covers on the convertible couch, Jaxon laid down, closed his eyes, and yawned. “I drank way too much wine with that meal. Have to say though, never tried predator food. I quite enjoyed it. Skye’s now determined to learn how to cook. So, thank you for that. I’d prepare myself though, if I were you. She made a list of questions she wants to ask.”

Nick chuckled. “I’ll do my best, but no promises that my answers will be of any help.” Stripping naked, Nick grabbed some sleepwear and headed to their bathroom to take a shower. He saw Jaxon staring at him and gave the jackrabbit a seductive pose. “Like what you see, Stripes? Should Skye be worried?” he asked teasingly.

Jaxon sat up and looked Nick in the eye. “Let me set the record straight here. First of all, I love Skye more than any other mammal alive. Nevertheless, I am a jackrabbit and I do have a high sex drive just like every other Leporidae out there. She’s fully aware that I’ve slept around on assignments. However, as long as I come home to her, she doesn’t give a damn. I’ve been circumventing my needs by taking special medication though, because that is how much I love her. Secondly, do I find you attractive? Yes, I do. I’m bisexual. The relationship I had prior to Skye was with a buck and the one before that was with a male dhole. I’ve only had one other girlfriend, a three-toed sloth. Third, no. Skye has nothing to worry about. I’ve already given myself over to her completely. There is no one else I’d rather be with besides her.” Scanning Nick’s body, Jaxon added, “But, I have to admit, you’re packing a rather large weapon.”

Giving Jaxon a smirk, Nick walked into the bathroom and shut the door behind him. Turning on the shower, Nick looked at himself in the mirror. His sheath and balls were indeed larger than your average tod. Thinking of Judy, he imagined what she would think of his size. The thought aroused him, and he felt himself begin to harden. Nick watched as the tapered tip of his cock peaked from his sheath. Reaching down, he gave himself a squeeze further stiffening his member. He ran a claw up one of the more prominent veins, increasing the speed of which he hardened. Soon, Nick was fully erect, knot exposed. Nick recalled the sizes of the tods in some of Judy’s porn mags. He easily put them to shame. He was both longer and thicker than they were. Stepping into the shower, Nick sat...
down on the seat inside. Looking at his cock, he found himself wondering something. Leaning forward, Nick was pleased to discover that he was, in fact, capable of sucking himself off. However, the taste left a lot to be desired. So, Nick switched to just simply stroking his dick.

A mental image of Judy emerged in front of him from within Nick’s mind. The image of Judy gave him a sultry grin as she leaned in close to his ear. ‘You going to be a good boy for me, Slick?’ it asked, drawing a whine from Nick’s throat. The mental image chuckled then straddled his hips. ‘You going to do whatever I say?’ it questioned, making Nick nod in confirmation. ‘Hm.’ it hummed as it slowly began to grind itself along his length. ‘What’s my name, fox? What am I?’ it inquired.

“Y—you’re Judy. My Judy, my mate.” Nick murmured shakily. He was rewarded by having the mental image position itself so that his tip was just parting her vaginal lips. Staring into the eyes of the mental construct, Nick watched as it slowly lowered itself down onto his cock. Gasping, Nick began to pant. She was tight, vice-like. In reality, Nick was fully aware that this was due to him squeezing his own cock, but he couldn’t help wondering if this was what it would actually be like when they finally got to that point.

The mental Judy continued to grind itself onto Nick’s cock. ‘Now, be a good boy and cum when I tell you to. Okay?’ She began to bounce up and down on his thick fox-meat at a rapid pace, causing Nick to throw his head back against the shower wall. ‘Ready? Cum!’

And cum Nick did. He came as the imaginary Judy’s cunt devoured his entire member, knot and all, and squeezed. He shot cum clear across the shower, coating the opposite wall. Huffing from excursion, Nick opened his eyes to look at the large load he had released. It was quite a lot. Detaching the showerhead, he washed it down the drain then reattached it so that he could actually shower. By the time he got out, Jaxon was already asleep, snoring loudly. Nick climbed back into bed, pulling out one of the notebooks from the bedside table drawer. Thanks to his natural night vision, Nick didn’t need any light to read the contents. He flipped back to the page he had been reading earlier.

‘Atavism: this ability allows one to revert to a state of primeval retro-progression, gaining the abilities of an evolutionary throwback of their species. One with this ability still maintains control over self instead of devolving into a truly feral beast.’ Nick read the pros and cons of the ability, not that were many. There was a small note on the side from his father listing other abilities that should be acquired first, one being Tranquil Fury. Going to that page, Nick read the description. ‘Tranquil Fury: mammals with this ability can enter a state of tranquility while their mindset is that of a feral savage. This ability, in essence, grants one the ability to channel their savagery while maintaining total control.’

Nick read up on the other abilities his father listed one should learn before attempting ‘Atavism’. He noted that none of them seemed particularly difficult, but one should never judge a book by its cover. Putting the notebook back into his bedside table drawer, Nick laid down and closed his eyes. As he drifted off to sleep, he thought of Judy, thinking, ‘Goodnight, Sweetheart. Goodnight.’

Chapter End Notes

Track list:
~Listen to Your Heart [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLFTmGnwaDQ]
~Moon River: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkM5_IR4W Eg]
~I Feel for You: [N/A } Sorry. The version of the song I wanted isn’t available
anywhere other than on iTunes. Therefore, [https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/i-feel-for-you/212972881?i=212973235]
~So Close: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ad7ejBn3KSQ]

Music Trivia: Despite public belief, the song "I Feel for You" is a song written by Prince that originally appeared on his 1979 self-titled album, released in (obviously) 1979. It was then performed by the Pointer Sisters (June, Bonnie, Anita, and Ruth) in 1982. However, nowadays, the song is associated with Rufus & Chaka Khan.

Editor Wanted:
Author in need of a 'Grammar-Nazi' editor. Applicants must have at least one semester of High School Freshman English under their belt. Must be willing to tolerate my madness at irregular intervals. Flexible Hours. Everything else is negotiable. If interested, please leave a comment stating such.

Final Words: The FF.net version my counterpart over there [ApatheisticDevil] posts in my stead will get updated next Thursday. So, those of you here are technically getting it early. Also, once the prologue and premier chapters of my Original Work get posted here, I'll be alternating my monthly releases for it and TZD. While everything has pretty much settled down here at home, I've gone back to work as a freelance multidisciplinary consulting specialist. My previous clientele have returned, and I've acquired some new ones which I must acquaint myself. So, I'll be busy, busy, busy. However, Ian will still update SWZ semi-regularly, but school comes first and foremost.

I'll see y'all next release.
(Warning: This chapter is the longest to date. The events of this chapter take place at the same time as the previous. Nick and Judy are only ever mentioned. The segments of this chapter all either overlap or take place concurrently/simultaneously with the last.)

Zootopian Police Academy – 6:15 am

When Jameson had gathered the initiates yesterday to inform them that they would not suffer under his tutelage, he hadn’t been lying. Instead of Jameson, the initiates and regular ZPA recruits found themselves awakened by Majors Friedkin, Wolverin, Jackael, and Lt. Col. Fenrir Wolford, who dragged them out of bed by their ears and/or tails to the training grounds. Being awoken at 5:30 am was a semi-regular occurrence for the initiates, but wasn’t normal for most of the ZPA recruits. Plus, none of them had been expecting the rigorous training session they had been thrown into for the past 45 mins. As it was, only Harrison Wolford and Shay Morrigan remained standing, though Harrison was hunched over with his paws on his knees.

While the recruits and initiates were all but tortured at the paws of the strict specialty instructors, two vulpines were locked in a friendly, strategic war over a Go board. Jameson Wilde (nee Vulpin) and Scarlett Reddington exchanged snark comments as they battled it out in a game of Go. Neither of
them were too worried, but they were both aware of what needed to be discussed. Jameson, not one to pussyfoot around, was the one to start the conversation.

“You ever going to tell her?” Jameson asked at he set his stone down with a resounding ‘clack’. “After everything you’ve put her through, she deserves to know the truth. Don’t you think?” The snap of Scarlett playing her own stone was sharp, signifying that Jameson had struck a nerve. ‘Good.’ Jameson thought. ‘That means that she’s already been considering it.’

Scarlett glared at the onyx-furred fox tod. “I’m not surprised you managed to figure it out, but tell me something. How did you come to know that she’s my daughter?” To Scarlett, Skye was more like her father than she was to her. She had his snow-white fur, his strong-willed stubbornness, and she even shared her father’s way of thinking. It almost made her heart hurt to see how similar they were. “I did my best to keep our relation under wraps.”

Jameson gave Scarlett a small smile. “If you must know, I pieced it together. She’s every bit your daughter. Of course, you can probably only see the similarities to her father, your mate. She shares your fiery spirit, and your eyes.” He placed his stone down then took a sip of his watermelon flavor infused water. Setting his glass down, he collected the stones he had captured and deposited them into the upturned lid of the container for his own stones. “So, I ask again; You ever going to tell her?”

Playing her move, Scarlett gathered the stones she just captured before replying, “I want to, but I don’t know what to say.” Truth be told, she’d done the cliché thing and practiced it multiple times in front of her bathroom mirror. “Do you have any idea how hard it is to find the correct way to tell your daughter, who doesn’t even know who you are, that you’re their mother?”

Giving the vixen a look, Jameson asked, “How do you tell your son, ‘Hey, by the way, you aren’t supposed to exist. In fact, the very concept of your entire existence was considered beyond absolute impossibility.’?” He placed another stone down, collected those he had captured, and downed the rest of his drink. “Mine’s a lot more complicated, wouldn’t you agree?”

Scarlett’s face fell in shame. It was true. How do you tell your kit something like that? “Sorry.” she murmured. Scarlett began chuckling. “How did our lives end up this way?” she pondered, aloud. “Skylar would’ve probably had a rather insightful answer.”

“Want to talk about it?” Jameson asked, offering her a much-needed chance to vent. He poured her some more water in case she needed something to drink. Jameson watched as Scarlett opened the locket she normally kept hidden. “You can keep the memories alive by talking about them.”

“Heh. That sounds like something Skylar would have said.” Scarlett stated. Sighing, she began to weave her tale of a vixen’s quest for vengeance. “I never wanted to leave her behind, but I didn’t want to endanger her either. So, I left her with Skylar’s brother Gabriel and his family. I built a network of informants to help me gather information. Once I had what I needed, I used it to hunt them all down. It took me 17 long years to exact my revenge on every mammal involved. By the time I returned to get her, I was too late. Gabriel informed me of his son’s actions and I flew into a rage. His kits think the only reason I have red fur is because I bathe in the blood of those foolish enough to incite my wrath. I tried to use my network to locate her, but it was a fruitless effort. I never once gave up hope that I’d find her though. Eventually, I came across some information that was too good to be true. A vixen matching her description was found in Foxhollow. I followed the lead and, low and behold, there she was, courting a jackrabbit. Not just any jackrabbit either, but your friend Jonas Savage’s son, Jaxon. I couldn’t believe it at first. I finally just accepted it was happening when I learned my daughter had proposed. I was so happy to see the smile on her face every time they were together that I couldn’t force myself to be upset. Then, word came of what was happening in
Zootopia. I knew I had to do something. So, I made it my network’s primary focus to find as much as it could. I soon discovered that it was far more than anything I ever came across previously. I decided to get directly involved and use it as a way of getting closer to my daughter. I was aware they were partners, but chose to use Jaxon as my ‘in’. Now, I find that I’m utterly petrified to reveal myself to her. What if she rejects me? I don’t think I could survive knowing my daughter hates me.”

Jameson had remained silent as Scarlett spoke, simply listening to her ramble on. When she finished, he said, “She could never hate you; You’re her mother. Just be honest with her about the whole thing. She’ll understand.” He took a long drink from his glass. “Before you ask, yes. I do indeed tell my wife everything. I don’t have any secrets from her. Vanessa knows every aspect of my past life, even what I used to be and what I truly am. She doesn’t care. I’m slowly getting there with Nick, but as I said, ‘How do you tell your kit that he’s not even supposed to exist?’.”

Cackling, Scarlett shook her head sadly. “I guess Equinox is laughing at us right now. Surely, he, as the Divine Entity of Balance, is the one to blame for all this.” She drained her glass in one go. “They’re not so little anymore.” This got a shake of the head from Jameson. “I’ll tell her tonight. After all, you’re right. Skye does deserve the truth. I just hope that the truth really does set a mammal free.” Scarlett looked at the board then reset it. “New game. This time neither of us is to hold back.”

The Cage

Andrew Bellwether had no idea what time it was, but he guessed it was early morning. He had spent the last couple of hours performing physical fitness exercises to burn through what energy he’d had and was now sprawled out on his prison bunk. Drew didn’t know how long he still had to wait until the plan went into effect, but one thing he knew was that he had never been the most patient of mammals. He was antsy and twitchy, though the twitchiness could be a side effect of morphine withdrawal. It had been hours since he last shot up. Andy sat up as he began to wonder why he kept referring to himself using old monikers from his younger years. Rolling off his cot, he went to the door of his cell. Unlike the door of a normal cell, his was a solid mix of iron, steel, and palladium with a single slot for food, mail, and for him to stick his hooves through so the guards could cuff him. Being in solitary meant no outside interactions. He didn’t even have a window to see outside. Then again, he was underground, so it wasn’t like he’d see sunlight anyway.

Waiting by the door for his morning rations, Andrew wondered what the others were doing. ‘Hopefully, they’re finding a way to neutralize the biological materials the Chancellor plans to use in the bio-bombs,’ he thought to himself. The sound of his cell door slot’s lock disengaging had him return to reality. Andrew found himself served a very nice plate of fruits from a kangaroo guard, who also provided him with chopsticks. Thanking the guard, he waited for the guard to close and relock the slot before grumbling at being given chopsticks. That was until he saw the words carefully carved into them from Chief Bogo stating that they’d be moving within the hour. He had to give the old cape buffalo props for originality.

Quickly eating his fruits, Andrew dressed himself in his full prison garb. Thoughts of how this could all go wrong flitted through his mind, but he pushed those thoughts aside, going for optimistic outlooks. For a while, he treated the chopsticks like drumsticks, drumming a rhythm out to pass the time. When he heard mammals approaching his cell he broke them, then ground them into the ground. His cell door’s slot opened, and he was ordered to put his hooves through while facing away from the door. Andrew was then led to the transport area where an armored transport shuttle was being prepared. Chief Bogo wasn’t around, but Commissioner Catlin stood watching as the guards brought him over.

“We had to switch to the contingency plan.” Catlin explained. “Word got around to the other inmates that we were going to stage a riot. Blasted that plan right out of the water. Thankfully, we had
backup plans prepared.” Indicating to the transport shuttle, he continued. “This shuttle bus has a tracker installed to let your mammals know your location. The officers that will be on board have been told what to expect. Once you reach a rough distance of approximately ten kilometers from here, your associates will have a quarter of an hour window to ‘save you’. Any more time than that, we risk the Chancellor realizing the ruse.”

Nodding, Andrew stated, “I understand. 15 minutes, preferably less.” Glancing at the guards wearing tactical gear, Andrew recognized a reindeer as one of Randolf’s underlings. Giving him a discreet nod, Andrew returned his attention to Commissioner Catlin. “Anything else I should be made aware of? Things to look out for perhaps?”

“Just watch your back,” Catlin replied before walking away.

The bobcat made his way to the warden’s office, where he was waved in by the grizzly bear himself. Taking a seat in one of the chairs, Catlin asked, “Everything set?” Receiving a grunt of confirmation, Catlin said, “That reindeer officer is allied with them. I don’t think they realize I saw their exchange, but I want his name and badge number recorded for later.” Giving the clock a brief glance, Catlin muttered, “Five minutes until we get this show on the road.” They waited quietly as the minutes ticked by. The moment the clock struck the intended time, Catlin stood and returned to the transport area. “Alright. Move out!”

Andrew was escorted onto the armored transport by the reindeer officer, who sat him down on the driver’s side of the shuttle bus before taking the seat directly across from him. They were followed by a tapir and okapi officer, who took seats closer to the driver. As they drove away from the Cage, Andrew looked at the reindeer officer and asked, “How long?”

Knowing what the ram meant, the reindeer officer answered, “Six minutes.” He checked his tranquilizer to confirm that it was functional. This had been a gamble, to say the least. He guessed that his life as an officer was over now, but he didn’t care. The moment he had received new instructions from Randolf and why, he felt ashamed and appalled by all his actions up to that point. He had requested this assignment as to rectify his mistakes. Peering at his fellow officers, he slowly got up and stepped closer to them. He carefully slipped his tranquilizer darts from the chambers of his dart-gun. He had three vials plus two to spare. This had to be done quickly with no mistakes. Flying into action he stuck both the okapi and tapir with a dart then rushed the driver with the third. All the other officers under the effects of the sedatives, he pulled the shuttle over, depositing them onto the side of the road, then uncuffed the ram, and drove off to the rendezvous point.

“Good job.” Andrew stated as he sat behind the reindeer. “You do realize that the ZPD is now aware you’re one of us, right? They installed a tracker into this shuttles hardware. Plus, I’ve got a tracking chip in my shoulder as part of my deal.” He got a shrug in response, Andrew looked up into the rearview mirror to see that the reindeer’s eyes showed no sign of surprise, as if he had come to accept his fate. “Let’s get back to our comrades. We’ve got work to do.” They continued to drive towards the location Doug, Randolf, Parker, and Liam were waiting for them so they could move on to Phase Two.

Home of Ian and the late Walter Wilde - 7 o’clock

Ian sat in the dining room of his home, eating the small meal his vixen friend had prepared for him. He hadn’t expected to find her waiting for him to return, but it was a pleasant surprise nonetheless. However, knowing the city was slowly undergoing evacuation, Ian somewhat expected her to have hopped a train out of Zootopia. The fact she remained behind to stay with him meant a great deal than he could articulate.

Washing the dishes, Krystal’s ears perked upon hearing what sounded like a soft ‘thump.’ Glancing
over her shoulder, Krystal’s eyes widened at what she saw. Slowly, she turned to watch Ian as he forced himself to stand on shaky legs.

Body trembling as he stood to his hindpaws, Ian focused on carefully maneuvering his way around the table to Krystal. He kept his eyes locked on hers the whole time. With each step, it got just a bit easier for him. Ian was pleased the physical therapy he did at home was beginning to pay off.

When he was only a pace away from her, Krystal reached out to him. That last step he took was one too many, and Ian nearly fell to the ground. Krystal caught him before impact though. Holding onto him, she asked “Why?”

Breathing a bit heavily, Ian looked her in the eye. “After everything you’ve done for me, it’s only seemed right I did something for you.” Nudging her cheek with his nose, he asked “Help me into the computer room.”

As Krystal was about to grab Ian his wheelchair, he squeezed her shoulder, making her look at him. Seeing him shake his head, Krystal began to guide him slowly towards the computer room on hindpaw. Setting him down in an open chair, she asked “Anything else?”

“Stay with me,” Ian told her. Patting his lap so she knew where he wanted her, Ian waited for her to sit before getting started. Typing away at his keyboard, he said “Tell me if you see anything anomalous.”

Krystal watched as Ian typed at a rapid pace in awe. “What exactly are you doing?” She asked. “If I don’t know, then how can I tell what is and isn’t an anomaly?”

“Fair point,” Ian conceded, “I’m scouring the CCTV security footage from a couple of years ago. You see that car at the top-right corner? You’re looking for anything suspicious following it. Okay?”

“Got it.” Krystal took a good look at the car indicated, so she could identify it in the footage. After a few minutes, she spotted something in odd in one bit of footage. “Stop that one. Screen three.”

Pausing Screen 3, Ian waited for her to continue. As Krystal started listing times, dates, and screens to pause, Ian complied. Each time, the car he had her looking for was on screen, with another car tailing it.

“There you are. You bastard of a whore,” Ian mumbled under his breath. Magnifying the image and increasing the resolution, it quickly became clearer. “That’s a Zootropolis license plate. A diplomatic one at that.”

“What’s this about, Ian? Why’re you so focused on this?” Krystal had to admit this was the closest she had ever gotten to having Ian open himself up to her.

Sighing, Ian said “That first car is my late father’s. A few years ago, my father and I were in a major vehicle accident. My father kept saying he thought someone was after him, but I didn’t believe him. I just kept assuming he was paranoid. That is, until our accident. I managed to regain consciousness temporarily after the accident to discover someone checking to make sure my father was dead. Although he wasn’t, there was no way he’d survive. I realized then my father hadn’t simply been paranoid. So I’ve been trying to find out the party responsible, and bring them to justice.”

Floored he even told her, Krystal remained silent as Ian ran a search on the unidentified vehicle. A series of clicks later, a name and photo popped onto the screen. The picture was the standard silhouette issued to those whose identities were classified. However, the name wasn’t redacted: John Whiskerson.
“I know that name,” Krystal whispered, “I can’t remember from where though.” Closing her eyes to try and recall where she knew it, Krystal muttered “Remember. Remember.”

Ian could also recall previously hearing that name. Except, he could remember quite clearly hearing his father tell him the mammal wasn’t someone you wanted to cross. Not if you wanted to continue living anyway. Ian racked his brain, trying to make a connection between this mammal and his father. Switching programs, he ran a search through the data from the Yliaster Group’s confiscated mainframe.

A series of documents which contained the names of his father and John Whiskerson were produced by the search. Speed-reading through them, Ian saw that Mr. Whiskerson had discreetly followed his father for a while, taking note of his patterns and routine. More information was given by removing his father’s name from the search.

While most of the information on John Whiskerson was remarkably vague, a bit of it gave Ian a clear picture on the type of mammal he was. It was obvious the mammal was a predator, though what species was classified. He was a widower, according to a few of the records. No evidence of any other family members, living or otherwise. Occupation was labeled as ‘freelancer.’

One piece of information stood out though. From some extrapolation, Ian figured John Whiskerson had, at one point in his life, worked as an enforcer in the mob. That meant Mr. Big could potentially provide him with more intel on the mammal.

“He’s from Zootropolis,” Krystal finally stated, “That’s all I can remember, other than an old story my parents once told me about how one shouldn’t cross him.” The vixen could understand why it was so difficult to recall what else her parents told her about him. It was like she had that part of her memory wiped clean.

It started to make a bit of sense to Ian. Obviously, his father’s paranoia stemmed from something he had done. Something that was directly tied with John Whiskers. Rerunning the search for anything with John Whiskers and his father, Ian located the article he needed: The obituary of Helen Whiskerson.

His father, Walter Wilde, was named a mammal of interest in Helen’s death. No concrete, criminalizing evidence was found that specifically identified him as the murderer though. Further digging, using a search of Helen and Walter only generated another document indicating a past friendship between the two. The more he read, the more Ian got a picture of what happened back then.

The autopsy records indicated a large dosage of both fentanyl and methadone. Both were medications his father had access to since he had prescriptions for them. There were other indications that, although circumstantial, also pointed to Ian’s father.

Memories of how his father’s behavior changed after a visit to an old friend returned to the forefront of Ian’s mind. While he didn’t want to believe it, there was no doubt his father was complicit in the death of Helen Whiskers. The problem now was if it was an assisted suicide or a murder. Either way, his father’s murderer, John Whiskers, got his revenge. It was Ian’s turn now.

“Would you mind doing me a favor, Krystal?” Ian inquired. “Go in my room and get everything ready for us to have a long nap. I’ll join you in a bit.” Once the vixen had left to do as he asked, Ian dialed Mr. Big’s number. “Tell me everything you know about John Whiskers, and I do mean all of it.”

At the same time, Krystal was also making a phone call while getting Ian’s bedroom ready. Hers was
to a mammal with whom she hadn’t spoken in years: her brother. Despite everything that happened between her and their family, the two of them remained in contact.

“No,” Krystal giggled. “No. He’s a good tod. Yes, I promise.” Sitting on the bed, the vixen stated “Anyway, I’m calling because I need some information about somebody. John Whiskers.” She listened as her brother told her everything he could remember about the mammal. Most of it was either biased or colored due to what their father had told them about him. “What about Helen, his wife?” Sighing at his answer, she said “Well, thanks anyway. I’ll talk to you later.”

Setting her phone aside, the vixen laid back on the bed, waiting for Ian to arrive. Her thoughts were racing a thousand miles per second. There was no doubt in her mind Ian was out for revenge against John Whiskers for what the mammal had taken from him. Simultaneously, she feared what would become of Ian should he succeed in finding him. After all, John Whiskers was a trained killer who wouldn’t hesitate to do whatever was needed to ensure his survival.

Slowly, Ian hobbled into his bedroom, using the wall to brace himself. Seeing the expression on Krystal’s muzzle, Ian said “You needn’t worry. I know what I’m doing. I’ll be fine. I promise.” Stumbling over to his bed, the tod climbed into it. Intertwining his fingers with hers, Ian whispered “I just want closure. That’s all.”

It was understandable. The desire for closure. Krystal knew it well. Deciding to change the subject, she asked “What do you think about Zootopia’s current situation?”

Sighing, Ian shifted to stare at the ceiling. “I’ll be honest. It doesn’t look good. The city is already undergoing evacuation procedures. Only a moderate percentage managed to be temporarily relocated.” Tilting his head to look at her, he added “We probably won’t get more than at least two-thirds of the population out of the city before the Chancellor strikes.”

“What about evacuating?” Krystal inquired. The thought of leaving Zootopia had never crossed her mind. Especially not with Ian remaining behind.

“You should,” Ian told her sincerely. “I have to stay behind and help my uncle however I can. However, I want you out of Zootopia before anything devastating happens and you get hurt.”

Krystal snuggled herself into Ian’s side. “I don’t want to leave you here alone.” Her voice was a soft whisper, but full of sincerity.

“I know, but I won’t be able to concentrate with you in potential danger.” Ian rubbed her back gently, almost like a caress. “Promise me you’ll go somewhere safe until this all blows over. Please?”

“I promise.” Krystal hated herself. She wasn’t going to break a promise to Ian, but that didn’t mean she had to like it. “I’ll leave early tomorrow afternoon.”

Placing a kiss to her temple, Ian whispered “Thank you.” He soon fell asleep. A light snore escaped his sleeping form.

Watching Ian sleep for a moment, Krystal could understand why she fell in love with him. Despite his rough exterior, he really did possess a soft center, a heart of gold, and a pure soul. She owed him a lot. He had saved her from a horrible life on the streets as a prostitute, got her back into school, and overall gave her a brighter future.

Laying a kiss to his temple, Krystal whispered “Rest well, my sweet prince.” Closing her eyes, Krystal let sleep claim her. She dreamed of a future with Ian. One she hoped would come to pass.

Back in Ian’s computer room, his computers ran the algorithms he programmed into them. Unlike the
other programs Ian had, these were designed with the sole purpose of seeking out anything that fit within the search parameters. While Ian and Krystal slept, the computer beeped as a single match was found. The image was of a maltese tiger in a tuxedo, paws wrapped around the waist of a young Helen Whiskers on her wedding day.

*The Apartment-House of Spencer Wolvenett*

Larry and Gary were seated at the table, arm-wrestling, while Spencer prepared a quick breakfast. Though they had only been living together for less than a week, Larry, Gary, and Spencer had gotten into a regular routine. It was almost as if they had lived together for months, not hours. Spencer watched as the turkey bacon caramelized, thinking back to yesterday at the rally. The sounds of the shots still echoed within his mind.

The sights, sounds, and smells were all but ingrained in his memories. A subtle shudder wracked through him. There had been a few minor bumps the following morning, but nothing that wasn’t fixed right then. It was a little while later that day they had heard the truth about Fatima Ara from Bogo. It had come as welcome news for Spencer.

Gary and Larry didn’t lighten up in their protection of Spencer despite the news. Gary had immediately begun to set up extra security throughout the house, checked to make sure that his gear was working properly, and that his knives were sharpened. Larry did the same. They then made sure that Spencer’s own equipment and gear was up to snuff.

When they met up with Leodore Lionheart after the rally shooting, he had informed them that they’d be hosting another rally in two days. One that would also take place in Serengeti Plaza. The rally wasn’t meant to last long, just half of an hour. Still, Spencer didn’t know if anyone would even attend after the last time. Larry and Gary were working on his security detail. After all, his safety was their number one priority.

It had now been approximately a day since the Serengeti Plaza mass shooting, and none of them had been able to sleep, or even nap. If and when they did, they always flew awake panicked. Spencer, upon noticing the turkey bacon was done, gathered it all onto a plate and set it down on the table. “Breakfast,” he announced.

Larry and Gary ended their competition, turning their attention to the food. Gary said, “Ah, bacon. Food of kings.” He saw Larry roll his eyes, but ignored it. “What’re we going to do today?” he asked. With the current state of the city, it was important to know what their schedule was. That way they could know what they were heading into.

Spencer sat down after getting a glass of water. “I honestly don’t know,” he admitted. “Zootopia will begin undergoing evacuations next week. I guess we can go meet with the city council and discuss what will happen afterwards.” With that agreed upon, Spencer said, “Oh, by the way, I found something I think you’ll want to see. Just turn on the television.”

Curiosity getting the better of them, Gary and Larry moved to the couch and turned on the television. They nearly choked as they saw themselves rutting each other senseless onscreen. It was an old video they had made years ago, one of their firsts. The current image on screen was of Larry laying on his back, legs in the air, and paws spreading his ass cheeks to reveal his gaping pucker oozing Gary’s cum. Larry and Gary flushed a rich crimson as they watched the video continue. Gary had been holding the video camera at the time, so he didn’t really appear, but his cock sure did as it realigned itself with Larry’s hole on the screen. They then watched as Larry showed off his flexibility, perform autofellatio while Gary pounded his ass.

Bursting out into laughter at the stunned, embarrassed, and horrified expressions on their faces,
Spencer hopped over the back of the couch and sat between them. “You two don’t need to feel bad. I just thought you should know that I found this at a video store on the way home yesterday while you stood outside. I watched it last night while you two were patrolling around outside..” He turned the television off then got up to put the DVD back in its case before tossing it to them. “I bought it so that you could do what you want to it. Think of it as a welcome home present. I’m going to take a shower.”

As Spencer walked off towards the bathroom, Larry and Gary looked at the DVD case for a moment before looking at one another. The two agreed to hatch a revenge plan, so they started digging around quickly, knowing that Spencer never took long. As luck would have it, Gary found something they could use. It was a vibrating canine dildo, but there was something off about it. However, Larry, who was normally the one of them that preferred to get buttfucked, knew what it was. The dildo’s manufacturer specialized in producing replicas of real dicks from photos. Larry knew this from experience as he had ordered one of Gary’s for when he was lonely and in need of a good masturbation session. This dildo, however, was of Spencer’s as it had the name of whose cock it was stamped on the base. Gary and Larry looked at it then each other. The dildo was larger than either of them, which was a bit surprising considering that Spencer was roughly half a head shorter. A strange urge came over the two as they exchanged glances. Larry quietly ran the dildo to their own room and hid it under their bed before racing back to Gary. They decided to bide their time until the next opportunity presented itself. So, they returned to the table and resumed their arm-wrestling match as they waited for Spencer.

**Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia - 8:30 a.m.**

Fatima Ara laid in her hospital bed staring at the ceiling in thought. Li wasn’t there at the moment as he had gone to deal with some business downtown, but he had said he’d be back as soon as he could. Currently, all Fatima could think about were the two fetuses within her womb. To say that she had been totally blindsided would have been an understatement. Her thoughts kept going back to the last time she and Li had mated. It had been a spontaneous thing, completely unplanned, which was unusual for her. Yes, they had continued to mate after learning that their chances of getting pregnant again were practically impossible, but only after planning it out. Fatima placed a hoof over her womb as a sense of dread filled her.

’I almost lost them,’ she thought to herself. ’I almost lost my miracles.’

Forcing herself into a sitting position, Fatima rubbed her lower abdomen lovingly. She thought of Bahman and when she had been pregnant with him. Bahman worked here in the hospital, but he hadn’t bothered to visit. She wasn’t surprised. However, she wanted, needed, to talk to him. Pressing the call button for the nurse’s station, a young female antelope entered. Fatima recognized her as one of Bahman’s old school friends, Amalee, she believed. “Can you find Dr. Bahman Ara for me? I have something that I need to tell him.”

Nodding and leaving the room, Amalee wandered down the hall to the nurse’s station to grab her phone and call her stallion. Like always, he answered before the first ring finished. “Hey. Uh, your mom has something she needs to discuss with you. … No, I don’t know what it’s about. … Oh, grow a pair. She’s been through enough, don’t you think?” Lowering her voice so that no one but he could hear. “If you don’t get your wonderfully gorgeous butt here and talk to her, you won’t be getting any of mine for the next month plus you’ll be on the couch.” The line disconnected the instant she finished. Smirking, she put her cellphone away then went to do her rounds.

Bahman stood outside his mother’s patient room, nervous as hell. He didn’t know what to say or what this was about or anything. There was still a feeling of anger in him towards her, but that could wait. Forcing himself to move, Bahman entered the room to find his mother looking as if she had
managed to escape Hell. Just staring at her in this state quenched the fire of rage he had kept burning within himself. “Hey, Mom,” he whispered, softly.

“Hey,” Fatima replied. “Come sit down. I have something I need to tell you.” She waited until her son pulled up a chair next to her bedside. “I… I know that we’ve got differing opinions. I know that we don’t see eye to eye on a lot of things. I also know that I’m not the best mother. But, if I could do it all over again, I wouldn’t change anything. Well, except for my assault, of course, but that’s beside the point I’m trying to make.” Taking a deep breath, Fatima continued. “The reason I wouldn’t change anything is because if anything was changed then you wouldn’t be who you are now. I love you for that.” Taking one of Bahman’s hooves in her own, she laid it down over her womb. “I need you. Just like these two will need their older brother when they’re born.”

Stunned at what his mother had just told him, Bahman sat frozen. He had been told at a young age that the chances of having a sibling was almost downright impossible. Now his mother was telling him that he, a stallion in his mid-20s, that he would be a big brother to twins. Bahman couldn’t believe it and apparently that was obvious to his mother, who looked to her bedside table. Following her gaze, Bahman found the ultrasound image and scan, both confirming what she had told him. He was dumbfounded.

“A real surprise for you, your father, and I.” Fatima confirmed. “Truthfully, I was a bit skeptical until I was given those.” She had had a fit of hysterics after the information had sank in entirely. It was so bad that the nurses had strapped her down so as not to further injure herself or harm her unborn progeny. “Bahman, I’m not asking you to love me. I just want you to love them.”

Remaining silent, Bahman stood and made his way to the door. With a hoof on the handle, he said, “I… I’ll come visit you again soon. I just need to wrap my mind around this.” He exited the room then leaned up against the door after shutting it behind him. Running a hoof down his snout, Bahman couldn’t hold back the smile that stretched across his face. ‘Hopefully, this will make her realize that change is nature.’

ZPD Precinct One - 9:05 A.M.

Leon Delgato walked in on his own two legs, no longer using a cane. Dressed in buttoned-up shirt and slacks, he greeted Clawhauser. “Morning, Benjamin. How are you today?” he asked. Swiping one of the cheetah’s donuts, he kept the smile on his face as Ben gave him a sad expression. “Hey now. None of that. I’m fine. I’ve got an appointment for later this evening to go over my options.” It didn’t matter how hard anyone in the precinct tried, Ben always found out what secrets his fellow officers had. So Leon wasn’t at all surprised to find that Clawhauser knew of his condition.

“You are so not fine, Leon.” Clawhauser hissed at the lion. “You have Feline Leukemia. That’s nearly always fatal for us felines.” Ben didn’t like acting this way, but he cared very much for his fellow officers. ‘I’m going to need more donuts,’ he thought to himself, making a mental note to have some more delivered for after his lunch break with Chief Bogo. “The Chief is in a meeting right now, so he told me to give this to you.” Pawing over a file, he added, “Report to room 2-1. There’s someone waiting for you.”

Taking the file folder, Leon thanked Ben then made his way to his destination. Inside, he found himself looking at a female water buffalo wearing a business suit, red-rimmed glasses, and a visitor’s pass. For a second, he was concerned, but upon noting the name on the visitation pass, Leon relaxed. That was a mistake as the female water buffalo wasted no time explaining.

“Don’t relax.” Bertha Bodestinys stated sharply. “If you relax, you lower your guard. You lower your guard, the vultures strike. Now, sit down. We have work to do.” Seeing the lion obey, she frowned, “For crying out loud, show some backbone. Complying is a weakness during press
conferences.” Grumbling, she muttered, “Toby had better uphold his end of the deal for this. I’ve got more work than I bargained for with this one.”

Leon didn’t know what to do. This wasn’t exactly a normal, everyday occurrence for him. He waited for her to do something, but what she did was totally unexpected. He watched as she pulled out a yardstick and set it down on the table. Leon had flashbacks to when he was in elementary school and was whipped with one for misbehaving. Gulping, he settled in for whatever she had planned for them.

Meanwhile, Chief Bogo wished Commissioner Catlin farewell after the two had concluded their meeting over the new development into the Predopurge Investigation. Making their way down to reception, Bogo said “I’ll let you know what we learn.” He watched as Commissioner Catlin exited the front doors. With it only being 10 o’clock in the morning, Bogo looked over at Ben. “Has Delgato come in yet?” he asked.

“Already sent him up, Sir. He’s with your mother as we speak.” Clawhauser informed the Chief. “Sir, if I may ask. Why are you having your lunch break with me? Why not your mother?” It had been bugging him since this morning when Bogo had informed him of the fact. Now, Clawhauser loved Mrs. Bogo, thought she was so sweet. To hear that instead of going on break with his mother, Bogo would be going on his lunch break with him was, to Benjamin, bizarre.

“Two reasons.” Bogo replied. “One: I have something important to discuss with you that I’ve been putting off for some time. Two: It was one of the things I had to agree to in order to get her to agree to teach Delgato what he needs to learn for his new position.” In full honesty, his mother hadn’t so much requested, but rather demanded that he take Clawhauser out on a lunch date. She had openly scolded him for not doing it sooner, telling him that Ben must be tired of waiting for him to make a move. He had tried to argue, but his mother shot it down by slapping him upside the back of his noggin, shouting to pull up his big boy pants, grow a pair of rutting balls, and take him out to lunch. Now that he recalled it, the pain from the slap began to hurt again.

“Oh, I see.” was Ben’s response. The cheetah was a little bit giddy about the whole thing now. Clawhauser remembered one night when he was visiting Bogo’s parents with him for some family event. He had gotten drunk and ended up talking to Mrs. Bogo for hours about how in love with her son he was. Ben hadn’t been able to recall the conversation the next morning, but Mrs. Bogo had recorded the whole thing on her phone, saying it was cute. She had taken to inviting him on outings, just the two of them, to talk about things. Knowing that Mrs. Bogo had arranged this for them had him excitedly hoping that today would be the day.

“Yep.” Bogo stated as he looked in the general direction of the room in which his mother was surely torturing the poor lion. “Anyway, I’ve got a meeting with the chief of Precinct Two this afternoon. So I made a reservation at the Giza Bistro for us to have lunch. The reservation is set for three, so it’ll be a late lunch.” Walking towards Mammal Resources, he said “Call me if anything comes up.”

“Yes, sir.” Ben yelled after the Chief. Pulling out his phone, he shot a quick text to Tito to tell him about it. The response he got was a photo of Gazelle with her two ‘maybe mores’ having a small snack outside MTHZ at a café across the street. He clamped a paw over his mouth to suppress his delighted squeal. He asked for a photo of Tito and his significant other kissing and got it not a minute later. Ben hadn’t met Tito’s lover yet, but Tito had been telling him all about the lucky mammal. So, when he saw that Tito was kissing Alejandro Tigre, another one of Gazelle’s backup dancers, Ben was floored. Not only that, it wasn’t a photograph that he received it was a video taken via cellphone of the two making out. Ben could help but blush and giggle before sending a teasing text of ‘Naughty, naughty tigers’ and putting his phone away.
Upstairs, Leon let out a yelp of pain as Mrs. Bogo brought the yardstick down on his paws for the eleventh time in just as many minutes. Rubbing his paws, he said “My apologies, ma’am.” He felt like a dunce at not even being able to do the simple task of how to stand at the podium with an air of authority. They had yet to even begin the mock interview. Trying once more, he waited for the strike, but it never came. Instead, what he got was three gentle taps on the head.

“Much better.” Mrs. Bogo commended. “Very nice. Straight back, eyes forward, and paws in the middle of each of the podium sides. You look like you’re meant to be there.” Taking a seat in the chair in front of the podium, Bertha said, “Now, when taking questions you must always look only at the mammal asking the question, ignoring the others. The mammal you are answering has your complete attention. The rest can wait their turn. While you’re giving your speech is the time to identify which reporters you’ll start off with and select the order in which to call them out. Always go for the bigwigs first, since they have more readers. The smaller news outlets will be the ones who’ll ask the tougher questions, as they want to garner more readers, so deal with them second. If a question that you’re unable to answer, either because that information cannot be revealed or due to lack of it, provide them with a mathematician’s answer.”

“A mathematician’s answer?” Leon inquired. “What exactly is that? Like a non-answer?” It wasn’t a phrase he had heard of before. He was certain, however, that it had nothing to do with math.

“Sort of.” Bertha replied. “Here’s an example: I’ve noticed that you have no criminal record. Is this due to you having never committed a crime? Or due to never having been caught? The mathematician’s answer to that question is simply ‘Yes’. It answers both questions, but offers nothing. Understand?” Getting a nod in response, she said, “Good. Now, as the Media Liaison for Precinct One, you’ll be needing to create connections with some of the media piranhas. The reason for this is that the better your connections with them are, the more they’ll be willing to help you. Say you need to have something published at the drop of a hat and you have a good relationship with a reporter from, say ZNN, they’ll be willing to have what you need released as soon as you need it in exchange for something like, oh, priority at the next press conference.” Bertha Bogo continued to provide a long list of advice to the younger lion for close to an hour. By the time she was through, Bertha felt pleased with the way things turned out.

Clawhauser was in the middle of watching the newest released music video for Gazelle title ‘The Thrill.’ It was easily identifiable as the companion piece to ‘The Hunt.’ There was a link below that which brought you to a webpage to vote on what new song she should work on next, but Ben had already done that. When the video was over, he looked up to find himself nearly nose to nose with Mrs. Bogo. Startled, he said, “Mrs. Bogo! Don’t scare me like that.” Setting his mobile aside, the cheetah asked “Is there something I can do for you?”

“You can tell me if Toby’s taking you out on a lunch date,” Mrs. Bogo stated. “If he hasn’t, I’m going to gore him with his own horns after I rip them from his skull.” She watched as the cheetah smiled widely and let out a sigh of relief, knowing that her son had, indeed, told Ben about it. “About bloody time. I swear, my son’s more of a bloody pain in the arse than his father. Took me nearly a frigging month to get Andreas to ask me out on a date.”

“Well, Chief never actually called it a date,” Clawhauser explained. “We do however have reservations for a late lunch meal at Giza Bistro. With the way things are for the city right now, he’s being efficient. He’s got a meeting at Precinct Two set for just prior to then. After that, we’ll head to the bistro, have lunch, and discuss something he wants to talk to me about.” Ben’s tail was flailing around like a whip behind him in his excitement.

“Oh, okay. That’s good,” Bertha said, relieved. “Well, I think I’m finished with that poor lion for today. I’ll be here tomorrow afternoon for the follow up. Have a nice lunch date, Ben.” She made
her exit and inhaled the fresh clear air of the outside world. As much as she loved visiting the precinct, Bertha hated how stuffy it constantly seemed to be inside. Making her way downtown, walking fast, Bertha chose to head towards the supermarket for groceries, as she was out of Bermuda grass.

Chief Tobias Bogo slammed his fist on the counter of the Mammal Resources receptionist’s desk in rage. “What the devil do you mean you’re unable to locate the information?!” he shouted at the top of his lungs. The poor vicuña trembled in fear before the wrath of the Police Chief of Precinct One. Bogo leaned forward threateningly. “Do not make me repeat myself,” he ordered.

The vicuña gulped before replying “T-th-the i-inf-o-information i-is n-n-n-no l-long-longer in our s-sys-system, S-sir.” He was on the verge of shitting himself as the Cape buffalo’s eyes narrowed dangerously. Pulling himself together as best he could, he said “Of course, I could always check again. In fact, that’s exactly what I’ll do. I’ll check again. Maybe the data’s in one of the other two systems.” Rapidly typing in the search parameters, the vicuña hoped that he could find the information. He was too scared to relax his body when the data turned up in the backup system since he was positive he’d crap himself if he did. “Here it is, Sir. I’ll have it printed out for you promptly.”

Bogo grumbled as he waited for the printed pages to be given to him. During that short time a thought struck him. “You said the data was in the backup system. Why wouldn’t you have found it in the primary?” It didn’t make any sense why data would be in the secondary network and not in the main one.

Stapling the documents together the vicuña said “There are a bunch of reasons for that. One is that when information is stored into the system the files are normally made in duplicates. The first copy is stored in the backup, then the second is stored on the primary. Deletion from the primary doesn’t do anything to the backup copy, it just removes it from the main network. Truth be told, not many know that there is a backup network as a security precaution. The only mammals capable of accessing the backup are MH and IT.”

Fear gripped Bogo as another thought occurred to him. “If I were to request who deleted the files from the primary network, could you provide me with that information?” He watched as the vicuña once more began typing on his computer’s keyboard, searching for the information he had requested. A couple of seconds later, Bogo was looking at the vicuña’s computer monitor, which gave the name, rank, and a photo identification of the officer: Sgt. Sahar Humpback out of Precinct Two in Sahara Square. “I want his information forwarded to Commissioner Catlin and Precinct Two Chief Atem Imhotep. Tell them that he’s a mammal of extreme interest, and that the information is for their eyes only. Do you understand?”

The vicuña nodded vigorously as he began to do as he was ordered. As soon as Chief Bogo left, he zipped the file and sent it via the encrypted communications network straight to those intended. To be safe, he purged his digital hoofprints from the network’s history. Closing out of the window, he looked to one of his coworkers, saying “Can you take over for a bit. I really have to use the restroom.”

**Offices of Kit Services**

Odafin ‘Finnick’ Fennixon stayed outside in the hall as his mother, Agatha, shouted, yelled, hollered, and screamed at Stacey for lying to her. He had been tossed out of the room by Stacey, who told him to wait ‘while the females handle things’. Snorting at the attempt to placate him, Finn busied himself with backlogged paperwork, thankful for something to do. Director Badgerheim had come by for a bit with coffee and once she was informed of why there was such a loud argument, she laughed as she headed for her office. Finn felt scared after the noise died down then made his way to the door
through which his mother and Stacey could be found. Knocking on the door, Finn asked “Did you two kill each other?”

The door opened to reveal Agatha Fennixon, who had a deep scowl on her face as she looked at her only kit. “You have a shitload of explaining to do, Finny.” She then pinched one of his ears, much to his painful dismay, and dragged his ass inside, next to Stacey, who had a pack of frozen peas pressed to the side of her head. “Now, start talking. I want to know what the whole truth is, and I’m not going to let either of you out of this room until I do.”

To both their credit, neither Finn nor Stacey flinched at the harsh tone being used on them, having experienced much worse at the paws of the general public on multiple occasions. However, they did comply to the enraged fennec vixen’s demand and began to tell her what they knew. Finn was first explaining how he had ended up in the paws of Kits Services until he aged out, followed by his various attempts to get a job, which all fell through rather quickly, then finally turned to conning mammals out of their money to survive. His story was lengthy and took up a good chunk of time, but he spared no details from it so that his mother wouldn’t whoop his ass. Stacey’s turn was far shorter when she was allowed to give her contribution. She admitted that she had let the vixen believe a lie, but pointed out that she never explicitly stated that she and Finn were an item saying that it was all an assumption that was never addressed, confirmed, nor denied. This had caused Agatha to pause as she realized it was true.

“Okay.” Agatha stated after a bit of thought. “I find that all of that is an acceptable answer. I’m still angry that neither of you told me this earlier, but the past is in the past, and I can’t do anything to change it. So I’ll let it go.” Sitting down on the small cushion at the foot of the sofa that her son and Stacey were sitting on, Agatha sighed. “But you two are something now, right?” she asked.

Stacey and Finn exchanged a glance before answering together. “We’re…giving it a shot.” Finn looked at his mother with a sad smile, saying “I’ve, uh, got a few things I need to take care of before we move any further in this.” He had spent some of the time at the courthouse making a list of mammals he had to talk to, like old fuckbuddies. The list was currently written down on a piece of paper stuffed in his shirt pocket. “Once I’m through with that, we can consider moving forward.”

Not wanting to say anything to make matters more uncomfortable, Stacey remained quiet. There were a lot of things she had to think about. One was her current living situation. Her so-called home was a rental property whose owners were currently under investigation from the Zootopian Bureau of Dangerous Substances, or ZBDS. As of the night before the incident with Harold Fennixon, Stacey didn’t have a place to live except the living quarters here at the Office of Kit Services. In olden times, a vixen was meant to locate a suitable place to start a den. Nowadays, however, it was up to both the tod and vixen to agree on where they would den. Stacey failed in that regard, being technically homeless, but so was Finn since he lived out of his van.

Agatha nodded knowingly. Obviously her son had a past that he had to deal with prior to moving further than where they were now. That wasn’t a problem in her eyes. The major issue was that it seemed that none of them had anywhere they could call ‘home’. As she had only just gained her freedom, Agatha had no knowledge of what the city was now like. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that things had changed since she last saw the city. Agatha needed to get out there and see it for herself. She also needed to find a place to call her own, because she refused to go back to that awful house she had been confined in for years of sexual abuse. “We can deal with all that in time. For now, just… take me out to see the city. I want to see how everything has changed.” And that’s exactly what they did.

Finn and Stacey went to Badgerheim, explaining the situation. She merely waved them off saying ‘She deserves a lot more than that for what she went through. Get the hell out of here and show her
the city already.’ Finn led his mother to his van, receiving a whap upside the back of his head for the condition of it. He tried to explain he had bought it as a fixer upper, but it fell on deaf ears as his mother climbed into the backseat. Her nose wrinkled at the stench of stale sex seeped into the cushions, scaring him to death that she’d want to discuss it. Gratefully, his mom said nothing about it as Stacey climbed into the passenger’s seat. Starting the van, Finn pulled out onto the street heading into town, but not without backfiring first.

The first place they stopped was, ironically, Mystic Spring Oasis. Agatha was under the impression it was some kind of eatery, but while they did serve food, it wasn’t at all what she thought it was. This however didn’t stop her from enjoying herself inside after dragging Finn and Stacey with her, to their great embarrassment. They soon discovered that they were unfortunate enough to be there on the one day it was considered alright to partake in public mating. Finn covered his eyes as he watched his elderly mother bounce around like a little kit, enjoying the exhibitionism. Stacey wasn’t in much better shape as a wolf tried to convince her to let herself feel the pleasure of sweet, sensual lovemaking. This ended with Finn growling so deep that it echoed across the entire courtyard, scaring the bejesus out of the poor wolf.

“Oh, this place is amazing!” Agatha exclaimed excitedly as she watched a leopard dump a large load of his spunk into a male giraffe’s asshole. She wandered from area to area to watch members of varying species rut one another as if they were the last two mammals on the planet. Agatha soon stumbled across Nangi the Elephant, legs spread wide open and letting a caribou unload himself into her vagina. She recalled the elephant as one of her son’s character witnesses from the day before. “Excuse me! Excuse me, ma’am!”

Nangi looked past the caribou currently depositing his third helping of cum into her vaginal cavity at the fennec vixen. “You’ll have to wait your turn, miss.” Using her trunk, Nangi fondled the caribou’s testicles, coaxing another spurt forth into her. “He’s got one or two more then I’ll be happy to have a round with you.”

“Oh, no, no, no. I would just like to thank you for being a character witness in my son, Odafin’s, case.” Agatha replied, though now wondering what it would be like to have homoerotic sex with the somebody like the elephant. “I was already certain he wouldn’t receive a heavy judgement, but your assistance sure helped him regardless.” She was a bit astonished when the caribou withdrew himself from her to shoot his final load all over the elephant then leave to find another partner.

Collecting some of the semen coating her body with one of her hooves, Nangi drank it down before turning her attention to the fennec vixen. While she didn’t have that good of a memory, Odafin wasn’t someone you tended to forget easily. “So you’re Odafin’s mother. Your son is one hell of a lover. You should be proud. He’s the first male ever to get me to orgasm.” Standing, Nangi wished her a pleasant stay and walked off to find another partner.

Finn kept Stacey close as they searched for his mother to get out of there. It was difficult to keep his paws to himself as his nose picked up the ‘Rut me’ aroma her body was putting out, but he managed it by digging his claws into his paw-pads. When they finally managed to find his mother, Finn wanted to run away. With her were seven out of the eleven or so females he had frequented while visiting this place before. Letting out a groan, he whispered to Stacey, “Okay, look. Those females with my mom are some of my… previous partners. When we get over there just remember I only have eyes for you now. We’ll grab my mother and I’ll explain myself to them then we are out of here.”

Stacey nodded as she followed Finn over to the group of females. She had a hard time wrapping her head around the fact that one of them was a giraffe, the same one that she had seen a leopard rut until
he shot his load deep into her snatch. There was also a hippopotamus that was currently letting a female wombat finger herself while sucking her tit. ‘I am never coming to this place again,’ she promised herself. Taking ahold of Agatha while Finn gave the gathered females a short speech along the lines of finding his hopefully future bride, Stacey said “We are so out of here.”

Agatha frowned at the crossbred vixen. “Hey, I was having fun.” She flinched as Stacey gave her a death glare. “Okay, okay. So, I was gathering information after talking with that female elephant, Nangi I think, from Odafin’s case. Something she said bothered me, so I started asking around.” Oh and did she get a book series worth of stories about her son’s sexcapades. One thing that she found herself proud of, despite the obvious list of things she would later berate her son for, was that Odafin had taken precautions to never knot any of the females he rutted. Though that was more likely due to him having taken his grandfather’s knot at a young age. The fact he was even able to want to knot this particular vixen was a miracle.

Scowling, Stacey said “Your son has been trying to find a way to tell all his former partners know that he won’t be needed their ‘services’ anymore. The fact that you think that his sex life is any of your business is appalling. He is an adult, and doesn’t need you to tell him how to live his life. He didn’t have you with him growing up and he did just fine given what circumstances he had to face off against. I know I sound like a bitch, but I don’t give a single goddamn fuck. Let him be.” Stacey hadn’t realized just how loud she was until the sound of a throat clearing brought her attention to Finn and Yax standing behind her, arms crossed over their chests.

“Don’t upset the balance of the MSO, please. It’s always such a drag trying to even the aura out after something like this goes too far. If you two are having problems, please take them outside this fine sanctuary of ours.” Yax said, sounding as if he had taken a few too many hits from a bong. He then started what was apparently a dance meant to cleanse the bad vibes from the area. The others followed suit chanting some gibberish.

Finn facepawed, saying “Let’s just get the hell out of here.” He led them outside, back to his van. He looked at his mother, now dressed in her clothes once more. Stacey had on her pants and bra, but that was all. Finn had on his pants and shirt, but it was open, leaving his toned abs visible. Finn didn’t start the van, they just sat there for a while as he tried to find out how to say what he wanted to tell them. Grunting, he finally just said “Let’s find a diner. We’ll talk there.” He had just the one in mind, too.

<Time Skip>

**Across the street from the Giza Bistro - 1:45 p.m.**

Chief Bogo watched as unmarked police vehicles pulled up to his location. The addax that had been their server was in the backseat of his own. Bogo was pleased to see that Precinct Two Chief Atem Imhotep himself had shown up. What surprised him was that Sgt. Sahar Humpback was pulled out of the back of one of the recently arrived cruisers, confined in a straightjacket. “Well, this is new.” Bogo told Chief Imhotep once the Egyptian wolf approached.

“Yes, it is. However, you can thank me later when you see why I brought him with us,” Imhotep answered. He then smiled and pulled Bogo into a strong hug. “It’s good to see you, Tobias. I apologize for not being there when you held the briefing at Precinct Two, but I took it upon myself to deal with Sgt. Sahar.” Stepping away, he looked to Bogo’s vehicle and noticed the addax. “This the mammal who tipped you off?”

“Indeed, he is. He won’t give his name, afraid that he’ll be targeted by his fellow workers and/or his boss’s…unsavory associates,” Bogo replied before adding “I don’t blame him either. After what happened to Dawn Bellwether I would be too.” He approached Sahar, towered over him and
demanded “Are you pleased with yourself? Proud? I hope that all this was worth it to you. After all, what will the Chancellor think once he’s discovered you’ve been captured? What do you think he’ll have done to you?”

Sahar trembled in sheer terror at the thoughts that raced through his mind at the questions posed. “I don’t want to think about it,” he answered honestly. Following as Chief Imhotep led him towards the assigned area, Sahar wondered if he would be able to convince Camela to surrender as planned. The chances were slim, but not nonexistent. He waited beside Chief Imhotep as Chief Bogo proceeded to explain the plan to the other officers. “She won’t surrender easily,” he expressed to his former superior.

“I have no doubt of that,” Atem replied. He had read the file on Sahar carefully the moment they came to his attention. The male camel’s relation to Camela went deeper than just conspirators, they were blood relatives as well. Camela Sandifer was Sahar’s older brother’s wife’s father’s niece. While that may not seem like it, Camela had at one time been a Humpback because her own father was the grandson to Sahar’s paternal great-grandfather. Her reason for not sharing the family name was due to a former marriage. “However, you will do whatever you can to get her to surrender. Otherwise, I cannot guarantee her safety.”

Bogo finished briefing the officers and said “You all know your roles. Let’s get to work. Remember, minimal casualties means less paperwork. Let’s move.” He watched as the officers got into position, surrounding the establishment. An officer wearing the addax’s waiter attire went from table to table explaining the situation to the customers in a hushed whisper. Slowly, but surely, the guests began to exit in a calm, orderly fashion as to not arouse suspicion. Finally, all that were left were the waitstaff, including the undercover officer. He gave a signal from inside that Camela Sandifer was indeed in her office, prompting the others to enter the building as quietly as they could. Officers quickly detained the waitstaff and kitchen employees, leading them outside and loading them into large armored transports to take them back to Precinct Two for interrogation.

Chief Atem Imhotep led Sahar into the building. The Egyptian wolf led the camel towards Camela’s office then halted, giving him a severe warning look before uncuffing Sahar. He then stood to the side of the door, signaling to carry on with the plan. However, just to add incentive, he aimed his service revolver at Sahar’s head.

Sahar knocked on the door, receiving a ‘who is it?’, and said “It’s me, Camela. I’m on break and was wondering if we could talk.” He was awarded with the lock disengaging. Entering the office, he smiled at her. “Thank you.” Closing the door behind him, Sahar took a seat in the open chair. “I heard you had Officer Hopps and Cadet Wilde come by to eat today. Is that true?” He had to be very careful here, for if she learned the truth, it spelled disaster.

“It is.” Camela answered, gleefully. “I ordered my cooks to poison their food with high concentrations of ethylene glycol. My kitchen staff are all capable of making the stuff tasteless.” A wicked smirk etched itself across her face. “I can just see them within my mind’s eye dying slowly somewhere.” The idea truly thrilled her. “What about you? Have you learned anything new about their investigation on us?”

Shaking his head, Sahar said, “I’ve was assigned another case. It has been taking all of my time.” Leaning forward, he added “It’s a case of attempted murder. The prime suspect isn’t aware we’re investigating her, but she will soon enough. She attempted to murder some innocent civilians to cover up the murders of her husband and others.” It was true. Camela had murdered her husband to collect on his million-dollar life insurance policy to open this place and fund the tasks given to her by the Chancellor.
“Sounds complicated. She must be some special kind of insane.” Camela said as she read over the expenditure documents. “What evidence do you have against her?” She scowled at finding an error. “Is it enough to arrest her for the crimes she committed?”

“I’ve gotten an inadvertent confession.” Sahar told her making her look at him curiously. Rising, he walked around her desk to stand behind Camela. Placing his hooves on her shoulders, he said “Don’t make this more difficult that necessary please.”

Camela was dumbfounded at the turn of events. “You…you’ve betrayed us?” she asked quietly. She didn’t want to believe it, couldn’t believe it. Not after everything they had done to get to this point. “Sahar, please tell me this is a joke. Tell me that this isn’t really happening. That you haven’t betrayed the cause.”

Sahar sighed heavily. “Camela, I haven’t betrayed anything. I’m still firmly allied with our cause. However, things have changed. They know that we’re involved. I’m only here because they offered me a chance to talk you down and surrender. So, no. This is not a joke. This is actually happening. Please, just this once, listen to me and give yourself up.”

Slowly standing, Camela sucked her teeth. “Well, in that case.” She spun around and stabbed Sahar in his thigh. “I’ll just kill you right here, right now.” Twisting the blade of her scissors, Camela said “You should have just killed yourself, saved me the trouble.” The look in Sahar’s eyes caught her off guard. It wasn’t one of shock or anger, but sadness.

“They’re right outside the door. They have heard every word we’ve said.” Sahar explained as he looked over her shoulder. He watched as Chief Bogo and Chief Imhotep walked in and proceeded to cuff Camela. “I’m sorry,” he whispered. As they took Camela away Sahar groaned in pain, which prompted a medic to come take a look. Batting the medic away, Sahar walked outside to witness as they placed Camela into the back of a cruiser. He sat down on an available chair with a pained grunt.

Chief Atem Imhotep came up beside the camel and placed a paw on his shoulder. “You need medical attention,” he observed. Seeing the bland expression on Sahar’s face, he said “But you don’t want any do you? You just want to bleed out.” This got a nod in response. Sighing, the Egyptian wolf walked away, leaving Sahar to die on his own terms. He made sure that the other officers left Sahar alone. When the last of them left the scene, he looked at the sky. “Winds of destiny, change.”

**ZPA - Nightfall**

Skye made her way to Scarlett Reddington’s room. She had a date with Jaxon scheduled for later tonight, so she was going earlier than normal. Entering the room, Skye found Scarlett looking at a photograph that she couldn’t quite make out. “Scarlett? Can we talk?” Watching as Scarlett set the photograph down, Skye took her usual seat on the opposing couch. “I want an answer this time. No deflections. Why do you seem so familiar to me? Where do I know you from? How do I know you?”

Scarlett looked at Skye and smiled. “So tenacious. Jameson was right. You really are a lot like me.” She shook her head. “I hope you’re ready for a story. It’ll take a while.” Taking her locket out, Scarlett said “When I was younger, I met a young arctic tod by the name of Skylar.” A gleam came to Scarlett’s eyes as she recalled the first time she met Skylar. “He was so dashing. Before you ask, yes, this story is important to answering your question. Anyway, it was like a whirlwind romance. We never courted each other, we just…knew. He was so nervous, which was funny because he was always so dominant, so alpha, all the time with others. One day, Skylar told me that he was tired of being afraid and kissed me. After that, he spirited me away to his ‘Ice Palace’ as he called it. It was a truly one of a kind den he had fashioned from a mountainous block of ice. We didn’t step outside for a solid month. Skylar was so gentle, so tender and loving the whole time.” A shadow fell across
Scarlett’s muzzle as she continued. “Then it all came crashing down when his past came back to claim him. Old associates who had felt betrayed by his departure from their world hunted him down, capturing us. At the time, I was pregnant with our first kit. I had planned to tell him that evening, but I never got the chance. Skylar was furious when they descended upon us. He slayed a majority of them, but there were far, far too many. One shot him through his legs and shoulders, sending Skylar to his knees. He told me to run and not look back, so I ran. I ran as fast as I could, but I couldn’t not look back. I turned just in time to see Skylar be decapitated. Enraged beyond belief, I raced to the home of Skylar’s brother, who sheltered and protected me. I bided my time, created contacts, built a network of informants, and planned my revenge all as I waited to give birth to the kit that Skylar and I had conceived.”

Listening with rapt attention, Skye was confused as to why this story was important to her questions. It sounded like a long-winded drawn out attempt to stall for time, but she gave the red fox vixen the benefit of the doubt. A couple of things that she heard stood out to her though. For instance, Scarlett’s lover was an arctic tod. One that was named Skylar. Skylar had a brother who cared for Scarlett while she waited to give birth. It all had an eerie similarity to what her foster-father/uncle had told her. ‘But, it couldn’t possibly be,’ Skye thought.

“Finally, I gave birth to our kit. I begged and pleaded with Skylar’s brother to care for it while I claimed my revenge on those who had taken my mate from me. He acquiesced, telling me that I had better return, to which I swore on my life I would. I raced off to begin my Great Hunt. It took 17 years, but I eventually succeeded in having my vengeance. I then rushed home as quickly as I could, hoping that I could still have some time with my kit. However, when I returned I discovered that Skylar’s brother had no knowledge of where my kit was. He explained that his own kits had let slip the truth of my kit’s parentage causing them to run away. I flew into a such a rage that my in-laws now believe that the only reason my fur is red is from bathing in the blood of those moronic enough to cross me. I once more used my network of informants to try and locate my kit. Eventually, they succeeded. They found my kit in Foxhollow, from where I had originated. I wanted to speak to them, but I soon saw that they had already come to accept that I would never return to them. Disheartened that my kit was under the assumption that I had simply abandoned them, I chose instead to act as their guardian demoness. I continued to watch over them as they grew, matured, and fell in love with someone I never imagined they would. I witnessed as my kit found their place in the world.” A sad smile formed upon Scarlett’s lips. “One day, I got word that my kit had been captured by some opposition forces on a mission. I did what any mother would do and sent aid. My mammals tore through the base of those holding my kit and brought it crumbling to the ground, leaving no survivors behind other than those who were my kit’s allies.” Fiddling with her locket, Scarlett unclasped it and looked at the pictures inside. “This is the only two photos I have of Skylar and our daughter, whom I named in his honor.” Scarlett tossed the locket to Skye, who caught it and stared at the two photographs.

With shaky paws, Skye gazed at the two photographs held within Scarlett’s locket. The photo on the left was of a dashing arctic tod with gray eyes and the name ‘Skylar’ etched in calligraphy below it. On the right, a photo of a fox kit, not yet a week old with her father’s white fur and sky-blue eyes that matched Skye’s own looked back at her. Underneath the picture, etched in calligraphy, was the name ‘Skye’. Looking up at the red fox vixen, Skye stared at her and began to hyperventilate. She tried to force herself to move, but failed, unable to get her brain to send the signals to the rest of her body. “Y-you? You’re…you’re m-my…my mother?”

Scarlett gave Skye a sad smile, nodding in response to her question. “I’m so, so, so sorry, Skye. I truly am.” Scarlett stated, remorsefully. “If I could go back to change things, I would have taken less time to get back to you, but I can’t. I don’t expect you to forgive me. Or even accept my apologies, for that matter. I just want you to know that I never stopped thinking of you, ever. I was unable to let go of your father’s death and it drove me to my ruin. Whenever I asked myself why I was doing this,
you were what my brain supplied as the answer. I kept hunting for the mammals who had taken my mate away before he could ever meet his little vixen, before he could watch her grow up, threaten the male who wanted to take her on dates, court her, before he could walk her down the aisle at her wedding, handing her off to the male she had chosen as her lifemate. Grow old with me surrounded by all of our kits and grandkits before taking off on another journey together. That’s what kept me going, and it caused me to miss everything about you, my daughter, growing up.” Tears were streaming down her face, nonstop, as Scarlett bared her soul to Skye.

It was too much. Far too much for Skye to process. She bolted for the door, threw it open, and raced outside, unable to take anymore. Skye ran to escape from it all. She didn’t have any idea to where she was running, but all Skye knew was she needed to get there as fast as her legs were capable. When she stopped, Skye found herself at the front entrance of the Mess, where Jaxon was waiting for her to arrival. ‘That’s right.’ Skye thought. ‘We have a date tonight.’ She entered the building, heading to the table at which Jaxon was already seated. As she sat down to join him, Skye couldn’t help but wonder what Scarlett was going through.

As it turned out, Scarlett had remained seated in the same position she had been when Skye ran away. The only difference was that she was crying into the shoulder of Jameson, who had been hidden within the shadows of the room the entire time per Scarlett’s request to make sure she went through with it all. Scarlett was sobbing herself to the point of exhaustion. She had anticipated such a reaction from Skye at the reveal of the truth, but that didn’t mean it didn’t hurt.

Jameson, for his part, simply held Scarlett in a tight embrace, allowing her to let it all out within the safety of his presence. “She’ll be back, Scarlett. You must give her some time,” Jameson whispered to her. He had watched the entire exchange from within the shadows of the room. Unsurprised by Skye’s reaction, Jameson had taken his current position beside Scarlett, knowing that she would need someone to lean on for support. “Just give her a little time.”

“I screwed up, Jameson. I really, really screwed all this up. My life, my daughter’s. I just screwed up the lives of everyone I cherish dearly,” Scarlett sobbed, “…I knew this was what would happen, but I had to tell her. It was physically painful to keep it from her.” Scarlett kept weeping into Jameson’s shoulder, thankful that he was there. For the span of about a second, Scarlett wondered how Jameson did it. How he managed to in control of himself after millennia of witnessing those he cherished die around him. Then it dawned on her that, much like he from whom he was created, Jameson accepted their deaths, knowing that they were now in a much better place. Scarlett found herself jealous of Jameson’s mate, but that feeling didn’t last more than an instant as memories of Skylar flooded her mind. “I miss him,” she whispered.

“I know.” Jameson whispered back. “Believe me, I know.” He continued to hold her until she fell asleep in his arms. Picking her up, Jameson carried Scarlett to her bed and laid her down, tucking her in. He silently left the room, locking the door behind him. Pulling out his mobile, Jameson dialed Vanessa’s number. When the call connected, he said, “Hey. How are you? … No, I’m just fine. … Yes, I promise. … I… I just wanted to hear your voice. … I know. I love you, too.”
from other male wolves, all saying to call them to have a good time.

“Oh, that’s just pure gold.” Gary snickered as they watched a young Spencer pirouette on the television screen. “I have to say though, you do look like one smoking hot dame.” He leaned into Larry’s side as he burst into another round of laughter. Gary couldn’t believe their luck that Larry had managed to find the video. This was a golden moment, perfect payback for earlier that day when Spencer had surprised them with a copy of one of their old sex tapes.

Larry, unlike Gary, wasn’t laughing. Instead, he was fantasizing about how Gary or himself would look in a dress similar to the one the young Spencer in the video was wearing. There was also the odd feeling of arousal at the sight of the preteen Spencer wearing drag. Larry could feel his member begin to harden from the mental images plus the ones on screen. He let out a strained yelp when Gary’s paw snaked into his trousers to grip his sheath. Shooting his mate a sorrowful look, he mouthed “I can’t help it.”

Gary wasn’t upset. In fact, he was highly amused. Though it was entirely plausible that was due to the generous amount of alcohol they all had tossed back. Seeing Spencer’s horrified gaze glued to the television, Gary licked his mate’s cheek, drawing his attention to him. Gary shifted in his seat, spreading his legs a little to display the prominent bulge of his fully erected cock and wriggled his eyebrows. He quickly brought his legs together as Spencer turned to look at them. “If you want us to turn it off, you’ll need to do something for us.”

Through the alcoholic haze, Spencer had a good idea of what it was they wanted. Grumbling, Spencer stalked over to the coat closet and started digging around inside, looking for what he had hidden in there. Finding the garment bag, Spencer walked back to his new cohabitants, set it down, and began to strip. It only took a few seconds before Spencer stood there in only his underwear, which, unfortunately for him, was a male thong. Spencer was not homosexual, having on a number of occasions spent the evening rolling in the sheets with she-wolves, but he did enjoy certain aspects of the lifestyle, including the undergarments. He looked at Larry and Gary, who had stopped laughing in shock and awe at seeing him in only his underwear, and unzipped the garment bag to reveal a lovely floor-length cream coloured dress that matched well with his sandy tan fur.

Larry and Gary felt themselves begin to breathe heavier as they stared at the mostly unclothed wolf before them. They watched as, with practiced ease, Spencer adorned the dress, which boggled their mind as it made him appear to be entirely female. There literally was no way to differentiate Spencer from a she-wolf you’d run into at random on the streets. Larry couldn’t stop himself from licking his lips in lust. Gary swallowed thickly as he let his eyes raked down Spencer’s form. They slowly moved their paws in front of their crotches in a vain attempt to hide their, now throbbing, wolfhoods.

Spencer struck a sensual pose, cocking his hip out and placing a paw on it as he looked at the two gawkers. “You can take one photo each, then I’m putting this away,” he stated. There were two rapid-fire clicks of cellphone cameras then Spencer went to take the dress off only to have his paws halted. The lust hungry looks in Larry and Gary’s eyes caused his own to narrow threateningly. “Let. Go.” They obeyed letting him remove the dress and store it once more into the garment bag, which was then returned to the coat closet. Deciding to remain in just his male thong, Spencer sat back down on the couch, switching the station to PBN.

“So?” Larry drawled on questioningly. “Do you, uh, often go out wearing that dress?” While he honestly didn’t expect to get a response, Larry was hoping that Spencer would give them some hint. It was not to be however, as instead Spencer gave him a withering look. Focusing his attention on the television, Larry spared a glance at Gary, who seemed to be in another world. ‘Probably imagining what I would look like in a dress. Or how I think he would look in a dress,’ Larry thought.
The television suddenly fritzed, went static, then revealed the silhouette of the Chancellor. The three leaned forward as the unidentifiable mammal began to speak. Spencer hit the record button on the television remote so that they could have it examined at the precinct as soon as they could. For a span of about 5 minutes, there was no audio being generated by the onscreen image. Right as Spencer was about to see if there was an issue with the sound, the Chancellor spoke.

“Mammals of Zootopia, I fear that my last message did not get the response for which I had originally hoped,” the Chancellor stated, sounding almost sorrowful, “I had wished that the authorities would acquiesced to my very reasonable demands, but alas it was not to be. As a result, I shall be the bigger mammal. Within the span of one week, I will have my supporters move throughout the city, making the necessary preparations for our impending assault on Zootopia. During that time, I will patiently await for A.G. Hoover, Commissioner Catlin, Acting Mayor Wolvenett, and the City Council to finally agree to my demands. I fail to see why they chose to continue their attempt to delay the inevitable, but then again, I would if I were in their positions. If the mammals I have named are watching this broadcast, I wish to remind you that this is not a bluff. If you require more proof of my conviction to carry through with my plan, then please report to Melody Hall at 8 o’clock in morning the day after tomorrow. Your proof will be there.”

The screen then returned to its original broadcast, leaving Spencer, Larry, and Gary with dire expressions. Gary and Larry jumped to standing positions, quickly gathering their equipment as Spencer walked to his bedroom closet, pulling out his old tactical gear. Donning their gear, the three raced to their vehicle and took off towards Precinct One, where they encountered a large crowd of mammals trying to storm the building. Spencer led Larry and Gary to the back entrance into the precinct, then up the stairs to Bogo’s office. “Please tell me we have a location for this madmammal.”

Inside Chief Bogo’s office was the Chief himself, obviously, Commissioner Catlin, A.G. Hoover, Supreme Commander Deego, the newly named Media Liaison Leon Delgato, and, surprisingly, Dr. Loretta Pouncer. It was Loretta who answered Spencer’s question, but her voice and expression were grave. “No, we do not. The transmission ended mere nanoseconds before we could get a lock on from where it was transmitting. However, that doesn’t mean that we don’t know where to look.” Indicating the large map of Zootopia and its surrounding areas, she continued. “We were able to identify an approximate search area. But, here.” She pointed to a small circle that had been drawn on the map. “This is where the old village of Shiregrove once thrived. The Chancellor’s identity is, as I have confirmed, Jacen Carno, the previously unknown survivor of the massacre that took place there decades ago.”

Spencer sat down in an open chair. “Why haven’t I heard of this case?” How hadn’t anyone in the Justice Department heard about this? A case like this didn’t just disappear from the records. “How does a case this large just vanish? It doesn’t make any sense.”

That was A.G. Hoover’s cue to step up. “The reason the case was never made public was due to the fact there was so little evidence discovered. As you know, cases that have little to no forensic evidence don’t go to trial, therefore nothing comes from them. However, thanks to the information provided to us by Hannibal Hyector, we now know the reason for this. Isn’t that right, Commissioner?”

Commissioner Catlin sighed heavily as he stood. Walking over to the window that overlooked the street outside, Catlin said “Prior to the Massacre of Shiregrove there were whispered rumors of mammals who wished the destruction of the village. No one paid attention to them, thinking nothing of it. When the assault took place it caused panic throughout the city’s citizens. I was a beat cop at the time, and Shiregrove wasn’t, and still isn’t, in our jurisdiction. However, there were many of us who wanted to investigate. Our superiors, on the other paw, refused. We were ordered to stand down, threatened with termination due to insubordination if we ignored those orders. We didn’t
know why, but back then no one was willing to go against the orders.” Shaking his head, he continued “The evidence provided by Hannibal proves that the higher ups at the time were involved in a coverup of a government conspiracy. The mayor at that time was Councilsow Swinton’s father, Mervis Leonard Swinton, who would, ironically, be proud of Jacen Carno’s actions against predators. He used his influence to launch an attack on Shiregrove, hoping to gain control of the land so that he could develop it and expand Zootopia’s territory. After the attack, Mervis manipulated the police to cover up his actions."

Chief Bogo stepped in. “Mervis was never brought to trial, but not long afterwards, he disappeared without a trace. His body was never recovered. An investigation was performed, but turned up fruitless. Those in law enforcement who were involved are no longer with us. Most died under suspicious circumstances, but nothing was ever proven. I believe that Jacen Carno is responsible for their deaths, but I can’t prove it. If so, his use of Piggy Swinton is either ironic, or an act of revenge. The others he had Hannibal murder don’t seem to have any connection to the destruction of Shiregrove. Mervis did a good job in eliminating the evidence against him and his accomplices.”

Spencer used a paw to rub his forehead. “So, those responsible for the massacre of Jacen Carno’s fellow villagers are dead. Then why in the hell is he doing all this? Just because he can?” As an officer, he was skeptical that the Chancellor, Jacen Carno, was legitimately insane. As an ADA, Spencer was well aware that some mammals didn’t have motives behind their actions. He looked at the others to provide answers, but got none.

Supreme Commander Deego, who had remained silent the entire time, finally spoke. “We need to accelerate our movements. We don’t have time to wait until the beginning of this coming week to evacuate the city. We need to go on full, citywide lockdown as soon as possible. Starting tomorrow, we will proceed with the evacuations. I suggest that anything you need to do, you do it tonight or early tomorrow morning. As we lack the luxury of time, we’ll coordinate while on the move. We’ll have to set up a command post in a secured location. We’ll begin at dawn’s early light.” The rest all agreed with the plan, but remained at the precinct.

**Penthouse of Gisella/“Gazelle”**

Gisella sat upon the couch in her penthouse in Sahara Square’s Palm Hotel. Unlike a lot of hotels, the Palm Hotel provided long-term residence to those who could afford it. This particular penthouse suite was specially designed for Gisella herself. The designer and owner of place was a diehard fan of hers and had built the penthouse for her. While originally not wanting to accept such an extravagant gift, Gisella had agreed in exchange that she pay a set rent rate. It had been her only condition, to which the designer/owner agreed. Currently, Gisella was watching the news broadcasts on her television as the newscaster reported the situation outside Precinct One.

“Crazy. Just crazy.” Pronk said from his spot next to Gisella. He and Bucky had been dragged here by Gisella and her tiger backup dancers after the shooting at Serengeti Plaza. Pronk hadn’t been surprised by the luxury of her place, but had been a bit stunned by the decorations. There were photos of them from childhood and early teen years that lined the walls. There were newspaper clippings about him and Bucky framed on her walls as well. One was the announcement about their, at the time, upcoming nuptials. Another was the article that announced his graduation from Zootopia Med. Yet another was the obituary for Bucky’s sister. ‘She never forgot us,’ Pronk had thought upon seeing all of it. “The world has gone crazy,” he said as he watched the news broadcast.

Bucky let out a long ‘hmm’ in response to his husband’s words. He was sitting at the breakfast counter looking out the large, wide window overlooking the city. An empty bowl was situated before him that had earlier contained oatmeal. Looking out at the city, Bucky said “The world is indeed crazy.” Putting his dish in the sink, Bucky looked at Pronk and Gisella, both of whom were
nude, and sat down on Gisella’s other side. “And it’s only getting crazier.” Putting an arm around Gisella’s shoulders, Bucky asked “What do you think? Should we evacuate? Or shall we remain in the city?”

Watching as the mammals onscreen tried to force their way into Precinct One, Gisella said “We’ll stay. I refuse to let this beast of a mammal run me out of the city I call home.” Standing up, she walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. “I know that our first attempt to organize a rally, but we should give it another try.” She let out an ‘eek’, feeling a hoof give her left ass cheek a squeeze. Spinning around, Gisella glared at what she thought would be Bucky, but was Pronk instead. “PRONK!!” She shouted, wacking him lightly on his shoulder and causing him to laugh.

“Sorry,” Pronk stated, unapologetically and with a wide grin. Reaching past her into the refrigerator, he grabbed a bag of salad. “I have to say though, you’ve got a really good ass that just begs for it.” His words made Bucky laugh from where he remained on the couch. When Gisella went to say something, Pronk gave her a quick peck on the lips which stunned her speechless. He walked away waiting for her reaction and was pleasantly surprised when Gisella launched herself at him, tackling him to the ground.

Shaking his head with a smile, Bucky watched as Pronk and Gisella wrestled around on the ground laughing like mad. He waited for just the right moment then tackled Gisella. “Now, Pronk!” He yelled. Bucky held down a squealing Gisella as Pronk blew raspberries into her stomach. He laughed as Gisella giggled, screaming ‘mercy’.

The three continued to play like this for upwards of an hour until they were tired. They ended up on the large bed in Gisella’s bedroom. As the three laid there, they talked about their relationship. Gisella was just happy to have her best friends back. Pronk and Bucky were happy about it, too. However, the conversation soon took a turn.

“Have you two ever thought about…us?” Gisella asked softly. She could recall, when she was little, telling everyone, friends, family, anyone who would listen, that one day she’d marry the two of them. During her teen years, as she started noticing males a lot more, she hadn’t strayed from that goal. Gisella had written love songs for Bucky and Pronk both, but never sang any of them. She still had the songs she had written, now typed up and saved on a flash drive locked in her closet safe. “Have you ever considered the three of us together?”

Pronk rubbed Gisella’s back while in thought. Looking at Bucky, he smiled. “I know I have. When we were younger, I would often write our names in little hearts.” There had been many times Pronk had fantasized about the three of them just like this, lying in bed together.

“I have, too,” Bucky expressed, “I’ve wanted this for a while. I almost feel like this is a dream and I don’t want to wake up.” He stroked Gisella’s hair tenderly a couple of times before he leaned in to kiss her cheek. The action caused Gisella to giggle lightly.

“I’m glad, but I meant the three of us as, well, more,” Gisella told them. She hid her face with her pillow so that they didn’t see her blush. “Have…have you ever thought of us as…you know?”

Bucky and Pronk exchanged warm looks then they pressed themselves against Gisella so that she could feel their stiff members rubbing her body. They each leaned in to one of her ears and began to whisper sweet nothings, making her tremble. Eventually, their words and actions brought Gisella to her breaking point.

Unable to hold herself back, Gisella got out of bed and headed for the attached bathroom. Stopping in the doorway, she peered over her shoulder at her the two males who held her heart. “When I get out of the shower, we are going to have a long talk about how we’re going forward with this. I’m
tired of waiting. Start making plans.” She stepped into the bathroom, closed the door, and got into the shower. ‘You two had better be prepared.’ Gisella thought to herself. ‘I’ve been waiting a long, long time for us to get to this point. I refuse to wait for much longer.’

**On the streets of Zootopia**

“This city has lost its damn mind.” This had been what Duke Weaselton said as he watched the newscast while sitting in a mustelid bar located in the Canal District. It wasn’t the greatest place to grab a drink, but as he was trying to lay low, it was Duke’s only option. Ever since his last run in with Flopsy-Copsy and Wilde, Duke had tried to stay under the radar, which is why he was currently waiting for the owner of the establishment. Duke had noticed the ‘Help Wanted’ sign in the window as he walked by the place. He hoped that he’d get a fair interview for the job.

The bartender sauntered over to the weasel and said, “The boss will see you now. Head up those stairs, through the third door on the right.” He collected the four empty glasses before the weasel, then went to serve his other customers. Watching as the weasel disappeared upstairs, he asked the young female otter “What’re you in the mood for, dearie?” The young otter was a regular who only showed up when a conquest didn’t pan out. He wouldn’t admit it, but he had a soft spot for her. They had rutted on many occasions, often after she cried her little eyes out, blubbering that she’d never find anyone who’d love her for her.

“Surprise me,” Kris replied, dully. She watched as the older otter prepared her a sex on the beach and placed it before her. “Thanks, Martino,” Kris gave him a sad smile, “You always take such sweet care of me.” She gave him a small peck on his lips in gratitude. Taking a sip, she let an ‘mm’ slip from her mouth, “So good.” Setting her glass down, Kris leaned on a propped-up paw. “Can I ask you a question?”

Martino shrugged. “Even if I tell you ‘No’, you’ll ask anyway.” He began to wipe down a glass that clearly desperately needed it. “What’s on your mind Ms. Otterton?”

“Well,” Kris began, “I wanted to know if you’re doing anything after work. Just to see if you’d come with me to take a walk through the city.” She waited for the giant otter’s response. When he smiled at her, she found it difficult to not smile back at him.

“Sure. I clock out in…” he looked at the clock behind the bar. “…30 minutes. I’ll just have to change out of my uniform, then we can go.”

“Great,” Kris replied. She had already decided what path they would walk. It was a lovely little stretch that ran alongside a stream. At the end of it, there was a small pond in which she hoped Martino would swim with her. Kris watched as Martino wandered from patron to patron exchanging pleasantries and polite conversation, but would always take a peek in her direction. She hid her giggles behind her paw as she watched him deal with a drunk female mink who was failing miserably at seducing him.

Martino sighed as the poor female mink kept trying to sweet-talk him into spending the night in her company. “Ma’am, with all due respect, you’re very drunk and you aren’t thinking clearly. Now, there is an available room downstairs in which you can sleep it off. Please, let Mr. Wiesel take you there. Maybe, if you’re lucky, he’ll take you up on your offer. Believe me, you’d rather have a strapping young lad like him than an old tosser like me.” Getting her consent, Martino waved Mr. Wiesel over and explained the situation. Once that was over, he saw it was time to clock out. He went into the back, punched out, changed into casual clothes, and went to join the young Ms. Otterton.

Meanwhile, Duke Weaselton sat stunned as the female polecat shook his paw after welcoming hi
aboard. He was in complete disbelief that it had been so simple. “So, wait. I’m hired?” He asked in
shock. Seeing the polecat raise one of her eyebrows in amusement, Duke said “Never mind. Th-
thank you. Uh, what time do I come in?”

“You can come in tomorrow for the grave shift,” the female polecat answered. “You’ll have Martino
as your trainer. Please be on time. He’s a stickler for punctuality. He’s even given me hell for being
late. Now, off you go. See you tomorrow evening, Mr. Weaselton.” She shooed him away, getting
back to the ledger in front of her.

Exiting the manager’s office, Duke walked downstairs. There was a different bartender now, a male
badger. Ordering a club soda to go, he thanked the bartender and left the bar. Duke walked down
the street, still unable to believe he now had a legitimate job as a bar-back. He stopped at a
crosswalk, waiting for the light to change. Drinking his club soda, Duke felt something he hadn’t felt
in a long while: pride. He was now an employed mammal. Sighing heavily, he thought ‘Now, all I
need to do is find someplace to live.’

Across the Canal District, Kris Otterton was laughing as Martino grumbled loudly at the state of his
clothes. The giant otter had made a misstep and fallen into the stream they were walking alongside.
Getting out, he gave the young female sea otter a playful scowl. He grabbed her by the waist and
tossed her into the stream.

Squealing at how cold it was, Kris shot Martino a look as she clambered out. “You ass,” Kris
chuckled. Shivering, she took off her shirt to wring it out. “You’re horrible. Tossing a fine female
like me into frigid waters. You should be ashamed,” she playfully scolded him. All this did however
was make Martino laugh.

“Well they do say revenge is a dish best served cold,” Martino retorted. He let his eyes roam over
her. She really was beautiful. He noticed that she caught him looking and redirected his gaze,
clearing his throat. “Anyway, let’s keep walking.” He meandered down the path slowly that way she
could catch up.

Kris quickly fell into step next to Martino. “Zootopia’s about to undergo mass evacuation,” she
stated. It was common knowledge, so it wasn’t as if she was revealing a big secret. The hum that she
got as a response made her look at Martino. “You staying? Going?”

Shrugging, Martino replied “Don’t know. Haven’t decided yet. I mean, I’ll probably stay in the city,
but I don’t have any real reason to leave. I’ve survived a lot worse. I remember Hannibal Hyector’s
reign of terror. Wasn’t pretty. The government wanted everyone to leave, but barely anyone left. We
weren’t going to let one madmammal drive us from our homes.” He kicked a small stone into the
stream they were walking beside. “What about you? You and your folks staying?”

“Yep. My dad can’t travel as he needs to get regular check ups every other week.” Kris responded.
“He doesn’t want to risk something happening and not being near a hospital that isn’t equipped to
deal with it.” They got to where the pond was, but Kris was disappointed to see that it was closed
off. “Well, there goes my plan.”

“Wanted to go swimming, huh?” Martino chuckled. “It’s no matter. We can some other time. Let’s
get you home. They’re probably going to initiate a curfew pretty soon.” He led Kris to a nearby bus
stop and flagged down a taxicab. Giving the driver the address of the Otterton’s Floral Emporium.
They rode in silence. When they got there, Martino got out with Kris, paid the driver, and walked her
to the door. “Well, this is where we part ways. For tonight, at least.”

Kris looked at Martino for a good minute. His smile was warm. “Can I ask you another question?” Receiving a shrug and nod from him, she asked “Why are you always so kind to me? I mean, I don’t
understand.” Lowering her voice, Kris whispered “I know we’ve rutted a couple of times, but…” She trailed off at the smile Martino gave her.

Rubbing the back of his head, Martino said “I’m old, Kris.” He never called her Kris, except for when they were having a roll in the sheets. “I’ve never been married. I got very close though, got engaged. Never made it to the altar. She cheated on me with my best friend at the time. Broke the engagement off once I discovered it. I was hurt, badly mind you. Thought I’d never fall in love again,” looking at her with an affectionate gaze, he confessed, “Then, one day, this young female otter, no older than just old enough to drink, walks into my bar and begins to tell me her story. How she had been dating this male, who kept bugging her to give up her virginity, and she had refused, which in turn caused him to break it off. She cried and cried, and drank, a lot. Then, she kissed me. Next thing I knew, I’m waking up in one of the rooms the bar has for drunkards to sleep of the alcohol with her cuddled up next to me. I was freaked. She woke up, smiled at me and told me that she was glad her first time was with me. I was flabbergasted when she returned after another failed date and dragged my ass back to that very same room where we made passionate, passionate love again. This became a regular routine. Later, I started to wonder why I was so okay with it. It didn’t take me long to put the pieces together. I fell in love with this bizarre female, who I had, and still don’t have, any idea of how she feels, but I’m happy. Happier than I ever was with my ex-fiancée. However she feels, whether she loves me back or not, I’m just happy that I got to have time with her.”

Kris was in tears. It was so heartwarming. “I…I’ll see you tomorrow.” She gave him a deep kiss then walked inside. Putting a paw over her heart, Kris hoped that Martino would be safe on his way home. She went into the kitchen and found her mother, Octavia, and her father, Emmitt, eating oysters. “I’m home,” she announced.

Emmitt looked up “Hey, how was your night?” Only receiving a ‘Good’ in response, Emmitt said “I’m glad. So, hey, listen. With the situation Zootopia’s in, your mom and I are going considering renting that spare bedroom for anyone who needs a place to stay during the lockdown. Do you know anyone?”

Joy filled Kris’s chest. “I think I just might, Dad.” She started to think of a way to tell her parents who it was and what he was to her. However, it was a conversation that would have to wait until tomorrow after she brought it up to Martino. Kris kissed her mom and dad goodnight then headed to bed.

**Shiregrove - Late Evening**

The Chancellor screamed in frustration. Swiping at the ghostly mental hallucination of Hannibal Hyector, he yelled “Why? Why are you still haunting me, you goddamn bloody motherfucking scavenger?” This did nothing but cause the hallucination to cackle maniacally. The Chancellor continued to swipe at the figment of his own imagination, seething. Finally, it disappeared, much to his relief. Sighing, he made his way through the village toward the mass grave. Paying his respects, the Chancellor finally lowered his cowl to reveal his face as it started to rain.

Andrew Bellwether approached the Chancellor as inaudibly as he could. However, he wasn’t quiet enough. Andrew watched as the Chancellor shifted his head to look at him, and his breath caught in his chest. The single eye that he could see was bloodshot and milky. The side of the Chancellor’s face was burnt, hideously scarred, and disfigured. While it was obvious to Andrew that the Chancellor was a species of canine, it was impossible to determine which due to the extensive amount of damage that he possessed. Andrew froze in fear at the horrendous sight before him. Seeing the Chancellor stand, Andrew swallowed thickly. “Chancellor,” he greeted softly.
Gazing down at the black-wooled ram, the Chancellor turned completely around to face him. “I’ve heard that you were captured by the ZPD. I sincerely hope that you didn’t snitch on us. I’d hate to have to kill you, Andrew.” The Chancellor’s voice gave no indication that he was lying, but in truth, he wouldn’t’ve cared whether he’d have to kill the ram or not. “Well?” the Chancellor demanded as he slowly approached Andrew Bellwether.

“I gave them false information,” Andrew stated, praying he didn’t exhibit any sign of deception. After turning himself in, Andrew had undergone a five-and-a-half-hour interrogation in which he divulged everything he knew. In exchange, all he asked for was that they consider his proposed plan of action. Thankfully, they had accepted the plan he and the others had put together. His role now was to act as a mole for the ZPD gathering data for them, while making the Chancellor believe he was sending them false information and pretending to provide him with verified data about the ZPD’s movements. ‘High risk, high reward,’ Andrew thought to himself as he watched the Chancellor narrow his eyes.

“Splendid. Simply marvelous.” the Chancellor exclaimed as a devious grin broke across his muzzle. He began walking back towards the village center. “Did you all hear that? We have the advantage.” His shout echoed throughout the area. The Chancellor was aware his action left Andrew baffled, but he didn’t care. He watched as ghostly apparitions of the villagers appeared, then vanished, leaving only a singular one: Hannibal Hyector. Frowning at the sight of Hannibal’s so-called ghost, the Chancellor grumbled “Why won’t you just disappear already?”

The specter of Hannibal smirked widely. It then warped into another form, one of a young female from the Chancellor’s past. “Why are you doing this, Daddy? You’re hurting mammals who haven’t done anything to you. Why are you being so mean?” the little red wolf female asked sadly. Before the Chancellor could reply the poltergeist morphed again, this time into a slightly older red wolf female. “You’re not my father. The male I called my dad wouldn’t do something like this. You’re just a monster. I hate you!” The phantasm transformed once more, becoming a red she-wolf much closer in age to the Chancellor. “Jacen,” it said, mournfully.

The Chancellor stared at this new apparition, unable to do anything more than that. The figure in front of him was his best friend, his lover, his one true mate, his wife, Melinda. Falling to his knees, the Chancellor ceased to be himself, and once more became Jacen Carno. “M-Melinda?” Jacen Carno had completely forgotten that he was in the presence of Andrew Bellwether, who was watching all this unfold. Jacen didn’t care.

The phantom disappeared. Nothing took its place. Jacen Carno returned to being the Chancellor, but there was a minor difference this time. The Chancellor had tears streaming down his muzzle. Rising to his full height, the Chancellor wiped his tears away. “Return to the others,” the Chancellor ordered Andrew, “Tell them to prepare for the next phase of our plans.” Walking back to the shell of what was once his home, the Chancellor’s mind was flooded with memories of when he was Jacen Carno. It had been such a simpler time. Back then, he had his wife, his daughters, the other villagers, and there hadn’t really been anything he had to worry about. Of course, that was until the city’s representative started hounding him to sell the land his village was on. His family had started Shiregrove generations ago. They were proud of the village, flat out refused to sell it. Life became much more complicated as a result. It started with mammals vandalizing their homes then ended with them burning the village to the ground and killing all those who lived within. All that for land that they didn’t even acquire as a result.

Andrew Bellwether swiftly rejoined the others at the Chancellor’s flattop stone. “He’s ordering us to begin the next phase of his plan,” he explained, “You know what that means. Let’s get going.” They all piled into separate vehicles in pairs: Zebrina and Randolf, Liam and Doug, Parker and Andrew. Liam was bringing Doug to the facility Randolf had acquired for them to use as their laboratory, then
serving the court order to the CCPM in order to get the materials they needed. Andrew was being transported to a safehouse located in the Meadowlands. As for Zebrina and Randolf, the two of them set off for their offices. Zebrina was already on her mobile talking to her executive assistant trying to get food distributed. Being the CEO of the second largest multi-million zoollar supermarket chain gave her plenty of access to produce. Randolf, on the other hoof, had been approached by his old friend Ma Li earlier that day. Li had requested a merger between their two empires. Li owned well over half the newspaper companies, while Randolf owned the majority of Zootopia’s news stations, such as Zootopia Broadcasting Network, Zootopia News Company, and Zootopia Public Broadcasting.

Hearing his friend tell him of Fatima’s death, Randolf had grown livid at the Chancellor’s actions. It took a great deal of effort to maintain a calm demeanor within Li’s presence. Randolf agreed to the merger, turning them into business partners under the new title of Zootopian Public News Network Broadcasting Station, or ZPNBS. It was after they had signed the necessary documents that Randolf pulled Li off to the side and confessed. Li had been angry, but thankfully, he gave Randolf a chance to explain himself. While Li was still angry afterwards, Randolf was grateful that it was no longer directed at him. They discuss a few options on what to do and the two decided to use their new partnership to send cryptic messages to those in the know. They used old codes and ciphers hidden in Li’s newspapers.

As Zootopia would be undergoing emergency evacuations at dawn, that didn’t leave them all a whole lot of time to get everything ready. This was where things would get very tricky. They had to remain inconspicuous as they performed their tasks, not drawing any unwanted attention from the Chancellor. While doing that, they also had to convince him that everything was going according to his plan. This was dangerous territory they currently tread, and they were fully aware of it. If they were caught, there was no telling what the consequences would be. The six of them could only pray that things would go as planned.

Chapter End Notes

For the past couple of days, I've had an issue with my memory. I'd blame my advanced age, but that's not all it is. I won't go into details though.

Key facts: I thought it was 1992, scared my kids, scared myself. My wife brought me back to reality by pinching the bridge of my nose. How this worked is anyone's guess.

Anyway, as a result, I have an appointment with a psychotherapist. The same one I visited before committing myself for the events leading to my breakdown prior to my hiatus. I'll be going "dark" for the weekend. No social media (not that I possess any besides e-mail.)
Chapter Nineteen: Welcome to Hell, Kits!!

Chapter Summary

The moments before Hell breaks loose.

Chapter Notes

A little late for a midnight release, but only by a few minutes.

Again, I give thanks to my editor. They pointed out some inconsistencies that were in dire need of editing.

I'm leaving the more important details for the End Notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Nineteen: Welcome to Hell, Kits!

Zootopian Police Academy – Predawn

Jameson stood outside in the large field on the grounds of the ZPA. The sun had yet to make its appearance over the horizon. His reason for being there was that he was awaiting the arrival of an old friend. Jameson’s ear flicked as he heard the approach of a stealth copter. He looked in the direction of the sound to see the chopper in the distance. Checking his watch, Jameson whispered “As punctual as always, M.”

The stealth copter descended into the large open field. As it descended, the rear cargo door was already beginning to open. The chopper never touched down, remaining airborne, hovering just a few meters above the ground. A figure jumped out of the open cargo door, landing a couple of paces from Jameson. The mammal righted himself, standing tall.

Quickly making his way to the new arrival, Jameson greeted him with a smile. “M. It’s been a long time. I think it’s been, what? 100 years? You look good for someone so old.” He had to chuckle at the annoyed expression on the margay’s muzzle.

“You’re one to talk, Jameson,” M retorted. “You’re what, 2,100 years old now? You qualify for senior citizenship.” Cracking his neck and popping his joints, M grinned at Jameson. “So, what’s this I hear about you having a son? Please tell me that he’s one of the poor, unfortunate souls I’ll be training. It’ll make my score.”

Laughing, Jameson nodded. “He is indeed, but I should warn you, he’s far more dangerous than I am.” This caused the margay’s smirk to falter for but an instant. “Come. I need to introduce you to the other instructors.” Jameson led the margay towards the faculty dormitories. “Should I inquire on your luggage’s whereabouts?”
“I don’t have any,” M explained to the onyx-furred tod. “I mean, besides what’s in my rucksack, I’ve got nothing.” He always packed light. It was practically second nature after half a century of serving as a covert operative for the Zoolympian Empire’s Clandestine Operations Force. “If I need anything, I’ll simply go out and purchase it.” As they reached the main area of the ZPA’s grounds, M looked around. “Looks almost like where we received basic training. What was that place called again?”

“I prefer not to think back on it, myself,” Jameson answered honestly. “But, yes, you’re right it looks a lot like the Asylum.” He glanced up at the margay out of the corner of his eye. “How are things back in Zootropolis? Anything of note?” M, despite having been born outside the Zoolympian Empire, was one of their most notable military mavericks, having survived dozens of suicide missions in their name. He had been stationed at the military base in Zootropolis for ten years prior to retirement and taking up the mantle as their training officer, instructing the newest recruits in advanced warfare.

“Nothing much, in all honesty,” M replied, a bit melancholy, “I wish something, anything, would happen to liven up the bloody place. But that wasn’t what you were asking.” M came to a halt as he said “There’s an internal power struggle within Zootropolis’ government. The Prime Minister vs the Director of Military Ops vs the Head of the Department of External Services. It’s an utter shitstorm. The Prime Minister is acting as a middle mammal between the other two, who are waging a personal war with each other. The other officials are either picking sides or their sitting on the sidelines to see what will happen. Thankfully, they’re keeping all of this under wraps as not to cause mass panic within the general populace.”

“Sounds like troubles brewing over there,” Jameson mused. “I’m glad you’re here, though, M. I think you’ll find this task a real challenge.” Checking his timepiece, Jameson said “We’ve got approximately an hour twenty before it’s time to get started. Let’s get you acquainted with your fellow instructors. After that, we’ll wake everybody, get them fed, and prepared for a stroll through Hell.”

<MEANWHILE>

Judy woke to a loud crash accompanied by a yell of ‘BASTARD OF A WHORE!’ that emanated from the small kitchenette area of she and Skye’s dorm room. Sitting up, Judy turned just in time to see Skye drop a pot full of what appeared to be soup of some sort and hear her shout ‘SONUVABITCH!’ before knocking over a pitcher of liquid. Getting out of bed, Judy padded over to the vixen to stop her from making any more of a mess. “Here. Let me,” she told her friend, taking over. Judy managed to salvage what she assumed was around a little more than half of the foodstuff.

“For your first real try, you did better than I did when my mother attempted to teach me,” Judy commended.

Ignoring the compliment, Skye looked at the disaster she made in the kitchenette with a miserable expression. During last night’s date with Jaxon, Skye resolved to learn how to cook the standard dishes of her species after tasting some of Nick’s cooking. It was a bit of a surprise for her because she remembered them having to order takeout every night they lived together. Jaxon’s face as he ate was one that made her heart hurt, feeling like it should have been the food she prepared responsible for his happy expression. When she had returned to the dorm room, Skye had talked to Judy about some of the everyday dishes cooked by Leporidae. Having woken up earlier than normal, Skye had researched a dish to fix Jaxon for breakfast. The semi-charred remains were currently in front of her, looking almost like charcoal briquettes. “I’m pathetic,” she murmured looking at the cooking catastrophe before her.

Patting Skye’s back comfortingly, Judy sat down next to her. “You just need more practice,” she
said, softly. Though she said that, Judy couldn’t help but wonder if it would end up being impossible. Judging by the food that was before them, it would take a lot of practice, patience, and perseverance. “Next time though, wake me up so I can help and give you tips, m’kay?” She picked up one of the charred baby carrots, looked at it, then gave it a nibble. Astoundingly, it tasted rather nice. Taking the small bowl of glazed orange slices, Judy found that the flavor was fairly alright. “This isn’t half bad,” Judy told Skye with an authentic smile.

A little doubtful, Skye sampled the same items as Judy had to find that the bun had been correct; It didn’t taste all that bad. They ate for a few minutes before Skye started to clean up the devastation she had left in her wake. Maybe she couldn’t cook, but she could clean a mean set of dishes. After putting the dishes into the small dishwasher merely out of habit, Skye washed her paws. “We should get dressed. Who knows when they’ll come to collect us for morning drills,” Skye stated. The two quickly got dressed in workout apparel and made their way to the lobby. As they reached it, Judy and Skye could hear a hushed argument taking place. Peering around the corner, they saw Shay and Harrison squaring off, teeth bared in snarls, with Nick in between them trying to calm the two down.

“What’s going on here?” Skye asked, drawing Shay and Harrison’s attention away from each other. She was caught completely off guard as Shay landed a powerful punch to Harrison’s solar plexus, knocking the wind out of the wolf. Harrison fell to his knees with a wheeze. Skye rushed to his side, asking Shay “What the hell is wrong with you?”

Shay ignored Skye’s question. Instead, he stared down at Harrison with a bored expression and said “You’ve got a long way to go before you could take me on, Pup.” The painted wolf walked away unbothered, leaving the rest behind, utterly stunned by his actions.

Harrison coughed for a bit before he managed to wheeze out the words, “Damn. He’s got one hell of a freakin’ punch.” Harrison groaned as he stood up. “That’s gonna smart later.”

Rolling his eyes, Nick retorted “You deserve it, Harry. You should be grateful you aren’t dead. After all, Shay is a highly trained assassin.” Shaking his head, Nick said “Let’s go. We’re expected to report to the Training Annex in less than 15 minutes.”

Together Nick, Judy, Skye, and Harrison exited the Temp Housing Complex, heading towards the Training Annex. As they approached, the four saw Major Friedkin holding a hushed conversation with another polar bear. The new ursine was younger than she, and he seemed rather uncomfortable wearing his Cadet outfit. They watched as Major placed a comforting paw on the shoulder of the younger ursine. Very little could be made out, but Nick and Judy, both having their sense of hearing enhanced, were able to make out the words, ‘Your dad’s the one who filed your application, Cadet Kozlov. You don’t have to worry about him being upset.’

Judy and Nick exchanged a quick glance after seeing the young polar bear nod as he walked into the Training Annex. “Family troubles, Major?” Nick queried with sincerity. Judy motioned for the others to go inside and that she and Nick would be right there in a bit.

“Not exactly, Foxtrot,” Major answered, rubbing her eyes. Sighing, she produced two files which were then given to the fox and bunny. “Those are the papers that Tobias faxed over for you.” Scanning the area, she signaled them to follow her around the corner. Once out of sight, she lowered her voice to a whisper “I’m gonna level with you. The city’s evacuation will start at 7 o’clock, today. As in, an hour thirty. Most of our cadets are being told to contact their families to get them out of Zootopia. Tobias has already taken care of your sibs, Hopps. He’s got an officer escorting them back to Bunnyburrow. As for you Wilde, your cousin Ian was adamant that he stays here in the city, something about private business, I don’t know, but he’s been transferred to Precinct One to aid the Cyber Crimes Unit. The evacuation is guesstimated to last four to five days, and all paws are needed
on deck. So be prepared if you’re selected to aid in the evac.”

Nodding, Nick and Judy saluted as Major Friedkin departed. Making their way into the Training Annex, the two found themselves watching in awe as Fenrir Wolford and a margay squared off in a no-holds-barred beatdown. They made their way to stand next to Jaxon, Honey, and Zannah as the fight continued. The two combatants weren’t just landing blows, but their punches connected with each other in rapid succession. The sound of the impacts echoed throughout the building. Neither fighter moved a nanometer from where their hindpaws were planted.

“Holy shit,” Judy whispered. She couldn’t quite believe the sight taking place directly before her eyes. Each punch flew and connected with the punch of the other. Judy couldn’t tell who held the advantage in this exhibition fight as the two seemed to be evenly matched. She cast a glance at the other spectators to gauge their reactions, finding that everybody appeared to share her thoughts on what they were witnessing.

Shay and Harrison shared a momentary glance with one another before refocusing their attention on Fenrir and the margay. Shay found himself wondering if maybe he’d been mistaken in his judgement of Harrison. Harrison kept his thoughts on analyzing his grandfather’s movements, trying to figure out how to incorporate them into his own combat style. The two watched as Fenrir caught the margay’s jab then twisted, heaving the margay through the air, over his shoulder, and slammed him into the ground so hard that the wooden planks under them cracked with a sound similar to a gunshot.

With the match over, Fenrir leaned over the margay saying, “I’m still top dog, but good try, though.” Helping the margay stand, Fenrir addressed their audience. “Everyone, this is M, the new instructor. A five-year war veteran with two two-year tours under his belt. He’s going to teach you advanced military tactics.” Giving M the floor, he went to stand next to Josef and Carlos.

M took a second to size up his trainees. His eyes immediately zoned in on Nick. Having spent a lot of time amongst those with Izu Genes, M knew just by looking at him that Jameson hadn’t lied when he said that Nick was far more dangerous than himself. He also spotted the bunny doe next to Nick and thought ‘Now that’s certainly intriguing. Never seen a bunny with vulpine markings before. This will be a ton of fun.’ “Alright, as Lt. Col. Wolford stated, I’m Marshall-Montague-Montgomery-Maniford De la Conquistador, BUT you’re only allowed to call me M, and I’m your new instructor. No, I’m not taking the place of your current instructors, I’m simply joining their ranks.” Sweeping his eyes over everybody, he said “I need to get a baseline on your present abilities. Therefore, I’m going to have you face off against each other.” Taking the clipboard from Josef, who had been holding it for him, M said “I’ve already chosen who will spar with whom. Arena 1: Shay Morrigan vs. …” M looked up and locked eyes with Jaxon. “I have two names for you. Which do you prefer?”

“If it isn’t too much to ask, I’d prefer my codename,” Jaxon replied as he started walking towards Arena 1. Stripping himself of his shirt, Jaxon laid it down on the bench positioned nearby.

Nodding in understanding, M returned his focus to the clipboard in paw. “Arena 1: Shay Morrigan vs. Jack Savage. Arena 2: Harrison Wolford vs. Judy Hopps. Arena 3: Zannah Fangmeyer vs. Honey Madge Badger. Arena 4: Nicholas Wilde vs. Skye Wintory.” As he called their names, they all made their way to their assigned arenas. Tucking the clipboard into the crook of his shoulder, M said “I don’t want to see anyone holding anything back. Ready? Begin.” A bell rang, signaling the beginning of their bouts.

A loud ‘THWACK’ drew everybody’s attention to Arena 1, where they saw that Shay had been launched into the wall a couple of feet outside the arena’s boundaries. The painted wolf shook his head to collect himself before reentering the ring. Jaxon’s expression was unreadable bordering on
lifeless. It seemed like everyone, including M, forgot about what they were supposed to be doing as they watched Shay and Jaxon fly into action.

Shay was impressively quick for someone of his size while facing off against a species that was known for speed, but even so, he always seemed to be half a step behind. Jaxon, on the other paw, was incredibly strong compared to how much smaller he was than Shay. It was a truly bizarre battle to witness, a jackrabbit handing a painted wolf his tail despite said painted wolf being an elite assassin. It was a sight to behold.

Finally remembering what their tasks were, the others gave their opponents a polite bow before dropping into battle ready stances. For Nick and Skye, this was an interesting moment. Contrary to standard practice, Nick took a step back. The action prompted Skye to lunge forward. By the time she realized her mistake, it was too late. Overextending, she left herself wide open to Nick’s counterattack, a kick to the sternum, which sent her skidding to the edge of the ring. Skye coughed once as pain flared in her chest, then went to attack again.

On Harrison and Judy’s end, the large wolf didn’t make the same mistake as Shay had and underestimate his lapine opponent. Rather, he fell immediately into a tight defensive posture awaiting her attack. Judy surprised him, however, when instead of attacking, she simply stood there, completely open. Alarms started going off in his head, telling him, ‘WARNING! WARNING! DANGER! DANGER!’ Harrison slid his hindpaws a quarter of an inch further apart to ready himself, but that proved futile. The instant that he finished repositioning himself, Judy disappeared from his view due to her speed. The impact that her foot had with his side felt like what he imagined compared to a sledgehammer striking a shale wall. He crumpled under the force of the blow, falling to a knee with a powerful exhale.

Zannah and Honey’s little match was… unorthodox, to say the least. Honey’s attack pattern was eccentric to the point of having Zannah think, ‘What the hell is she doing?’ Zannah continued to watch as Honey showed off some rather unique hindpaw-work. When the badger finally stopped, she made the ‘C’mon’ gesture. Cocking her brow, Zannah spun, striking Honey with her tail, sending the badger flying from the sheer power of it. ‘That was…sad, really,’ Zannah thought.

As the sparring sessions continued, M, Fenrir, Josef, and Carlos took turns going from one arena to the next, making mental notes to compare with the others. M’s main focus was the match between Harrison and Judy. Having heard of the bunny doe’s achievement of KO’ing a rhino, M had chosen to have her face the large wolf to see if she’d be able to come out victorious. Much to his amusement, the large wolf appeared to be primarily on the defensive and unable to gain the advantage. When M made it to the bout between Nick and Skye, he actually found himself in awe at the overall agility they both possessed. Their movements were fluid, precise, and proficient, almost to the point of unrestricted. M could scarcely believe what he was seeing.

Above all their heads, seated within the viewing booth watching everything take place, General Andreas Bogo nursed a cup of black coffee. With Jameson having run off to take care of some personal business, Andreas used this time to observe the initiates’ training. Seeing M present had admittedly been a pleasant surprise for him. Cellular phone chiming, Andreas checked the Caller ID to see that it was Supreme Commander Deego. Answering the call, he said “Supreme Commander, how can I be of assistance?”

**Camp Bastion – North Meadowlands – Zootopia**

Scanning the area, Jameson pondered exactly how he planned to pull this thing off. Before him was Camp Bastion, an old military R&D outpost. The building was supposed to have been abandoned over a decade ago, but reports showed that it was still operating. Jameson had a very good idea what
it was that the mammals using the place for wanted. Memories he had long suppressed made their way to the forefront of his mind.

*Flashback Begins*

“Just think about it, Colonel Wilde,” Gerard Wolferick claimed, “Bioaugmentation at the genetic level. We could create pseudo-Izu Genes that could potentially allow us to make regular military officers into super-soldiers.” The arctic wolf’s eyes gleamed with a maniacal light.

Shaking his head, Jameson stated “That’s madness, Dr. Wolferick. There is no way that this... experiment of yours will have the intended effects. Your research is flawed and will more likely kill those who volunteer.”

“If they die, it will merely give us the data we need to improve our work,” Gerard argued, “We need every advantage we can get our paws and hooves on.” The arctic wolf stood tall as he tried to convince the tod. “I’ll make sure they know the risks, but we need this.”

“No, Gerard. We don’t.” Jameson rebuked. “Our forces are already superior to 90% of the rest. We do not require fringe science to remain ahead of our enemies.”

“Why don’t you get it?” Gerard shouted at the top of his lungs. “We can always improve, always become better than we are. We have the chance to evolve past our limitations, but you would deny us of that. Why?”

Jameson stared the arctic wolf down. “You want to know why?” He asked. “Fine. I’ll tell you. Do you know how many mammals I’ve seen die in their misguided attempts to force their Izu Genes to awaken? Nearly 100%. Only a fraction of a percentage managed to survive, and they never lived long. Their bodies couldn’t handle the stress, broke down, and died before they ever got to make something of themselves. This experiment you’ve designed is no better.”

Pointing a claw at Jameson, Gerard vowed “Mark my words, Colonel. I’ll succeed. I’ll show you just how wrong you are and make you eat those words.”

*Flashback Ends*

Of course, just as Jameson had predicted, Dr. Gerard Wolferick’s experimentations had failed. As a result, the military pulled their funding, leaving Dr. Wolferick unable to continue. Discredited and shamed, the arctic wolf had committed suicide. The military seized control of Camp Bastion and all contents therein. For quite a few years they had tried to discover a way of utilizing Dr. Gerard’s experiment, but the efforts proved fruitless. Every time they managed to find the solution to one problem, twenty more would reveal themselves. Eventually, Camp Bastion was decommissioned, and the experiments discarded.

Now, as Jameson scanned the location, he could see different mammals patrolling the area, like security guards. ‘All prey,’ Jameson observed. Inaudibly, he approached an old ventilation duct and slipped inside. Crawling silently through the ductwork, Jameson listened for any indication to where the leader could be found. The further into the facility he went, the more voices he could hear. Finally, Jameson heard a voice issuing orders and giving a break down of plans. Peering through a grate, Jameson saw a mutilated male red wolf talking to a white-tailed deer.

“You’d be wise to obey,” the red wolf ordered, “I have no issue with providing you with a slow, painful death. I’ll only guarantee your survival if you adhere to my commands.”

“I refuse,” the white-tailed deer doe replied stoically. “I’m not going to assist you in this plan of
yours. So go ahead and kill me.”

The red wolf did just that, swiping so hard that his paw took out a massive chunk of her throat. “Stupid little cunt,” he muttered. Kicking the corpse off to the side, he examined the items on the workbench.

Inside the vent, Jameson studied the red wolf’s movements. Something was off about them, as if the red wolf was suffering from unattended injuries that had healed improperly. ‘He’s not here for the pseudo-genes,’ Jameson realized, ‘He’s here for the nanomeds.’ Continuing to observe the red wolf as he searched for his goal, Jameson spied the stack of black manila folders on the desk situated in the corner. ‘When he leaves, I should get those and bring them back to the ZPA.’

Letting out a triumphant ‘HA!’ the red wolf said “One of the greatest inventions of the late Dr. Gerard Wolferick: Nanomeds. The fool never realized that these had so many other applications, including cellular activation inducing high rate regeneration.” Injecting himself with the contents of the vial, the red wolf released a sigh of relief. “I should start moving. I don’t know when these nanomeds will kick in, but I need to be in position when the time comes.”

Watching as the red wolf left the room, Jameson cautiously exited the vent and headed for the black manila files. Stuffing them into his pack, his ear twitched at the sound of the door opening. Turning around, he found himself looking at a motley crew of prey species mammals armed with guns, knives, and brass knuckles. Rolling his eyes, Jameson muttered “Oh, great. Just bloody great.” Like a bolt of lightning, Jameson quickly drew his two sidearms and opened fire. Dodging a hailstorm of bullets, he ducked behind a metal crate for cover. Exasperated, he rolled his shoulders then said “Looks like I’m in for a refresher course.” Waiting for a break between rallies, he prepared himself for his retaliation. When it came, he returned fire until his clips were empty. The ‘CLICK, CLICK, CLICK’ of his guns made him sigh. ‘Next time, gotta bring more ammo.’ Dropping his guns and extending his claws, Jameson launched himself across the room towards his adversaries. Making quick work of them, Jameson heard the sound of Camp Bastion’s alarm. “FUCK!” Racing through the maze of hallways, Jameson found himself at a T-intersection, surrounded. Behind him was a window with a lake that he estimated was 60 yards below. Looking at the large group that had him blocked in, Jameson shrugged then jumped through it. Swan diving into the lake, Jameson gave thanks that his pack was waterproof. Speed swimming across the lake, Jameson climbed out at the far side. Pulling his radio out of his pack, he called for an extraction.

**Crisis Command HQ – City Center – Zootopia**

Supreme Commander Deego, Police Chief Tobias Bogo, Attorney General Hoover, and Acting Mayor Spencer Wolvenett sat around the summit table of the Crisis Center’s main office. Also present were the heads of the city’s Evac Services. With evacuations underway, they had convened to discuss the situation.

Chief Bogo had what little free officers he had available patrolling the streets, locating mammals that needed assistance, and paired with a military equivalent to promote good relations. Supreme Commander Deego was drawing up contingency plans, just in case. Acting Mayor Wolvenett, as well as Larry and Gary, were coordinating with the local packs to assist the Emergency Evac Service officials. Attorney General Hoover was simply overseeing the meeting, acting as a soundboard.

“So, everyone’s got a good handle on their roles?” A.G. Hoover inquired of the others. Getting nods from everyone, he said “Then I think we can call this meeting adjourned.” As the others exited the room, only he and Chief Bogo remained seated. “Have you managed to locate Leodore?” A.G. Hoover questioned once they were alone.

“No,” Bogo answered, “He’s in the wind. I wouldn’t be too surprised to find he was on the first
transport out of the city.” Bogo’s tone said that he wasn’t pleased. “Leodore was always the cowardly lion. I had hoped that after being mayor for six years he would’ve gotten over it, but apparently not. We may as well just forget about having his help.”

Sighing, A.G. Hoover weaved his paws together and rested his head on them. “Have we learned anything new? About Jacen Carno, I mean.” After learning the identity of the mammal behind this fiasco, A.G. Hoover had authorized open warrants for all officers to use for anything that could be tied, however loosely, to the case.

Shuffling through some papers, Bogo said “We’ve sent recon teams to Shiregrove, but they have yet to report back. I’ve also got officers digging through what information we manage to get out of Camila Sandifur. As of right now, we know little more than previously.”

A.G. Hoover huffed, but said nothing. The two then went back and forth, trying to decide the best way to proceed from there. It wasn’t too much later that Bogo was called back to Precinct One.

<MEANWHILE>

Supreme Commander Deego met up with General Andreas Bogo at the Officer’s Club, a bar for military mammals, both currently serving and retired. Taking the seat across from the large cape buffalo, S.C. Deego said “Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I wasn’t sure if you would.” Nodding in thanks to the cocktail waitress, S.C. Deego took a swig of the beer she set before him.

“I’m not one to turn down free food and drinks,” Andreas replied as he swirled the contents of his scotch glass. “Now, tell me why you requested this meeting. I highly doubt that this is a social gathering.”

S.C. Deego frowned. “You are correct.” Setting down his beer, he said “I need the status of Nicholas Piberius Wilde and Judith Laverne Hopps. I’ve tried asking your son, but he refused to give me an answer.”

Downing his scotch, Andreas responded “I won’t either. Those two are none of your business.” Seeing S.C. Deego’s eyes narrow, Andreas grinned “If you think you scare me, you’re sorely mistaken. I’ve taken on mammals far larger, more dangerous, and much more ferocious than you. The fact that I’m sitting here should give you an idea of how those fights ended.”

Weighing his options, Deego let out a huff. “The Emperor wishes to know. I have no knowledge as to why he does, but he does.” Taking another sip of his beer, Deego added, “His insistence for knowing defies my understanding. I don’t see any reason why these two are so important to the Emperor, but I was ordered to provide him with everything I could learn about their wellbeing.”

Andreas didn’t respond, instead he flipped through the menu nonchalantly. When the waitress came back, he ordered himself a small meal. Once she left to inform the kitchen, Andreas said “Whatever his reasons are, he’d do well to remember that neither of them have anything to do with him. He should stick to running his empire.” Andreas’s tone was grave, leaving no room for misunderstanding about how he felt on this subject.

Deego wanted to push the issue, but the sudden feeling that he was facing an insurmountable obstacle stopped him. Placing his own order when the waitress returned with Andreas’s food, he inquired “What do you think is this Jacen Carno’s end game? Surely, he has one. No mammal, no matter how insane, would go to these lengths without having a goal in mind.”

Chewing his fruit flan, Andreas replied “I haven’t the slightest idea. He’s left us no doubt that he wants predators to leave the city, but that seems to only be a red herring. It is entirely possible that
he’s trying to limit the population of Zootopia to prey mammals so that he could exterminate them as an act of revenge for the destruction of Shiregrove, his home. All the deaths could, in his mind, be necessary casualties. Sacrificial pawns if you will.”

“If that’s the case, then our evacuation is merely aiding in his plans,” Deego stated, “At the same time, we have no other choice.” Finishing his beer, he pondered aloud “Is it possible that every move we’ve made has gone according to his plans? Could it be that he’s actually foreseen every one of our moves?”

Swallowing his most recent bite, Andreas said “No. I know because he didn’t foresee Officer Hopps nor Nicholas Wilde’s involvement.” Draining his second glass of scotch, he clarified “For all his planning, he didn’t account for either of them bringing all this to light. Now, he has the entire city gunning for him. I’d like to think he’s scrambling to regain control of things.”

Nodding, Deego waited a few minutes before asking “May I ask why Zootopia’s military base is so hard to locate? I knew the general vicinity of it, but until I arrived there, I had no knowledge as to exactly where it was located.” He watched as General Bogo pondered this.

“The reason the base was built in that location is something of a secret. It isn’t classified, but…” Andreas weaved and interlocked his fingers. “Below the base, and I mean deep underground, there is an old military prison. In olden days, the most vile, repulsive, dishonorable military prisoners were housed there. It’s no longer operational, but the place is still usable. Think of it like a Military ADX facility. It was built in the middle of that perpetual whiteout because even if an inmate managed to escape the prison, they’d never find their way to freedom.” Closing his eyes, Andreas sighed. “I can’t even remember how many mammals died trying, but it has to be well over a thousand. After the last war, they decommissioned the prison and retrofitted the aboveground area as the military base.”

Deego was a hardened veteran, having served through more battles than he cared to reminisce, but he couldn’t bring himself to imagine dying under those circumstances. To feel yourself freeze to death? He shivered involuntarily just from thinking it. Deego remained silent for the rest of their meal.

Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia

Dr. Vanessa Aurora ‘Rory’ Wilde sat with the other veterinarians of MTHZ in the lecture hall. Her team was further up, in the back of the room. The chairmammal of the Board of Directors stood at the podium, the rest of the board seated on either side. Rory caught the eye of her friend Ellis, a mongoose who was the only doctor on the board. Prior to this meeting, Ellis had informed her of what would soon take place. The two nodded discreetly to one another as the chairmammal began to speak. It was the usual stroking the prides and egos of the veterinary staff followed by the expectations and accolades. Finally, the true purpose of the meeting was brought to the attention of everyone.

“As you all are now aware of the city’s situation,” the Chairmammal began, “we’re currently in a state of emergency. All hospitals in the city are prepping for the predicted fallout of the bio-bombs being used by the terrorist known as the Chancellor. As Zootopia’s foremost medical institute, we here at MTHZ need to be prepared to do our part. Dr. Ellis Lloyd, the head of our Trauma Ward, will be in charge with the aid of Dr. Rory Wilde.” These words caused most of those present to try and argue, but the chairmammal silenced them with a single word, “ENOUGH!!” The room became so silent that it might as well have been the hospital’s morgue. “Dr. Rory Wilde has on numerous occasions proved her worth here. She’s saved not only her own patients, but most of yours as well. Patients that have been turned down by over 90% of you because of your own personal bias have
found salvation in her care. In case you all have forgotten, let me remind you that our hospital wouldn’t be here any longer if not for her and her care of the late Dr. John Wolfson. Because of her, he saw it appropriate to bequeath all his financials unto us, ensuring that we remain operational for the next 50 years. All of you need to shut the fuck up, pull your grown ass diapers on, AND LEARN TO DO YOUR GODDAMN JOBS!! IF YOU’RE GOING TO CONTINUE BEING A CONSTANT PAIN IN MY BLOODY ARSE, THIS HARDHEADED, STUBBORN, AND MORONIC THEN YOU’RE FIRED!!”

Everyone in the room was totally silent, unable to fire back a rebuke, retort, or counter argument in their own defense. Not a single one of them had ever seen the chairmammal this enraged before now. A few audibly gulped at the realization that this was no bluff, he really would fire them without a trace of guilt, regret, or remorse. A couple even whispered apologies to Rory for their behavior to which she gave them a tiny smile. Only a pawful of others ripped their employee badges off and stalked out of the room. Once the last one departed, the meeting resumed.

“Now that we’re through with that, let me make a few more things clear,” the chairmammal stated. “One: From this moment forth, any veterinarian discovered refusing medical care to any patient for any reason such as personal beliefs or bias will be suspended without pay until the board says otherwise. Two: We, as well as the other hospitals in the city, will provide safe harbor for those of our staff that choose to remain onsite. In return, all we ask is that those of you who do stay here to please assist your fellows when they require it. Three: I, and the rest of the board, will be here 24/7 until this thing blows over. If any of you need anything, please come find one of us. With that said, this meeting is adjourned.”

Filing out in an orderly fashion, all went back to their rounds with the exception of Rory, her team, Ellis, and the chairmammal. However, the chairmammal soon followed the rest after sharing a few quiet words with Ellis. The mongoose slumped in her seat, looking exhausted. Rory made her way over to her friend and sat in the seat next to her. “My, I must admit I wasn’t expecting that kind of outburst from the old bugger. What’s got his tail in a knot?”

Chuckling, Ellis let her head roll to the side, so she could look at Rory. “There have been a large number of complaints filed about our hospitality and bedside manner. He’s been at his wit’s end about it for weeks. The rest of us were afraid if nothing got done soon he’d suffer another infarction.” Sitting up, Ellis took a deep breath. “Learning that we’re facing possible bioterrorism has all of us on edge. Him more than others. We’ve had to keep a close eye on him to make sure he doesn’t crash. He’s been running himself ragged trying to prep everything for the worst-case scenario.”

Giving her friend a nod of understanding, Rory asked “Well, shouldn’t we be doing the same? I hope you don’t mind, but my team tends to follow my lead.” She said that last bit gesturing to her team, who had remained behind waiting for her. This got a laugh out of Ellis, who shook her head before motioning for them all to follow her. “What are we doing first?” Rory inquired as they entered the hospital’s Infectious Disease Ward.

“First, we’re going to make sure that we have all the necessary equipment we’ll need,” Ellis explained. They checked all of it, from the muzzle-shields to the iso-suits and air tanks. “Next, we’ll need to check to make sure we have enough meds, antivirals, antibiotics, the whole shebang.” This took time, as there were hundreds upon thousands of them to check. It was approximately three hours later that they finished. “Whoo. I think we can call that a wrap. For now, anyway. We’ll need to recheck all of this in a couple of hours. Let’s all go get something to eat.”

The group made their way to the cafeteria, chatting about minor things as they walked in. Each was a bit astonished to see how many of their fellows were there, apparently trying to determine whether
they’d remain at the hospital or not. Taking over one of the larger tables, the group took turns grabbing food. When they all started eating, Doogie asked “Have any of you experienced something like this before?”

Rory nodded as she took a bite of her chicken fried steak. “It was right after I finished my residency. We were warned about a possible biological attack from a terrorist organization looking to spread panic, but it didn’t happen. Those fuckers were smart, using just the threat of it, which did a lot more damage than actually doing it. Mass hysteria led to the deaths of nearly 3,000 civilians.”

“That terror cell doesn’t even come close to this, though,” Ellis stated, “Things are much worse this time around. Fear always works. It is the most powerful weapon anyone can utilize in war. It devours you.” Setting her bug-meat burger down, she folded her paws across her chest. “I hope that they can manufacture something to fight against whatever it is in those bioweapons. I’d hate to have nothing. I’d feel so helpless,” she whispered, almost to herself.

Meanwhile, across the hospital, in the patient room of Officer Lillian Cheetara, the said feline was attempting to break free of her restraints without success. Groaning, she flopped back down, tired. Her fellow officer Leopardi had been visiting every few hours to give her updates on the developments made on the Predopurge Case. She felt like crying. She wanted so badly to be there, helping them. But thanks to her own damn foolishness, that was seeming more and more like a fever dream. ‘Stupid pussycat,’ she thought self-critically. ‘You just had to go and fuck your chances because you thought you knew better than the mammals who were trained extensively in medicine. You goddamned stupid pussycat.’ Cheetara couldn’t be mad at the veterinarians. They hadn’t done anything wrong. This was all on her. Hearing the sliding door to her room open, she looked to see who came to visit.

Officer Leopardi gave Lillian a sheepish smile. “I didn’t wake you, did I? I can come back if I did.” Hearing her snort, he took that as a sign that she’d been up for a while instead of resting like the vets had ordered her. “We just heard back from the recon team that was sent to Shiregrove. There’s a massive frequency dead zone they had to go through to get there, which is why we’re just now getting a response. They should be on their way back within the hour,” Sitting in a chair at the side of the bed, he continued, “From what I managed to hear, it’s not a pretty sight. There’s a large mass grave that will have to be exhumed to examine what’s left of the bodies. The village is all but burnt to the ground and there’s evidence that Jacen Carno has continued to live there since the tragedy.” His use of a made-up word brought the tiniest of grins to Lillian’s muzzle. “In all seriousness though, it would appear he’s deserted that location for somewhere else.”

Lillian huffed in frustration. “I want to be out there helping.” Beating her head against her pillow, she just stared at the ceiling. “Do you think I’m egotistical?” She asked suddenly. “I mean, I’m always so… I don’t even know what the correct word to use. I make rash judgements about almost everything. Take Judy for example. I was one of the most outspoken about her ineffectiveness as an officer then I find out she KO’ed a rhino singlepawed. I looked up her scores while I was instructing at the police academy. She was top of her class, not that I didn’t know that, but I thought the instructors just gave her a curve. Nope. No curve. In fact, her tests were graded on a much more difficult scale than the rest and she still made it to valedictorian. I was valedictorian of my class, but after comparing my old scores to hers? I don’t even deserve them.”

Leopardi shrugged before saying “Do I think you’re sometimes a hard mammal to deal with? Absolutely. Do I think you give mammals a hard time for no reason other than you think you’re superior? Hell yes. Do I think that you need to change before you end up ruining your career? Without a doubt. However, I also think you’re a good mammal and a fine officer. You need to learn to take criticism, advice, and orders better, but yes, I think you’re a fine police officer.” He gave her a friendly smile. “You know, when we were at the ZPA, I had a total crush on you.” Seeing her quirk
her eyebrow, he rolled his eyes. “No, this isn’t a confession. I’m happily dating a wonderful female leopard. Anyway, I had this major crush on you for all of three seconds then in the middle of a team exercise you shot me because I wouldn’t play by your rules.”

“Oh my gawd!” Lillian exclaimed, “That was you. What the fuck dude? Why didn’t you just shoot me back? It would’ve probably put me in my place. Besides, we lost that trial because of that.”

Chuckling, Leopardi shook his head. “Yep, that was me. And I didn’t shoot back because it wouldn’t have done any good anyway. I was out of the game, so shooting you wouldn’t have done anything.” Leaning back in his chair, he said “The reason I tell you this is to get you to think about all the possible mammals who wanted to be your friend or ‘something more’ that you pushed away with your words and actions. I’ve seen how you tend to have a new male every time you come into work. I also know that your little circle of friends is basically comprised of the ever bubbly Clawhauser, who let’s face it is friends with everyone, and me. So, a bit of friendly advice: Be more willing to listen.” The two them began trading stories about the cases they worked on and swapping notes.

**Shiregrove**

Officer Damien McHorn watched as other officers and crime scene technicians scoured the entirety of Shiregrove’s ruins. He’d just gotten discharged from the hospital when he received orders to take part in the recon team. His first impression of the village’s state was simply ‘damn.’ Burnt out, hollow structures, or parts of them anyway, littered the area. A soot covered church made of mortar and cobblestone was the only intact structure standing. The whole scene looked like it was out of a horror cinematic. The grass was dead and yellow, no plants grew near anything, and there was nothing to indicate that the forest around the village wished to reclaim what was once its own. The mass grave was just that, massive. McHorn didn’t even want to think about how many bodies were entombed within. Only two memorials stood apart, the names Ana and Courtney were carved on the stones.

Taking another look around, McHorn wished there was some way to see what this place looked like before it was burned to the ground. He proceeded to examine the remains of a few houses to see if there was anything of note, but found nothing. He noticed that a few of the other officers were gathering around something near the mass grave further away than the two memorial stones. Lumbering over, McHorn joined the crowd to see what it was they were looking at. What he saw was flat piece of stone that had the engraving ‘That Swine.’ “Call for an exhumation immediately,” McHorn ordered. Not a few minutes later, the team of crime scene techs slowly began to unearth the skeletal remains of a pig. “Get this cadaver to Dr. Loretta Pouncer ASAP. I think we may have just discovered what happened to Sir Mervis Leonard Swinton.”

After the corpse had been hauled away, McHorn decided to examine the building they had identified as the home of Jacen Carno, aka The Chancellor, one final time. The building wasn’t quite large enough for him, but McHorn carefully began to take the house apart, piece by piece. Once that task was complete, McHorn stepped inside the abode and slowly scanned the premises. The first two sweeps hadn’t revealed anything, but for some odd reason, McHorn felt that this time something would stand out. As lady luck would have it, something did.

Kneeling down, McHorn brushed his finger against a portion of the floor. There was a trapdoor hidden in the ground. Pulling it open, McHorn clicked on his flashlight to take a look at the contents. “Oh, fuckin’ hell.”

**ZPD Precinct One HQ**
Leon Delgato was mildly terrified by what he was about to do. Standing behind the curtain that separated him from the cameras of news crews, he looked at Mrs. Bogo who gave him a raised eyebrow. “This is totally intense,” Leon muttered to himself. Checking his wristwatch, he saw he had five minutes before show time. Taking a deep breath, he let it out slowly to calm himself. He was about to appear on television, informing the populace that evac procedures had begun. This wasn’t something that one simply said over the TV. Oh, no. This was something that was likely to send the entire community into a mass panic. “Am I really about to do this?” Leon hadn’t realized he spoke his question out loud until Mrs. Bogo replied.

“You are.” Watching as the lion shifted around uncomfortably, Mrs. Bogo had to stop herself from rolling her eyes. “Stop fidgeting. You’ll do fine. Just remember our lessons.” She straightened his shirt, dusted off his shoulders, and fixed his tie. “Look, all you have to do is go out there, say what you’ve been told to say, then walk off stage without answering a single question. Tobias will take it from there. He has no qualms about facing an assault of reporters and their questions. He just hates giving long speeches. I don’t blame him either. You’ll do fine as long as you keep calm. If you feel overwhelmed, just look in my direction and I’ll come assist you. Alright?”

Feeling much better thanks to Mrs. Bogo’s words, Leon nodded. Ear flicking in the direction of the stage, he heard the current speaker starting to announce him. “Wish me luck,” he whispered, walking onstage. Reaching the podium, Leon scanned to see who was present. He caught sight of his sisters, who were news reporters and journalists. Getting thumbs up from them, Leon went full on professional. “As of 7 am this morning, the city of Zootopia has begun emergency evacuation procedures. This is merely a precaution resulting from new evidence recently discovered during the investigation into Predopurge. While nothing has been proven at this time, we, the ZPD and military forces, have decided to take preemptive countermeasures in the event that the information proves true. We encourage those of you with family outside the city to seek safe harbor with them for the next week. Anyone who remains in the city, Emergency Services will provide you with whatever you need, be it food, amenities, or supplies. The hospitals, clinics, and med centers will continue to provide medical care, medications, and first aid. There will be an increase in police patrols as well as military presence. Those of you who choose to temporarily relocate, the city is providing transport out. If you choose to leave, you will find a list of items to bring with you on the ZPD’s website. If you choose to remain, the site also lists items to stockpile in storage. Updates will be posted on all major news outlets at the time of occurrence. So please, stay tuned to your primary or favorite stations. That is all. Thank you.” Leon made his way offstage, ignoring the onslaught of questions from the reporters. Slipping backstage, he sighed, “How was that?”

Mrs. Bogo gave him a nod of approval. “A little longer than I would have liked, but otherwise, very good.” Peeking past the curtain, she saw Tobias begin answering the questions of the press. “Tobias has it from here. You should go find a place to relax for a while. I doubt that they’ll try searching for you, but better to err on the side of caution.” She gave Leon a pat on the back then circled around to mix in with the journalists.

Police Chief Tobias Bogo ignored his mother’s movements through the throng of ‘vultures’. Answering question like ‘When should the citizens begin evacuating?’ and ‘Will those who leave be informed when they can return?’ Bogo started drumming his fingers in annoyance. ‘I’ll never understand their need to ask the same question so many different ways,’ he thought to himself. Finally, Bogo stated “That’s enough. You’ve all asked your questions. I’ve given you answers. You have all the information you currently require. As stated earlier, we will update you when new information is available. Until that time, prepare yourselves.” Walking away, Bogo sent his mother a glance that she, thankfully, understood. Meeting her near in an area typically restricted to the public, he said “I need a favor. Can you let Ben stay with you and Dad for a while? His roommate is evacuating, and I don’t like the idea of him being on his own during this.”
“That’s fine,” his mother replied, “What about you? Where are you staying? Don’t tell me at the precinct. If you tell me you’re staying there, I’ll drag you home by your tail. Do you understand me, Tobias?”

Huffing, Tobias looked off to the side. “I’m not staying at the precinct, Mother. I’ve been sleeping at an apartment often used by visiting delegates near it, but not at the precinct itself. It’s fully furnished and stocked.” Rubbing his forehead, he added “I don’t have the luxury of going back to my own apartment with the current state of things. I want to be in close proximity to the precinct if something important arises.” Squaring his shoulders, Tobias said “Speaking of, I’m expecting reports from a recon team. I’ll inform Ben that you’ll collect him when his shift is over.” Giving his mother a peck on the cheek, he made his way out.

Sitting in an otherwise vacant waiting room, Leon Delgato sat back with a paw on his chest. A side effect of his pretreatment process was that occasionally he would suffer from chest pains as his heart pumped the intravenous medication through his system. For a moment, he felt like an idiot for being so far away from help if he suffered a myocardial infarction. Leon felt relieved when the pain began to ease. ‘That time was frightening,’ he thought, leaning forward, resting his elbows on his knees. Leon’s thoughts turned to possible reactions to his broadcast. Would Zootopia’s populace panic? A mental image of the city burning down around them due to chaos brought on by hysteria flashed through his mind. Shaking his head to dispel the thought, Leon turned to the door, which had opened to reveal one of his sisters, Lona. Waving for her to come in, he asked “Penny for your thoughts?”

Lona sat down in one of the chairs next to her brother. “You did good,” she told him. Seeing the remnants of discomfort on his muzzle, she asked “Chest pains?” Getting a nod, Lona gave him a sad smile. “At least we know that that means it’s working. If you didn’t experience any, we’d have a problem.” Lona wasn’t the eldest of them, but she was the one who tended to be the most responsible. Leon was her favorite sibling, bar none. Finding out that he had Feline Leukemia had hit her hard. Cupping Leon’s cheek, she whispered “How bad was it? And don’t lie to me. Be honest.”

“Painful,” Leon answered, leaning into her paw, “Felt like my chest was trapped in an industrial compressor.” Knowing that someone was nearby was a comfort. “Where are the others? Did they already leave to type up their articles?”

“Yeah,” Lona replied, “They send their love though. My boss was with me today, and he gave me permission to look for you. Said he’d type the article this time around.” She had almost kissed her boss in gratitude. “Do you want me to call Mom or Dad? See if one of them could come get you?”

“That’d be nice, but I still have a couple of things to do first,” Leon responded, “You can tell them to pick me up in an hour.” Kissing the paw cupping his cheek, he got up and headed out of the room. “I’ll see you at home, Lona. Love ya, Sis.”

Meanwhile, Benjamin Clawhauser was excitedly packing a few of his things into his bugout bag. Since this whole thing started, he had taken to using it to carry his more important items with him. All it really held was his phone’s charger, a photo album, a couple of Gazelle memorabilia, toiletries, and two changes of clothes. Finding out that the Chief’s parents were letting him stay with them until things settled down, Ben had double-checked to make sure he hadn’t forgotten anything. His desk phone rang. Answering it, he said “ZPD Precinct One Dispatch. This is Officer Benjamin Clawhauser. How can I assist you?”

“Officer Clawhauser,” a dark voice replied over the line. “I’m very disappointed with the actions that you and the rest of the ZPD are taking in direct opposition of my request. I had hoped that you all would come to your senses, but alas, it doesn’t appear to be.”

Ben froze as he realized who exactly it was on the other end of the line. He looked for a fellow
officer and, upon finding Officer Po Pandaria, signaled for him to come over before hitting the speaker button. “Well, Mr. Carno, unfortunately for you, we don’t obey terrorists.” He watched as Officer Po quietly radioed for a trace on the call as well as inform Chief Bogo of the situation. “Are you just calling to complain? Or is there another reason you’re calling?”

“I just want to welcome you kits to Hell,” Jacen Carno replied. “You’ll soon see your beloved city tear itself apart. Funnily enough, the cause won’t be me, but your recent press conference broadcast. I hope you enjoy the mayhem.” The line went dead.

Ben felt a shiver go down his spine. “Tell me that we managed to get a trace.” Ben whimpered. However, Officer Po shook his head, making Ben whine. “Dammit!” He cried. He heard hoofsteps approach him from behind. Turning, Ben found Chief Bogo standing there. “I’m sorry, Chief. I didn’t keep him on the line long enough.”

“It’s fine, Ben,” Bogo replied, “I doubt he would have stayed on the line long anyway.” Giving Ben a pat on the shoulder, comfortingly, Bogo said “Don’t worry about it too much.” Walking up to the second-floor terrace, Bogo addressed all his officers, “Alright. Listen up. We’ve received a call from Public Enemy No. 1, Jacen Carno, aka The Chancellor, welcoming us to Hell. Let’s show him that we can put out the fires of Hell with nothing but our resolve. Let’s show him that Hell doesn’t scare us.” There was a resounding ‘YES, SIR!!’ from all the officers. “GET OUT THERE!!” Bogo ordered.

ZPA

Nick and Judy laid on Nick’s bed exhausted. M had had them face off against everyone in turn. The two of them couldn’t remember a day that they felt so sore. Laying there on Nick’s bed on their sides, facing one another, they gave each other soft, tender smiles. In the space between them were their interlocked paws.

“Today was one hell of a day, wasn’t it, Carrots?” Nick whispered. “Never thought we’d be put through the wringer like we were today.” He could feel his body screaming out in agony. He and Judy hadn’t just sparred with everyone, they had also been put through the most intense training session imaginable. M had them perform an entire series of military maneuvers that pushed them physically, mentally, and emotionally. M also had them undergo conditioning, which had pushed them even further off the brink than the military maneuvers.

“It truly was,” Judy replied in a voice just as soft as Nick’s. “I never imagined it would be that intense. I grew up listening to my grandfathers regaling us with tales of their military service. I honestly thought they were exaggerating.” Her body hurt all over. She felt so tired from the stress of their training and wanted to sleep. “You know, I wonder how our Izu Genes will react to all this,” Judy pondered aloud.

“I don’t know,” Nick stated after a moment of consideration. There were a few minutes of silence before Nick asked “What time is it?” He somehow managed to raise his head high enough to see the digital clock on his bedside table. He let his head fall back onto the mattress with a groan. “9 o’clock.” Nick closed his eyes and sighed. They had eight hours before their second day of training would begin. “I feel so tired, but I don’t want to go to sleep.”

Judy chuckled weakly. “Same.” She scooched closer to Nick, tucking her head into the crook of his neck. “But, we need to rest and recuperate. Otherwise, well end up dead on our hindpaws.” Judy let out a hum as she felt Nick’s tail drape over her like a blanket. Placing a kiss to his throat, she whispered “I love you, Nick.”

Nick smiled tenderly at Judy’s words. It was the first time that she’d said it to him directly. He went
to say it in return, but heard her soft, even breathing, indicating that she had already fallen asleep. “I love you too, Judy,” he whispered affectionately into her ear. Pulling her close, Nick soon joined her in the realm of dreams.

Elsewhere in the Temp Housing Complex, Scarlett Reddington was fixing a small snack prior to getting ready for bed. She turned to her door at hearing a knock. Taking her scrambled eggs of the stove, Scarlett wiped her paws off as she walked to the door. Opening it, Scarlett was a bit startled to find Skye standing on the other side. They looked at each other for a few seconds before Scarlett stepped aside to let her daughter enter.

Stepping inside Scarlett’s room, Skye felt a little scared. She had spoken to Jaxon about what she had learned during her last visit to get his point of view. His advice had been to visit Scarlett once more, let her explain why she had done the things she did. ‘She’s your mother, your family, whether you like it or not. Give her a chance.’ Those had been Jaxon’s words. So here she was, giving her mother a chance to explain herself. “I want to know why.”

Scarlett nodded, gesturing towards the table for Skye to take a seat. Once she had, Scarlett set the plate of scrambled eggs before her daughter. Preparing to make another serving, Scarlett said “It was never my intention to be gone for so long.” She cracked a few eggs, mixed them, then poured them into the pan. “I didn’t anticipate that they would run to the world’s edge so that they could escape my wrath, but they did. I had hoped to return by the time you became a young teenager, however, that obviously didn’t happen.” With a heavy sigh, she added “I really hate myself sometimes, for not being there to watch you grow up. It’s one of the greatest regrets of my life.” Plating the new batch of scrambled eggs, Scarlett sat across from Skye. “On the other paw, I just couldn’t let the ones responsible for your father’s murder go unpunished. I did what I thought had to be done. I paid the price and now I have to deal with the consequences.”

Skye ate her eggs slowly as she listened to Scarlett’s words. “I can understand that, but why didn’t you simply stay in contact with me once I was old enough? You could have at least done that, right?” That had been one of the things that had hurt her the most, the lack of contact. Skye had always wondered growing up if the reason her mother never contacted her was because she was ashamed or wanted nothing to do with her. “Why didn’t you reach out?”

“To protect you,” Scarlett stated sincerely, “I didn’t know whether the mammals who killed your father would target you or not if they knew of your existence. You see, your dad was very influential. He was the firstborn son of a noble family. Any progeny that he sired, male or female, with someone like me? There was a chance that they would be marked for death. Your Uncle Gabriel walked away from his life as a noble. Since he was the second son, no one cared. Your father, Skylar, being the firstborn, had a set of high expectations placed upon his shoulders. He was expected to mate with another noble or possibly royalty, sire a son to carry on the bloodline, and eventually be buried with his ancestors within their familial mausoleum. Instead, he ran away from all that, met and mated me, had a kit out of wedlock, and died at the paws of mammals who saw it as sacrilege.” Scarlett shook her head. “I refrained from contacting you because I didn’t want to risk our child’s safety. If those I hunted discovered your existence, they could have targeted you. I simply couldn’t risk that.”

“Did you search for me when you came back?” Skye inquired. “Did you bother to look for me at all?” She watched as Scarlett’s expression turned serious, stood up, and started pacing. Skye followed Scarlett’s movements with her eyes.

“Of course, I did,” Scarlett stated vehemently, “I searched everywhere for you after I returned. Obviously, I went to Gabriel’s first, but you weren’t there. I learned of your cousin’s deed and flew into a rage. They now are under the impression that my fur is red due to bathing in the blood of my
enemies. Afterwards, I used my network of informants to locate you. However, it always seemed that I was a step or two behind. I almost caught up to you in Foxhollow. By the time I got there though, you had disappeared without a trace. When had I found you again, you were with Jaxon. I couldn’t believe my eyes when I saw you two together. Jonas Savage was the only mammal ever to catch me. To learn that my daughter was in love with the son of Jonas Savage? I thought I had gone insane. After a while though, I realized that he was what you needed in your life. I was happy for you, happy that you found someone who loved you just as much as you loved them.”

“I guess you also learned about my less than respectable past as well,” Skye said softly. A sense of shame overcame her as she realized that her mother would be aware of her less reputable activities from her younger years. Closing her eyes tight, Skye didn’t want to see her mother’s expression, which she could only assume would be something akin to disappointment. Instead, she felt herself embraced in a warm hug. Opening her eyes, Skye found herself held tightly within Scarlett’s arms.

“Yes, I did,” Scarlett whispered. “You have no idea how horrible I felt when I learned of it. I felt like I had failed you as a mother even more than I already had. I was distraught.” Pulling away to look at Skye, Scarlett gave her a sad smile. “However, I was never once ashamed of you. You were only doing what was required of you to survive.” Kissing Skye’s forehead, Scarlett said “I’m proud of who you are, no matter what you’ve done. You made something of yourself that your father would be proud of, unlike me.”

Skye felt tears begin to pool in the corners of her eyes. She went to say something, but was interrupted by Scarlett’s phone going off. Watching as Scarlett went over to answer it, Skye couldn’t help herself from wondering what her life would have been like if her mother had been there. She realized that it would have meant never meeting Jaxon. If she had never met Jaxon, her life would have felt just as empty as it had without her mom. Skye smiled, realizing she was now grateful that her mother had left her behind. However, seeing the grave expression on Scarlett’s muzzle, Skye felt a sense of dread take hold of her. “What’s happened?”

“Around two hours ago, the ZPD issued an emergency broadcast informing Zootopia’s citizens about the evacuation,” Scarlett stated. “Following that, the Chancellor, Jacen Carno, called the precinct to welcome the ZPD to Hell. Soon afterwards, a riot broke out not too far from the precinct. More riots then erupted around the city. He was right. Zootopia has begun to tear itself apart.”

Chapter End Notes

So, effective immediately, I’m routinely scheduled for five injections every 60 days. Since I hate pills, this is great. Plus, my tattoos hide the injection marks relatively well.

I’m getting more rest, I’m clear minded, and I can recall the order of a shuffled deck of cards (both number and suit) without much difficulty. So, I’m good to go.

I’m posting my Original Work, Zugzwang, in a few minutes. Update schedule for that will be sporadic. I’m gonna focus on my current projects first, despite it having been created well before anything else.

Cya next release, everybody.
Chapter Twenty: The War Begins

Chapter Summary

As it says on the tin.

Chapter Notes

Things will be slow for a bit. Ian’s got testing soon, and I’m helping him study. However, since my exemplary editor and I had this chapter finished last week, I figured it's time to post it.

We’ve got six more chapters in Arc One remaining. I’ve got three filler chapters undergoing a bit of rework before I send them in for editing. After that, I'm going on a temporary hiatus to finalize the story outline for Arc Two. I've got most of it worked out, but I still feel like it's lacking something. Then, I just need to type it and submit it for approval before posting them like normal.

More in the End Notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 20: The War Begins

The Crisis Command HQ

Supreme Commander Deego was pulling his military gear on as Chief Tobias Bogo walked into the locker room. “How many?” He asked as he fastened the last strap of his boot. Standing up to double-check that everything was done properly, Deego watched Bogo’s expressions darken. “I take it that it’s worse than we expected.”

“Much,” Bogo replied, “We’ve managed to contain most of the rioters, but there are loads more that we’re struggling to regain control of throughout the city.” Walking over to a locker, Bogo typed in the access code, unlocking it. Pulling out the gear within, he, too, started to don riot control gear. “Emergency Services have managed to expedite the departures of evacuees, but with things the way they are currently, it’s like trying to harness command of a cataclysmic force of nature.” Putting on the tactical vest, he said “We’ve been able to evacuate a good majority of the citizens. However, there are still tons that are trying to get out before chaos fully takes hold of the city.”

“Then we need to get moving,” Deego replied, checking his weapons. Holstering his twin pistols, he prepared his heavy repeating assault rifle. “The longer we wait, the more damage dealt.” Finished getting ready, Deego began walking towards the exit. Activating his targeting visor, Deego made his way to the military troops onsite. “Let’s move out. We’ve got work to do.”

Bogo was checking his heavy pistol to make sure it was functioning properly when his father, General Andreas Bogo walked in. “Father,” Tobias greeted. Getting a nod, he asked “Is there
"Return alive," Andreas stated bluntly. "I know you’re trained to handle situations similar to these, but not of this scale. Don’t make any rash decisions out there. Remember to rely on your fellow cops." Looking at his son in full SWAT gear, Andreas said "You’re a fine officer, Tobias. I’m proud of you."

"You sound as if this will be the last time we see each other," Tobias replied, closing his locker and sealing it. "I don’t plan on dying any time soon. You better not die on me either. Mom would bring you back from the dead just to kill you again herself." Propping a semiautomatic assault carbine on his shoulder, Tobias said "You have my word I’ll come back. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a city to defend."

Andreas watched as his son exited out into the city. "I’ll hold you to those words, son," he whispered. General Bogo then marched into the War Room to join Col. Willows and Lt. Col. Oxford. "What do we know?" Sitting down at the round table, Andreas listened to the two military officials begin to give him sit reps. Having only worked with the two once previously, Andreas was pleased to find that they hadn’t changed in the slightest and they were still as efficient as last time.

"Reports show that a new riot has broken out near Precinct Three in Tundratown," Col. Willows reported. "We have officers en route there now. ETA: eight minutes. We also have received word that a number of protestors have rallied themselves for a march on City Hall. I have military troops moving to cut them off. For public safety, I have my mammals armed with nonlethal weapons and wearing heavy battle armor for their own protection. If we can avoid severely maiming anyone, I’ll count it as a blessing."

"There are reports of a group of rioters inciting other mammals to join their attack on a military convoy transporting rations and meds to a homeless shelter," Lt. Col. Oxford revealed, "I have a small company of troops heading that direction to defend the transport." He placed a copy of a few other reports before General Bogo then stepped back.

"What’s the status of the recruits en route from the ZPA?" Andreas asked. "I’m aware they have yet to undergo proper instruction, but most of them have been training on campus, preparing themselves for situations such as this. Do we have an estimate to how many and when they’re scheduled to arrive?"

"The first group will arrive within the next 12 hours," Col. Willow replied. "I’m not sure when the second group will arrive but, as of now, I think we’ll be okay for approximately a week." Looking at the reports in his paws, he said "Most of the cadets that will be arriving in the first group are larger mammals. Very few of them are midsize."

Huffing, Andreas said "They’ll have difficulties dealing with the smaller civilians. Their large size makes them slower, less able to match the speed of the smaller mammals." Andreas wondered why no one had taken him seriously about hiring tiny and small sized mammals all those years ago. He had proposed the idea years before Dawn Bellwether had suggested it to Leodore Lionheart. ‘All things in their own time.’

<MEANWHILE @ THE ZPA>

Nick looked over at Zannah and gave her a nod. As soon as she stood to return fire, Nick shot out towards a new covered position. ‘Damn. Never thought that we’d be put through a shoot out training scenario this early on,’ Nick thought to himself. He heard light pawsteps approaching fast. Whipping his gun in that direction, he waited to see who came around the corner. Nick sighed at seeing Jaxon.
Racing to Nick’s side, Jaxon whispered “Zannah’s taken cover on the other end of the room behind a squarish column.” Loading a new magazine into his weapon, the jackrabbit added, “Also, Harrison took out Madge.” He shot an annoyed look at Nick as the vulpine failed to hide his snicker of amusement. “Watch it, Bub. Don’t let her find out you laughed. Remember what happened earlier?”

Shuddering at the memory of Shay getting his ass given to him by the female honey badger, Nick muttered “Sorry.” Peering around his corner, Nick pulled his head back as paintballs struck the area it had been. “Who’s got the blue paint?” Nick asked.

“Judy,” Jaxon answered, “Besides her, only Skye is left. I took out Harrison after he took out Madge. Madge took out Shay out of revenge for earlier. So it’s three vs two.” Pulling back the slide, Jaxon gave Nick a look. “Don’t think for a minute that means we’ve got this. Our gals are still in play.” He made sure to emphasize the word ‘our’ so that Nick understood the hidden meaning of his words.

The two suddenly heard a roar of protest, signaling that Zannah had been taken out. They looked at each other, nodded, then started moving. Jaxon took the low ground while Nick took the higher one. Both kept their eyes and ears open, but Nick had the additional bonus of having a stronger sniffer. Two shots in rapid succession followed by two groans told the tod that Jaxon and Skye had managed to take each other out of the game. That meant only he and Judy were left.

For Judy, she simply rolled her eyes at hearing Jaxon and Skye give each other props. Silently sprinting towards Nick, Judy stopped as she realized that her ears were no longer picking up his pawsteps. ‘He’s not moving anymore,’ she assumed. Scanning her surroundings, Judy radared her ears in all directions, trying to catch any sound Nick generated. She heard nothing. Moving slowly, Judy closed her eyes, letting her ears guide her movements, reminiscent of a bat using echolocation. Killing her sense of sight allowed her other senses to become stronger. Soon, she could pick up the sound of Nick breathing, coming from a short distance behind her, to her left, and on the move. Thumping her foot once to generate sound to create an echo thereby allowing her to ‘see,’ Judy started to move, eyes still closed.

Figuring what Judy was possibly up to, Nick halted in his movements. Closing his own eyes, Nick took a shallow sniff. Locating Judy through scent alone, Nick began to make his way towards Judy following her trail with his nose. Suddenly, the sound of her thumping her paw came from somewhere else than where he expected. ‘Of course! Duh, dumb fox. Bunny hearing,’ Nick criticized himself. Stopping at a corner, he listened carefully, trying to pinpoint Judy’s new location.

M was observing all this from the viewing booth up along the wall. ‘These two are something else,’ he thought as he watched the two closely. The others were also interesting in their own way, but it was these two, specifically, that intrigued him. “They’re learning as they go on,” M murmured to himself, aloud.

Major Friedkin, who was standing next to the margay, said nothing as she watched Judy and her fox draw closer and closer to a final face-off. She remembered the first time Hopps did this exercise. It hadn’t been pretty. But Wilde? He had managed to survive longer than she had expected of him. ‘It’s more like he’s a special operative,’ she mentally told herself. Wilde’s scores had shown that he was an exemplary mammal, but this? He put his predecessors to shame. He adapted to new situations as soon as they arose, and came up with solutions just as quickly.

Back within the training area, Nick and Judy were closing in on the other rapidly. Running at full tilt, they nearly ran right into each other as they went to turn the same corner. The two then found themselves in a close combat gunfight. It was almost like something one would see in a movie about a dystopian future involving gun wielding martial artists. Every so often, either Nick or Judy would
fire their weapon only for the other to mess up their aim at the last possible instant. Within seconds, all that was heard from the paintball pistols were clicks, signifying they were empty.

“Game!” M shouted from the viewing booth, signaling the end of the training session. “Bravissimo to the both of you. Now, all of you head towards the Mess, grab something to eat, then meet me back in the main room.” After they all departed, M turned to Major Friedkin. “You wanted to speak with me?”

“I did,” Major Friedkin replied. “In roughly eight hours, I’m to send a group of cadets to aid the ZPD and Zootopia’s military troops in their attempt to regain control of the city. I need someone to evaluate them and I’d like you to be the one to do it. It shouldn’t take longer than 30 minutes. The reason I ask is that you’re the only mammal here that has former military experience.”

Leaning against the glass wall, M said “That is true, but I’ve been ordered to train these initiates. They take priority.” When Friedkin went to speak again, M cut her off, adding “But, this isn’t a normal situation, so I’ll do it. This will give the initiates enough time to recuperate for the next phase of training. Have those going in the first group prepped and ready in one hour at the outdoor training area.”

Thanking M, Major Friedkin departed for her office. She had a list of cadets that she needed to go over one more time before finalizing it and informing those same recruits to report to the outside training area. Upon entering her office, however, she found herself face to face with her Uncle Kozlov. “What’re you doing here?”

“Nice to see you as well, Barbeara,” Kozlov retorted, ignoring her question. When she drew her sidearm, he sighed. “I’m not here to cause trouble, my dear niece. So put your gun away.” Stepping aside so that his niece could enter her office, Kozlov took a seat on the couch that was along the wall. “I’ve heard that the ZPA will be sending cadets to aid law enforcement. Boris is among them, I believe.”

Holstering her sidearm, Major Friedkin confirmed those words “He is; He volunteered.” Taking her seat behind her desk, she added “I tried to talk him out of it, but he was very adamant.” Centering her gaze on her uncle, Friedkin asked “Why did you send him here instead of indoctrinating him into the services of the Bigs?”

Kozlov leaned forward, elbows on knees, fingers interwoven together, muzzle resting on paws. “Because I’m his father, and I want something better for him.” Remaining in that position, Kozlov said “I never wanted to be in the servitude of the Bigs. I simply followed my father’s pawsteps. Your dad was braver than I. He defied our father’s wishes and made something respectable of himself. Made a life that I envied more than I could admit to anyone back then. I want Boris to have that.”

Friedkin frowned. She remembered every story her father spun about his own father, none of them painted him in a good light. Pushing that from her mind for the moment, she asked “Is there any other reason you’re here? Or is that all? Because I have work to do.”

Standing, Kozlov said “I came to tell you that you won’t have to send as many cadets to assist the ZPD. Mr. Big has spent a great deal of time negotiating with those in the Undercity. Its residents will soon march to the ZPD’s aid.” Walking out of his niece’s office, he told her “Take care of yourself, Barbeara. Look after Boris for me.”

The moment her office door closed, Major Friedkin found herself feeling… relief. As a young cub, she once had the unfortunate experience of meeting her grandfather, who brought her to the Undercity to show her the darkness hidden away from the world she had thought she knew. To know that these mammals… these beasts were coming to their aid, it was like waking up to find that
sometimes the monsters that existed within your nightmares were more frightening to others than they are to you. Pulling the list of volunteer cadets, she began scratching out names. She left Boris’s, knowing he’d go regardless.

**Warehouse 13 – The Docks**

Doug Ramses looked around at the state of the art equipment that spanned the entire ground floor of the warehouse. He was astonished by all of it. “I can use *all* of this?” He asked in disbelief. His employer gave him a nod then proceeded to take his leave. Watching him walk away, Doug turned back to the sight of an entire warehouse of advanced laboratory equipment. Taking out his mobile, he dialed the number for Andrew. When the call connected, Doug said “You’re never going to believe this.” A few minutes later, Andrew, Parker, Liam, Randolf, and Zebrina stood leaning against the railing of the catwalk that overlooked the main floor of the warehouse that Doug had been given permission to use. “What do you think?” Doug asked them after a few moments of letting them soak up the view.

Andrew turned to look at his friend with a crazed look in his eye. “I think you’re one lucky bastard, Doug.” Making his way to the 1st Floor, Andrew wondered how it was possible that their company had kept this place a secret. Compared to some of this equipment, the stuff in their office labs was downright pathetic. “With all this, we can manufacture an antiviral capable of counteracting the biomaterials within the Chancellor’s bio-bombs.”

“That is the plan,” Liam stated from up on the catwalk. “My question is: Do you know how to use even a tenth of this stuff?” He was answered with scoffs of annoyance. “Okay, I guess that answers that,” then he muttered, “sorry I asked.”

Parker waddled down the stairs to join Andrew and Doug. “Should we start all this equipment up? We don’t know how long it will take to make the antiviral, do we? Wouldn’t it be wise for everything to be warmed up when the materials get here?”

Both rams exchanged looks then started to turn on each of the machines, one by one. As each one came to life, there was a symphony of beeps, whirs, chirps, and whistles. Doug and Andrew looked at one another for a bit then made their way to the computer workstations. Logging into their server accounts, the two nodded to each other.

Randolf and Zebrina watched as the black and white rams went about prepping everything. The reindeer and zebra didn’t say a word as they observed them. Randolf’s cellphone chimed the same time Zebrina’s. Both extracted their mobiles, they saw messages from their subordinates. The messages weren’t good news.

“Doug? Andrew?” Zebrina called out, getting their attention. “We’ve got a problem. Due to the riots, the ZPD have halted all traffic within the city. Zootopia is now considered a warzone. I don’t think that the transport carrying your materials will get here anytime soon.”

“It’ll get here,” Randolf stated resolutely, “I’ve got some of my subordinates on their way to aid the transport vehicle’s progress. They should be here within the next half an hour.” Putting his phone away, he looked at Liam. “You and I need to go. We’ve got work to do.”

“I’ll drive you,” Zebrina announced, “I need to check in on my employees anyway.” The three of them left Andrew, Doug, and Parker in the warehouse. Getting into Zebrina’s vehicle, an equine-sized zebra-print, four-door sedan, they took off for their destinations. As they got further into the city, the three of them saw that the term ‘warzone’ was an appropriate description for it. Stores had their windows shattered, there were fights taking place in the middle of the streets, and hardly any cars were on the roads.
“Holy Fuckin’ Hell!” Liam stated as he looked at the damage in the area. “You were right, Zebrina. Zootopia’s a warzone.” No one gave a reply as they continued to drive into the city. Every once and a while, they’d see a police cruiser pass them, lights and sirens on. “Fear always works.”

“It does,” Randolf whispered in response. “Zootopia’s slowly but surely tearing itself apart at the seams. All out of fear.” As the car reached a stoplight, he said “Let me out here, and drop Liam off at his destination. I’ll contact you all when I’m situated.” Getting out of the car, Randolf just barely managed to dodge as a stone flew at him. Ducking into an alcove, he waved for Zebrina to go. Racing down the street towards one of his television stations, he dodged objects that were being thrown through the air. Making it, Randolf closed the door behind him, heaving in breaths. “Oh, please be careful you two.”

Meanwhile, Zebrina tensed up as she and Liam drove even further into the heart of the city. She’d scream whenever something would hit her car. Finally, Zebrina couldn’t take it and pulled over to the side. She was shaking almost convulsively in terror. “It wasn’t supposed to be like this. It wasn’t supposed to be like this. It wasn’t supposed to be like this,” she repeated like a mantra.

Liam sat and watched Zebrina suffered through her panic attack. He didn’t know how to help her, so he just sat there. When she did calm down, Liam said “We need to keep moving. If we continue to sit here, we’re leaving ourselves open to being assaulted.”

Nodding, Zebrina pulled back into the street. “You’re right. We gotta keep moving,” she told him. They started making their way to Liam’s office at the law firm of Skipper, Eeyore, and Xûr. Giving Liam a worried look, she said “I’ll call you once I’m settled. Be safe.”

“You too, Zebrina,” Liam replied as he walked towards the front door to the office building. After she drove away, Liam entered the law firm, waved to the receptionist, and headed his way to the elevators. He stood next to a paralegal and asked “Which floor?”

The paralegal, a chamois, looked at Liam and stood straight. “Ah, the 13th, Mr. Bucksworth. I’ve been called to a meeting with Ms. McBear.”

“Oh? I thought Ally was on vacation. Glad to know she’s back,” Liam stated as the elevator opened and stepped inside. Seeing that the chamois hadn’t moved, he asked “You coming?”

Stepping into the elevator with Mr. Bucksworth, the chamois asked “What floor, sir?”

“How 13. I have a meeting with messieurs Skipper and Fallin,” Liam answered. Watching as the chamois pressed the button for the 13th floor, Liam thought ‘I wonder what they want to talk to me about.’ He had received a cell phone call earlier saying they wished to speak with him.

Mr. Harvey Skipper and Mr. Simon Fallin were two of the three partners that ran this law firm. The third partner was Ms. Ally McBear. Mr. Skipper was the son of the original, the other two founders never having children that followed in their pawsteps. After the death of the original Mr. Skipper, Harvey had taken it upon himself to revitalize the firm with the help of old law school buddies, those being Mr. Fallin and Ms. McBear. Their combined efforts made them a force to be reckoned with inside the courtroom. Within only a few months after his father’s death, Harvey had made the firm the second biggest and successful in Zootopia. Liam had gotten hired right out of law school and soon found himself placed directly under Mr. Skipper.

Exiting the elevator, Liam walked towards Mr. Skipper’s office. Knocking, he waited for permission to enter. Instead, the door opened to reveal Mr. Fallin, who let him into the office. Taking a seat, Liam found himself a tad worried. “May I ask what this is about?”
Harvey was an older buck with gray now making up a large portion of his fur color. Simon wasn’t that much younger, but a Tasmanian Devil. They looked at Liam with appraising eyes. There was a very good reason for why they had called the arctic hare into this meeting, but they wanted to let him stew for a bit, see if he’d crack under the pressure. Both were pleased when Liam showed no sign of doing so.

“Liam, you’ve been with us for a while. In that time, you’ve proven yourself to be an excellent defense attorney,” Simon began, “However, with the current state of the city, things have changed.” Exchanging a look with Harvey, he said “Harvey and I have decided that until things tide over, everyone will be placed on paid suspension. The reason we called you in was to tell you that, and to inform you that once everything has settled down we’d like you to be a junior partner.”

Hearing this, Liam brought his paw to his mouth, as if wiping it, to stop himself from laughing. It wasn’t excited or happy laughter, but laughter full of disbelief. He said “Well, that’s… I feel honored that you think so highly of me, but I’m afraid I must decline. You see, I’ll probably be in prison by the time this is all over.” Liam then walked out of the office, leaving two very bewildered mammals in his wake. He checked his phone to see if he had gotten messages from Randolf and Zebrina. He did have one from Randolf, but Zebrina had yet to send one. ‘Did something happen?’

<A QUARTER OF AN HOUR EARLIER>

Once she saw Liam disappear inside his law firm, Zebrina departed for her own office. Taking the backroads, Zebrina managed to make it there without much trouble. Walking into her company headquarters, Zebrina looked at her assistant. “Call everyone into the conference room.” Entering said room, Zebrina got everything ready for what she was about to do. The moment the last of her team had come in and taken a seat at the table, Zebrina said “I have a confession to make, but what I’m about to tell you all is to stay within the confines of this room.” Noting that she had everyone’s attention, Zebrina told them “I’m a member of Predopurge.” As she expected chaos erupted amongst her team.

Within minutes, ZPD officers arrived to take Zebrina away for interrogation. As she was being escorted to a cruiser, Zebrina passed a note to her assistant, telling her “Call Liam Bucksworth in 45 minutes, tell him everything.” Along the way to the precinct, Zebrina looked out the windows at the mayhem that had taken the city. ‘This isn’t what was supposed to happen. It wasn’t supposed to be this way,’ Zebrina thought to herself. Reaching the ZPD’s HQ at Precinct One, Zebrina was led to Interrogation and was made to wait. When the door opened, she found herself looking at a rather haggard Commissioner Terry Catlin.

Sitting down across from the zebra, Catlin released a heavy sigh. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to think, Zebrina,” he said, expressionless. “I used to, but now?” He threw his paws in the air then setting them down on the table lightly. “I don’t have a goddamn, fuckin’ clue.” Catlin stared at her without emotion, not saying anything else.

Zebrina swallowed, or rather tried. Shifting uncomfortably in her seat, she said “I’m willing to pay my due, but first I’d like to explain.” When the Commissioner didn’t say or do anything, Zebrina took that as her cue to continue. “A long time ago, I was engaged to an amazing young zebra stallion. We were so in love, it wasn’t even funny. It was about… a week… before our wedding that the two of us decided… let’s go on a pre-wedding honeymoon. He brought me to a very nice restaurant, took me dancing, and paid for us to go on a boat ride. It was a wonderfully beautiful night.” Her face darkened. “Then it all ended when, on our way back to our apartment, a predator came up and mugged us. It was a caracal, male, not more than maybe 17 years of age. My fiancé, being the lovable idiot that he was, tried to fight him off instead of listening to me and giving the young caracal his wallet. They fought, and it lasted a total of maybe 12 minutes. My fiancé was on
the ground, wounded. There was no reason for him to do it, but the caracal used his claws and severed his carotid and jugular then ran off. The cops came, asked me question, but I was in shock over losing the love of my life, so I couldn’t tell them anything.”

“Does this sob story have a point? Or are you stalling for time?” Catlin asked. “Either way, wrap this tale up quickly so that I can leave.”

Zebrina laughed mirthlessly, “Sure.” Smiling without any real feeling behind it, she said “The caracal was eventually arrested, but that wasn’t enough for me. I wanted him to suffer what I had suffered. I was approached by a group of mammals who told me they were working towards the eradication of predators. I didn’t waste any time and jumped directly on board.” Shaking her head, Zebrina whispered “I can’t believe I was so stupid. I should have realized that it was too good to be true.” Looking the Commissioner in the eye, she told him “You want to know where you can find the Chancellor? I’ll tell you. He’s currently holed up in an abandoned hut in a section of the Marshlands known as Bayou Belle Reve. Be careful though. He’s got a lot of defenses in place.”

Catlin stared at Zebrina for a short bit of time, then got up and left the room. Looking at the officer gazing into the room through the one-way glass, he said “Get me Chief Bogo. NOW, DAMMIT!”

Precinct 99 – Nocturnal District

Deep within the Nocturnal District sat the often-forgotten ruins of ZPD Precinct 99, aka the Midnight Precinct. Sitting within these ruins was a single mammal, who was awaiting the arrival of those he’d been ordered to welcome. He wasn’t as young as he once used to be, but he could complete this mission easily. His ears picked up the approach of a massive group of mammals. Opening his eyes, he saw a black bear standing before him. “Torbjörn Schwarzenberg, I assume.”

“You are correct,” Torbjörn replied with a nod. “You are ZIB SSA Raoul Mauler, yes?” Getting a nod in response, Torbjörn gestured to the others that surrounded them. “We’re the first wave. The rest will join later. Mr. Big told us that agreement says we have conditional immunity in return for servitude. This true?”

“It is,” Mauler confirmed, “Temporary full immunity in return for providing the ZPD and Zootopian military with reinforcements. As long as you do, you will not be prosecuted. You have the word of not only Mr. Big, but myself and Attorney General Hoover on that.”

“Good,” Torbjörn stated. “Then we go.” At his words, the rest of those around them began to march towards the heart of Zootopia. Torbjörn looked at SSA Mauler after everyone else had departed. “Come. We must depart.”

SSA Mauler followed the battle-scarred bear. A thought crossed his mind as he wondered how Agents Savage and Wintory were doing. He shelved those thoughts for the time being, choosing instead to focus on the here and now. “Why did you all decided to come to our aid? I’m sure that, as criminals, all of you would have preferred to remain uninvolved.”

Torbjörn huffed in annoyance, halting to glare at the younger ursine. “Criminals we may be, but this is still our home. This shutta will pay for attacking it.”

Climbing into his vehicle with Torbjörn in the passenger’s seat, SSA Mauler said nothing in response to that. As they drove into the deeper parts of the city, Mauler could hear Torbjörn curse under his breath. “Yeah. It’s pretty bad, isn’t it?” It was at that moment that their vehicle was t-boned, spinning them out of control and slamming them into the side of a building. Groaning, Mauler shifted his head to see Torbjörn climb out of the vehicle. “W-wait.”
Ignoring the plea, Torbjörn stalked over to the other automobile, punched through the door, and ripped it clean off. The ibex shuddered in terror before him. “Out.” The ibex didn’t hesitate for a second, and then Torbjörn tore the roof of the automobile off to make room for himself. Repositioning the car, he hauled Mauler into the passenger’s seat. “Nearest hospital?”

Glancing around to gauge their position, Mauler pointed at the tall multistory building with the letters MTHZ on the side saying “There.” The pair soon arrived at the doors of the hospital and, with Torbjörn’s help, Mauler stumbled inside. They were greeted by a young coywolf, who led them into an examination room to check their wounds. “How bad are things right now?” Mauler asked the young veterinarian.

“Some things are better than we had hoped. Some are worse,” the coywolf, who’s badge indicated his name was Doogie Howlser, answered. “We’ve received a large influx of wounded over the past couple of hours, which is bad. On the other paw, we’re able to release them just as quickly as they’re brought in.”

“Any police or military?” Mauler wondered. With the chaos that was running rampant out there, Mauler didn’t think it was too much of a stretch believing that there had been a few military or law enforcement officers through here. Again, his thoughts turned to Agents Savage and Skye.

“None, if you can believe it,” Dr. Howlser replied as he tended to the wounded ursine. “From what we’ve managed to hear over the police scanners, less than 5 have been wounded since the city when down the shitter, and no deaths either.” Carefully extracting the shards of glass that were embedded within his patient’s flesh, the young coywolf stated “The 5 that were wounded only received minor injuries as the result of a homemade explosive. The idiot was then bowled over by an elephant officer.”

Bursting out in laughter, Torbjörn replied “I wish I had been there to see that. I would have loved to have seen it happen. Tell me, what species was the offending mammal?”

“A muskrat,” Dr. Howlser answered, fighting a grin. “He got treated here. When he woke up, he asked if the predator responsible for his injuries had been arrested. His expression after he was told it was another prey? Oh, it was priceless, believe me.”

The door to the exam room opened to reveal Dr. Vanessa Aurora ‘Rory’ Wilde, looking like she just returned from a M*A*S*H unit. “Doogie, I’ll take if from here.” Once the coywolf departed, she looked at Torbjörn. “Been a long time, Torbjörn. You doing well? How’re the wife and cubs?”

Smiling kindly at the vixen, Torbjörn answered “They are doing well. How about you? Your husband and kit doing okay?”

Chuckling weakly, Rory replied “Oh, we’re all doing fine considering the circumstances. J’s just brought us some rather interesting research documents that our labs are trying their best to decipher. Something about nanomed.” Double-checking Doogie’s work, she told the wounded bear, “You’re rather lucky. A few more centimeters higher and it would have cut clean through your external carotid. You would have bled out within seconds.”

Gulping, Mauler nodded in understanding. He then indicated between the veterinarian and the mercenary. “You two know each other?”

“She is mate to old friend,” Torbjörn answered with pride in his voice. “This vixen best vet ever.” Thumping his chest with a paw, he said “She fix me up after many close calls. I’ve a massive scar on my chest from a wound that was to claim my life. She defeated death and save me.”
Glancing between the two ursine, Rory shook her head. “Ignore him. He exaggerates. Anyway, you look ready to rejoin the fray. I must go check on my other patients.”

Leaving the two bears alone, Rory took an elevator up a couple of floors. Exiting and making her way to Fatima Ara’s room, she nodded to Officers Snarlof and Pennington before entering. “How are we feeling today?”

Fatima and Li both gave her tired smiles. The chaos outside had affected them as well. Li’s current appearance was that of a much older stallion as opposed to Fatima who simultaneously looked both older and younger than her age. Fatima’s vocal cords had undergone reparative surgery rather late the evening prior, but they had healed enough for her to say “We’re fine.”

“I’m glad.” Rory climbed the steps near Fatima’s hospital bed. “Has anyone come to check on your babies?” Getting a shake of the head from Fatima, Rory sighed. “Then let’s have a look now, shall we?”

They performed an ultrasonography. After printing a copy of the onscreen image of two healthy looking equine fetuses, Rory gave it to them and left the room. Heading towards the nurse’s station, she was pulled into a room. She was going to scream, but the instant her assailant’s scent hit her nose, she relaxed. “Jameson, I swear.”

“Sorry,” Jameson said, laying a kiss on Rory’s cheek. “Look, I don’t have a lot of time. Deego’s received word that I’m here at the hospital. I’ve got to ghost, but I wasn’t going to leave without seeing you.”

“How did he find out?” Rory asked worriedly. “You were so careful. Everyone on the staff knows to never call you by name.”

Sighing, Jameson shook his head. “I don’t know, but however he found out, he’s on his way here. I refuse to be extradited back to the Imperial Capital. I’ll still be around for you, Nick, and Judy, but you’re not going to know where I am until he leaves.”

Releasing a whine, Rory kissed him passionately. “Couldn’t he be coming here to tell you that you no longer have to run? Is that not a possibility?”

“No,” Jameson stated, “No, it is not. What I did back then was, and still is, considered treason. My crime cannot be expunged. I’ll forever be branded as a traitor, if not by others, then by myself.”

Kissing her one more time, he swiftly departed.

Rory walked out of the room a couple of minutes later and headed towards the break room. Upon entering, she found herself faced with Supreme Commander Deego, who sat at one of the tables. The two of them locked eyes. Rory narrowed her eyes as she walked towards the other canine. Sitting across from him, Rory said nothing and folded her arms across her chest.

Deego didn’t glare at her, just looked at her. “I see you know who I am,” he stated, “I won’t try to dissuade you from hating me, but I need to know the location of your husband. I have a message from the Emperor for him.”

Not moving, Rory simply continued to stare at the Pitbull/Boxer/Great Dane mix with unfiltered hatred. She felt a little pleased with herself that it caused him to shift uncomfortably, but remained expressionless besides her utter disdain. Finally, Rory watched him sigh and reached into a pocket of his full metal military jacket. When he offered her a folded piece of parchment, she looked at it quizzically before taking it. Opening it, she saw it was a letter of Imperial Pardon addressed to Jameson. Refolding the letter, Rory kept ahold of it. “I’ll deliver it when I can. However, you should
know that he still believes that everyone considers him a traitor.”

“I’m aware,” Deego replied solemnly. “However, evidence was recently discovered that proved his innocence. The Emperor was absolutely distraught then spent many mammal hours as well as a fortune trying to locate him. The Emperor is also aware that Jameson has no desire to return to his side and he’s perfectly okay with that. He just wants your husband to know that he’s no longer considered a fugitive.” Standing, Deego said “I’ll take my leave. There’s a war going on out there, and I’m needed. Farewell, Mrs. Wilde.”

Gisella’s Penthouse – Palm Hotel – Sahara Square

Gisella watched Zootopia fall apart from the balcony of her penthouse. It was heartbreaking to see it happen before her eyes. Not a minute prior to all this starting, she had finalized the plans for a concert. Gisella felt Bucky standing beside her, pressed up against her side. “This…”

“Shush,” Bucky whispered. “I know. Think about how I’m feeling, knowing that Pronk’s still at MTHZ, treating mammals that are involved in all of it.” It wasn’t as if she didn’t know what he was feeling, Bucky just wanted to take her mind off the larger picture she was viewing.

Shaking her head, Gisella walked back into the main area of her penthouse. “This isn’t right, Bucky. This city is supposed to be a place that represents unity between predators and prey. Now? Everyone’s at war over something so… so stupid.” She didn’t consider herself violent, but Gisella felt the urge to punch something.

“They’re fighting out of fear, Gisella,” Bucky pointed out. “Fear is powerful, corruptive even. It isn’t something you can control. You can generate it. You can conquer it. You can’t control it.” Standing right before her, Bucky placed his hooves on her shoulders. “Fear makes you do stupid things. This?” He asked, gesturing to outside. “This is the result of someone playing upon everyone’s most primal fears.”

Feeling powerless, Gisella stepped closer to Bucky and hugged him. “What do we do? We have to do something. I can’t just sit by and let Zootopia destroy itself.”

“I don’t have a clue,” Bucky answered. “If it was possible, I’d say that you continue with your plan to host a concert. However, I don’t see how you can do that now, with the current state of the city.” Holding her for a little bit longer, Bucky said “Wait here. I’ll switch on the radio.”

“Radio?” Gisella whispered. “Radio,” she said a teensy bit louder. “Oh, holy… Bucky! Bucky that’s it! I can host a live radio show broadcasted over the emergency alert system!”

Bucky looked at her as if she were crazy. “You’d have to get permission from the Director of the Department of Transportation to do that,” Bucky stated. “Even if you somehow did manage to pull that off, you’ve got no guarantee that mammals would listen.”

Gisella gave him a smug smile. “I won’t need permission. I happen to know just the mammal that can patch my studio into the frequency.” Grabbing her cell off the counter, she murmured “I hope he’ll help. This really is a Hail Mary.” The phone rang twice before the line connected. “Ian? Hey, it’s G. I need your help.”

ZPD Precinct One HQ’s IT Sector

Ian Wilde sat with each paw at a separate keyboard and his phone connected to an earpiece via Bluefang. After listening to Gisella’s plan, he immediately got to work on trying to remotely patch her home studio into the emergency alert system. “I have to say, G. You come up with the most
insanely bizarre ideas sometimes.”

“Oh, Ian, you smooth talker.” Gisella giggled over the phone. “You’re just saying that to make me feel special.”

“Oh, you’re something special alright,” Ian teased. “How’re your two bucks? Vitaly told me in case you’re wondering.”

“Oh my gawd! I’m so going to tan his hide,” Gisella complained. “SHUT UP, BUCKY!! GO SEE IF YOU CAN GET AHOOLD OF PRONK!!”

“So,” Ian began, dragging the word out, “Their names are Bucky and Pronk? Hm. Interesting.”

“YOU SHUT UP TOO, IAN!!” Gisella fumed. She then took a deep breath. “How much longer until you’ve got us patched into the frequency?”

“You want the truth? Or do you want me to lie to you?” Ian asked. Hearing Gisella mutter under her breath, he asked “What was that? I couldn’t hear?”

“You want the truth? Or do you want me to lie to you?” Gisella asked in annoyance.

“Testy,” Ian replied. “Okay, I can see you’re not in the mood for conversational games.” He typed in a few more keys. “There. Your home studio should be patched into the emergency alert system. I sure hope you know what you’re doing, G.”

“I hope so too, Ian. I really, really do.” Gisella told him before ending the call.

Ian shook his head then got back to what he had been doing prior to answering Gisella’s call. Having managed to convince Chief Bogo to let him work with the Precinct’s IT Sector, Ian had hoped to assist on the technological front while also searching for any information on John Whiskers. Mr. Big hadn’t had much to say, having never made use of his services. Other than saying that John Whiskerson was one, if not the only mammal that ever survived an encounter with a mammal known as ‘The Gravewalker,’ Mr. Big’s only piece of information was that John Whiskers often went by the moniker ‘The Boogeymammal.’

“The Boogeymammal,” Ian whispered to himself. It was a tale that his father had often told him on Devil’s Night when he was a kit. Although more of a lullaby, it was still considered a ghost story parents would tell their offspring to frighten them into behaving themselves. A beep from the second computer drew his attention. He found himself looking at an IM from his Uncle Jameson, informing him that he was going ghost. Cursing under his breath, Ian purged the memory of their communiques. “Looks like things just got more difficult.” Before closing out the window, he chose to send one final message: Chancellor found. Marshlands. Exact location unknown. Afterwards, Ian exited the window.

**ZPA**

Everyone looked at each other as they stood side by side. Nick was on one end of the line, Harrison on the other, Judy standing just an arm’s length away. M stood before them accompanied by Fenrir Wolford, Carlos Jackael, and Josef Wolverin. General Andreas Bogo and Major Friedkin stood off on the far wall, waiting for what would soon take place.

“As you’ve probably heard around the grounds, Zootopia is now classified as a Class-1 warzone,” M stated gravely. Beginning to pace from one end of the line of initiates to the other and back, M said “Normally, I wouldn’t even consider what I’m about to do, but drastic times call for drastic measures.” Stopping in front of Nick, M peered down at him with a sharp gaze. “In little less than
five hours, I’m going to turn you all into some of the most well trained, elite squad of military mavericks the Zoolympian Empire has ever seen. Hell, you might all end up becoming one-mammal armies.”

“Sir? Permission to speak freely?” Shay asked. Getting a ‘go-ahead’ gesture from M, he asked “What the fuckin’ hell are you talking about?”

M gave Shay a truly malicious smirk. “Get ready, pup. I’m about to cast you all straight into the abyss.” At his command, Fenrir walked forward and gave Shay an injection then proceeded to do the same to the rest with Nick and Judy being the only exceptions. Once Fenrir returned to his spot between Carlos and Josef, M looked at his chronometer. “It should be hitting you right… about… now.”

As if on cue, Shay, Harrison, Madge/Honey, Zannah, Skye, and Jaxon started to convulse and collapsed. Nick and Judy gave them empathetic looks before returning their attention to M. The margay had his eyes trained on his chronometer. The convulsions worsened as time went by, but no one moved to aid them.

Skye was the first to stop and gasp, feeling a surge of energy unlike any she ever felt before. As the pain faded away, she found that her senses were heightened, sharper. To Skye, the only way for her to describe the sensation was it felt like being reborn.

The second one to stop convulsing was Harrison. For him, it was an indescribable sensation. Similar to breaking through the surface from the depths of the ocean. Heaving in breaths, he immediately moved over to Zannah’s side. Harrison held her head in a vice-like grip to prevent her from hurting herself accidentally.

Third to be released from the torment was Madge/Honey. She didn’t know how to accurately express what she felt after suffering through that. Sitting up, the honey badger saw that Jaxon, Shay, and Zannah had yet to free themselves from whatever it was they had been given. Going to Shay’s side, Madge began to speak soft words of encouragement.

Jaxon and Zannah both freed themselves at the same time. The two started to gulp large lungfuls of air as if breathing in for the first time. The jackrabbit was instantly embraced by the snow-white vixen in a powerful hug. The tigress found herself in a similar position with her wolf.

However, Shay had yet to escape from the convulsive state in which he was trapped. M just continued to stare at his chronometer, but now he was mouthing a countdown as well. “8… 7… 6… 5… 4… 3… 2… 1…” It was at that moment that Shay released a gasp and inhaled deeply. M returned his chronometer to his pocket and walked over to the painted wolf. Leaning over him, M asked, “So tell me; How was Hell?”

Coughing, Shay wheezed out “You’re a goddamn bastard, you fuckin’ tosser.” He then received a strong kick to the side of his muzzle from the margay, forcing him to release a high-pitched whine of agony.

Straightening himself, M cracked his neck, popped a few of his joints, then walked into one of the rings. “Come on, pup. I’ll put you in your proper place.”

Shay forced himself to stand then hobbled a couple of steps before he collapsed onto all fours in pain. His muscles were screaming at him in excruciating pain. It was unbearably agonizing, like as if his muscles were still convulsing under his skin. Shay once again forced himself to his hindpaws and proceeded forward into the ring.
Everyone watched as M got into a battle-ready stance. They all held their breath when Shay, clearly still suffering from what he just went through, also dropped into a ready position. Now all standing around the battle circle, waiting to see what would happen, no one moved, breathed, or blinked, afraid they would miss it.

What happened was that Shay, unable to remain standing, fell to his knees. He didn’t have any strength left within his body. The ordeal he just went through had left him incapable of doing anything. Shay felt utterly powerless, and he hated it. Suddenly, he felt someone walk up to him. Looking up, Shay saw that it was Nick.

“That’s enough, Shay.” Nick ordered. “You’ll understand in a few hours. For now, rest, relax, and recuperate.” The painted wolf apparently didn’t need any additional encouragement than that, for he fell forward towards Nick, who caught him. Peering over his shoulder, Nick told M, “He was right you know. You’re a bastard.”

Shrugging, M stated “He still needs to learn his place within your pack, squad, whatever you want to call it.” Focusing on the others, he added “As for the rest of you, just like this moron, rest, relax, recuperate. I still plan to turn you all into the most well trained, elite squad of military mavericks in the Zoolympian Empire within 5 hours. But, I must commend you for surviving. Not everyone does. I think only one other mammal ever managed. I expect you all back here in 90 minutes. Now, go.”

With those words, M left followed by Fenrir, Carlos, Josef, Andreas, and Major Friedkin. Once they were out of hearing range, M said “Go ahead and say it. I can hear you all thinking it. Might as well get it out of the way.”

“You’re insane,” Carlos stated, “Jameson told us a long time ago that no one who forced their Izu Genes to awaken prematurely ever lived long. You basically just forced them to an early death.”

While he himself was something of a death seeker, Carlos hated those who did things like what this margay had just done.

Halting and turning to look at the jackal, M gave him a grim smile. “Oh, you think so, do you? Just so you know, I wasn’t lying when I said that to my knowledge only one other mammal ever managed to survive.” Shifting to fully face Carlos, M stated “You’re currently talking to him right now.” M felt a sense of satisfaction at seeing Carlos blanch. “I’ve lasted a long ass time, pup. Over twenty years longer than expected and still going strong. That injection that was given to them was the same one I gave myself all those years ago. However, this was a fresh batch using more modern techniques to make it. Believe me, they’ll be fine.”

No one else said a word as M walked off on his own. Carlos glanced at Fenrir, who simply watched the margay’s departure. Josef stood there with Andreas and Friedkin holding a hushed conversation about what M was planning. After a couple of seconds, Carlos and Fenrir bade farewell to the others then made their way to the Mess. Sitting in one of the corner tables, they thanked one of the staff who was kind enough to come take their order so that they wouldn’t have to get their own food.

Fenrir looked at Carlos, who stared out the window with a far-off look in his eyes. Over the past few days, their relationship had improved, though Fenrir was sure that Jameson had something to do with that. The wolf knew that Carlos wasn’t much of a team player with those he didn’t know or trust, which was why the two of them often had problems. Yes, they trusted each other, but Fenrir tended to be a bit more of a private mammal than Carlos, who in comparison always voiced his thoughts and opinions. Fenrir had spent a bit of time working himself up to be more open with Carlos, which in turn gave the jackal insight into who Fenrir was as a mammal. Now Jameson was a mammal that Carlos would follow into the very heart of Hell, so learning that he had called M to assist with training the initiates, it felt a bit like betrayal.
“You know Jameson trusts you, right, Carlos?” Fenrir queried. “Him calling M had nothing to do with thinking you were incapable. He just knew that we would need help.” Not getting a response, Fenrir sighed and leaned back in his seat. “The first time I ever worked with Jameson wasn’t a standard mission.” This got Carlos’s attention. “My company was deep into enemy territory, running reconnaissance. Before we even knew it, we were totally surrounded. Miles from any allies, our group was captured and brought to a prison camp where we were tortured for information. If we didn’t talk, we were killed. I don’t know how he heard or how he did it, but Jameson came after us, alone. It was late at night, no moon, lots of cloud cover so there were no stars to guide anyone. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I hear suppressed fire. I had no idea what to think. Then I hear the lock of my cage disengage. When it opened, I found myself staring in complete disbelief at a lone tod that stood in the middle of the doorway. He cut me loose, then the two of us started freeing everyone from my unit. After setting them all free, we hightailed it out of there to a nearby mobile command outpost not too far from where we were positioned. I don’t think that we made it more than half a mile when alarms started going off from where we just escaped. Jameson told us to keep going, that he’d handle it. I was not about to let the mammal that risked his own hide to come free us by himself alone to take on an unknown number of hostiles. I sent everyone else on ahead before running back to aid him. I arrived just in time to shoot an enemy officer about to blow Jameson’s brains out, point-blank. The instant that mammal’s carcass hit the ground, Jameson asked me what the hell took me so long, and I… didn’t have an answer. After we got back to camp, Jameson told me that the moment he saw me that he knew he could trust me. Next thing I knew I was a member of his team via orders from the higher ups on Jameson’s recommendation. I had never felt so honored in my fuckin’ life. Sure, I would occasionally fuck up, like any ordinary mammal, but he always trusted me when it counted. Every once in a while, we’d get a mission and he tell me ‘Fenrir, I need you to stay behind.’ I’d feel like shit because of it, but then something would go wrong, just as he’d expect, and I’d be there when he’d need me the most. That… is what’s happening here, Carlos.”

It was then that the staff member delivered their meals. Carlos took one look at it then dug in like he hadn’t eaten in days. Fenrir shook his head at the jackal’s antics. It was something that always happened after Carlos was pulled out of his funk. Digging into his own meal, Fenrir watched as a group of ZPA cadets entered the Mess and made their way to the buffet line. He was pleased to see there were more tiny- to mid-sized mammals now enrolled into the Academy. Suddenly, the sound of helicopter blades reached his ears. Both canids looked outside to see a chopper making a final approach. Exiting the Mess, they made their way over to see that the pilot was speaking to M, who looked as if though he had received ill-timed news.

M patted the pilot’s shoulder, thanking him, then walked away. Coming to a stop before Fenrir and Carlos, M said “Have everyone pack their bags. We’re departing as soon as mammally possible. I’ll explain later. You have my word on that.” Making his way to his current lodgings, M used his encrypted commlink to contact Jameson, but got no response. After four failed attempts, he chose to let it go and focus on what needed to be done. Entering his room, he packed his things swiftly for immediate extraction. He returned to the chopper a few minutes later to find that everyone, with the singular exception of Andreas Bogo, was present and packed. “Board the helo. The moment we’re in the air, I’ll explain.”

Everybody quickly loaded their luggage, climbed into the copter, and fastened themselves into their seats. M was the last one to board, but forewent strapping himself down, choosing to remain standing. Hollering at the pilot, the margay shouted “TAKE US OUT!” The helicopter slowly began to rise, then turned midair before flying them out of there. Turning his attention to those with him, M began his explanation.

“Alright, listen up. The original course of action that Jameson and I agreed upon was that I put you through the basics before transferring you all to a specialized facility outside the purview of the Zoolympian government,” M stated, “This facility is known only as the Centre. I’ve had to scrap the
original plan as unforeseen circumstances have forced me to accelerate our timeline. I can’t go into elaborate detail, but I’ll tell you this: evidence recently discovered during a reconnaissance mission shows that our predictions were wrong. So, I’m having us extracted ahead of schedule.”

Judy raised her paw. When M called on her, she asked “What evidence did they discover that prompted this course of action?” She showed, or hoped that she showed, no fear when M narrowed his eyes threateningly at her.

“I can’t tell you,” M stated with finality. “Now, before anyone else asks a question, may I finish speaking? Good. Zootopia has been declared a warzone, some of you know this already. What you don’t know is that the city is also under quarantine. Emergency Evac Services has managed to relocate most of the populace. Reports show that roughly a quarter of the city’s inhabitants remain. Statistically, that’s somewhere in the range of 1.26 million mammals are still in Zootopia. Those 1.26 million are in a state of hysterics. Fear has set in, making them lash out violently. Thankfully, no deaths have been reported, nor have any been discovered. As you are now, you stand no chance. Rest up, because when we get to the Centre and begin, I’m going to make you wish I’d just kill you.”

Chapter End Notes

Ian’s a High School freshman. I’m sure you remember those years, and everything involved. I do. My wife is helping our first set of twins ready for their testing while I help Ian.

I must make a confession: I have never felt more stupid. I swear in the years since I graduated the curriculum has undergone a significant overhaul. Oh, I can understand all of it rather easily, but the stuff their teaching Ian in 9th grade is the same I learned during my collegiate sophomore years.

Anyway, until he’s done with testing, my time will be spent getting him ready. Therefore, writing time will be limited. You can infer what that means.

Rule #1: Family comes first, and you do whatever is necessary for them. No matter what you have to sacrifice.

I’ll see you all next chapter. Or, at least, I hope.
Chapter 21: Beginning of an End

Chapter Summary

This is where it begins, the beginning of the end.

Chapter Notes

I was informed last chapter by a reader they won't continue to read the story. Why? You can read it yourself in the comments, and my acerbic response.

Why do I tell you this? No real reason.

Anyway, this chapter is where things start accelerating. As a result, the actual purpose will seem unclear. This is deliberate/Intentional. With Arc One coming to a close, I need to begin setting things up for Arc Two.

Remember: This story contains FIVE ARCS. Therefore, a lot of shit will only make sense when it's all over. So, this process will be repeated in each Arc up until the end of Arc Five.

Again, I extend tons of gratitude toward my editor. Now, let's get on with it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Gisella’s Penthouse

With the professional music studio quality microphone before her, Gisella steeled her nerves for what she was about to attempt. Glancing off to the side, she saw that Bucky was also preparing himself. Gisella had him running the sound equipment since he was the only other one with her. Getting an air check from him, Gisella took a deep breath then let it out slowly.

“Greetings, Zootopia. I don’t know how many of you are listening, but it’s Gazelle. I know that most of you are afraid. I’ll admit that I am too. I’m scared that we’re letting this mammal known as the Chancellor use our fears to tear our great city apart. It’s okay to be afraid, but it isn’t okay to live our lives in fear. We can’t let our fears control our lives, because the moment we let it is the moment that we give up on ourselves, on our city. We can’t let this madmamal control us through fear. We must unite ourselves against him. Show him that he won’t win. We’ll get through this together. All of us.”

Signaling for Bucky to end the transmission, Gisella stepped away from the mic. Sighing, she asked him “How did I do?” Getting a so-so gesture from him, Gisella sat down and folded her arms. “Now, we sit and hope for the best.”
The streets of Zootopia

As it turned out, nearly everyone in the city had heard Gazelle’s broadcast. It had caused a lot of them to stop and consider her words. Many of them looked at those within their vicinity. Slowly, it dawned on them that she was right and, upon taking in their surroundings, realized what they had been doing. The city looked nearly destroyed in some areas. It looked like some scene from some kind of post-apocalyptic cinematic motion picture. It completely horrified them.

One of the mammals on the streets was Kris Otterton, who was trying to find Martino amongst all the chaos. They had agreed to meet at the bar at which he was employed, but he hadn’t shown. She refused to believe that he was seriously injured, but she ran down every single street looking for any sign of Martino. After spending an hour waiting, Kris fell onto her paws and knees as the gut churning realization that something may have happened to him set in. The memories of her time with the giant otter flooded her mind. Kris fought hard not to shed tears, but it was a futile effort. The teardrops fell from her eyes like rain. Kris was startled when a comforting paw gripped her shoulder. Looking up, her olive-green eyes met with the dazzling cerulean blue of Martino’s.

Giving Kris a small smile, Martino helped her stand. Dusting off the bits of lingering ash that clung to her clothing, he murmured “I find it touching that you’d cry over me.” He was going to say more, but before he could Kris kissed him, rendering him a tad speechless. When she pulled away, Martino blinked once, twice, three times before he found his voice again. “Not that I’m complaining, but that was unexpected.”

Taking hold of Martino’s paw, Kris led him quickly towards the direction of her family’s flower shop, where she and Martino would be staying. Her father, Emmitt, and her mother, Octavia, had changed their minds about remaining in the city, but Kris herself remained determined she would remain in Zootopia. Her parents had already granted her permission that she could have someone stay with her while they were away. Martino had been the very first mammal to come to her mind. With her parents having left late yesterday evening, Kris had taken the liberty of getting everything set for Martino’s arrival. She didn’t say anything while swiftly guiding Martino through the hectic streets towards her parents’ shop.

Martino did his best to keep up with the young female otter, but every now and again, he had to take a break that way he could catch his breath. Gratefully, Kris understood and would slow down for him. From their starting point, they still had a few city blocks to transverse in order to reach Otterton’s Floral Emporium, but they managed to get there safe and sound. Stepping inside, Martino was struck with the multitudinous aromas of all the various flowers that were held within. The smells reminded him of springtime, provoking memories, long buried, to resurface. The most prominent one was the first time Kris walked into the bar, their first night together. He continued to follow her as she led him to the back and up the stairs to the living area. His first impression was that it was homely and welcoming. It looked like he had expected.

The place wasn’t small, but it wasn’t large either. There was a loveseat located underneath the front facing window. The kitchen only had the bare essentials of a stovetop oven, a fridge, a microwave, a sink, and a dishwasher. The main area had an old tube television, possibly black and white, with an adequately sized sectional. There was a ladder off in a corner, possibly leading to a half-story loft. A short hallway that lead to the bedrooms. The one door that seemed out of place, Martino guessed led to the bathroom. ‘Simple and minimalistic,’ The giant otter thought to himself. Martino could see himself living in a place very similar to this. His current home was a small rental apartment. So small that he occasionally felt claustrophobic.

Kris left Martino to take it in for a few minutes while she busied herself with preparing them something to eat. A part of her was infuriated that she hadn’t thought to stockpile food, but it
couldn’t be changed now. For only a second, Kris considered braving going outside to make a grocery run, but ultimately decided against it. The state that Zootopia was in, it wouldn’t have been wise. Though mammals had stopped after hearing Gazelle’s broadcast, there was no guarantee mayhem wouldn’t start up again.

Over with Martino, the giant otter found himself sitting on the sectional with a photo album in paw. Its spine read ‘Kris’ and inside were dozens of photographs featuring the young female in a variety of ways. Each was accompanied by a title plus a description. The one Martino was currently focused on was labeled ‘17th birthday.’ Judging from the expression on her muzzle, Martino could tell she hadn’t been pleased by the events that day. He refrained from chuckling as to not draw Kris’s attention to what he was doing.

However, Kris had a pretty good idea of what Martino was doing. She had purposely left the photo album out. Keeping her eyes on their meal, Kris wanted to let out a long groan at how slow it was progressing. ‘How in the world does it take this long to cook such a simple dish?’ She thought to herself. Deciding to let it sit for a while, knowing from previous experience that it would take some more time to cook, Kris peered out the nearby window into the city. ‘I wonder what’s happening out there.’

Outside, back on the streets, the myriad of mammals that had, up until recently, been antagonistic towards one another were now helping each other, regardless of whether the one they aided was predator or prey. The cold world of flames quickly filled with life as those who had been hiding came out to help as well. The military troops and mammals from the Undercity began providing further assistance to the civilians. The injured were carted off to receive medical care. Those left really looked at their surroundings for the first time. Their beautiful city, once known as the Shining City, now seemed like a scene from those old war films. Slowly, but with purpose, everyone began to clean and repair what damage they could.

Gazelle’s message had reached them through the fear. If someone such as her could be frightened by all this and still be strong enough to hold onto hope, they could as well. It was clear to everyone that to rebuild the vast destruction they had created within such a short span of time would require even more. But no matter how much time it took, they would eventually rebuild. Progress would inevitably be slow, and that was okay, but they would take their time, do it right. With their own paws, the citizens of Zootopia would recreate their city from the ashes which it had become by their actions.

Amongst these mammals was one who felt nothing but rage at seeing how abruptly the chaos had been quelled. It was obvious that not a single mammal recognized him, not that any knew who he was to begin with. The red wolf ground his fangs in vexation. The havoc he had so desired to witness had ceased due to a pathetically short speech from some stupid popstar. With no way to unleash his wrath without drawing unwanted attention, the Chancellor resumed his stroll through the city’s streets. His destination: City Hall. Prior to all of this, he had had some of his minions store equipment within various areas of the structure. Once again, the Chancellor was forced to accelerate his plans, much to his ire.

Attorney General Hoover sat behind the mayoral desk. Searching for a file long forgotten to time, the chinkara heard the door to the office open. Raising his eyes to see who it was, dread pooled in his gut. “Hello, Jacen,” A.G. Hoover greeted solemnly, “I must admit, a tiny part of me hoped their deductions were wrong. Apparently, they were right on the money.” He watched the red wolf near him at an ominous pace. “I know this means nothing now, but I’m so sorry for what happened back then. I had no idea that Mervis would stoop so low.”

Jacen Carno, the Chancellor, a red wolf that had everything that ever meant anything to him taken
away, leaned forward, paws on the mayoral desk, nose almost touching that of the Attorney General of the city of Zootopia, and whispered morbidly. “That is your failing, your sin. I’ll have you pay it in a way that shall forever be recorded in the annals of Zootopia’s history.” Getting no resistance from the chinkara, the Chancellor dragged Hoover to the roof. Leaning him backwards over the stone railing, Carno asked “Before I kill you, do you have anything to confess?”

Hundreds of thousands of thoughts flew through Hoovers mind as he tried to find what it was he wished to tell the red wolf. Knowing that this was his end, Hoover saw no reason to keep it a secret any longer. “On the eve that your home and family perished, Mervis and I sat down for a business dinner. It was then that he informed me of what was taking place. I’m the one that forced him to visit the remnants of Shiregrove. I’m the one who inadvertently delivered him into your paws. That impalement wound that was located in his gut came from me when I thrust the veggie kebab into him in rage.”

Carno stared at the chinkara for a solid minute, before raising his eyes to the scene below them. The street was now full of mammals watching the proceedings. Glancing back at Hoover, Carno remembered the cries of agony from Mervis Swinton. He recalled seeing the wound that adorned the pig’s gut. The red wolf had often wondered why the bastard chose to enter his domain. Knowing that mammals about to die rarely remain as calm as the chinkara was now when about to die, Jacen Carno realized he spoke the truth. For a moment, the Chancellor persona vanished as the red wolf struggled with a question he never imagined he’d have to deal with: Could he kill the mammal who indirectly presented him with the beginnings of his revenge?

The part of the red wolf that was Jacen Carno screamed ‘NO.’ For if it had not been for A.G. Hoover, he wouldn’t have gotten this far. He owed this mammal. The part of the red wolf who was the Chancellor partially agreed, but argued that Hoover to deserved feel his wrath. The reason was that Hoover had known, or had at least been privy to and suspected, Mervis’s plans. His mind waged war with itself. A loud echoing cackling erupted within his mind.

Sitting upon the stone railing next to A.G. Hoover, was the mental construct of Hannibal Hyector, shaking in laughter. Staring at the hallucination, the red wolf growled out “Why do you always appear at the most inopportune times?” The hallucination leaned back and fell over the railing. Knowing that it had reappeared behind him, the red wolf said “Your tricks no longer work on me, Hannibal.”

It didn’t take Hoover long to realize that Carno was speaking to some hallucination of Hannibal Hyector. ‘Always did leave an impression,’ Hoover thought. The chinkara paid little attention to the conversation Carno seemingly held with his mind’s construct of Hyector. Turning his head slightly to peer at the street below, Hoover saw that some military troops, ZPD officers, and what he guessed were mammals from the Undercity were present. ‘Don’t you dare shoot,’ he screamed mentally. He watched as law enforcement pushed the crowd back a moderate distance and set up a perimeter. Bogo was nowhere to be seen, but Spencer Wolvenett, his bodyguards Larry and Gary, plus an entire legion of Zootopia’s wolf population marched towards City Hall.

Witnessing the Attorney General in his current position, Spencer told Larry and Gary “I want to know what’s going on up there. Find me someone who can get me eyes and ears within range.” Spencer identified the red wolf as Jacen Carno, thanks to old lithographs that he and others had managed to dig out of the city’s Hall of Records. ‘ Doesn’t look like he’s suffered the wounds one would expect of a village immolation,’ Spencer thought. A tap on his leg had him look down at an unidentified mammal outfitted with military gear holding a phone. Taking it, Spencer watched him disappear into the crowd. Then, the phone started ringing. “Hello?”

“Mr. Wolvenett,” the mammal on the other end of the call greeted, “I want you to listen closely. I’m
sure that as you’ve guessed our red wolf up there with Attorney General Hoover is Jacen Carno, aka Public Enemy No. 1, the Chancellor. You need to be aware that he’s injected himself with something highly experimental known as nanomeds. They were designed by Gerard Wolferick for military purposes. The intended goal was for the nanomeds to act as catalysts meant to induce regeneration from severe wounds, such as fourth degree burns. However, they were never perfected."

“So we don’t know what Jacen Carno will experience as far as side effects,” Spencer guessed. “That’s just great.” He stared at the red wolf and Hoover, who seemed rather calm considering the circumstances. “I’ll go out on a limb here and guess you won’t tell me who you are. Right now, I don’t care. Just tell me that you’re on our side.”

“You have my word that I’m your ally, Mr. Wolvenett,” the voice replied. “Now, I need you to do as I say. First, get your best civilian sharpshooters and military snipers set up into what they think would be the most optimal positions.”

Wolvenett continued to follow the voice’s directions. Knowing he was putting a lot of faith in someone he had no way of knowing if they were truly on their side, Wolvenett chose to bet on the long shot. When everyone was in position, he asked if anyone had a shot that could hit the red wolf. He listened as 46 of the 47 gave a negative. The last one was silent. “Number 47? Do you have a shot?” Still no response. “Number 47, I don’t give a fuck if the shot is nonlethal. If you have a shot, take it. That’s an order.”

The instant those words left Spencer’s mouth, a shot rang out, and a howl of unbridled agony pierced the air. Spencer watched as the Chancellor jerked back from Hoover, who dropped behind the stone railing. Another shot rang out from the same position as the first, hitting the Chancellor. Then a third, fourth, fifth. Shot after shot struck home, but none managed to bring the red wolf to his knees. Instead, the red wolf bolted at a speed no one expected of a lupine towards the rear of City Hall’s roof, out of sight.

Simo Häyhä Frisk managed to get one last shot in before the Chancellor disappeared from his sight. He waited to hear from the others. Once the others had reported that they hadn’t taken any shots, he opened his channel and tapped Morse code then left his sniper nest. Making his way back to return the radio, Simo Häyhä Frisk saw that everyone was watching him. Presenting his radio to Wolvenett, he saluted.

Wolvenett and the rest stared in utter shock at the arctic tod’s rifle. There was no scope. Wolvenett turned to the highest ranking military officer on site, a king cheetah, who was so dumbfounded he was left speechless. Returning his focus to the arctic tod, Spencer Wolvenett spotted what appeared to be dog tags around his neck. “May I?” He inquired. Not getting any response, Spencer cautiously knelt to examine the tags. “Simo Häyhä Frisk, 2nd Lt. Ghost Squad.” Letting the dog tags fall, Spencer stared at the arctic tod for a whole new reason. This mammal before him was a living legend.

Hidden within the crowd, Jameson Wilde (née Vulpin) heard Spencer Wolvenett’s words. Carefully maneuvering through the mass of mammals, he came to a halt once his gaze fell upon Simo Häyhä
Frisk. Long ago, the two of them had once engaged in a sniper duel, with Jameson coming out the victor. Simo Häyhä Frisk had been grievously injured, resulting in the arctic tod’s inability to speak. Whether it was by chance or fate, the two tods locked eyes. Jameson expected to see animosity within Simo Häyhä Frisk’s eyes, but there was nothing of the sort. In its place, Jameson found amity. Mimicking a hat tip, Jameson slipped away, but not before seeing Simo Häyhä Frisk reciprocate the gesture.

Somewhere in Zootopia

The Chancellor leaned against the side of a building, trying to catch his breath, the pain of being repeatedly shot still fresh. ‘I have to get to the safehouse,’ he thought to himself. Slipping through the city streets undetected was difficult thanks to his actions not too long ago. Military troops were performing sweeps at what seemed to be every turn. Jacen Carno didn’t know how he managed it, but he finally reached his safehouse, a small, unassuming building that no one would give a second glance. Entering, he made his way to the storage closet and opened the hatch hidden in the floor. Dropping through the opening, he let out a hiss of pain before navigating through the tunnel system towards his true destination.

During a time of heavy prohibition, speakeasies used these tunnels to move shipments of alcohol from one locale to another so as not to draw the attention of the agents under the employ of the Bureau of Prohibition. Even after those times had come to an end, the tunnels remained, though unused. Anyone could use the elaborate web of tunnels if one only knew where to look and how to navigate them. Jacen Carno was one such mammal. Despite living in Shiregrove, there had been instances where he’d be required to visit Zootopia for business affairs. While here, Jacen Carno would study the city’s fascinating history. He had stumbled upon his safehouse by mere accident one day and discovered the entry to the tunnels by chance. After the fiery destruction of his village home, Jacen Carno not only took the moniker of ‘the Chancellor’, but planned out how best to use the Prohibition Tunnels to exact his revenge.

Coming up to his exit, the red wolf climbed the ladder then shoved the trapdoor open. Closing the hatch behind him, he slipped into the main area of the building he had entered. The building had once been an old walk-in veterinary clinic, but it was now abandoned due to the newer hi-tech advancements in the field of veterinary medicine. The facility itself was located within walking distance of the ZTA tram and monorail system. The Chancellor grabbed some of the leftover supplies and got to work tending to his wounds. Even though his regenerative capabilities were enhanced, the level of damage required treatment.

When deciding to utilize the clinic, the Chancellor rerouted some power from the nearby shops, but not enough to draw suspicion. Picking up the landline, he dialed the contact number for one of his Twelve. There was no answer, so he dialed another then repeated the process when that one got no response. After the last went unanswered, Jacen Carno slammed the receiver down hard enough to break it. “BLAST!!” What the devil was happening? Where were all his underlings?

Standing, the Chancellor walked over to the window. He watched as those outside continued to help each other however they could. Nothing was going as he had planned. Taking out and putting on a set of veterinary scrubs from the supply closet, he exited the building. He’d need to find new clothing soon. Being careful to avoid drawing attention, the red wolf disappeared within those on the streets.

Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia

It was fascinating to see how the words of one mammal such as Gazelle could impact so many. For Rory, it was like watching a mass epiphany occur. All those with any medicinal training quickly began to help anyone who needed it. Standing just outside the main entrance to the MTHZ, Rory
delegated triage with her friend and colleague Ellis. The members of her team were spread throughout the building, taking care of everyone they could. The vixen wanted nothing more than to take a team of emergency response technicians and scour the streets to see who else needed help, but unfortunately, that wasn’t possible at the moment.

After a short while, the number of mammals brought in began to wane. Ellis and Rory stood there, waiting to see if any more would arrive. When no one did, they both released a sigh of relief. Moments later, Rory’s team joined them. Everyone shared tired smiles before walking towards the cafeteria to grab something to eat. They all basically collapsed from exhaustion into some available chairs. Food was brought to them by the cafeteria staff. Thanking them, all of them began eating.

Pronk managed to text Bucky that he was okay. Resting his head on the tabletop, Pronk let out a groan. With a breathless laugh, he said, “Reminds me of our first 48-hr shift right out of med school. I didn’t know it was possible to compress two days into a little less than one.” This caused everyone else to chuckle. “I’m so tired that I’d trade places with Rip Van Winkle.”

“You and me both,” Wolfstein and Clawfrey stated simultaneously. The two looked at one another then said, “Jinx. Double jinx.” Their antics made the others burst out in laughter. The wolf and jaguar simply smiled before emulating Pronk, placing their heads on the table.

Doogie had leaned back in his seat and was already snoring softly. Rory and Ellis shared a look. Being so young and having such a high stress profession, they both felt that the coywolf deserved a commendation for his achievements. It would have to come at a later date though. For now, they all needed to rest and recuperate themselves since no one knew when the chaos would begin again.

Wolfstein and Clawfrey carried Howlser to one of the rooms set aside for the veterinarians remaining at the hospital. It wasn’t just any room though. It was the one they used as their team office. The spare beds that the hospital had managed to scrounge up were situated inside for their use. The gray wolf and jaguar put the coywolf on one then each claimed their own. Pronk took one himself and fell asleep without delay.

Hearing the snores emanating from her team, Rory shook her head, smiling. She walked over to the corner, where her desk was located, and used her computer to send an email to Ian. It was short, simplistic, just a rundown of how she was and asking how he was faring. While she waited for a response, she played solitaire. When the response came, Rory read it over carefully to check there were no hidden messages contained within it. Noting there was not, she reread it as it was intended. Like her own, Ian’s was simplistic, detailing tidbits of what he had done recently. She noted that he admitted to being the one who patched Gazelle into the emergency broadcast system. She wasn’t that surprised by it. They continued to exchange emails for a few minutes before signing off. Rory then climbed onto the last of the hospital beds and joined her team in slumber.

Elsewhere in the hospital, Fatima Ara watched as Ma Li paced back and forth restlessly. “You need to calm down,” she told him, “You’re not helping my anxiety nor my stress.” When he finally stopped and sat down, Fatima smiled a bit, saying “This reminds me of when we first found out that we were pregnant with Bahman.”

“Yeah, well, the city wasn’t in a state of emergency back then, Fatima,” Li countered. “I can’t help feeling frightened. Plus, you’re almost 60. You’re well past the age range for safely giving birth. Anything could go wrong. You could die, as well as the babies, leaving me with an empty feeling inside.” There was a ton of ways all this could end horribly. A ping drew his attention to his tablet. Opening his email, Li found a message from Randolf. Reading it, his breath caught in his throat. The email had a video attachment that someone had managed to take of the events at City Hall. The sight of the red wolf wasn’t as impactful as the expression on his muzzle nor that mad glint in his eyes.
The video didn’t have sound, but that didn’t matter. Li had heard the shots even from the hospital.

“What’re you watching?” Fatima questioned her mate. When Li showed her, she sucked in a shaky breath. “That’s him. That’s the mammal who tried to kill me. He looks different now, but I’d never forget that wicked gleam his eyes have.” A shudder wracked her body as she remembered what he had done. The door opened, pulling her attention in that direction. Officers Grizzoli and Snarlov entered the room pushing a food cart. Both had grim expressions on their muzzles, which had Fatima worried. “What’s happening?”

Neither answered the question, stepping off to the side as Chief Bogo walked in decked out in full SWAT gear. The large cape buffalo wheeled the rolling stool over to sit, no doubt to ease the weight of all his gear off his knees. His expression was unreadable, but just from the air he carried with him, it was clear what would soon be spoken was grave. It took a hoofful of seconds before Bogo cleared his throat.

Setting his hooves on his knees, Chief Tobias Bogo steeled himself. “A few hours ago, I assigned a team of ZPD and military police officers with a couple of crime scene techs to the remains of Shiregrove. They swept the area several times to make sure nothing was missed. On what was supposed to be the last, one of my officers located a hidden underground compartment, similar to a cellar or basement, constructed beneath the former home of Jacen Carno, aka the Chancellor. Within, they discovered a great number of things that they immediately sent to the lab as quickly as they could. Among what was found were old documents, lithographs, and various other trinkets.” Pulling out an evidence baggie, he passed it to Li, who took it in hoof to examine.

Inside the evidence baggie was something that Li had never seen before, but looked rather familiar. It appeared to be a safety deposit box key with an insignia. Li managed to place it after searching his memories. The insignia was the Ara familial crest. “Fatima? To what is this key paired?”

Fatima closed her eyes as a tear escaped the corner of one. Oh, how she had hoped that key had been lost, never to be found again. It appeared that Fate had other plans. “That key belonged to my father. Not the stallion you know, but his old self. That key opens a safety deposit box stored in the Meadowlands District Bank. I have no knowledge of what it holds, but my father would tell me repeatedly that it was considered key evidence that he had been given charge to destroy. It didn’t sit right well with him, so he had it guarded in the only place he trusted. I’d hear my father when he was drunk argue with himself on whether he should turn it over to IAB. I never learned what was inside. I lost it not long after my father gave it to me on his deathbed when someone broke into my apartment.”

Bogo nodded. He remembered the case. It had gone unsolved as nothing of significant value was stolen. “We got a court order and had the safety deposit box opened. Inside were various government forms that dealt with the attack on Shiregrove. These forms included a complete list of all mammals heavily involved with Mervis Swinton’s plans. There were other papers that detailed their activities, going back to well before Mervis was mayor. Your father was on Mervis’s payroll, but was only an evidence garage clerk. Things tend to disappear from there on occasion, like guns, drugs, and other items that are scheduled for disposal. Your father provided the others on Mervis’s payroll with what they needed from the disposal list.”

“Not to come across as rude, but what does this have to do with what’s happening now?” Li inquired. “Was there something else your recon team discovered? Did they find something that warrants this interrogation? I’ll readily admit that my late father-in-law, if he were alive, should face charges, but what exactly is the point of this meeting?”

“The Shadow Ledger,” Fatima explained. “It was there as well wasn’t it.”
a statement. The Arabian mare watched as Chief Bogo nodded once.

“I don’t understand. What is this ‘Shadow Ledger?’” Li asked. The Ferghana didn’t know what they were talking about. Based on guesswork, Li figured it was a closely guarded secret only a few mammals knew.

“Indeed, it was,” Bogo replied. “As for your question Li, the Shadow Ledger, despite its name, isn’t a compilation of dealings, but instead a compilation of some of the most closely guarded secrets about the city itself. The contents are considered above top secret, even I don’t have the necessary clearance for it. Only a few select mammal within the government know of its existence. Officially, it doesn’t exist. Unofficially, to those in the know, the Shadow Ledger was stolen years ago. The fact that it was in the paws of Jacen Carno for all these years…” He trailed off, letting them fill in the blanks themselves.

Knowing that the Chancellor knew Zootopia’s secrets, it was a truly terrifying thought. There was no way of knowing how he would use that knowledge. Neither Fatima nor Li spoke, and the room stayed silent for far longer than what one could be considered comfortable. Everyone within the room relaxed when one of the authorized nurses came in to examine Fatima.

“One last thing I must take care of before I leave,” Bogo stated. Standing, he said “We’re having you moved to a more secure ward. It’s located on one of the subterranean levels of the hospital. The staff members you’ve had will still be the only mammals authorized to take care of you. Unfortunately, Li will not be allowed to visit you until this all blows over. I’m also pulling Officers Grizzoli and Snarlov off your detail. Officer Pennington will remain with you. Say your goodbyes quickly, because they’ll be moving you soon.”

Rather sadly, ‘soon’ was only 20 minutes later. Li gave Fatima a tender kiss, whispering sweet nothings to her. Fatima returned Li’s kiss then a question popped into her mind. “I’ve been meaning to ask. What happened to our divorce papers?” She had only just signed them prior to getting assaulted.

With a small smile, Li said “I had them suspended for the time being. I wouldn’t have been able to be with you if I was your divorcee. I’m planning to have them voided, though. Can’t let my foals grow up in a broken household. Besides, I’m still in love with you, despite how difficult you tend to be.” He gave Fatima one more quick kiss before Officer Pennington wheeled her away. Standing there alone, Li sighed then walked towards the front of the building. Figuring that if he was careful, Li decided to head for Randolf’s television studio nearby.

Warehouse 13 – The Docks

Parker stared at the liquid filled vials, each one was a different colour. Doug and Andrew had explained that the colour told them which chemical was which. It really didn’t help the platypus at all. But, he’d been told to watch the vials for any change in colour, so here he sat watching them. Not a single change had occurred over the past three hours and it worried him a bit. “How long does it normally take for a shift in colouration?” he asked loudly.

“Anywhere between 3.5 to 4.25 hours.” Andrew hollered back from his location in the warehouse. He was staring at his mobile which showed a missed call from one of the Chancellor’s hideouts within Zootopia. Muttering a string of profanities, Andrew started calling each one by one, trying to get ahold of him. He got lucky, or unlucky, when he called the old Church of the Divine Entities over in Hyenahurst. “Your Chancellorship, I thought you were hiding out in the Marshlands. How may I be of assistance?” He listened as the Chancellor shouted at him for not answering his phone earlier then gave him a set of simple instructions. “Yes, sir. I’ll get right on that.” Hanging up, Andrew let out a loud ‘RAAAAAAARGH!’ “I’ve gotta go. Doug, you need to find a way to
expedite the process. I’m not sure that the Chancellor won’t blow the bio-bombs sooner rather than later.”

The white-wooled ram gulped as he started trying to think of different ways to accelerate their progress. A sudden idea came to him. One that any scientist would consider fringe. Douglas Ramses turned to look at the prototype MK-V Genome Sequencer that was situated in the far corner of the warehouse. Reverse sequencing and then resequencing the genetic code of something such as the biomaterials being used was theoretically possible, but it had never before been done. Taking a vial of the biomaterials, Doug slowly made his way through the maze of equipment.

“It’s gone purple,” Parker cried. The blue chemical had slowly shifted to a purplish colour. Carefully lifting the vial from it’s stand, Parker brought it over to the vial of clear fluid and poured it in. The two liquids mixed and changed to a pale pink. It was so pale in fact that you could barely tell it was pink at all. “What do I do now, Doug?”

Doug stood before the MK-V Genome Sequencer. He considered the possible outcomes, every success, every failure. This decision, his decision, would determine whether they succeeded in creating an antithesis to the Chancellor’s weaponized biomaterials. Inserting the vial, Doug began to type the necessary instructions into the control panel. Once he was done, Doug called out to Parker. “Take the phial and place it above the Bunsen burner. After it turns a bloody crimson colour, set it aside and focus on the other two vials.”

Doing as he was told, Parker asked “What exactly is this? What’s the use of it?” The platypus waited until the saturation of the chemical’s bloody crimson colour reached the maximum before removing it from the Bunsen burner. Focusing his attention back onto the last two vials. The chemical that had been pale yellow was now a rich golden color. Likewise, the vial beside it was no longer teal, but a nice seaweed green.

Moving to stand next to the seated platypus, Doug answered, “We will combine it with our synthesized genetic sample to create a serum to counteract the Chancellor’s viral contagion.” The ram was impressed at the color saturation of each chemical. He only knew of a hoofful of mammals that had such a keen eye. Letting out a slow exhale, Doug took a seat next to Parker. “I wonder what the Chancellor has Andrew doing right now.”

<MEANWHILE>

Andrew Bellwether made his way through the packed streets of Zootopia’s Docks District. His goal: to rendezvous with the Chancellor at the decommissioned post office near the ZTA’s Peak Street station. Not having any reliable method of transportation was a pain as the Docks were a sub-district located in Savanna Central, near the Zootopia Sound. Mole Harbor was often viewed as the primary ingress and egress point for ships in the area. ‘This is going to be a long walk,’ Andrew grumbled mentally.

Walking through the streets, Andrew couldn’t stop the feeling of guilt. All of this was his fault, or at least partially. Every now and again, he would stop to aid someone who was in need of assistance before continuing on his way. There was a moment when the thought of the bombs placed throughout the city had him stop to really look around at his surroundings. Andrew imagined the world in ruins, the debris of all the collapsed buildings, the mountains of corpses, innocent mammals who had lost their lives because of him.

He didn’t know if it was those images that prompted the thought, but Andrew knew one thing: he would make sure the Chancellor died, even if it was the last thing he ever did. Making haste towards his destination, Andrew found an abandoned bicycle and, taking possession of it, pedaled forth as fast as he could. Thanks to the bike, which he gave to a young caprine once he was within walking
distance, Andrew made it to the rendezvous point earlier than planned. Entering the building via the loading area, Andrew walked towards the postmaster’s office.

The Chancellor was laying on the ground, covered in blood. Not all of it was his own. Some of it was from mammals that had attacked him while he wandered the streets of Zootopia. The wounds he had received from the sniper fire had yet to fully heal, the nanomedics having to equally distribute themselves to the damaged areas, slowing down the accelerated regeneration considerably. Having received even more damage, the Chancellor knew that he wouldn’t be capable of performing the next step in his plans. Andrew Bellwether would have to be the one to do it in his stead.

“You came quickly. Good,” the Chancellor stated. “You know what to do. The equipment is stored inside that footlocker in the corner there. You’re to return once you’ve finished. Now go.” The red wolf watched as the caprine grabbed the equipment and left the room. Looking at the ceiling, the Chancellor enjoyed the silence. Until it was broken by his hallucination of Hannibal Hyector.

“Looks like your plans are spiraling out of control, Jacen,” the hallucination said conversationally. “It would also appear that you’ve taken a bit of damage. Any ideas on how this will play out now?” It was floating parallel above the red wolf. Of course, being a hallucination, that wasn’t unexpected.

Not answering the mental illusion, the Chancellor tried to discover where it was that he had made his miscalculation. In the meantime, he watched as the imaginary construct of Hannibal floated around the room. It continued to talk, some of it’s words making no sense. Then it said something that made him pause. “Repeat that for me.”

“I said ‘did you really think that nothing had changed since Shiregrove’s destruction?’” The figment repeated. “It took you how long to plan this? A little over two decades? Things change as time passes. Why would Zootopia remain the same? Most, if not all, the mammals responsible are dead and buried. What is it that you’re really after?”

The red wolf could only stare at the apparition. Hundreds of thousands of thoughts swarmed his mind as he tried to find a counterargument, but none of them seemed acceptable. Again, he watched as the hallucination morphed into his daughters and wife repeatedly. He managed to finally dispel them simply by saying “You’re not real. None of you are real. You’re simply figments of my imagination based off my memories.”

The hallucinations disappeared, but an eerie voice, one that was his wife, daughters, and Hannibal’s, said “Just because we’re in your head doesn’t mean that we aren’t real. After all, your mind is capable of making anything real.” Then, once more, the postmaster’s office was silent.

Laying on the floor, Jacen Carno, the mammal that Zootopia feared as the Chancellor, experienced terror. Those parting words had impacted him greatly, for it was true. Fear crept into his mind as he wondered what these hallucinations planned.

**Department of Kit Services Main Office**

The chaos that had erupted out in the streets hadn’t really affected anyone within the mighty walls of the Department of Kit Services’ main office. Most of them were kits who Finn and Stacey had managed to gather prior to it beginning. Others were simply their fellow workers who somehow managed to arrive before all hell broke loose. Everyone was on the second floor, staring out the windows as the outside world all but collapsed before their eyes. A few of the kits hid under the beds that were within the room. The adults were either caring for kits or standing by the window, looking outside.

Finn was seated on one of the cots alongside his mother, who was taking care of a crying lion kit. As
for himself, he was bouncing a young shrew on his knee. Every now and again, Finn would take a peek over at Stacey. The lovely vixen was colouring with a bunch of kits, cubs, and pups, and laughing with them. Finn smiled as he watched her, which quickly became a frown at his mother’s words.

“She’s really good with kits,” Agatha Fennixon observed. “That vixen’s going to be a good mother once you two have some of your own. You’re not getting any younger, so hurry it up and seal the deal.”

Groaning, Finn said “Ma. I love ya, but shut up. We’re taking it at our own pace. I’m in no rush, and I’m not going to force her into anything.”

Agatha rolled her eyes at those words. “Oh, please. I’m old, but I’m not blind. You two are so nervous about moving forward that it’s holding you back.”

“Oh, shut it, Mum,” Finn replied. “I know what I’m doin’. Ain’t my first time doing this stuff.” In truth, Finn was lying his tail off. Yes, he had had previous sexual exploits, but never one like this. He looked over at Stacey, who had turned to look at him. Their eyes locked and the two didn’t bother fighting the smiles that took over their muzzles. ‘I’ll take her on a memorable first date once this is all over.’ Finn promised himself.

As for Stacey, she didn’t know if Finn was aware, but a couple of the little ones she was with were asking her about him. It was becoming increasingly difficult to deflect the questions as her other coworkers joined in the interrogation. Stacey gave all the standard answers: ‘We’re taking things slow,’ ‘We just started going out,’ and, of course, ‘We’ll get there when we get there.’ Her colleagues just wouldn’t let up though. Finally, the one who had started the whole thing chose to point out that she wasn’t getting any younger and that a vixen, even a crossbred one like her, in her late twenties who didn’t have a mate was highly unusual. This caused Stacey to react quite badly, growling at the offending caraval, frightening those around them.

Pointing a claw at the caraval in warning, Stacey stated “If you know what’s good for you, I’d keep your trap shut Raegan. If anyone has room to talk about waiting for so long, it definitely isn’t you.” Rising to her full height, Stacey still wasn’t quite enough to appear threatening, but that didn’t matter to the mixed vixen. She glared at the caraval with a withering look. “You’re the last mammal who should talk on the subject.”

“What’s going on here?” Finn asked as he approached the group. The fennec had heard Stacey’s growl and chose to make his way over to see what was happening. The caraval that had apparently started this confrontation had a fearful expression etched on her muzzle. Finn glanced at Stacey, who looked so puffed up that one would think she was going to explode like a cartoon character. He didn’t fight when she grabbed his paw and led him out of the room towards their shared living quarters. Finn watched as she closed the door, locking it, before turning around and sliding down it, putting her head in her paws, sniffling. The fennec tod was dumbfounded, not knowing what was going on, but felt that he needed to do something. So he did the only thing that came to his mind.

Stacey let out a startled gasp at feeling Finn’s paws cup the sides of her muzzle and laying a featherlight kiss on top of her head. She looks up at him, finding concern within his eyes. Looking away, Stacey said “Sorry. It’s just that Raegan is such a…” Shaking her head, she sighed. “Never mind.”

“Ya wanna talk ‘bout it?” Finn offered in question. He really wasn’t sure how it was possible, but within seconds he found himself relaxing on the couch with Stacey resting her head on his lap as he stroked her ears. All of it just came pouring out of her. Stacey bared her heart to him, told him things that no one else knew about her. Finn simply listened as she told her story, not interrupting even
once. She didn’t hold anything back from him, telling him everything: Her first crush, her first kiss, every male she tried to date but ended up dumped. She told him about how when she was younger her father wanted her to do what her mother did, which was exotic dancing, to rake in the cash. Then, she dropped a bombshell that inverted Finn’s world.

“There was this fennec tod when I was younger,” Stacey whispered, emotionally exhausted. “He was such a bizarre mammal, but he always made me laugh. I only ever met him a couple of times. There was this one occasion, when I maybe 17, that I ran into him while he was performing street magic. For his last trick, he needed a volunteer. He spotted me and hauled me out in front of everyone. He asked me to think of my favorite flower, to focus on it. Then…”

“A flurry of cherry blossoms came out of nowhere, and the fennec tod said, ‘Only such a beautiful female could use my magic to create something so lovely.’” Finn finished. He felt Stacey tense before she shifted to look at him. They stared into each other’s eyes for what seemed to be eons.

Finn would never forget that day, couldn’t even if he tried. It had been just prior to meeting Nick, when he hustled solo. Street magicians had been a big thing at the time, but very few mammals managed to make it happen. That particular day, Finn hadn’t had a clue what to expect. He tended to set up his area in a part of town that often had heavy pedestrian traffic. There would always be a crowd that’d gather around him for his performances, and one mammal that’d stand out. She’d show up for every one of his performances. Finn found himself fascinated with her constant attendance and wonder if she actually thought he was that good. On that day, he called her to assist him, wanting to thank her for always coming to the show. He had chosen cherry blossoms due to the necklace she constantly wore.

Staring at the vixen whose head was on his lap, Finn wondered how it was even possible that he hadn’t recognized her. Sure, it had been a couple of years since he had last done a performed as a street magician, but for him not to recognize her, he felt like a fucking dumbass. He couldn’t stop himself from what he did next. Leaning forward, he pressed his lips to hers. Finn slowly shifted them so that they were better positioned on the couch. Being slightly shorter of the two, Finn pulled her on top of him.

In Stacey’s mind, it was if Finn had cast a spell on her. All it took to steal the breath from her lungs was that kiss. She didn’t resist when he shifted them so that she was over him. It was as if their lips were magnetized. They only separated for a split moment of time to catch their breath before the pull brought their lips back together. Neither could find it within themselves to stop when someone knocked on the door. They simply ignored it, continuing to savor the feel of the other pressed up against them.

So many thoughts, ideas, concepts flitted through each of their minds as the two continued to relish the feelings they were experiencing. It escaped their notice when Stacey’s blouse fell to the ground and Finn’s shirt joining it not much later. Later, they would wonder when they had moved to the bed. For now, the two were far too busy getting tangled within the sheets, running their claws through the other’s fur, taking the screams of passion into their maw, so that they didn’t alert anyone with superb hearing of their activities.

Stacey whimpered into Finn’s maw as she felt his cock’s tip run up and down the crease of her pussy lips. A small part of her mind, which retained rationality, tried to remind her that they had only known one another for a couple of hours, at most. They hadn’t gone a courting outing either. The futile attempt was made in vain. She wanted, needed, this more than anything she ever imagined possible. Another part of her pointed out that she had known him for a lot longer, but hadn’t realized it until now. Her legs wrapped themselves around his waist.
Unable to breathe anything in except the scent of the oh so attractive female beneath him, Finn bucked his hips involuntarily. His brain was foggy with the smell of her arousal. A tugging sensation in his loins told him that his knot had appeared. This caused him to remember where he was and who he was with. When coherence returned to him, Finn found that he was inside her up to her hymenal flesh. It took every ounce of self-control to pull his dick out of her warm crevice. He didn’t make it entirely out when his eyes caught the glint in hers. It was the only warning he got before her legs, which were vicelike around his waist, slammed him forward hilting him into her, knot pressed tightly to the outside of her lower lips.

Letting out a soft, euphoric moan, Stacey began to shed tears of joy while laughing wetly. She had done it, or more accurately her instincts had. No longer was she a virgin, but at the same time a piece of her died on the inside. Stacey could feel Finn throbbing within the clutches of her inner walls, could feel him growl gently with his muzzle pressed into her chest. That feeling of having him inside her, there was no greater feeling than that in her mind. As Finn continued to thrust into her, Stacey regained some mental clarity. The dawn of realization struck her so forcefully that the vixen tensed up, which in turn caused the walls of her pussy to clamp down on Finn’s cock.

That broke Finn from the mental haze in which he had lost himself. Raising his head to look her in the eye, Finn spoke in a voice that was thick with lust, yet was soft with tender passion. “Tell me what you want, Stace. I need to know. Please, tell me what it is that you need of me.” There was no going back from this, for either of them. Finn could feel her opening to accept his knot, which was demanding entrance to the warmth within her. This was the greatest challenge he ever found himself taking head-on. Every single one of his muscles was stock-still, not moving even a fraction of a nanometer. If he moved, that would result in loss of control.

There were so many ways to answer Finn’s question, but Stacey could only come up with one. “Do it, Finn. Tie me. Make me yours, now and forever. I… I can’t see myself with anyone other than you, even if we’ve only really known each other for such a short span of time. So, knot me, pump me full of your seed, fill me to the brim, and make sure that everyone knows to whom I belong.” Stacey could see the impact that her words had on the fennec tod. She knew that these next words would break him. “Take me, Finn.”

That did it. Like, really did it. The words didn’t just break Finn. They stripped him of his sanity. It was as if he devolved, reverting back into the primal state of their ancestors. Finn snarled as he began to rut her with every intention of doing exactly what she told him. He slammed his hips into her so strongly that their bed, which wasn’t really that large, started to rock, scrape against the floor, and make the headboard hit the wall. His feral mental state reacted to the sounds of pure pleasure that this female, his mate, let loose. Finn finished with an incredibly powerful slam of his hips into hers, knotting the vixen, and pouring a large amount of cum directly into her womb.

Biting down on her lip to try and stop herself from screaming in ecstasy, Stacey gripped Finn with as much strength as she could muster. Both were panting pretty heavily as the exhilaration of what just happened ebbed. The vixen could feel Finn’s load inside her. With a gentle, tender touch, Stacey ran her claws through Finn’s fur. She inhaled sharply as he released a few more spurts occasionally, accompanied by a grunt. By the time he was finished, Stacey felt slightly heavier and wondered if she looked it too. They simply laid there for a couple of moments until Finn’s knot went down and he slipped out of her.

Before either of them could speak a word, the door to their living quarters opened. It was as if they transformed into lightning. Impacting the door so hard that it shut with a resounding slam. Stacey raced over to their clothes, dressed, then tossed Finn’s at him. Switching places, so that Stacey was keeping the door closed and Finn was getting dressed, they heard a string of profane words, which let them immediately identify the mammal as Finn’s mother.
Once Finn was dressed, they opened the door to let Agatha Fennixon into the room. However, she
didn’t take a single step inside. There were a number of reasons, but the primary one was that the
room positively reeked of recent sex, pheromones, and carnal delight. There was also the fact that
Stacey’s unique scent had changed, which for foxes could only mean one thing and one thing only.
She honestly didn’t know whether to let out a celebratory ‘hallelujah’ or yell at them. True, she
wanted them together, but Agatha had still expected them to at least go on a proper outing first. The
expression on her Finn’s muzzle, however, had her sigh and say “Can I get my things out of there, so
that I can move to another set of living quarters?” There was simply no way in Heaven, in Hell, or
on Earth she wanted to stay in the same room as the two of them now.

**The Marshlands District of Zootopia**

“Sound off,” Supreme Commander Deego ordered through his headset. He was answered by all the
mammals that had been assigned to accompany him out to the Marshlands District of Zootopia. Their
numbers were a grand total of 50 strong. They were also aided by approximately 20 to 30
mercenaries from the Undercity, which was a surprise for him, but one he was glad to get. Most of
the mercenaries present with them were either former military or military trained, so their presence
was appreciated by everyone.

McHorn was the last one to report in, having only arrived about three minutes prior to moving out.
The rhino was still having a difficult time getting over what he discovered in that hidden
underground chamber. It was going to haunt him for a long time; That much was a fact. He had
never seen such atrociousness in all his years as an officer than what he found within. McHorn felt ill
just remembering the discovery. Trying to push the images from his mind, he awaited orders from his
group leader. He didn’t know if it was a stroke of fortune, but getting placed in the same group as
Supreme Commander Deego was an honor.

Over in another group, Raoul Mauler, still a little bit tender from earlier, was squatting back against a
large tree trunk, looking through the messages on his phone. For the past several hours, the ZIB’s
Department of Internal Affairs had carefully scrutinized the dossiers of every mammal Scarlett
Reddington had named with a fine-tooth comb. SSA Mauler would receive regular updates on the
progress of that investigation. The most recent had shown that every name provided so far had been
right on the money. ‘108 down, 72 to go,’ Mauler thought to himself. The ZIB’s Zootopian office
employed some 500 odd mammals, approximately 270 were predators, which meant they were
exempt from the DIA’s investigation. That left 50 prey agents that weren’t corrupt. While to some
that would seem like good news, Mauler knew that meant little in the long run.

No one was sure what exactly set it off, but as the first group moved forward towards the cabin the
Chancellor was said to be located, multiple anti-troop IEDs exploded, sending shrapnel everywhere,
causing serious injuries. This brought everyone to a halt. Anti-troop IEDs normally had a distinct
smell that any trained sniffer could detect. Which begged the question: How had none of them
picked up the scent?

Examining the surrounding area slowly, S.C. Deego found his answer a few yards from his position.
“Dammit! Everyone fall back.” Hidden a couple of yards away, almost completely out of sight, was
the smoldering remnants of a small fire. Based on experience and an educated guess, S.C. Deego
figured that the fires had been used to burn scent neutralizer oils, therefore, eliminating the smell of
the IEDs in the area. It was a simple trick, but an effective one. “Alright, I need everyone to listen
carefully. We’ve got scent neutralizer oils being smoldered all over the place. Tread forward
carefully. Look out for IEDs and other traps.”

Everyone heeded the warnings with care as they crept forward. SSA Raoul Mauler stayed close to
Torbjörn Schwarzenberg, the older bear being outfitted with an assault cannon. Mauler chose to stay
as close as possible, feeling a little out of his depth. McHorn moved at a sloth’s pace, so that he could study his surroundings before continuing onward. Supreme Commander Deego’s own movements were pure muscle memory, maneuvering through the terrain with ease accumulated from years of experience in warzones.

After what seemed like hours, though only being a few minutes, and deactivating countless traps, the large company of military and law enforcement officials arrived at the cabin. The structure left much to be desired in terms of appearance, but as it was only meant to be a hideout, it sufficed. They set up a perimeter so that if the Chancellor was inside, he wouldn’t be able to escape. Deego, McHorn, and Mauler all crept forward as inaudibly as possible. No sounds could be heard coming from inside the cabin, making them suspicious.

Slowly opening the door, McHorn let Mauler and Deego enter first as they had more than sufficient firepower than him. Following behind them, McHorn entered the building, gun leveled. Looking around, one would expect some kind of…anything to be present, but it was barren of any decorations. Lowering his weapon, McHorn asked “Did we get bad intel?”

Deego shook his head. “We had satellite imagery that showed that there was a mammal here not even an hour ago. He must have found a way to slip out.” He pulled out his cell to make a call, only to find that he had no signal at all. “ Either of you have signal?” He inquired.

McHorn and Mauler both took their phones out to see that they too lacked telephonic signal. McHorn tried contacting the ZPD’s HQ via radio, but that failed too. Mauler knelt and extracted a satellite phone from a modified holster around his ankle. He dialed his own mobile number and heard the message: ‘We’re sorry, but the number you’re trying to contact is unavailable. Please try another.’ That at least told him that it could get through, so he handed it to S.C. Deego.

Thanking the bear, Deego dialed the number for Chief Bogo. The line rang three times before connecting. “Chief? He isn’t here. … When? … I see. … No. We seem to be in a dead zone. No standard signals in or out. …” Looking to McHorn and Mauler, Deego mouthed “Look for a signal jammer.”

While S.C. Deego stayed on the phone, receiving updates, McHorn and Mauler began searching for the possible signal jammer. Mauler’s focus was on the walls and ceiling, thinking it could be hidden within them. McHorn, on the other hoof, had a sneaking suspicion and focused on the floor. As it turned out, McHorn’s hunch hit the mark, for in the corner was a trapdoor disguised to match the surrounding floor pattern. Opening it, the rhino feared he’d make another horrific discovery, but thankfully, once it was opened, all he found was a ladder that descended a couple of feet down into what appeared to be a tunnel.

Being far too large to fit, the three had another officer investigate. When he returned, he informed them that there was indeed a signal jammer down there, which he deactivated, as well as a tunnel that led back towards the city. He surmised that the hut they were standing in was the final stop for the old escape tunnels that were once used during war evacuations. He then explained that there were tons of others tunnel down there, making it impossible to determine where their target had exited within the city.

With the signal jammer now inoperative, Deego contacted Bogo, informing him of their impending return. The buffalo’s sole response was for them to hurry, despite the fact the unrest had been quelled momentarily. Rounding everyone up in order for them to make their way back to Zootopia, Deego got into his transport and led the convoy. Right before they reached the city, his vehicle exploded.
If anyone can explain how to share a playlist on YouTube, please leave a comment. I've got almost all of the music I listen to while writing this compiled onto a single list. All I need now is finish it for sharing.

Ian's testing begins next week, and we've been performing practice exams since Day One. I can't express exactly how relieved we'll both be once this is over. If I could convert my brain's pain to electricity, I could probably supply the world with enough continuous power to last a year.
Chapter Summary

Chaos ensues, or it's at least implied. Try imagining the madness ordinary people would go through for this.

Chapter Notes

Wanted to post this last week, but real life got in the way. Long story short: Double walking strep pneumonia. I was asymptomatic until last Thursday afternoon. Since then, I've been in the hospital with only my phone for company because it wasn't ordinary strep; More accurately I had double walking MRSA pneumonia.

Anyway, I'm back. Big thanks once again to my editor, without who I probably wouldn't have had this to post.

Also, PLAYLIST: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLS0GiesEUPnbWuyylan89c5zesO1dXocX

Unfortunately, some of the videos were deleted and I'm now having to relocated them. The account is from a long ass time ago, so the name isn't correct. I'm just too lazy to change it back to my real name. Yes, I changed my name then changed it back. Not the point.

To the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 22: 3...2...1...0!!!

????

‘Where am I?’

‘How did I get here?’

‘What am I?’

‘Who am I?’

It didn’t have an answer to these questions. While there was the sensation of floating, there was also the feeling as though it was hurtling through a maelstrom within this endless void. It tried desperately to remember anything about itself, but nothing came to mind. It tried to understand what was happening, yet that was beyond its comprehension. It felt robbed of all its senses. Well, all except the ability to experience pain.
It vaguely recalled feeling something similar at some point previously. It felt as if lightning coursed through its nerves. Its blood boiled as if it were molten lava. Its muscles might as well have been stone with how heavy they were. The pain was excruciating, to the point that it wanted to wail continuously in agony.

It wouldn’t have mattered if it wailed anyway. It couldn’t hear anything. Nor could it see, smell, or taste. All it could feel was pain, agonizing, unbearable pain. It wanted to cry, to beg for relief, but it couldn’t as it was unable to speak.

As it hurtled through the darkness that was all encompassing, it wondered ‘Why? Why am I being subjected to this torture? For what purpose have I been chosen to endure this?’

That was when it heard it, the first sound since it could possibly remember. It was a giggle, but not one of malice, much like a sadistic bastard who was getting off on watching it suffer. No, this giggle was something else, something that triggered an instinctual response. It no longer felt as though it was a leaf trapped in the gale of a storm. Now it felt as if it was floating, suspended in midair.

The tiniest pinprick of light appeared in the distance. Moving in that direction, it could feel something restraining its movements, as if attempting to pull it in the opposite direction; However, it resisted, and fought to make its way to that minuscule source of light. There was another giggle, followed by a feminine voice saying, “Come on! Hurry up!” It pushed forward with renewed strength.

A male’s voice came next. “That’s it! Fight! You can do it!” The voice was so familiar to it, but could unable to recall whose.

Another voice joined in, also female. “Don’t give up! Keep fighting!” This voice was also familiar, and it wished it could put names to them all.

The next voice was yet another female, but this one he knew instinctively. It would recognize that voice anywhere. “You ready to make the world a better place, Nick?”

Nick. Yes, that was his name. Yet, it still didn’t know who it was. A name meant nothing. It was just something anyone would use to identify themselves. A name doesn’t tell you who someone is, but who they see themselves as.

That force trying to drag it back into the darkness increased, but ‘Nick’ kept resisting its pull. The voice of his mate returned, encouraging him to continue onward. It, ‘Nick,’ finally managed to speak through the intense agony it, he, felt. “J-J-Judy.”

Gravity shifted, causing Nick to lose balance. He found himself feeling like he was climbing the face of a cliff. Holding on with all his might, Nick forced himself to move towards the light, towards Judy. He continued to resist whatever it was trying to keep him from getting there.

Suddenly, without warning, that thing disappeared. Other than that tiny pinpoint of light, there was nothing. There were no sounds, no smells, nothing except that dot of light.

Resuming his climb, Nick pondered what exactly this was. A dream, maybe? What was this place?

The light was getting brighter, but the closer Nick got, the more he realized that it seemed to be some sort of rift. Upon reaching it, he slipped through to find himself somewhere he didn’t recognize. Looking around to decipher visual clues, Nick discovered that he had no conceivable idea where he was. Hearing movement, Nick spun in its direction and took off after it.

Sprinting through the lush forest, Nick weaved in and out of the trees and brush. Arriving at the edge, Nick paused briefly before stepping past the threshold. What he saw caught him by surprise.
There, in the distance, was a city that looked lost to time. Not even winded, Nick shot forward at top speed once again towards it.

The closer Nick got, the more he became aware that something was off about this place. He had almost reached the outer limits of the city when the tod had to dodge an attack. Quickly countering, Nick found himself in a deadlock with what appeared to be a semi-evolved mongoose.

“Oh, boy. What the hell have I gotten myself into?” Nick asked himself aloud. Sensing another attack coming from his left, he raised his left arm to block, stepped to his left, and punched that assailant’s solar plexus with his right paw, sending the attacker its knees before evading another attack from the original mongoose combatant. “2 vs. 1? Seriously? Shit!”

“Watch your head!” Shay shouted, swinging a large branch as Nick ducked, striking another warrior, sending it flying. “You alright?” He asked Nick, kicking yet another in the chest. However, he nearly got struck by a spear carrier. He was saved when a striped paw grabbed the shaft of the spear, snapping it.

“He’s fine, doggy. You need to focus on keeping your eyes open.” Zannah retorted. Using the piece of the spear she had in paw, the tigress threw it directly into the head of the opponent with whom Judy was locked in combat. “Judy! Heads up!”

Nick looked around to see that everyone had just joined him. Harrison was facing off with a bear. Jack and Skye were tag-teaming a rhinoceros. Judy was taking on three hares. Shay was now using the remaining part of the spear its would have been attacker had as a baton. Zannah was exchanging blows with a lion. “When did you all get here?” he had to ask.

“Just now.” Judy answered as kicked one of her opponents in the head. “But, we’ll discuss all this later. Focus on surviving this battle for right now.”

None of them argued with Judy on that. Redoubling their efforts, all of them didn’t realize that the area was beginning to change around them. Even without them noticing the alterations to their surroundings, they all began to adapt how they fought.

Losing track of time, all were stunned when the last adversary fell, and they scanned the area. They were all now in a large white expanse with nothing as far as their eyes could perceive, besides each other. Then they noticed that all of them were beginning to fade away. After that, they lost consciousness.

The Centre – Privately Owned Classified Blacksite Training Facility

M watched as the initiates began to rouse from their slumber, wondering if they remembered anything about what caused them to fall unconscious. The margay was sitting next to Fenrir, Carlos, and Josef at a table playing a round of poker as they waited for their recruits to wake. Unsurprisingly, Nick was the first one to awaken, and was quickly followed by Judy. M stood to make his way over to them, pulling out a penlight. Standing above Nick, M asked “Can you follow the light with only your eyes for me?” Seeing the proper responses from the vulpine tod, M did the same with the bunny doe, who also gave the proper responses. “Glad to see you’re alright. Let me check on the others, then we can talk.”

Fenrir aided Nick and Judy, both of whom were a little weak at the moment, to a rather large Barcalounger for them to rest, but remain upright. Josef threw a blanket over the two, while Carlos provided them each a cup of red clove tea mixed with honey. The tod and doe accepted each offering graciously and with a thank you. The two then watched as they repeated the routine with Jaxon and Skye, Harrison and Zannah, then Shay and Honey. When they were all situated, everyone
looked at M for an explanation.

The margay sat down across from the pairs while the others stood behind them. M knew that what he was about to reveal would probably be taken badly, but he honestly didn’t give a fuck. His five-hour window was now down to 4.5 hours, and he had a self-imposed deadline to keep. “What do you remember about our arrival?” Getting nothing except shakes of the head from them, M said “I see. Well, right after we arrived on site, I had you all sedated using this.” He pulled out a tranquilizer rifle and displayed it to them. No one said a word, so he continued. “What do you remember experiencing while unconscious?” This question was important.

All of them closed their eyes, trying to remember. They could recall everything. What astonished them the most though, was there were other memories they could recollect that they didn’t remember experiencing. Most of them involved extensive training they hadn’t undergone, yet, somehow, had. They took turns explaining what they could recall to M, who nodded after each finished.

“What exactly did you do to us?” Harrison asked the margay, looking him directly in the eye. “How is it that we can remember things that didn’t happen as if we experienced them firstpaw? Where is the connection between you sedating us and these… fabricated memories?” The others made sounds of agreement, wanting to know the answers to Harrison’s questions as well.

Pointing towards the bedlike mechanisms they had just extracted them from, M stated “Each of those machines are called an Animus Matrix. Originally, they were used to recommission decommissioned agents who had undergone mindwipes; However, after discovering a potent side effect, the Zoolympian Empire’s Military R&D had them repurposed. It allows one to re-experience a mammal’s genetic memories, or those of others. If one were to continue using it for extended periods, they begin to suffer from what’s known as the ‘Bleeding Effect.’ Essentially, the user assimilates the skills and abilities of those whose genetic memories they’re experiencing and are capable of using them themselves.” Sighing, M added “By doing this, I’m hoping to condense everything I need to teach you into a tinier timespan than my original goal of five hours. The main reason I knocked you all unconscious is that by doing so, you stay in longer without the complication of desynchronizing from the memories.”

Nick had no problem understanding M’s explanation, and by the looks of the others, they didn’t either. Yes, it was extremely risky, but the reward was also extremely high as well. By condensing everything this way, they would be able to undergo years, even decades, of training in only the pawful of hours available to them. “Then we need to go back in there. Sooner rather than later.” Nick’s words were followed with sounds of agreement from the others.

M, Fenrir, Carlos, and Josef helped their trainees back into their Animus Engines, got them situated, then gave them powerful sedatives plus intravenous nutritional supplements. Right before they fell asleep, the margay informed them that he was going to load multiple genetic memory sequences, so they needed to be prepared for the shifts between experiences. After that, the initiates reentered stasis. M looked at the others. “Well, back to our card game.”

Zootopia Police Academy

Scarlett Reddington stood tall despite the shackles that adorned her wrists, ankles, and waist. Currently waiting for the transport that would bring her to the ZPD’s Precinct One HQ, the aged vixen looked at Rey Vulpes. The tod had been the single consistency during her time here, bringing her food, correspondence, and such. Scarlett had held short conversations with him a couple of times, but he never really spoke about anything without a bit of prompting. And so, it fell to her to once again get the small talk rolling. “You going to accompany me the entire trip?”

“Those were my orders,” Rey replied. Eyes flicking to the older vixen, Rey waited for her next
attempt. When she didn’t make one, he asked “Do you have any idea as to why you’re being transferred? Besides being a criminal of course.”

Smiling, Scarlett said “I may be a criminal, Mr. Vulpes, but I’m a criminal out of necessity.” Patting him on the arm as best she could, Scarlett added “My reasons are my own, but don’t think even for an instant that I’m one of the baddies. I’m here to help, whether you want to believe it or not.” When the door to the room opened, Scarlett let Rey lead her out towards the front, where there was a heavily armoured car waiting for them. Climbing inside, followed by Rey and the other officer, the vixen sat with her back against the wall separating them from the driver, facing the backdoors. ‘Here we go,’ she thought, ‘I sure hope this works, Jameson. We have one shot at this.’

Once they had the backdoors locked and sealed, Rey and the other officer, whose name he didn’t know, took seats on either side. Rey checked over his gear carefully. Over the past couple of days, he had taken to studying all the guidebooks that the academy had to offer in their library. The term ‘by-the-book’ wasn’t something he ever thought would apply to him, but here he was performing a by-the-book examination. When the vehicle started moving, Rey looked up at his fellow escort officer. “Do we know what to expect within the city?”

“A lot of destruction,” was the answer the other cop gave as he checked over his own weapon and gear. That was all that was spoken for a while, but both continually cast glances at Scarlett Reddington, as if waiting for her to say something. They sensed something was wrong the moment the transport slowed down to a halt. There was no way they had already reached Precinct One.

Rey watched as his fellow officer got out to investigate. He stayed with their detainee, not wanting to breach protocol. The sound of shackles hitting the ground caused him to turn and see Scarlett stretching herself. “How…?”

“I’m not just a pretty face, Rey. I do have skills of my own, you know.” Scarlett opened the rear doors to the transport, revealing a team of polar bears wearing full suits. One had the now unconscious officer that had been with her and Rey in his arms. “Hello, boys. Nice to see you. He isn’t dead, is he?”

The lead polar bear shook his head, signifying that he was simply knocked out. The other polar bears quickly went into motion, aiding Scarlett out, throwing the unconscious officer back inside, as well as the driver. Pointing at Rey, one asked “What do we do with this one, Miss?”

Looking at Rey, Scarlett replied “Nothing. I need him to get to Precinct One intact. Give him the keys to the transport, then we can leave.” Moving close to Rey, she said “When you get there, tell Chief Tobias Bogo that I’m with Antoine de Medici-Borgia. He’ll understand. Stay safe.” With those words, the vixen jumped into the polar bears’ vehicle, waving farewell to Rey as they drove off.

Rey watched as their vehicle disappeared into the distance. Clambering out and into the front of the armoured transport, the tod did his best to wake up the driver. By the time he managed it, there was no way of catching up with Scarlett Reddington, so they drove towards Precinct One to report the incident.

<MEANWHILE>

Scarlett Reddington changed out of that hideous prisoner’s garb in which she had been encased for transfer. Having on a variety of occasions been forced to wear nothing but her fur, Scarlett wasn’t bothered by the gazes obtained from the polar bears. “Sorry, boys. I’m mated.” Smiling at the grumblings they gave in response, Scarlett maneuvered her way to the front seat once she was dressed in a very fine dress, courtesy of Mr. Big. She had to admit, the dress looked as if it was suitable for battle.
The journey to Mr. Big’s mansion was a quick one, as the polar bear driving used nothing but backroads, which cut the travel time down considerably. Upon arrival, they weren’t greeted with fanfare, but with a shout of ‘ATTENTION!’ and the mercenaries present falling in line. The polar bears signaled for them to continue their previous actions while Scarlett made a beeline for Mr. Big’s inner office.

“Ah, Ms. Scarlett. Welcome to my humble home,” Mr. Big greeted. The arctic shrew was surrounded by various others, one looked remarkably like Jerry Vole, only older. They all wore personalized business suits that indicated to which Family they belonged. “Please, my dear, take a seat, we were just about to begin.”

Taking the indicated seat, Scarlett looked at those present. Some of them she could easily name, but there were a few she didn’t know. ‘Newly appointed Family Heads, I’m guessing,’ she thought. Clearing her throat, Scarlett greeted them each in turn as best she could. She saved Mr. Big for last, as it was he who oversaw the rest and was there for the one who held the most power. “I’d like to thank you for your assistance, Antoine. Now, I’m not sure how you wish to start, but I want to have the floor first.”

“I have already informed the others that if you graced us with your presence that you’d be the primary speaker,” Mr. Big replied. “By all means, please, go ahead.” The arctic shrew gestured for her to proceed.

Over the next couple of minutes, Scarlett gave a review on everything they knew about the current state of things, from the knowledge that the Chancellor was in the city to the counteractions being taken against him. Coming to the end of the review, the vixen started the minor speech she had prepared earlier. “Most, if not all, of the Chancellor’s supporters are now either on the run or imprisoned thanks to information provided by Camila Sandifur, Andrew Bellwether, and myself. Even so, we need to move quickly, yet cautiously. The wrong move could cause the populace to break out in another wave of mass panic. If this happens, there is no guarantee that mammals won’t die. I’m aware that the residents of the Undercity have allied with us. They’re a great help; However, we still need more. The ratio of civilians to lawmen is still 15:1. I know that the Family de Medici-Borgia are helping, and I’m grateful, but I have seen nothing from the remainder of you. So, I’m here to ask one question. Why?”

Mr. Big watched as those who had yet to send aid shifted uncomfortably. Among them was, his daughter, Fru-Fru’s husband. The young shrew had always been a thorn in his side, but his darling daughter had asked him to give her ‘humble hubby’ a chance. Being the doting father that he aimed to be, Mr. Big had done just that, but the little ignoramus caused more problems than not. He held no love for his daughter’s husband other than one would a son-in-law. The sole reason Mr. Big even tolerated his presence here was due to him being a Family Head. Not that his family truly held any power, but it did have more reach than most others. “She asked you all a question. I myself would also like to hear the answer.”

One by one, the other Family Heads tried to explain their reasons. They listed nearly everything from ‘War breeds profit,’ to ‘The econometrics of wartime supply and demand.’ Each excuse made the fires of wrath with the elder shrew grow in intensity. By the time that Fru-Fru’s husband’s turn came, it was clear that Mr. Big was compiling a list of names to ‘strike from the records,’ so to speak. The young shrew was obviously terrified, but when he spoke, his voice was clear as crystal.

“I have not gotten involved because…” Fru-Fru’s husband hesitated for a moment before finishing, “…I thought that it would be unwise to get involved. I see now that I made a horrible mistake. You can expect my family’s enforcers to take action as soon as I’m free to give the order.”
A tiny smile appeared on Mr. Big, which is a rarity. ‘At least he’s honest about why, unlike the rest of them.’ Refocusing his gaze on the vixen across from him, Mr. Big said “You can expect the full support of everyone present. If they fail to do so, they will be excommunicated.” His words had the intended effect of causing the rest to shudder.

Scarlett nodded, but remained seated. There was one last order of business the vixen had to take care of before she could depart. “Thank you. Now, before I go, I have something I’ve been dying to know. For what purpose did your subordinates gun down those under my command at the Yliaster Group?”

Expression shifting grimly, Mr. Big answered “That’s a private matter, Ms. Reddington. I cannot tell you. I will give you this hint though. Their reason is the same as why you became who you are today. Someone was taken from them, they were never given closure, and, after years of waiting for answers, decided it was time to acquire them. They came to me simply because it was mutually beneficial, and the timing was right. While you have my sincerest apologies for the actions that were taken, I’m not going to say I wouldn’t do it again if given such an opportunity. I’m sure you wouldn’t either.”

Cryptic as that was, Scarlett did understand the message that Mr. Big wanted to get across. She had lived that way of life herself, therefore, it wasn’t hard to accept that explanation. Still, it had her wonder exactly who it was that this mammal wanted found, and why. “I can accept that. I’ll take my leave now. Have a pleasant day.”

**Crisis Station**

With the city of Zootopia back to some semblance of normalcy, it became imperative that the Chancellor was dealt with before panic once again gripped the general population. That being said, A.G. Hoover, now recovered from his confrontation with Jacen Carno, called an emergency summit. Present were A.G. Hoover himself, along with Supreme Commander Deego, who had managed to survive the explosion of his vehicle, Police Commissioner Terry Catlin, Police Chief Tobias Bogo, Acting Mayor Spencer Wolvenett, ZIB SSA Raoul Mauler, and the Undercity’s spokesmammal Torbjörn Schwarzenberg.

“So,” A.G. Hoover began, “we know that the Chancellor, Jacen Carno, is currently here in Zootopia. We know that he’s using the subterranean tunnel systems to move undetected. We are capable of speculating that he’s read the Shadow Ledger, which means he knows a great deal of Zootopia’s secrets, including the network of old prohibition passageways throughout the city. We know that he has bioweapons planted and ready to use. Is there anything that I’ve failed to mention?” Hoover inquired, scanning the expressions of the others.

“That’s pretty much it, if I’m not mistaken,” Mauler answered. “I mean, we already know that he’s had sleepers within various agencies, but as of a few minutes ago, we’ve cleaned house. According to the most recent reports from General Bogo, we also have confirmation that the emergency evacuations have resumed and approximately 40%-45% of the remaining population have been successfully relocated.”

“I’ve finally gotten updated reports from our forensic lab techs,” Chief Bogo stated. “The mummified remains found by Officer McHorn in the hidden underground room of Jacen Carno’s old home in Shiregrove has been identified as one Melinda Redding, a red wolf runaway reported missing over two decades ago. DNA tests show that she’s the mother of the Jacen Carno’s two deceased children. The DNA tests also proved that the pig skeleton are the remains of Mervis Swinton, the former mayor. We’re currently examining every scrap of evidence our recon team discovered. Hopefully, it’ll provide us with some insight.”
“All of the wolf packs have prepared themselves for war,” Spencer reported, “most have undergone either military or law enforcement training from a young age. They’ll be ready to act in the event that things take a turn for the worst. I’ve also received word that the different lion prides are also mobilizing.”

Police Commissioner Catlin ran his claws through his headfur as he said “I’ve been staying in contact with the various hospitals and medical units throughout the city. From what I’ve managed to gather, all of them are still fully functional, primed and ready to provide whatever help they can. Pharmacies are stocked, but until we know exactly what it is that the Chancellor’s bioweapons are armed with…” He trailed off, leaving the rest up to their imaginations.

“Those remaining in the Undercity will soon deliver a shipment of gear topside,” Schwarzenberg informed the others. “Most of it will be weaponry and armour, but there will be some medical supplies as well. If necessary, more can be delivered at a moment’s notice. Our forces are currently performing sweeps to try locating the faggot responsible for all this. So far, nothing.”

“With the city on lockdown, the military is setting up a quarantine, effectively sealing off Zootopia from the rest of the world,” Deego explained. “All known points of ingress and egress have been sealed. With the exception of the evacuees, not a single soul is getting in or out of Zootopia until we’ve finished this.”

Suddenly, a mobile phone began to ring. Everyone looked at each other until Chief Bogo realized that it was his. Answering, he said, “This is Chief Bogo.” Bogo remained silent as he listened to the mammal on the other end of the call. When he did speak again it was to say “I see. Thank you for calling to inform me. I’ll make certain that it’s relayed to the rest. Stay safe.” Hanging up, Bogo stated “That was Andrew Bellwether. Originally, he was one of the mammals who worked on weaponizing the biological materials being used for the Chancellor’s bioweapons. He’s now working as a mole alongside some others who’ve turned on the Chancellor.”

“What was he calling to tell you?” A.G. Hoover inquired. “You did nothing but listen for a majority of the time. I’m guessing that whatever it is has to be of great importance.”

“Indeed, it is,” Bogo replied. “First, the Chancellor has him priming the bio-bombs hidden throughout the city. He was given a map indicating their locations, which he is bringing here as we speak. Second, his collaborators have managed to synthesize a counter-serum to the biomaterials being used. The only issue is that while they have the equipment to create it, they don’t have means to manufacture and produce it on a massive scale. Their solution is to provide the different pharmaceutical companies in Zootopia with the ‘blueprints’ to make up for that inability. They’ve already sent the emails, so we should be receiving confirmation soon. Once we have enough, there are two tasks we must undersee: inoculating our servicemammals, and replacing the bio-materials within the bombs with it.”

“You’re going to allow the bombs to decimate the city?” Spencer asked incredulously. He couldn’t begin to comprehend how Chief Bogo would allow that to happen. It was simply incomprehensible to the wolf. It was Supreme Commander Deego who provided him with an explanation.

“While I understand your adversity, there really is no other way to proceed otherwise,” Deego stated matter-of-factly. “We have to make the Chancellor believe that he was successful in his objective. By detonating the bombs, he’ll be lured into a false sense of security, thinking he’s achieved his goal. However, instead of releasing the weaponized biomaterials, the bombs will release the serum designed to counteract it. Yes, the city will be devastated, but eventually you will rebuild, and greater than before. It is a small price to pay compared to the alternatives.”

“Once Andrew Bellwether arrives, I’ll have digital copies of his map leading him to the bombs
distributed to our mammals on the streets,” Bogo informed. “The two main problems we’ll have to figure out how to deal with are how to get the serum to those locations and how to deal with the Chancellor’s civilian supporters. Dawn Bellwether was one of Carno’s lackeys and, during her time as Mayor, there were many who agreed with how she did things. Meaning that by extension they supported Carno. I’m not usually a gambler, but I’d be willing to bet what prey mammals remain in the city are those who’ll side with him.”

“Typically, prey outnumber predators ten to one,” Catlin recited from memory. It was a bit of information that was common knowledge, taught during primary schooling. “We’d need to evacuate at least 70% of Zootopia to have an even playing field. To be fair though, if we can manage to evacuate 65% we may be able to pull it off with minor difficulty, but I don’t think we’d stand a chance at 60%.”

A knock on the door alerted them that Andrew Bellwether had arrived. A.G. Hoover looked at his companions for a moment, then said “What are you all waiting for? Christmas? MOVE!”

**The Chancellor’s Post Office Hideaway**

The voices were getting more frequent. It was disconcerting, to say the least. Hearing Hannibal, his wife, and his children ceaselessly was bringing him to the verge of ruin. It wouldn’t stop no matter what he tried. The Chancellor wondered if it was at this point that they followed through on their threat of destroying him. ‘Hopefully not until I see this city burn to the fucking ground,’ Jacen Carno thought to himself.

Years of planning and waiting patiently for the right time to put it in motion, those were the prices he had paid to get to here. Of course, there had been unforeseen complications that he couldn’t’ve predicted. Officer Hopps being the first on the list, followed closely by Nicholas Wilde. The Chancellor hadn’t anticipated them, even in the slightest of possibilities. All the problems stemmed from their interference. In retrospect, he should have paid closer attention to them after they proved themselves worthy of his attention the first time. He had dismissed them after Hopps’ departure back to Bunnyburrow. Wilde had simply vanished without a trace. He had tasked a couple of his minions to find the tod, but to no avail.

Three months had come and gone before those two reappeared, causing him to take drastic measures. When they brought Bellwether’s actions to the attention of the ZPD, it had caused him no end of trouble. Then, once law enforcement began digging deeper, the ZPD had them go underground, out of his reach. None of his underlings had been able to find out anything on their whereabouts. This had led him to wondering if they were simply waiting for him to slip up so that they could strike him down the moment his guard was down. Therefore it was decided he wouldn’t leave himself open to retaliation.

Glancing at the clock, the Chancellor noted that Andrew Bellwether should be almost through priming the bio-bombs spread throughout Zootopia. A wicked grin took over his muzzle at the thought. ‘Almost time.’ Testing his available range of motion, the Chancellor was pleased to discover he was fully recovered. Rising to his full height, he walked towards the exit.

Zootopia’s streets were still littered with evidence of the mass hysteria from earlier. There were few mammals still wandering the streets, but those who did showed no signs of nervousness. Alarms started going off in his head. Scanning the area, the Chancellor studied them closely. When it dawned on him why he felt the instinctive drive to escape, he wasted no time in doing so. The instant he broke into action, so too did the others on the street. ‘Dammit! How did they find me?’ He thought, infuriated.

Slipping into an alleyway to try and escape, the red wolf quickly climbed a fire escape. Reaching the
first landing, he ripped the ladder away, tossing it to the ground before ascending to the next and repeating the process. His pursuers, unable to follow, split up going to the last and next alleys to climb the fire escapes there. Jacen Carno looked around for a possible way out. Seeing a neighboring building not too far away, he took off in that direction. It would be a bit of a leap, but feeling more fit than ever, he chanced it.

Officer Grizzoli, one of mammals on the Chancellor’s tail, managed to scale a fire escape quickly and ascend to the same roof. Bolting towards the red wolf as a sprint, Grizzoli saw what his intentions were. ‘Oh, no, you don’t.’ Running full tilt, Grizzoli watched as the Chancellor jumped the gap and land on the other side. ‘Look to see if anyone’s following you.’ Almost as if he could hear him, Grizzoli saw the Chancellor stop to check for pursuers. This gave the arctic wolf just enough time to make the leap himself. Making it across, Grizzoli landed with a roll that ended with him back on his hindpaws.

The two wolves glared at each other, in battle ready positions. They slowly began to circle each other, gauging their opponent. It was obvious to both that this confrontation would last long. The only question was who would come out the victor. Grizzoli knew that no one else would probably be able to make the jump, meaning he, like his adversary, was alone. The Chancellor seemed to have caught onto this as well, for a malicious smile made its way across his muzzle. Halting their movements, their eyes took in the minute flexing of muscles that the other made. Then, without any clear signal, the fight began.

Grizzoli lunged forth with his right paw, claws extended. When the Chancellor went to step further into attack range, the arctic wolf switched to a strike with his left, catching the red wolf in the jaw with a rather sickeningly powerful punch. The moment he saw the Chancellor stumble backwards, Grizzoli grabbed him and pulled him to attack again. This time it was a blow to the solar plexus, and he could hear the gasp of pain his opponent let out. Slamming his right hindpaw down on one of the Chancellor’s, Grizzoli heard the crack of bones followed by a howl of agony.

Using all his strength, Jacen Carno shoved the arctic wolf away with enough force to send him flying. He felt the nanomeds begin to take effect, healing him, but in direct combat, they would be useless. He needed to find a way out of this situation, and fast. However, from what he could see, there wasn’t anything that’d be helpful. His only option was to daze the arctic wolf for a couple of seconds then run. Going on the offensive, the red wolf struck a kick to Grizzoli’s abdomen. The blow didn’t have the intended effect, as the arctic wolf wasn’t even fazed. Unsure of what else to do, he waited until his opponent was within range then made a powerful clapping motion at Grizzoli’s head. Both paws struck home on either side, just below Grizzoli’s ears.

The attack stunned Grizzoli, whose ears were now ringing. His balance was thrown off by the blow, and his vision blurred. He stumbled, trying to regain his footing. He couldn’t quite make it out, but Grizzoli was sure his fellow lawmen were shouting something at him. Blinking a few times to bring the world back into focus, Grizzoli saw the Chancellor had escaped. “DAMMIT!!” He shouted, before grabbing the side of his head in pain. His outburst caused a flair of pain that brought back the ringing in his ears.

Jumping into an alleyway dumpster from a lower rooftop, the Chancellor grunted then climbed out. With no way of knowing how close law enforcement was to his position, it was of the utmost importance that he left the area immediately. This proved to be easier said than done. A quick observation of the area showed that there were cops and armed vagrants everywhere. ‘SHIT!! SHIT!! SHIT!!’ He mentally growled. He would have to move quickly to evade detection. Looking towards the other end of the alley, he moved to check what it looked like over there. Fewer mammals to evade, but tighter spaces to maneuver through. Looking back down the alley, he noticed a couple of doors. Quickly checking them, the Chancellor discovered that one was unlocked. Entering, he
locked the door and remained silent, listening as his pursuers passed just outside. ‘Looks like I’ll have to wait a little longer before I can move again,’ he thought to himself.

Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia

One of the most difficult tasks that Dr. Vanessa Aurora ‘Rory’ Wilde had ever undertaken in medical school was performing a Batista procedure during cardio-thoracic surgery on a bumblebee bat newborn. Back then that was considered an achievement worthy of recognition. She had previously thought that nothing would ever be more difficult than that. Oh, how wrong she had been. Staring at the molecular blueprint for the serum meant to counteract the biomaterials being used in the bombs scattered throughout Zootopia, Rory was lucky she could make heads or tails of it. Never before had she seen something so intricate. She thanked the entire Pantheon of the Divine Entities that her role was only to perform inoculations once they had a moderate supply of the stuff.

With the exception of Dr. Pronk Oryx-Antlerson, who Rory had sent home after he suffered a bout of severe anxiety from a nightmare, the entire team was present and studying up on the serum. They had each inoculated one another in turn, to get that out of the way. Pronk had been given his then he was provided with two other vials, one for his husband and one for their new girlfriend, who he wouldn’t name. After Pronk’s departure, Rory had received a call from a number out in Bunnyburrow. It was Bonnie Hopps wishing to thank her for caring for her kits as well as offering her a place to stay if she ever decided to visit with Nick and Judy. That call had warmed her heart tremendously. Following that, she received a text message from a blocked number with the message: ‘ILY.’ That let her know that Jameson was safe and watching over her, giving her a sense of much needed security.

The other teammates had had similar events, such as getting calls from patients and familial members who expressed desires for their safety. Doogie’s family had added how proud they were of him, making his heart skip as it was a very rare occurrence for him to receive those words. As the team finished reading over the data on the serum, it became obvious that none had ever encountered something so sophisticated. Like Dr. Wilde, they too thanked the Pantheon of Divine Entities that it wasn’t they who were stuck in the hospital’s lab manufacturing it.

“I’ve never seen something so complex,” Viktor Wolfstein stated as he placed the file down. “I’m sure glad we’re not the ones working in pharmacology right now.” Hearing grunts of agreement, the wolf inquired “Shall we get going?”

Everyone nodded, stood, then made their way out of their shared office space towards the main area on the first floor, where they joined Ellis, the Chairmammal of the Board of Directors, various nurses, orderlies, and lab techs in getting ready. Ellis directed them to their assigned posts then got everyone attention. Once everyone’s focus was on her, she began to give a run down.

“In approximately five minutes, we’ll begin inoculating the members of law enforcement, military service mammals, and their mercenary allies with the serum created to counteract the biological materials in the bombs throughout the city. We’re doing this on the off chance that we don’t get to them all in time to change the biomaterials. You should have already done yourselves and your teams. Once you have finished inoculating those assigned to you, you are to head home as fast as you can and catch the evacuation train out of the city. Understood?”

With nods of confirmation from everybody, Ellis opened the doors to the hospital. It was a blur as mammals from law enforcement, the military, and the mercenary forces came in, got their injections, and walked out. Moving like a well-oiled machine, the medical staff quickly powered through them all. Some, after finishing their own assigned group, would begin to help their fellow veterinarians get through theirs. Finally, after almost an hour and a half, they were finished and out the doors.
Rory went downstairs to see Fatima Ara, who was secured in the basement sub-level. It had taken some convincing, but she had managed to talk Officer Francine Pennington to agree to help her move the Arabian mare to an even more secure location. “Are we ready?” She asked them upon arriving.

“Yes. Let’s do this,” Francine replied. Rolling Fatima’s hospital bed out, Francine looked at the mare, who nodded. The elephant covered Fatima like a body from the morgue. Following Rory through the maze of hallways, they finally exited where an ambulance waited for them. Loading Mrs. Ara into the Advanced Life Care vehicle, they set her up, then they were off.

“We’re heading to Wilde Manor first, then our destination is roughly twenty miles outside the city,” Rory explained, “It’s an old retreat my husband and I used to use for getaways. We’ll be safe there.” Fatima nodded in thanks then gasped as a Braxton Hicks contraction hit her. Although, she wasn’t anywhere near her due date, Fatima had been getting them for the past couple of hours. It was followed by kick. “Why now of all times do these two need to start kicking?” Fatima asked.

Patting Fatima’s shoulder comfortingly, Rory answered “Consider it a blessing, Fatima. You’re doing something that’s incredibly difficult at your age.”

The trip to Wilde Manor didn’t take long, thanks in part to the lack of traffic. Rory ran inside, grabbed what few things she needed (like the key to the retreat), and raced back out. Hopping into the front with the driver, Rory directed him on how to get to their destination. They were only stopped once, but a flash of their credentials got them through.

Francine called up front “So, I have to ask. I know Nick is your son, that much is apparent, but what’re your thoughts on him and Judy?” Francine hadn’t had much interaction with the two, but it had pained her to see how utterly disreputable the other officers had been to Judy as well as how poorly foxes tended to be treated in general. It was obvious that those two were something special together after what they went through, but Francine knew the struggle that mammals like them faced being with someone outside their own species.

“I think they’re wonderful together,” Rory admitted with a bright smile. “You must understand, though, that Nick and I have always been at odds with how he lived. Growing up he showed no interest in any type of mammal. Finding out he had fallen in love with a bunny? I was shocked, elated, and intrigued.”

Fatima Ara laid there listening to her two companions discussed an inter-order relationship. She genuinely like these two, so she hesitated to give her input, but… “I don’t see why anyone would ever want to be with someone who isn’t even of their order.”

Laughing, Rory said “Funnily enough, neither do I. I did ask a friend from the Psych Ward about it though. Told me some interesting things that got me thinking.”

Curious to hear what a psychologist would have said about the topic, Fatima asked “What did you friend have to say? I’d like to hear it, if you wouldn’t mind. Maybe it’ll give me some perspective.”

“Well, my friend said that mammals interested in a relationship like that often find they share commonalities. Take my son and Officer Hopps. Both have above average intelligence, quick witted, demisexual, and work well together. Judy embodies a number of traits that one normally sees in a vixen, while my son, Nick, kind of embodies those found in a rabbit buck,” Vanessa explained. “There’s also the fact some in inter-order relationships identify more with their partners species than their own. While no one really knows the exact reason for it, researchers do believe such orientation simply develops the same way as someone who attracted to the opposite gender of their species.”
“Commonalities,” Fatima murmured. She could recall the day when she had met Li for the first time. They had had so much in common. Both driven, ambitious, wanting to change the world. A connection between the two had formed quickly. Fatima hadn’t questioned it at the time, but there had been another mammal with whom she had shared those traits: Kristofferson Reynalda. Kristofferson was a fox lawyer that still, to this day, spent his lunch hours having meals with her, if over telephone. Throughout high school and college, the two of them had always viewed the other as a good friend. With all the chaos, Fatima wondered what had happened to him. Memories of their time together replayed within her mind for the rest of the trip.

The rest of their journey was filled with the chatter taking place between ‘Doc’ Wilde and Francine Pennington. Their arrival wasn’t met with anything, but the ambulance driver was amazed nonetheless to see that it was a small gated community. Rory directed them to a medium sized abode that already had a vehicle in the lot. With Francine and the ambulance driver’s assistance, Rory unloaded Fatima’s bed. Once inside the house, Rory was welcomed by a fox tod with slate grey fur.

“I set up a room in the basement. Now uphold your end of the deal,” he stated. Slipping around Rory, the tod pressed the control that lowered the bed, bringing Fatima into view. He saw the baffled expression she gave him and smiled. “Hey, Fatima. You look good for someone who’s dead.”

Fatima hadn’t been prepared to see Kristofferson. During the trip, she had discovered that if he were the one who asked her to dance that night instead of Li, there wouldn’t have been anyone capable of stopping her. Once again, that night replayed in her mind.

Flashback

“So, anyway, as I was saying,” Kristofferson resumed after setting his drink down on the table, “you should totally run for city council when this is all over.” Patting Fatima’s shoulder, the tod smiled at her. “You’ll make one hell of a councilmember. I predict that you’ll show them all a thing or two.”

Laughing, Fatima shook her head. “Why do you bother putting up with me, Kristof? You’ve been letting me ride your coattails for years. You ever gonna tell me why?” Taking a gulp of her drink, she spots a Ferghana stallion across the room. “Look at that gorgeous stallion over there.”

“Hi. I’m Ma Li,” the stallion introduces after walking over. “Who exactly might you be, you fine mare?” Taking a seat, and scooting Kristofferson to the side, Li smiled at Fatima.

<PoV shift>

Kristofferson stared in shock at the stallion. The tod seethed as the stallion continued to monopolize Fatima’s attentions the entire evening. The party remained in full swing, drinks flowed like water, music echoed through the night, and mammals danced like no one was watching. Still, all Kristofferson could do was watch Fatima and this Ma Li have a wonderful time. He had been so close to finally telling her. As he watched her dance, the tod felt his chances slipping away. “You wish to know why, Fatima?” Kristofferson thought. ‘It’s because…’

Flashback Ends

“You never suspected?” Kristofferson asked Fatima as they sipped tea in the basement. An hour had passed since Rory, Francine, and Fatima had arrived at the retreat. Fatima and Kristofferson had spent that time catching up with one another.

After the wedding, Kristofferson’s life had taken a bit of a dive, but eventually he had clawed his way back. He kept up to date with Fatima’s career in his free time. Graduation had resulted in the
two seeing each other off on their new lives. Kristofferson had never gotten married or found a mate, unable to move on from the one which had already claimed his heart. Despite this, he had made a good living as a divorce lawyer. ‘The irony,’ Kristofferson thought to himself.

“Not until a little while ago,” Fatima admitted. “Why didn’t you tell me sooner? Sure, I probably would have freaked out for a bit, but I would never have immediately said ‘no.’ You must have known that, right?”

Huffing, Kristofferson shook his head. “I wasn’t going to make you do anything you weren’t comfortable doing. Plus, I feared ruining things between us.” There was more that he was going to say when a sound reached his ears. Swiftly turning on the television, he saw there was a live broadcast via news helicopter showing a sight that had his, and Fatima’s breath catch in their throats.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is curious about the headclap the Chancellor gave Grizzoli, please view: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS-Qd-jQFkM @ Time stamp - 1:45 to 1:48.

Ian's getting frustrated. He's had to rewrite his Chapter Eight multiple times. Keeps mumbling to himself ”It's not right yet.” I offered to help, and he just looked at me like I'm insane, which I am and I've got paperwork to prove it.

Since testing is over tomorrow, he'll probably be less stressed and relax enough to write.

On a bit of a different note, Summer Vacation is near. My wife and kids hustled me into agreeing to a major vacation. Disney World Tokyo. We'll be visiting my wife's little brother who's stationed there. So, I'll be away for a while. I'll started roughing out Arc Two during the trip. I've got the outline complete, but I need to rough them to get a sense/feel for it all.

TT4N. (I think that means Ta-ta for now. Forgive this old man if not.)
Chapter 23: Laying Waste

Chapter Summary

What's this? An update on a Wednesday?

Solo: A Star Wars Story is premiering tomorrow (Thursday May 24th). Ian's already got tickets, but he can't drive just yet. So, guess who's going with him.

Chapter Notes

Appropriate Intro Music for chapter: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixFXOJdydyc]

Hello again everybody. I'm doing a day early release due to Ian having somehow managed to get his paws on tickets to see Solo: A Star Wars Story tomorrow. Chapter Eight of SWZ is currently under review. He's got...issues with how he's written certain parts of it. It is coming though.

Anyway, more in the End Notes. Let's get to the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 23: Laying Waste

Zootopia

The first blast was the result of shaky paws accidentally causing the explosive to detonate. What no one had anticipated was that each bomb was linked to the others via the alternet. Thankfully, they had managed to avoid the worst-case scenario. The bomb that detonated had already had its biomaterials removed. It had been during the insertion of the serum canister that the device exploded.

One by one, all the explosives detonated, spreading devastation across the city of Zootopia. Buildings, if they didn’t crumble and collapse, had their windows shatter, raining glass onto the streets. The roadways fractured, split, and jutted in every which way. As each bomb exploded, the damage cascaded throughout the entire area of Zootopia. The mighty spire that stood at the center of the city fell one floor after another. There were explosions that ruptured gas mains, which resulted in even more destruction.

Within each of the city districts, police officers, military troops, and mercenaries ran for cover while doing their best to make sure that those with them were protected. The explosions in Sahara Square created a massive sandstorm to form from the drastic shift in the atmosphere, and The Palm Hotel disintegrated. Trees in the Rainforest District were either blown down or burst into flames, which spread swiftly. The snow and ice of Tundratown melted creating a flash flood that surged throughout the district, washing away the debris created by the explosions. The District of the Meadowlands caught fire and was razed by the billowing firestorm. The warehouses, wharfs, and piers that lined
the Docks sunk beneath the waves because of the explosions. Savanna Central and City Center were
totally leveled, leaving little to nothing standing. The blazes lit up the Nocturnal District as it burned
all that laid within to the ground.

What few civilians remained within the city’s limits were in hysteric, racing to find a safe place to
hide. Every abled-bodied mammal that could help get others to safe zones, did. Police officers,
military troops, and mercenaries were running around doing what they could, but there was only so
much they could do in the end.

Supreme Commander Deego opened his eyes slowly, ears ringing, pain radiating throughout his
body. Grunting, he forced himself to a standing position. Scanning his surroundings, the canid saw
the wounded that were around him. Gingerly moving forward, he knelt to shake Police Chief Tobias
Bogo. The buffalo groaned, coughed, then rolled onto his side. “Come on. Get up. We’ve got work
to do,” Deego told him as he carefully stood up again and walked to the next one.

A splitting headache pained Bogo as he rose up off the ground to survey the devastation. ‘Ben!’ He
thought, looking around for his cheetah. Spying, Clawhauser’s tail twitching from underneath a
fallen section of wall, Bogo marched over and, with a mighty effort, removed the debris. Kneeling
next to him, Bogo said, “Ben! Ben, open your eyes, you flamboyant cheetah!”

Coughing, Benjamin cracked an eye to see Chief Bogo kneeling at his side. “Hey, Chief. What
happened?” He got into a sitting position and gasped as he beheld the horror that was around him.
“O. M. Goodness,” Clawhauser whimpered.

All the others slowly regained consciousness as well. Rising from the floor, they looked at their
surroundings and checked on their friends. McHorn helped Higgins to his hindhooves, while Snarlov
was lifting and tossing aside debris to help those trapped escape. Grizzoli was busy aiding Delgato
over to a medic. The lion, holding his side, clearly had a shard of glass sticking out of it. At the
sound of hoofsteps approaching, they all turned to see who it was.

“Looks like you all survived,” General Andreas Bogo observed. “Good. We’ve got a Mobile Army
Surgical Hospital set up not too far from here.” Helping load the more severely wounded into a
military bus, the larger buffalo shared a glance with his son, Tobias. Giving him a nod, he let Tobias
ride with Benjamin.

Approaching the buffalo, Supreme Commander Deego said “We need to find out who all’s still
active. Need to get a sitrep, too.” Popping his neck then shoulder, the canid let out a sigh of relief as
the pain lessened. “Any ideas on what the hell happened?”

“They’re going to hold a minor conference at the Crisis Station shortly,” General Bogo answered.
“You should make your way there. I’m going to finish sweeping for survivors, wounded, and
anyone else I can find so that they can get medical assistance.”

Delgato let out a loud, pained hiss as the meat wagon, hit something that caused it to jolt. “Driver?
Where are we heading?” The thought that his Feline Leukemia would create complications entered
his mind for all of a minute before another jostle sent it flying.

“We’re almost there, sir. Just hang on a bit longer,” the driver answered. “We’ve set it up in one of
the only buildings that has remained standing.”

Grizzoli, who had hitched a ride with Delgato, gave the lion a grimace. “I don’t even want to know
what caused the bombs to detonate. I’ll probably end up knocking the idiot unconscious.”

“Hard to knock a dead mammal unconscious, sir. The poor ensign’s paw was shaking so bad that it
triggered the blast prematurely, killing him,” the driver replied.

Grizzoli’s ears went flat hearing that. “Sorry. Just a little...you know.” He saw the driver give a shallow nod. Sighing, Grizzoli maneuvered himself to get a better look of the city.

“What does it look like?” Delgato asked the arctic wolf. “Driver! Please be a bit more careful! This glass just shifted from that bounce!”

“Sorry, sir. Streets are looking more like gravel roads.” the driver apologized. “Good news is that we’ll arrive in 3…2…1… We’re here.”

Across the city, at the Zootopia Police Academy, Major Barbeara Friedkin had her cadets geared up and moving out. One of those cadets was Tasha Wolver, who was looking at a small photograph on her mobile phone. The pic was of her and Rey Vulpes, standing side by side, saluting the photographer. After their initial meeting during an exercise session, the two had spent some time simply holding pleasant conversation. The photo was taken right before parting ways that day by a fellow cadet who had offered after telling them how good they looked together. They had only exercised together a couple of times, becoming good friends, before Rey was ordered to accompany the detail escorting a detainee. She had gotten a message saying he was alright, but he hadn’t returned. Then, the explosions happened.

“Cadet Wolver,” Major Friedkin stated, causing the she-wolf to look up at her. “You’ll be in my group. Our destination is Savanna Central and City Center.” Spying the image on the she-wolf’s cellphone, Major said “I know you’re worried, but have faith. M’kay? Come on.”

They climbed into one of the seven buses tasked with transporting those from the ZPA to the city. Only four of the buses were carrying cadets, the other three were loaded with what supplies they could carry, one of which was entirely comprised of food. Tasha was eager to get to their destination and search for Rey. Worry had taken the form of a heavy stone in her gut.

Without warning, Tasha’s phone started to release a little tune, signifying that she was getting a call. A look at the Caller ID showed it was Rey. Answering, Tasha asked, “Hello? Rey? You there?”

“Yeah *cough* yeah, I’m here. Sorry that I didn’t call sooner,” Rey replied over the line. “I got knocked out cold. I just came to not that long ago and had to find my phone. Thought that I lost it for a minute.”

“Where are you right now?” Tasha inquired, feeling more relaxed. “Everyone from the Police Academy is on their way into the city. Major Friedkin’s group is headed for Savanna Central and City Center.”

“Oh, good,” Rey sounded relieved from his end. “Good. That means I’ll get to see you soon. I hope you’ve brought what medical supplies you could with you. We’ve got plenty of wounded, and the M*A*S*H need all the supplies they can get.”

“We’ll be there soon. Just hang on. Okay?” Seeing Friedkin’s gaze at her from the rearview mirror, Tasha added “I’ve gotta hang up now. I’ll see you when we get there.”

**Bunnyburrow**

The Hopps warren had never in history had such a fight erupt between the two familial heads as the one that was currently taking place. Bonnie and Stu had had spats previously, but never one of this magnitude. Stu adamantly refused to allow Bonnie to travel to Zootopia, while Bonnie clearly didn’t care what reasoning her husband used in his attempt toward getting her to comply with his demands.
It didn’t take a genius to figure out that whether Stu agreed to it or not Bonnie was heading for Zootopia with a full company of their kits to aid in the relief effort.

“It’s dangerous,” Stu stated, arms crossed. Sighing in defeat, he mumbled “But if you’re so set on going, I know I can’t stop you. Just please promise me you’ll be careful and keep me updated on how y’all are doing. Okay?”

Giving her husband a soft, tender smile, Bonnie planted a kiss on his cheek. “I promise,” she murmured. “You keep an eye on Jessie and Jamie for me in return. Those two need you now. I’ve already told Allison that she’s to stay here to help you with them.” Resuming her task of packing, Bonnie said “Now, Gideon and Travis will be staying here while I’m gone so that y’all don’t starve trying to fix something elaborate and to make sure my kitchen isn’t destroyed when I get back.”

Grumbling, Stu shot back “Hey! I can cook!” Flinching at the glare from his wife, Stu huffed. “It was one time, Bon. One time. Isn’t like I burnt the burrow to the ground.”

“One time too many, Stu,” Bonnie chided, “Plus, if it hadn’t been for your mama, we wouldn’t have the kitchen we’ve got now. Leave the kitchen in Gideon’s paws.”

“Fine,” Stu conceded. “So, are they bringing Lil’ Edie with them?” Stu had a soft spot for the little kit those two had. Lil’ Edie, to him, was probably the only kit outside his own Stu would ever consider cute.

“Well, they can’t very well leave him at home alone, now can they?” Bonnie retorted, zipping her luggage. “Yes, they’re bringing Lil’ Edie, but you’re not to ta-ta him too much. You hear?” Seeing her husband’s crestfallen expression, Bonnie gave him a comforting pat on the shoulder. “I’m not saying you can’t play with him. Just remember your responsibilities first.”

Michael Hopps, the eldest buck of Bonnie and Stu, named after the Guardian Entity of the same name, entered the Master Bedroom. “We’re all ready, Mum. Whenever you are, we’ll head out.” He looked away as his mother and father engage in a meaningful embrace of the lips. He then followed his mother out of the room and towards the garage where the massive double-decker bus was ready and waiting. Climbing into the driver’s seat, Michael adjusted the mirrors accordingly. “Let’s roll.”

The Hopps bus pulled out, carrying a rather unique group. While none of the Hopps kits were trained in things like law enforcement like Judy, they did have some trained in medicine, construction, engineering, and other things that would be useful in the relief effort. Most, if not all, of those on the bus were trained in self-defense, courtesy of their police officer sister during their younger, more formative years. Everyone was already choosing what groups they would be in when they arrived.

Ever the techno savvy kit, Ralph Hopps was using multiple electronic devices to get an idea on what they should expect. He had his laptop in his lap, his smartphone in one paw, a radio headset on, and a police scanner attached to his hip. Probably the only kit capable of truly multitasking, Ralph was easily keeping up with it all. “I’ve got reports that show that the destruction is citywide. All of its districts have been utterly devastated from the attack.”

The ears of all the Hopps warren members present radared in Ralph as he began orating his findings. Hushed whispers could be heard every so often as discussions were held concerning what Ralph was saying. Bonnie and Michael kept their ears open, taking it all in as they focused on the roadway.

Coming up on a checkpoint mammaled by a giraffe in a military uniform, Michael stopped the bus and stuck his head out the window. “Uh, relief effort?” He watched the giraffe consider him for a moment before he remembered the paperwork he had drawn up to hopefully get through checkpoints
like this. He passed it over to the giraffe, who looked it over with a careful eye. Michael released a
breath he hadn’t known he was holding when the giraffe gave him that head motion to continue on
his way.

The drive to the city of Zootopia, a full 211 miles from Bunnyburrow, wasn’t one the Hoppses made
often. So, it seemed to take forever. Fear of what they would see upon arrival wormed its way into
their minds. For some, the worry and stress made them ill. Therefore they stopped at a roadside diner,
which had a sign that read ‘Ozwald’s Roadside Diner’. The Hoppses disembarked the bus and
entered the establishment. A fox tod with the most startling silver fur greeted them from the counter,
and a bunny doe with reddish-brown fur welcomed them, telling to sit wherever they pleased.

The doe approached Bonnie saying “Hello. You must be Bonnie Hopps. You look just like your
daughter, Judy.”

Blinking in surprise, Bonnie nodded. “I am, and you mean to say she looks just like me, I’m sure.”
Glancing at the menu, Bonnie saw that it had options for predators and prey.

“I’m gonna guess y’all are on your way to help in the relief effort,” Clara surmised, “Y’all are gonna
need your strength for that. Judy stopped by here on her way back to the city with Nick, Jaxon, and
Skye. They were all really nice mammals, so I’m not surprised y’all are on your way to help.”

Todd came over carrying a tray of food for the table. “Food’s here,” he announced, much to the
shock of the bucks and does. Setting each plate of food in front of the mammal it was intended for,
Todd said “If you’re wondering how we knew what you all would want to eat prior to taking your
order, it’s a secret.”

Clara gave Todd a kiss, which had the Hopps crew reeling. “What? Can’t I kiss my mate?” Giggling
at the bugged eyed stares, Clara said “Yeah, Judy and Jaxon aren’t the only ones with foxy mates.
We usually just keep a low profile.”

“I would suggest you wait before resuming your journey to Zootopia,” Todd stated in warning. “It
isn’t over just yet. Those bombs were only the beginning.”

The Centre

Nick and Judy were locked in high-speed combat with each other in a sparring session under the
watchful eye of Fenrir Wolford. Only 15 minutes ago, they had finished their final session in the
Animus Matrixes. Thanks to those, both Nick and Judy, along with the others, had managed to
undergo years of training within M’s 5hr timeframe. Now all that was left for them to do was
demonstrate what they had learned. It was for this reason that Judy and Nick were sparring one
another.

“Allright. That’s enough,” Fenrir declared, ending the match between the tod and doe. “You two
have my seal of approval. Go wash up and prepare for extraction back to Zootopia.”

Breathing heavily, but with grins on their muzzles, Nick and Judy saluted Fenrir then made their way
to the showers, paw in paw with one another. They passed the rooms in which the others were also
sparring under the observant eye of a supervising trainer. Reaching the showers, Nick leaned in close
to Judy’s ear and whispered, “Do you want to take a shower together? Or use separate stalls?”

Judy playfully shoved Nick away. “Nick, remember your promise from earlier,” she chided with a
smirk. Watching him shrug, Judy stripped down to her underwear. “After this is all over, you and I
will go on one last date then discuss the finer points of intimacy. That’s what you promised, isn’t it?”
Eyes roaming over Judy’s physique, Nick answered “You’re right. I did promise you that.” Stepping up behind Judy, he rested his paws on her hips. It still amazed him to a degree that she was now closer to his own size thanks to her Izu Genes. She was still short enough that he could rest her head in the hollow of his throat though. “That doesn’t mean that I won’t tease and flirt with you a bit.”

Huffing in annoyed amusement, Judy spun around, shivering as Nick’s claws rake through her fur. Wrapping her own paws around Nick’s neck, she said “Oh, don’t I know it.” Giving him a smirk, she whispered “Plus, I’m sure you’re going to slip into my shower regardless of what I say.”

Frowning, Nick said “I wouldn’t do that if you told me not to do it. We’re going at your pace, Judy.” Leaning in, Nick gave her a light, chaste kiss. “You’re in charge of how fast we move with this.”

Ears dropping behind her back as she looked at him with loving eyes, Judy whispered “I’ll leave the stall door unlocked if you do decide to join me. No pressure, though.” Pulling away, she stepped into the shower stall and finished divesting herself of all clothing. Tossing her panties and bra over the, now closed, door, Judy turned on the shower.

Taking his own clothes off, Nick heard someone enter the shower area behind him. Looking over his shoulder, Nick saw Harrison and Shay enter the room. It didn’t appear that either noticed him yet, so he swiftly slipped into Judy’s stall. He did so quietly, not to disturb the beauty that he found within.

The sound of voices had Judy perk her ears to listen. ‘Sounds like Harrison and Shay,’ Judy thought. Smirking, she mentally added ‘Which means that Nick’s probably in here with me.’ Feeling Nick’s paws on her hips, she grinned. ‘Yep. Called it.’

“Sorry,” Nick whispered into Judy’s ear. “Didn’t want those two to see me, so I just slipped in with you.” Running his paws up and down her figure, he added “I’ll wash your back as an apology.”

Shivering from the feeling of Nick’s paws sensually rubbing in the fur shampoo, Judy teasingly whispered, “Nick? What’s that I feel poking me?” She already knew the answer, but wanted to hear him say it.

With a deep blush, Nick glanced down at himself. Sure enough, his fully erect cock was poking Judy’s just below her tuft of a tail. Gulping, Nick let loose an embarrassed chuckle. “Uh, I think you know what it is, Love. Do I really have to say it?”

Giving Nick a hum of confirmation, she said “Yes. Yes, you do. I want to hear you say it, Nick. So, what is that I feel poking me?” She teasingly asked him again.

“It’s, uh, it’s my…” Nick released a tiny embarrassed whine, “It’s my dick,” he whispered, squeezing his eyes shut.

“Hm,” Judy hummed. Taking a step back, smooshing Nick’s cock between her back and his front, Judy heard his breath hitch. “Once we finish this, you and I, we’re going to lock ourselves in a room with a bed. Do you understand?” She heard Nick give an affirmative answer. “I know you still want to discuss it, so when we’re done in here let’s go somewhere and talk about it. That sound good?”

“Yeah,” Nick answered. “Yeah, that sounds good.” He finished washing Judy then proceeded to wash himself. Judy washed his back and tail for him. Rinsing the shampoo and conditioner out of his fur, he asked “Can you still hear them?”

Listening for any sounds, Judy whispered “Nope, but I do hear the water of two other shower stalls flowing. Guess they’re already in their showers. Let’s bolt.”

The tod and doe made like lightning, sprinting out of the showers and down the hall towards the
room where they had had their stuff stored. They had just managed to don the spandex underarmour when Fenrir and M joined them, their expressions grave. Both Nick and Judy had a bad feeling about what the two were going to disclose.

M walked past the vulpine and lapine, approaching a locker unit and opening it. Extracting the contents, he performed a keen examination of them. Deeming that they met his standards, M tossed the two outfits at Nick and Judy. “Put those on,” he ordered.

Looking at what M had given them, Nick saw it was what appeared to be a specialized set of armour. His ear twitched as it registered the sound of Judy donning her own set next to him. Sparing a glance in her direction, Nick felt his breath leave him. She was gorgeous beyond compare in her armour. The overall design seemed to accentuate her figure while in no way restricting any of her maneuverability. The sight of Judy in her armor was a visage that inspired awe and fear. If it wasn’t for the fact they were together and not enemies, Nick knew he’d be hightailing it as far away from her as he could.

“Nick,” Judy whispered, “Stop staring and don your own armour. Something big had to have happened back in Zootopia, because otherwise, M wouldn’t’ve given it to us.”

Knowing that Judy was right, Nick looked at his own armour. It was much more elaborate, not only in design either. Nick gave Judy a sheepish look. “Do you mind, uh, helping me?”

It took a little bit longer than either of them had expected, but they did eventually get Nick clad in his armour. The design was something that neither of them had ever seen before. It looked almost otherworldly. Nick and Judy stood side by side staring at their reflections in a mirror. They looked like complementary opposites: Eldritch Monstrosity of Eradication to Divine Goddess of Holy Crusades.

“You look good, Slick,” Judy commended. “I’m sure you’ll inspire terror in whatever opposition we’ll have when we return to Zootopia.” Giving Nick a solid pat on the back, the doe had to fight the urge that came over her to jump his bones. He really did look good. Really, really good.

“Thanks, Fluff,” Nick replied with a smirk, nose picking up the scent of her arousal. ‘Wonder if it’s possible for me to keep this after all this is over,’ Nick mentally pondered. “Let’s rejoin the others, shall we?”

“Hold on,” Fenrir ordered. “You’ve got your armour. Now, you need your weapons.” Setting down footlockers appropriately sized for each, the wolf stated “I think… this should be everything. I wouldn’t actually know. M’s the one who told me these were for you two.”

Opening the containers, Nick and Judy were awarded the sight of an assortment of weapons, both melee and ranged. Nick’s had twin swords, two gauntlets with retractable hidden blades, a combat knife, and dual sidearms. Judy’s contained a single sword, one sidearm, a kunai with chain, and brass knuckles (although they looked as if they were made of wrought iron instead). Nick strapped his swords to his back much like the comic book character Deadpooch, stuffed the combat knife into a slit in his right boot meant for it, the dual sidearms were holstered on his waist, and the gauntlets went on his paws in the blink of an eye. Judy’s sword and sidearm were strapped around her waist, her kunai with chain acted as her belt, and the brass knuckles she put in the pouches of her waistband. Completely outfitted, they then followed Fenrir to where the others had congregated.

Harrison Wolford’s outfit appeared to be a simplistic, traditional looking kimono. However, when he rolled his shoulders as if performing a butterfly swimming stroke, the front parted just enough to reveal the lightweight, durable body armour hidden underneath. His weapons included four pistols, a quarterstaff, and gloves that were adorned with spikes on the knuckles. His hindpaws had what
appeared to be wraps, but as he shifted them one could see that the bottoms also had spikes, acting like cleats.

Jack Savage’s attire had a few similarities to Judy’s. It fit snuggly yet didn’t do much to hinder his movements. The jackrabbit’s weapons consisted of two sidearms, which were holstered at his waist. There were two combat knives hidden in his leggings. He didn’t appear to have any other weapons, but knowing Jack that’s what he wanted you to think.

Shay Morrigan’s getup was a mix of military spec ops and martial artist. The key areas, like heart, head, pelvis, and chest had protection, but the rest was only covered in a loose-fitting cloth much, like a tunic. Weapon-wise, Shay was equipped with a katana and wakizashi, or short sword. He also had what appeared to be a musket strapped across his back. Overall, he looked anachronistic, like a warrior from a bygone era.

Zannah Fangmeyer, for her part, looked like an Amazonian. Clad in armour that had her looking like a lady of war yet still keeping her tomboyish visage, the tigress, by all appearances, looked as if she could go toe to toe with a polar bear on equal footing with nothing more than her bare paws. She had one assault rifle strapped to her back, another on her waist, and one in her right paw propped against her shoulder, each a different variant.

Madge ‘Honey’ Badger, compared to the others, had little to no armour. She had a bulletproof vest fashioned from carbon nanotubes, but that was pretty much it. Forsaking more encumbering armour for speed, Honey also forsook weapons that could slow her down. As such, she carried one tactical combat knife which remained sheathed and attached to her belt on the left-pawed side and a single firearm, with additional magazines stored in her belt pouches. Comparatively, she looked more like your normal, ordinary police officer or military trooper than the rest.

It was Skye though, who commanded the most attention besides Nick and Judy. The vixen was fully clad in a unique set of battle armour that sported a design reminiscent of an angel of war. The armour’s colouration was white with cyan and silver-grey accents. In terms of weapons, Skye had two sidearms, two combat knives, additional magazines in the pouches of her belt, and she also had a small rucksack that contained grenades. Unlike the others though, her outfit had noticeably less padding and more armour to it. The reason was a bit of an unknown.

Fenrir, Carlos, and Josef were also decked out in full military-grade armour, but theirs had obviously seen prior battles, leading them all to realize it was the same armour they had worn in the last war in which they participated. Geared to the max, they swiftly checked their equipment with trained paws that hadn’t forgotten a single detail. It was when M entered the room that they all stopped whatever it was they were doing.

The margay’s armour had the design of a hellcat. Marching into the room with an aura of command, M was expressionless as he looked at the others. Pressing a button on the table in the center of the room, the large screen on the wall activated, showing an image of a Zootopia in ruins, ablaze and a husk of its former glory. “Approximately one hour and forty-five minutes ago, a young mammal attempting to replace the bioterror materials from one of the bombs triggered an early detonation. Unbeknownst to us all, the bombs were linked together. Meaning that if one exploded prematurely, so did all the rest. This is a current image of the former city known as Zootopia.”

It was an image that would remain embedded within their minds forever. The once grand city had essentially been leveled by the devastating explosions. Not one of them could find it within themselves to speak as they stared at the onscreen image. Even Fenrir, Josef, and Carlos couldn’t find the words to describe what they felt. The Initiates, having never witnessed anything like it, found themselves incapable of vocalizing their thoughts. No words were needed as they all marched
towards the military copter that awaited to take them back to Zootopia.

*The ruins of the Zootopian Skytree*

Whether it was by Fate’s design or by Lady Luck, the goddess of serendipitous fortune, intervening on a whim, Jameson didn’t know, but opening his eyes to see that the wreckage of the Zootopian Skytree hadn’t smooshed him was what he considered a sign that his time wasn’t at an end just yet. The pain emanating from his lower abdomen prompted him to glance down. “Well, damn,” Jameson grumbled, finding a piece of rebar protruding from his body. Slowly sliding a paw underneath himself, Jameson found that it had to have been Lady Luck as the rebar was no longer confined in concrete. Carefully, the tod stood then began to slowly, and painfully, extract the rebar from his being. Hissing and whining in pain, Jameson pulled it out and watched as the wound closed almost instantly.

Examining his surroundings, Jameson swung the rebar into one of the concrete walls that was still intact. The echoing reverberations gave him an idea of how to escape. Tightening his grip on the rebar, Jameson struck the situational ceiling once, twice, thrice, and kept going. The impacts were along the stress points in the concrete. He kept wailing until all the stress of the weight was centralized on one point. It was there that he plunged the rebar through the concrete, then pulled it free which caused a small shower of concrete shards to rain down upon him as a hole big enough for him formed. Leaping up, he pulled himself through, rebar still in paw.

The view to which Jameson was greeted was among the worst he could remember, and he could remember quite a lot. All around him the aftermath of the bombings was apparent. There was little left undamaged as a result of the detonations. Spying a small group of wolves in the distance, Jameson altered his grip on the rebar holding it like a reversed gripped sword and took off towards them.

Larry and Gary, along with Spencer and Alpha Regulus Wolford were slowly making their way through the debris around what had previously been the Zootopian Skytree looking for any civilians that hadn’t made it out of the city and survived the citywide devastation. Each fully equipped with military-grade gear, Larry was the first to spot the rapidly approaching mammal coming towards them.

“Stand down,” Alpha Regulus ordered as soon as he recognized the jet-black tod. As Jameson walked up, Alpha Regulus stated “The fact that you look exactly as I remember from when I was a pup is a bit disconcerting; However, I’m happy to see you alive and well, Colonel Wilde.”

“Glad to see that you grew into a fine Alpha, Reg,” Jameson replied. “Now, let’s head to the nearest command post. I know they’ve set them up throughout the city. Also, I need a sitrep.”

Spencer interrupted, “You were the mammal on the other end of the phone call during the episode at City Hall.” Spencer had always had an ear for voices. Identifying the tod as the voice of the mammal who had walked him through that incident, Spencer found himself a bit surprised that the tod had the respect of Alpha Regulus.

Giving Spencer a smirk, Jameson confirmed “I am indeed. Now, sitrep.” He listened as Regulus explained the current situation. Learning that while they hadn’t, a couple of recon teams had gotten ambushed by mammals who supported the Chancellor, Jameson’s expression darkened. He continued to listen attentively as Larry, Gary, and Spencer also gave their reports. “First things first. We need to get to a command post. Second, I need a computer.”

“There’s a command post not too far from here,” Larry informed, pointing in the general direction of its location. “It’s a bit of a ways in that direction, if I’m not mistaken. It shouldn’t take us more than
Making for the command post in the direction indicated, Jameson and company surveyed the devastation. The closer they got to their destination, the more that sense of impending doom settled over Jameson. The tod knew that he would face Supreme Commander Deego upon his arrival, but it was an inevitability he could no longer escape. It was time to face the music.

<MEANWHILE – ELSEWHERE IN ZOOTOPIA>

‘So, this is how I’m going to die,’ Andrew Bellwether thought to himself. He hadn’t been able to outrun the shockwave from the explosion. He didn’t know how far he had managed to drag himself with only his chin, but he hoped that he had at least managed to get far enough that someone would find his corpse. The world was utterly silent, a result of his close proximity to the explosion. Even if he did manage to survive, Andrew doubted he would ever hear again. The sensation of something cool, wet, and slightly sticky made him realize how long he had laid there, his blood pooling underneath him.

A flicker of movement caught Andrew’s attention. Mustering what focus he could, the black-wooled ram watched as that flicker grew to reveal Doug Ramses making his way through the rubble towards him. His friend was in rough shape. One horn was broken, the other missing, and Doug had a gash on his forehead that had gotten bandaged already. His white wool was stained with grime, dust, blood, and gods know what else. Andrew could tell that Doug was shouting, but couldn’t hear a thing. Eventually, Doug spotted him, rushing over before screaming at someone else that was apparently with him.

“Doug,” Andrew stated, unsure of how it sounded, “I can’t hear anything. The whole world has gone quiet.” He watched his friend’s expression go stricken with grief. Fatigue caught up to him then, and he wondered how much blood he had lost.

Doug Ramses turned to scream at Parker and Liam, who were coming up behind him. Looking at Andrew’s mangled form, Doug gulped. There were streaks and drag marks of blood that extended a little ways behind Andrew, proof of him crawling forward using just his chin. Doug carefully turned his black-wooled friend over to examine the body damage. It was far worse than he feared.

Andrew’s torso was flecked with innumerable shrapnel wounds. The fact he had even managed to get himself this far was a miracle. The chest of the black-wooled ram was heaving shallow breaths as his body tried to oxygenate what blood remained within it. Andrew had no doubts that his life had reached its ultimate conclusion.

Liam skid to a halt beside Doug. The arctic hare had a pack of medical supplies to staunch the bleeding, hopefully long enough to get Andrew somewhere they could administer better care. His own wounds were minimal; an ear had gotten sliced by a flying piece of debris, but it wasn’t anything major. Andrew’s wool proved to be a problem as it hindered their ability to see how extensive the damage truly was. Thankfully, Liam came prepared. Wielding a pair of shears, Liam made quick work of Andrew’s matted, grimy, and singed wool.

Parker was doing his best to keep Randolf informed of Liam and Doug’s actions. The reindeer was too tall to squeeze through the opening comfortably. The building in which Andrew was trapped could only be described as unstable. Any effort to shift a piece could bring the entire thing down on top of Liam, Andrew, and Doug.

Fashioning a makeshift gurney to carry Andrew out of there, Doug turned to Parker and yelled “Have a medic on standby! He’s critical!” Carefully, and with Liam’s help, Doug scooted Andrew onto the makeshift gurney then hoisted it to drag him out of there. Liam took up the other end, not
wanting to risk agitating Andrew’s wounds any further if they were to save his life.

Randolf Reins waited for Doug and Liam to bring Andrew out for treatment. As he did so, the reindeer surveyed the area around them. For as far as his eyes could see, there was nothing that remained untouched by the destructive blasts that had shaken the city of Zootopia. It was with a heavy heart that Randolf admitted he was partially at fault for this. Not once had he thought that this would be the result of his blindly following the Chancellor. He had seen a utopia for prey without the fear of predators.

Slowly, but surely, Andrew found himself carried carefully out of the darkness of the remains of the building that had formerly been the Civic Center in Sahara Square. The state in which it was in could only be said to be a heap of rubble and debris. The fact that Andrew survived its destruction really was nothing short of a miracle. As he was placed into a vehicle of some kind, the black-wooled ram wondered where his compatriots were taking him.

Leaning over Andrew, Parker held a pad of paper before his eyes with the message ‘We’re taking you to a medical outpost that has been set up not far from here. They’ll be able to take care of you.’ Parker watched as Andrew’s eyes closed, and in worry patted the side of the ram’s face. ‘You can’t go to sleep yet. Not until we know you’ll be okay.’

It hurt to chuckle, but Andrew did anyway. “Not sure I’m gonna live through this, Parker,” he whispered, or at least the ram hoped he did as he still couldn’t hear. “Even if I do, I highly doubt I’ll live for long.” Blood loss was making it hard to remain conscious. He wanted to sleep, but just to humor Parker, Andrew did his best to remain awake.

Quickly prepping Doug up for a mammal-to-mammal transfusion, Liam inserted the needle into the white-wooled ram’s arm. He then did the same to Andrew and opened the valve that facilitated the flow of blood from Doug to Andrew. Looking at Doug, Liam said “I don’t know how much he’s lost, but this will at least keep him alive until we reach the medical outpost.”

Watching as his blood flowed into Andrew, Doug replied “That’s good.” Licking his dry lips, he asked “Any ideas on what the Chancellor will do now that the city has been transformed into a wasteland?” No one had really been informed of what would occur once the Chancellor had reached this point.

“I have no clue,” Liam replied, bracing himself against the wall of the vehicle as it bounced. “However, I don’t think he’s finished just yet. All of this…” he gestured to the sight through the vehicle’s windows, “…is probably the setting for his final stand.”

**Main thoroughfare into Zootopia**

The double-decker bus carrying the Hopps warren came to a halt as it reached Zootopia’s city limits. It was a far more mentally scarring sight than any of them had anticipated. Michael actually had to get out of the bus to vomit. Bonnie got out to lean against the bus’s side as she looked out at the devastation before her. The other Hopps members couldn’t formulate a comprehensible way of expressing their thoughts on the sight.

Michael eventually found the strength necessary to climb back into the driver’s seat. Once his mother had reclaimed her seat, he drove forward. After a while, the bus reached a point from which it could no longer proceed due to the amount of debris in its path. “It looks like we’ll have to continue the old-fashioned way from here on out,” Michael announced.

The Hopps warren began to disembark the bus and gather the materials they brought with them. They stopped, however, as a coyote in military fatigues approached. Bonnie, despite her trepidation,
moved towards him. “Hello. My warren and I are here to provide what assistance we can.”

Staring down at the doe, the coyote stated “Sorry, ma’am, but I have strict orders not to allow anyone to pass. Unless you can get the proper clearance, I’m unable to let you proceed any further than this.” He highly doubted that the doe would be able to pull that off. He was shocked when she pulled out a satellite phone, dialed a number then passed it to him. “Hello?”

“Officer. This is General Andreas Bogo. You are to allow Mrs. Hopps to pass. Do I make myself clear?”

Eyes widening as he stared at the doe before him, the coyote answered “Crystal, sir. I’ll make sure they have an escort to your base of operations, sir.” Hearing the line disconnect, he returned the satellite phone to the doe. “Corporal Bounderson, you are to make sure that these mammals arrive safely.”

“Yes, sir,” a rather rough looking jackalope responded. “I’ll ensure they get there unharmed. If you’ll all make sure you’re not leaving anything you need behind, we’ll get going. Got a lot of ground to cover and not a lot of time in which to do it.”

The trek was indeed quite a feat. The size of some of the wreckage that was between them and their destination was a task of Hareculean proportions. Bonnie had suffered through worse, however. After all, it was no small feat to birth and raise nearly three hundred kits. Compared to that, this was simple. The same could not be said for some of those same kits that were with her now. If it wasn’t for Corporal Bounderson, Bonnie would have had a difficult time making sure everyone was still together. Regardless, the trek ended up being one of the greatest challenges any of them ever faced.

Stopping in the shade of one of the toppled buildings that had managed to have a portion remain upright, Bonnie made each of her kits partake in a bit of water to stay hydrated. “We still have a bit further to go, so make sure you drink plenty of fluids,” she’d tell them.

“You’re a good mother,” Cpl. Bounderson told the doe once she sat down not far from him. “However, I’m willing to bet your mate isn’t too pleased that you and your kits came here. The Divine Entities know I wouldn’t be if mine were doing what you are.”

Bonnie sent a wry grin the jackalope’s way. “He wasn’t that happy about it, but after being married for so long, he knew there was no stopping me.” Looking around at the scenery, which wasn’t much to look at, Bonnie added “My daughter happens to be a police officer of the ZPD. I came here because I couldn’t stand the thought of her being here during this without some familial support. Plus, I wanted to be able to help those I could.”

Surveying their surroundings himself, the jackalope stated “Yeah. It’s pretty bad, is it not?” Rubbing the back of his neck, he said “My company was originally scheduled to head home. Then the call came in ‘bout half an hour before we were set free. I hadn’t thought it would be this bad, but now I’m glad our commanding officer didn’t argue with High Command. Honestly, I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else right now.”

“You don’t want to see your mate?” Bonnie inquired. “Surely you have someone at home waiting for your return. Would you rather not be with them?”

The jackalope shrugged nonchalantly. “She knows that there’s always a chance that I’ll end up being reassigned a new mission. I just make sure to give her a call once I know for sure. Truth is, my mate and I haven’t been on good terms for a long time. You know us lagomorphs and our high sex drives. Came home from a tour to find that she was preggers. Obviously, the kits weren’t mine, but I stayed with her. I went on another tour only to return to discover she was once again pregnant. I moved out
after that tryst. Told her that if she managed to stay celibate during my next tour, I’d move back in with her.”

“Have you heard from her?” Bonnie queried. “Or do you have someone watching her? I’d imagine that you don’t want to return and find that once again she’s cheated on you.”

A harsh laugh escaped the jackalope. “I don’t expect to ever return home.” Seeing the shocked expression the doe had, he clarified “I’m not speaking of suicide. I’m not that depressed over it. No, I’ve always held the belief that every tour would be my last. If I make it through this, I’ll simply have my company inform her of my supposed death and start a new life. I expect that she’s in the arms of one or more lovers right about now.”

“That’s a bit harsh,” Bonnie replied. “Of course, I don’t see how you can expect her to be faithful anymore.” The thought of Stu having an affair was ludicrous to Bonnie. She had seen how bad he was whenever another doe, who wasn’t family, tried to speak to him. Even so, there were times she had had adulterous thoughts, which she would then immediately hate herself for considering.

“Yeah,” Cpl. Bounderson responded. Standing, he said “Anyway, we should continue on our way. There’s still a ton of ground we need to cover before we reach our destination.” Everyone got up at his words and he began to lead their little expedition towards the command post mammaled by General Andreas Bogo, his son, Police Chief Tobias, and Police Commissioner Catlin.

Officer McHorn saw the approaching group of lagomorphs and shouted to both General Bogo and Chief Bogo, who came to greet them. Chief Bogo led them inside while his father, the General, thanked the jackalope before sending him back. Commissioner Catlin offered them all refreshments which they gratefully accepted.

“You’re either exceptionally brave or really, really stupid, Mrs. Hopps,” General Bogo admonished. Taking a seat across from the doe, he stated “Your presence here isn’t the least bit helpful. However, I’m not in the habit of turning down what help I’m offered. So therefore, you, and those with you, will be allocated to a relief camp in Savanna Central near the border that separates it from City Central’s downtown area.”

“That’s fine,” Bonnie replied, “As long as we can help. Also, I would like to know the whereabouts of my daughter Judy.”

General Bogo sighed. “That information is classified. I will say that she is safe, but that is all I can tell you.” Waving a soldier over, he stated “This trooper will transport you to the relief camp. I’ll have someone there to greet you and delegate your duties.”

After she and her kits were escorted to the transport, Bonnie looked up at the younger cape buffalo that had also escorted them alongside the trooper. “Your father’s a good mammal,” Seeing that he didn’t react, she asked “Look, can you give me any information on my daughter?”

“Mrs. Hopps,” Chief Bogo began, “I would if I could, but like my father, I am unable to reveal anything.” Once she was the last to be loaded into the transport, he added “I’ll have her contact you when she can. You have my word on that. Until then, have faith.” He then helped her into the transport and watched it drive off. His father had informed him of the impending arrival of Cipher Squad, which included Hopps, Wilde, Wolford, Fangmeyer, and the other initiates, as his father called them. He just hoped that when they did, he’d still be here to deliver the message.

Office of Kit Services

Finn, his mother, and Stacey had managed to get all the kits in their care into a safe area built beneath
the building at Director Badgerheim’s orders. The panic room, as it was called, was large enough to fit a rather large herd of elephants with room to spare. With the help of one of the larger employees, Finn forced the door open.

“Alright. Let’s get out of here,” Finn told the rest. “Be careful, ya hear? No one run off. Stay together.”

It took a little while, but eventually everyone from inside the panic room got out. They stayed close to each other once they were outside. Director Badgerheim looked at the state of the office building, or at least what was left of it. Stacey stood beside the old badger, a paw on her shoulder. Patting Stacey’s paw, Badgerheim turned to look at the kits.

“Okay everyone, I want you to listen very carefully. We need to find friendly mammals. Do you all remember what I told you about friendly mammals?” At the collective of affirmations from the kits, Badgerheim said “Good. I want you all to get into groups with an adult then start looking for friendly mammals. Make sure that if you find one to use the walkie-talkie to let the others know.”

Agatha Fennixon had a group of eight young kits that huddled close. Whispering soothing words to them, she said “Y’all ready for an adventure?” At their nods, she stated “Let’s go then. Maybe if we find a friendly mammal first we’ll win a prize. No promises though.”

Agatha’s group moved slowly through the desolated area, taking in the view of the world now lying in ruins. For a reason she couldn’t identify, Agatha felt saddened that the city was in such a state. While she hadn’t experienced city life herself, Agatha knew that it wouldn’t be the same when they rebuilt it, if they rebuilt it. She felt a bit slighted, but there was nothing she could do to change it. The kits however took the search for a ‘friendly mammal’ quite seriously. After a few minutes, one of them spotted what looked like a vehicle heading their way. One of the kits pointed it out, but Agatha had a bad feeling about it. “Kits! Run!” No sooner had the words left her lips than a barrage of bullets rained down upon them.

The kits scrambled in fear for cover behind some of the debris that was around. Agatha, on the other paw, stayed perfectly still with her only movement being crossing her arms. The bullets speckled the ground around her, but she didn’t move a single nanometer in any direction. The bullets kept flying, yet the only thing Agatha did was yawn mockingly. Then the sound she had been waiting for reached her ears. ‘3…2…1…’ The vehicle exploded just a few meters away.

Turning to look at where the Rocket-Propelled Grenade originated, Agatha spied a grizzled looking wolf with striking silver fur. She watched him toss the rocket launcher aside as he got closer. “One shot?” She inquired.

“Only had one shell in it,” Fenrir replied. Scanning the area, he said “You kits can come out now. It’s safe. I’m here to get you to somewhere where you can be safer.” Returning his attention to the old fennec vixen, the wolf stated “Contact whoever else you can. The Crisis Station isn’t that far from here, and it’s taking refugees.”

**In a helicopter above Zootopia**

Gazelle, Bucky, and Pronk were circling like vultures in the sky above where the Palm Hotel and Casino once stood tall and proud. Much to their amazement, the base of the structure was still relatively intact. Touching down a few meters away from the entrance, they approached to see what remained inside. The three found themselves watching as doctors, nurses, orderlies, and hospice care specialists treated what wounded were brought into the facility.

“What?” Bucky asked as he looked around, “How did all this remain untouched?” It was an honest
question. After all, to discover that it had survived the destruction of the surrounding area wasn’t what they expected.

“Wait, I know this,” Gazelle answered, rubbing her temples as she tried to remember what the contractor had told her. “The base of the hotel was constructed to withstand earthquakes of a magnitude of 10 on the Richter Scale. That way it could be used as an emergency center in the event of a crisis.”

“Pretty good memory, Gazelle,” a voice off to the side stated. It came from a female kangaroo that approached them. “That’s exactly what the contractor had in mind when he built the Palm Hotel and Casino. I’m pleased to see you’re managed to remain safe.”

Sighing in relief, Gazelle said “I’m glad to see that you’re safe too, Kangala. I was worried.” Hugging the kangaroo, Gazelle added “How’s everyone doing? Are they all okay?”

Returning the hug, Kangala answered “Everyone’s fine. A bit banged up, but they’re okay. We managed to secure ourselves within one of the building’s safe rooms located in the basement.”

During this exchange, Pronk made his way to assist with caring for the wounded. Bucky stood there watching as mammals ran around trying to help however they could. All activity ground to a halt when the presence of a powerful mammal came down upon them. Everyone turned to see a wolverine enter carrying a case in either paw.

Stopping to look at those tending to the wounded, Josef Wolverin set his cases down. “Who’s in charge?” He inquired. Seeing the kangaroo standing the iconic popstar Gazelle, Josef meandered over. “Name’s Major Josef Wolverin. I’d like to offer my assistance. I’m fully capable of performing surgery in the middle of a warzone. Just point me where you need me.”

“Uh,” Kangala stuttered, before pointing towards the back rooms. “The major trauma area’s back there.” She watched the wolverine nod, gather his cases, and make his way in that direction. When he stopped to order Pronk to follow him, she glanced at Gazelle. “That was…”

“Unexpected,” Gazelle finished. A glimmer of hope, that’s what her first thought was after witnessing this happen. She then grabbed Bucky and began to do her part to help in caring for the injured.

The Catacombs, underneath the destroyed remnants of City Hall

Jacen Carno, also known as the Chancellor, drummed his claws atop one of the stone caskets that rested within the Vault of Heroes. Its existence was well-known, but its location was a well-guarded secret. It was among the secrets documented within the Shadow Ledger. Normally, the location was told to those who were sworn into select positions throughout the government, such as Mayor, Police Commissioner, Attorney General, and a pawful of others. Hidden underneath City Hall, it was here that the Chancellor had secluded himself during the decimation of Zootopia.

Exiting the confines of the Vault of Heroes, Jacen Carno walked through the graveyard hidden beneath City Hall, known as the Catacombs. The early detonation of his explosive devices had him a bit rattled, but he chose to see it as merely another step forward ahead of schedule. Climbing his way out of the Catacombs and into City Hall’s empty shell. Only one thing had him concerned: his hallucinations. He hadn’t had any for a while and it left him worried.

Stepping outside for the first time since the bombs went off, Jacen Carno surveyed the area around him. It was as he had foreseen, an all but barren wasteland that stretched out as far as the eye could see. Smiling, he closed his eyes and spread his arms out… only to hear the screams of Shiregrove’s
villagers. Gasping, the Chancellor gripped his head in agony.

“You’re no better than them,” Mel’s voice echoed within his head. “You’re no better than those beasts you hate so much. What you’ve accomplished is the exact same thing.”

“You’re not our father,” The voices of his daughters rang out, overlapping. “Our father wouldn’t have done something like this. He wouldn’t have done what you did.”

“The mammal we followed died with us,” The voices of all the villagers of Shiregrove shouted, screamed, hollered, and yelled. “You’re simply a husk of the mammal we trusted and respected. If anyone deserves a fate worse than death, it’s you.”

“Jacen Carno. The Chancellor. Two personas, same mammal,” Hannibal’s voice stated, causing the others to quiet down. “No matter who you are now, you’re finished. You’ve created your own personal Hell within the one place you can’t escape: your very own mind.”

Opening his eyes, Jacen Carno, the Chancellor, saw the phantasms of everyone manifest before him, surrounding him. Fear overtook him as he watched them converge upon him slowly. Every time one struck him, he felt it as if it were actually taking place. His mind made it all so real, and, as Hannibal so eloquently stated, there was no way for him to escape. His screams echoed out across the expanse of the devastated city of Zootopia, heard by all.

_Crisis Command Post Helipad_

The ‘SHWUP, SHWUP, SHWUP’ of rotary blades filled the air as the helicopter carrying the Initiates hovered a few dozen meters above and away from the helipad atop the Crisis Command Post. Nick, Judy, Harrison, Zannah, Skye, Jaxon, Shay, Honey, and M readied themselves to HALO (High Altitude Low Oxygen) jump from the transport onto the helipad. As the hatch at the rear of the copter opened, they all exchanged a look before racing forward and swan diving through it. Thanks to the Bleeding Effect, all of them knew what was required to land safely.

Once the last of them had touched down, M asked “Do we need to go over the plan one final time?” Receiving nothing but headshakes, the margay nodded. “Alright then. Let’s move out.”

Breaking up into their preassigned teams, they all took off in search of allied forces. Alpha Team was comprised of Nick, Judy, Harrison, and Zannah, who M assigned to scout Savanna Central and City Center. Shay, Honey, Skye, and Jaxon made up Beta Team, assigned to perform recon on Sahara Square and the Meadowlands. M was on his own, taking Tundratown. The Crisis Command Post acted as their starting point, located Downtown.

Inside the Crisis Command Post, Jameson Dorgengoa Vulpin and Supreme Commander Deego were seated across from each other, not saying a word. There was much to be discussed, but neither had any idea of how to proceed. It was an alert that an unidentified military-grade helicopter had entered their proximity, forcing them to glance at the viewscreen, letting them see who had arrived which prompted their conversation.

“I must admit, your son reminds me of you a bit, Jameson,” Deego stated, looking at the tod onscreen. “He’s got the same look in his eyes I remember seeing in yours.” Sneaking a peek out of the corner of his own eye, Deego saw the proud expression that Jameson had. “Did you get the letter I gave your mate?”

“I did,” Jameson confirmed, looking at the mix-breed canine, “I was a bit surprised at the contents, if I’m honest. Didn’t think that the Emperor would grant me a pardon. After all, I did basically murder all 46 of my brethren before I attempted to assassinate him.”
Sighing, Deego replied “You were right back then, you know. The Emperor… he had forgotten his place and needed to be reminded of it. Through your actions, the Emperor was forced to reevaluate his own actions and decisions. He hated you for it, but inevitably he admitted it was needed. Your designation as a wanted fugitive remained in place simply to make sure that you didn’t come back. The Emperor deemed it the only way to ensure you never returned, that you were a free mammal that no longer answered to him.”

Jameson let out a huff. “He still needs to learn how to let others know what he wants them to think. I was under the impression that I’d be extracted back to the Imperial Capital in order to face court-marshalling.” Releasing a sigh, the tod stated “Answer me this: Why does he want my son? I’m aware that Nick isn’t supposed to exist, but what does the Emperor want with him?”

Deego’s expression darkened. “The Emperor… he’s not the first mammal to awaken their Izu Genes, but he is considered the most powerful to date. An immortal who founded the Zoolympian Empire over 50,000 years ago, the Emperor always assumed that he’d never succumb to Malthael, the Divine Entity of Death. Yet, it would appear even an immortal as powerful as he isn’t outside Malthael’s influence.” Locking eyes with Jameson, Deego stated “The Emperor’s dying, Jameson. His final desire is to gift Nick his power.”

To hear that the Emperor, the mammal that Jameson had since his creation considered his sire, was dying had him shed a single tear. “How long does he have left?” Jameson inquired in a whisper. A tiny part of him hoped that the Emperor could resist Malthael’s summons for a little while longer, so that he could explain everything to Nick.

“Approximately a score,” Deego answered. “Therefore, we have some time left before he passes.” Slapping the table, he said “But all of this is something we can deal with at a later date. Right now, we need to focus on what’s happening here in Zootopia. As we just saw your son, his mate, and the rest of your newly recruited initiates of Cipher Squad have returned. I doubt they’ll need our assistance, but I plan on providing it anyway.”

Nodding, Jameson stated “Much earlier, I managed to tag the Chancellor with a marked bullet. If you give me access to a computer terminal, I’ll get us his location. Afterwards, I’m planning on rendezvousing with my son.”

<MEANWHILE>

Nick and Judy stalked the essentially empty streets of Zootopia, Harrison and Zannah right behind them. The fox and bunny had donned the smartshades given to them by Nick’s father Jameson, using them to scan their surroundings to a greater degree than they could with just their eyes alone. So far, they hadn’t come across anyone, either friendlies or hostiles.

“There’s nobody,” Zannah whispered to the others through her earpiece. “It’s like one of those old ghost towns you hear about sitting around a campfire late at night.” It had her on edge.

“Keep your eyes open,” Harrison stated in a soft voice. “There’s no telling who’ll jump out at us, or from where.” He adjusted then readjusted his grip on his sidearm. The wolf stopped as the smell of blood reached his nose. “Guys,” he whispered, pointing at the source of the putrid stink.

Silently making their way over, Nick and Judy used their newfound strength to life the debris. They didn’t find anything underneath the massive piece of stone besides a pool of small pool of blood. Signaling that it was nothing, they continued on their way. It was about a dozen yards further they came across their first encounter with hostiles allied with the Chancellor.

The storm of bullets that flew at them didn’t deter them as their enhanced high-speed reflexes
allowed them to evade each one. They heard the exclamations from their attackers as they charged forth to retaliate. Having decided ahead of time they would refrain from killing anyone if possible, Nick, Judy, Harrison, and Zannah incapacitated their assailants unarmed. Well… as unarmed as one could be without claws.

Knocking the last of their attackers unconscious, Judy muttered “What should we do with them? After all, we can’t just leave them unattended. They’ll continue if we do.”

Tearing a sizable piece of clothing from one of the attackers, Nick used it to bind the limbs of their assailants. “This will have to do for now.” Doing the same for the others, Nick straightened up and said “Let’s keep moving.”

Continuing on their way, Alpha Team moved slowly through the district. Eventually, they came upon what appeared to be a military outpost. Approaching swiftly and without raising the alarm, they readied themselves for another attack; However, what they found was much more welcomed.

Chief Bogo was reading the most recent reports gathered by their recon scouts when the sound of someone clearing their throats prompted him to look up. A sense of relief filled him as he saw Wilde, Hopps, Wolford, and Fangmeyer staring at him. “Good. You’re here. Where are the others?”

“Scouting Sahara Square and the Meadowlands,” Judy answered. “M, our… specialized trainer, is solo in Tundratown. Harrison’s grandfather and his friends are also running solo, but we don’t know what they’re doing.”

“What’s our current situation, Chief?” Harrison asked. “From what we’ve seen, it’s not good. Do we have any idea as to where the Chancellor is hiding?”

“Currently, we’re just now relocating a group of refugees to a safe haven camp,” Bogo replied. “It was a bunch of kits and Kit Services agent found by Harrison’s grandfather, actually. We’ve got them on a large cargo helicopter out of the city as we speak. An emergency trauma center has been set up in the base level of the Palm Hotel and Casino. We’ve received word that one Josef Wolverin has begun providing advanced medical care. Also, this…” the buffalo lifted the report he had before him, “…is a report that states Carlos Jackael has taken a few of the Chancellor’s supporters out via non-lethal sniper shots, 30 in total.”

“They work fast, don’t they?” Nick had to admit that he was impressed. The others responded to Nick’s question with affirmative grunts of approval.

“As for the current whereabouts of the Chancellor,” Chief Bogo began, “we’ve got an idea, but we’re waiting for confirmation. It shouldn’t be too much longer though.” Leaning back in his seat, the cape buffalo said “I want this bastard. I don’t care if he’s alive or dead, but I want him yesterday.”

“We’ll get him, Toby,” Nick promised, “I’ll make sure of it. You have my word.”

Looking at the tod with a death glare, Tobias Bogo stated “First of all, never call me that again. Secondly, I know you will. The reason I know that is because, if anyone can, it’s you, Hopps, and the rest of your team. Now, get out of here. You’ve got work to do.”

Chapter End Notes
Yep. All that just happened.

I've got a primary rough of Arc Two Chaps One and Two written, but after rereading the filler chapters, I've got a few alterations which are very much needed to be made. Therefore, I've gone ahead and purchased a bunch of legal pads and pencils. Summer Vacation starts May 25th, which is when we're leaving for Tokyo, Japan. I've already contacted an old acquaintance for use of their studio, to which they've agreed.

Now, for the bad news. I'll be going on hiatus/sabbatical until I've finished writing AT LEAST half Arc Two. Afterwards, I'll be posting Chapter Two of Zugzwang. Then, I'll focus on assisting Ian with SWZ. Once that's all done, Arc Two will get posted at a somewhat regular/consistent rate. Hopefully, this will help me keep things flowing more normally.

This isn't me saying, "I'm out". This is me saying, "I need a bit of time to get things in order". I'm not going anywhere for a long, long time.

Also, here's the playlist link again, just in case you missed it from last chapter.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLS0GiesEUPnbWuyylan89c5zesO1dXocX
Important Notice: Please Read

Chapter Summary

Important Notice: Please Read.

Note: if you wish to skip my personal history then start reading from the double page break.

Chapter Notes

After receiving a certain comment last chapter, I decided it was time to do a little reflecting. Afterwards, I reached a conclusion which prompted me to type this.

It will be mentioned multiple times, but I want to say it anyway. This isn't "Goodbye", but a "Until next time".

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Important Notice: Please Read

Addendum: If you wish to skip past my personal history, jump to double the double lines.

First of all, I want to make it clear this isn’t one of those posts where the author says they’re through with writing their story and abandon it. Not even close. Well, it’s kinda close. Similar, but different.

Secondly, I want to try expressing my thoughts about how fun it is writing these stories. You have no idea exactly how good it feels to begin writing again after so long. Or, if you do, you understand what I’m attempting to say.

Third, I think it’s important to tell you all how much I appreciate your comments. It’s actually the reason for posting this message.

I think it’s time for me to explain a few things. Without going into great detail, I need to inform all of you writing has never been my forte. I used to write fanfiction in the past, but after suffering certain indignities, I had to quit. Long story short: my fiancée died in a vehicular accident along with our unborn child.

Previously, I mentioned my current wife was #4, and I was engaged three times prior. The first cheated on me. My second and I split amicably, staying friends. The third died en route to our rendezvous from the hospital where she had only just discovered we were expecting, also the night I planned to propose.

After #3’s death, my life spiraled. I attempted to take my own life, but ultimately failed when her mother slapped some sense into me. With some encouragement, I admitted myself to a psychiatric asylum. It was there I first encountered Dr. Jo, who would become my psychotherapist. It was she
who introduced me to my wife, who I already knew from a long time ago.

My wife and I had known each other during out childhoods. We hadn’t been the best of friends, but rather partners in a “masochistic tango”, as it is often termed. However, we eventually realized why.

I was still an inpatient at the psychiatric asylum during our first few months of whatever we were at that time. We didn’t use the terms “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” or any other terms of endearment, preferring to simply call each other by name. As our relationship continued, we grew closer, and more intimate.

Originally, both of us thought our relationship wouldn’t last. Fate, on the other hand, apparently predetermined differently. Once released, she insisted I move in with her, which I did, only to discover another already living there. My initial reaction was disbelief. It was soon revealed this current roommate was none other than her youngest brother. I had never gotten to know her family before then, so my reaction was understandable. Within a year, the two of us learned we were pregnant.

I was a total mess upon hearing the news. My life, which had only begun to regain a semblance of normalcy, once again began to cave-in and collapse all around me. I was unemployed, had no prospects, and didn’t know what to do.

My family, from whom I was severely estranged, intervened. I was offered a temporary position at their company until I could manage on my own again. After ironing out the finer details of the contract, I accepted. My, now deceased, grandfather, upon learning of this, summoned me to his estate, where I was made his primary beneficiary. My grandmother did the same.

The twins were born a week late, but were otherwise healthy, which I considered a miracle. My wife and I moved into my grandfather’s estate, which he had bequeathed unto me prior to his death. Now a father, I dove back into the workforce with a renewed sense of purpose: To provide for my family.

As I was no longer writing fanfictions, all of my materials simply sat there, forgotten. I still wanted to write fanfictions, but I was not motivated, nor did I have any inspiration. My wife and I did eventually marry, and instead of going on a honeymoon, we stayed home for two weeks simply discussing our plans for the future while watching over our kids.

Fast forward to 2017, and I decided it was time to start writing fanfictions again. Yet, nothing seemed interesting enough to even bother trying. It was during an outing at the mall that my kids requested I purchase Zootopia. I was in my 40s, could remember the original Disney films like Robin Hood, Oliver & Co., and many others, and found myself utterly amazed by Zootopia.

I quickly excavated my old materials and attempted to reuse them for a brand-new fanfiction, which soon became TZD. Along the way though, my original purpose, motivation, and direction for the story changed. As a result, it lost a certain aspect and quality. I don’t know when it happened, nor do I know how, but it did.

In the process of posting my stories, I’ve encountered many wonderful people, such as liiwilliams08, wrecker159753, SaberGatomon, and Kaylin to name a few (hope they don’t mind). Every comment made on any of my stories has impacted and influence them in some way.

What I say next could potentially come across any number of ways, but I only intend for it to convey objectivity.

I do love reading comments from those who bother to read my stories. However, I’m a hypocrite. I
often tell other authors whose stories I myself read not to permit comments to directly affect their writing. I’m guilty of the same offence. I’ve allowed comments to influence my works too much. Thus, my stories don’t possess something they did in the beginning.

Late last night, I read a comment which floored me. My initial response was…less than appropriate. The reply I received was like an armour-piercing sniper round. It really forced me to consider everything about my works: the plot, the direction, the characters, literally everything. After exchanging a few more messages, I reached a conclusion.

I’ve already announced my family and I are going to Disney World Tokyo for Summer Vacation. The original plan was to use that time to flesh out Arc Two of TZD. However, as everyone should know, plans are victim to changing without much warning in advance.

The new plan is as follows:

- I’ll continue to post until Arc One is complete.
- Once that’s done, I’m going on an extended hiatus.
- During that time, Ian and I will completely rewrite, revise, and re-edit everything, starting from the beginning.
- We’ll redo it all, both TZD and SWZ. My Original Work is once again on hold for an indeterminate amount of time as well.
- Only after determining the stories are my best will I post the “remastered” versions.

Many will probably ponder for what reason I’m doing this. My answer is another question: Have you ever had an inexplicable need to simply do something the so-called ‘right way’? That’s why I’m doing this. I need to write my works the ‘right way’. I just haven’t figured out what the ‘right way’ for me to write them is yet.

Again, this isn’t me saying “Goodbye”. This is me saying, “Until next time”. I know many authors who have simply walked away without so much as saying a word. I even know a couple of authors who’ve committed suicide for some reason or another. I’m not doing either of those things. I plan on returning with an even better story. It’ll most likely take some time, but I shall return.

I want to end this by thanking everyone who has followed my stories. I don’t think the words to express or convey how appreciative I am toward you even exist. You all have given me something I haven’t received in years. I can only say, “I thank you”.

This post probably seems long, and pointless, to many of you who actually bothered reading it. That’s okay. You don’t have to understand it. This post doesn’t have any other reason than to explain why no one will hear from me for a while. It also serves to give you a portion of my history, although feel free to ignore that bit.

Until next time,

0P3RaGh05T (& by extension, Ian)

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who read this post in its entirety, allow me to explain why I included a bit of personal history.
It isn't my first time deciding to do this. I doubt it will be my last. I included it because it felt proper. To you, it's just useless information that has no bearing on anything. To me, it's my past, a part of who I am. It's supposed to help you understand why I'm doing this. Maybe it doesn't, but like I said, "That's okay".

I don't intend to walk/run away from writing fanfictions again. This time, unlike the last, I've got incentive to return. Those of you who've remained with me this long, you have no clue how much I appreciate it. Until I come back, which I will, I only have one request: Keep being you.

Also, I'll leave my stories posted until I return. However, once I do, I'm taking them down.

P.S. I'm not the best when it come to getting my point across, and I often find it difficult determining the most optimal words to use in that regard. I'm sure someone will look at all this and go, "WTF!?!!?" Point is: I'm taking some 'me' time to get my shit straight then I'll come back. Plain and simple.

Until next time y'all!
Chapter 24: This Ends Now (Part One)

Chapter Summary

Still updating until Arc One is complete. Here's the next chapter.

Chapter Notes

To reiterate, I'm still updating this story. At least, until Arc One is completed.

Good news, bad news.

Good news: We arrived safely in Tokyo a few days ago.
Bad news: I'm spending a fortune reprinting everything I need to rewrite this story because I couldn't bring it all with me.

Lesson: Keep multiple copies on portable storage for travel.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Four: This Ends Now (Part One)

The Big Residence – Tundratown – Zootopia

Antoine de Medici-Borgia, Bearnard Kozlov, and Scarlett Reddington stared out of the window at the deserted streets of Tundratown. The Big residence had remained relatively untouched by the explosions that devastated the district. The arctic shrew, polar bear, and red fox vixen needn’t say a word, knowing they each shared the same thought: This fucker must die.

“Is Fru-Fru safe, Kozlov?” Mr. Big inquired. The arctic shrew hadn’t spoken to his daughter since sending her away to ensure she and her own daughter were safe. Seeing the destruction outside, he had felt the need to confirm they were safe.

“She is, sir,” Kozlov answered. “There is no need to worry. Nothing bad shall befall them as long as they remain with their protective detail. I’ve also instructed those protecting them that they are not to let Lady Fru and Little Judie leave their sight.”

“Good. You’ve done well, Kozlov,” Mr. Big commended. Turning to Scarlett, he said “I think it is time for us to make our move. I’ll set things in motion. You, on the other paw, have a phone call to make, do you not?”

Nodding slowly, Scarlett hoped that Skye would pick up. The line rang four times before it connected. “Skye? Look, don’t speak. I don’t have that much time, so I need to make this fast. The mercenaries from Zootopia’s criminal elements are already on the move. Their leader is a grizzly by the name of Torbjorn Schwarzenberg. He’s already been informed of you and your crew, so there’s no need for you all to worry about that. But, that’s beside the point. The reason for this phone call is
that my condition has gotten worse. I don’t know how much time I have left, or if I’ll even survive long enough to see this through to the end. I want you to know that I love you and that I’m so proud of you. As we both know I’m not good with goodbyes. Therefore, I’m going to end this call saying this: Don’t you dare die. I expect you to live your life to the fullest. If you join me before it’s your time, I’ll spank your ass in the afterlife. I love you, Skye.” Hanging up before her daughter could speak, Scarlett let the tears fall. Covering her muzzle as she began to cough, Scarlett pulled her paw away to see blood.

Elsewhere in the district of Tundratown, M was sweeping the streets, looking for evidence that the Chancellor was in the vicinity. So far, he hadn’t found anything that gave him any indication of the Chancellor’s location. The margay also hadn’t heard anything from the others, so he determined that they had yet to find anything either.

The first sign of life that the margay came across was a supporter of the Chancellor, which he quickly dispatched. Knowing that it was unlikely that the mammal was alone, M quickly continued on his way. A short while later, the margay reached the location that had previously housed one of the bombs. Dropping down into the crevice, M scanned the area for any sign that someone else was there. Finding nothing, he carefully made his way to ground zero’s center most point to examine what was left. Not surprisingly, there wasn’t much.

Performing a careful sweep of the area, M found something that caught his attention. It was a fragment of the explosive device, but not just any piece. This was part that he identified as one of the triggering mechanisms. The thing that he had an issue with was that he recognized the design. ‘This isn’t good. This isn’t good at all. I’ve got to let the others know asap.’

**Meadowlands District**

Skye didn’t allow herself to shed any tears. It was neither the time nor the place for her to do so. However, the vixen promised herself that once she was alone, she’d mourn properly. Right now, she had to focus on the task at paw. A chirp from her earpiece alerted her that someone was contacting her.

“If you can read me, I need you all to listen.” M’s voice came on over the line. “Don’t go anywhere near the bombsites. Stay as far away from them as you can. I repeat, stay as far away from the bomb sites as possible. I’ll explain later.” With that the line went silent.

“Anyone have any ideas what that was about?” Shay inquired from nearby. “He sounded a little bit uneasy to me. Did any of you get that same feeling?”

“I did.” Honey replied. “I have a few ideas as to why. Not one of them is good. I suggest we heed his warning though.”

“I concur.” Jaxon seconded. “Besides, we’re supposed to be looking for any evidence as to where our allies are located. Has anyone found anything on that front?”

“Not a thing.” Skye stated, as she crept further into the district. A flicker of movement caught her eye. “Wait! I have movement at my ten o’clock. Approximately half a kilometer in distance.” Moving swiftly, Skye approached the location in which she had seen it. Getting closer, the vixen’s breath caught.

Slowly bleeding out onto the ground that had clearly once been a flower bed, Ma Li stared up at the sky overhead. The Ferghana stallion wasn’t sure exactly how he had ended up where he currently rested, but it didn’t matter to him. From his last lucid memory was the explosion that had taken the right side of his body. Besides that, short snippets of what memories he could recall led him to
believe the explosions had resulted in his current position. Ma Li couldn’t move or even feel anything about his own body.

Staring at the sky, Ma Li wondered if Fatima was safe. His mind went back to the night he first met her. It was an evening party hosted by some of the higher echelons of the city. Li had spotted her enjoying herself in the company of a fox tod and, in a fit of jealousy, taken it upon himself to steal her away. Never had he thought he’d fall in love with her for real. Li recalled reading a story about the tod later. He had made it as a reputable divorce lawyer. It had surprised him that Fatima and the tod remained good friends until the tod moved away.

‘I was a hypocrite.’ Ma Li finally admitted to himself as he laid there, knowing he was going to die. ‘I advocated for inter-order relationships, but I hated the idea of a tod and mare enjoying such a thing. I even went and stole the love of someone’s life away from them because of it.’ He had seen the expressive emotions within the tod’s eyes back then. Li had hated it, hated the thought that a mare would even consider someone outside her species. Thinking back on it now, maybe his adamant resolve to advocate for inter-order romances was born of his subconscious guilt.

Hearing someone approach, Li let his head loll to the side. It was a vixen with fur as white as snow, wearing armour and an expression of sadness, as if she knew that he was going to die just as much as he did. “Tell…tell my wife, I’m sorry.” Li choked out, blood spewing from his maw as he spoke.

“I will,” the vixen replied with sincerity. “I’ll make sure she gets your message. This I promise you.”

“T-thank you.” Li told her as he breathed for the final time. He didn’t know what came after death, but he wasn’t frightened. Li watched as the world darkened, felt as his heartbeat slowed and eventually stop beating altogether.

The Ferghana stallion’s dead body laid before Skye, who carefully closed his eyelids. Saying a short prayer, Skye stood and made her way back to the others of Beta Team. Shaking her head at their expressions to let them know it wasn’t a subject she was ready to talk about, Skye continued to lead them through the district.

Shay noticed what appeared to be an outpost in the distance. “Guys. Outpost at 2 o’clock. I’d estimate a distance of a few hundred meters, maybe eight.” Looking at them, he asked, “Anyone know our exact location to give us an idea of what to expect?”

“If I recall correctly,” Jaxon started saying. “That should be the old church that acts as the border landmark between the Meadowlands and the Rainforest Districts. We’ll have to move slowly. The ground there probably came loose during the explosions. If we’re not careful, we could end up in a pinch.”

Heeding those words, they slowly and carefully made their way in that direction. Sure enough, just as Jaxon said, the outpost was in fact the church that acted as the landmark that separated the Meadowlands from the Rainforest District. There was a sentry on guard, a battle-scarred grizzly bear wielding what looked like a turret.

“Halt!” Torbjörn Schwarzenberg shouted. “Identify yourself. If you don’t, I’ll blast ya to smithereens.”

“You first.” Skye hollered back. “Besides, I think you find that we won’t die so easily even if you shoot us with that thing.” As she spoke, Skye sensed Jaxon moving stealthily towards the bear and behind him.

“You got balls, lass. Name’s Torbjörn Schwarzenberg. I’m the leader of the mercenary forces allied
with the ZPD and the military against the bloody tosser called the Chancellor.” the bear replied. “Your turn now.”

“Skye Reddington.” Skye responded, using her mother’s maiden name for the first time in ever. “I think my mother informed you of my impending arrival.” She watched as Torbjörn lowered his turret.

“Aye, that she did. That she did.” Torbjörn stated. “Ye a lot earlier than expected, I must say. Come on. We’ve got work to do.” Leading them inside, the grizzly bear had them sit amongst the church pews. “Our forces are spread a little thin. A lot of ‘em didn’t make it though. There were a lot of ‘em that died when the city was sent sky high. A lot of my good friends.”

“My condolences.” Jaxon replied. “However, as you stated earlier, we have work to do. So, let’s get to it, shall we?”

“Right.” Torbjörn answered. “We’ve got reports that show what mammals in the city that support the fucker are based in an old warehouse in The Docks. Although we’re the furthest from their position, it’ll be up to us to handle ‘em. We’ll coordinate with everyone for a major strike. I suggest you prepare yourselves. It shouldn’t be too much longer now.”

**The Streets of Zootopia**

Racing through the deserted streets of the city, Jameson was making his way directly towards Nick, Judy, and the others. Right on his tail was Fenrir, Carlos, and M. Josef was still at the Emergency Trauma Center working out of the main floor of the Palm Hotel and Casino. With the location of the Chancellor currently being tracked and broadcasted via secure text message updates, Jameson wasn’t going to waste any time. Arriving at their destination, Jameson and the others stopped.

Nick, Judy, Harrison, and Zannah were already present at the rendezvous point. Nick turned to his father as he approached. “So, the Chancellor’s in there?” he asked, pointing to the remnants of what had once been City Hall.

“Underneath it would be more accurate.” Jameson answered. “He’s hidden himself in the Catacombs. It’s a secret graveyard built beneath City Hall for the mammals seen as heroes of the city. The Founders have also been buried there in a special area known as the Vault of Legends.”

“This is where the Chancellor plans to make his final stand.” Fenrir stated. “When we’re down there, we’ll all need to be on our guard. There’s no telling what he’s got prepared.”

Pulling out the fragment he had taken from the bombsite he visited earlier, M said, “Keep your eyes open. The explosives he used are highly volatile. They may no longer have the biomaterials, but there was enough C4 packed in each that the possibility remains that setting off any down in the Catacombs will bring the whole place down on top of us.”

All nodding in understanding, the group began making their way into the structure. A few supporters of the Chancellor resided within and started firing at them, but it proved futile. Returning fire, they took out most of the hostiles quickly. By the time they had, each of them heard nothing but clicks from their firearms, signifying they no longer had any ammo. Discarding them, everyone drew their melee weapons.

The further into the building they got, the clearer the murmurings that echoed throughout the air became. The nonsensical ravings that reached their ears made it apparent the Chancellor was suffering from some kind of hallucinatory attack. Jameson signaled for Nick, Judy, Harrison, and Zannah to head one way while he, Fenrir, Carlos, and M took another route.
Splitting into two groups, each went its own separate way. Nick led his group the long way around, while Jameson led his the more direct route. Everyone exchanged glances as they signaled they’d see each other when they regrouped.

Within the Catacombs, the Chancellor felt fear, anger, hatred, and despair as the hallucinations continued their mental assault upon his mind. He could feel the emotions of each of his attackers crash into him upon landing their blows. Whether by instinct or intuition, the red wolf turned to see a black-furred fox tod with a firearm leveled directly at center mass. “So, you found me.”

“Wasn’t that hard really.” Jameson retorted. “That first bullet I fired into you during your assault on Fatima Ara was marked so that I could track you later. I had planned to utilize it earlier, but never got around to it.”

Huffing, the Chancellor said, “I should have figured that when you tracked me to Camp Bastion.” Turning to face the tod fully, the red wolf revealed the horrendous state of himself. “As you can obviously see, the nanomeds have begun to fail. They were never very stable to begin with, were they?”

“Nope.” Jameson replied. “That was one of the main reasons they never made it to mass production.” Gripping his sidearm tighter, he added, “Looks like their beginning to break your body down instead of reconstruct it.” Locking eyes with the red wolf, Jameson added, “I’m guessing it’s also affecting your mental health.”

During this conversation, Fenrir, Carlos, and M got into position slightly above the heads of Jameson and the Chancellor, ready to strike at the tod’s command. They watched as the red wolf revealed a paw-held device. A tingle erupted in the back of their minds, warning them of imminent danger.

Toying with the remote, the Chancellor stated, “You know, when I first started planning all this, I never imagined that all it would take to cause everything to fail.” Staring at the black-furred tod, he smiled. “Mervis Swinton truly was a swine. It was because of him that all this even happened.”

“I’m aware.” Jameson eyes were flicking back and forth between the Chancellor’s own and the remote in the red wolf’s paw. “He thought everything would go the way he planned. Clearly, it didn’t, and he failed miserably. However, that doesn’t excuse you for what you’ve done.”

“I never thought it did.” The Chancellor responded with sincerity. “I just wanted everyone to know what I felt back then, to make sure that no one ever forgot what he did to me.” Running his thumbpad over the button of the remote, he added, “In doing so, I became the same thing I loathed so much.” Resting his digit on the button, he said, “I still plan on seeing my ambition through to the end.” Saying that, he pressed the button.

The explosions that happened as a result wracked throughout the Catacombs. The remaining structure of the former City Hall came crashing down. As the dust settled, the Chancellor clawed his way out of the rubble. Coughing, he raised his head to see a sight that had him reeling.

Before the mammal that had destroyed their home, Nick and Judy stood, swords drawn. Harrison and Zannah were helping Jameson recover Fenrir, M, and Carlos. Nick pointed one of his blades at the red wolf, wearing an expression that seemed to darken the world around them.

“Zugzwang.” Nick stated. He watched as the Chancellor stood and prepared himself for the impending battle. He felt Judy do the same beside him. “This ends here and now.”

With a bloody smirk, the Chancellor replied, “I can’t help but agree. This is where it all comes to an end.” Those were the last words he spoke before he lunged forward to strike.
The Chancellor’s Warehouse – The Docks

It was the explosion that had them spring into action. Skye, Jaxon, Shay, and Honey led the combined forces of the coalition of ZPD, military troops, and mercenaries as they descended upon the remaining followers of the Chancellor. Bullets flew through the air as the final battle for Zootopia erupted.

Their enhanced abilities gave them the advantage over their opponents, but it did nothing for the rest. Jaxon held nothing back as he revealed to all why he’d inherited his father’s codename of Savage. Those in his way didn’t see a jackrabbit bearing down upon them, but a creature from the depths of the Netherworld. Shay, following Jaxon’s example, was viewed as a hellhound, tearing through those who stood against him. Not a soul remained unfazed by the sight of the two leaving a trail of mayhem in their wake.

Chief Tobias Bogo and his father, General Andreas Bogo, along with Torbjörn Schwarzenberg and ZIB SSA Raoul Mauler, led the second wave of troops in the attack on the warehouse that housed the Chancellor’s supporters. They unleashed a flurry of bullets, mowing down all those that were in front of them. Even as bullets filled the air, the whistles of RPGs could be heard and were shortly followed by the explosions upon their impact. Still, no one flinched, continuing to march forward to end this once and for all.

A swarm of mice, shrews, rats, and other tiny mammals slipped into the warehouse, attacking from the inside, sending the opposition into disarray. Among them was the son-in-law of Mr. Big, who had chosen now was the time to cast aside his fears and do something that he himself deemed right. At his command, the assorted rodents tore through and demolished the interior of the warehouse, leaving nothing that could aide their enemies.

In the mobile command unit not too far away, Ian Wilde was acting as the tactical advisor, instructing the troops on where to strike next. At his side was Mr. Big himself, coordinating those under his command in time with Ian. Through their combined efforts and tactical advice, the coalition quickly gained the advantage over Predopurge.

Honey and Skye took turns picking off those who tried to flee. The badger was set up on one end of the compound, the vixen on the other. Communicating through their headsets, the two didn’t let a single one escape. When Skye eventually worked her way through all of her ammo, she took to using the grenades in her rucksack. The destructive force of each had those attempting to get away quarantined out of fear.

It took about two hours, but finally the skirmish came to an end, with the majority of the Chancellor’s extremists captured. Those apprehended were bound and deposited into armoured transports for delivery to face sentencing. Those who had willingly surrendered were placed in a separate transport, but were otherwise faced the same fate.

As the members of the coalition tended to their wounded, Skye gave Jaxon a kiss then ran off to find her mother. The vixen was literally picked up by Kozlov, who swiftly brought her to a converted cargo container only a few meters from the mobile command unit Mr. Big occupied with Ian. Inside, Scarlett was stretched out on a cot, breathing shallowly.

“Mom?” Skye whispered as she approached the ailing older vixen. “Mom? Can you hear me?” Gently taking hold of Scarlett’s paw, Skye sat on the edge of the cot.

Cracking open her eyes at Skye’s voice, Scarlett peered at her daughter. With a tired smile, she softly said, “Hey. There’s my beautiful little vixen.” Coughing up a bit of blood, she whispered, “Sorry.” Drawing a shaky breath, Scarlett asked, “Is it over? Did we win?”
“I...I think so.” Skye answered, brushing a paw over her mother’s brow. “We haven’t gotten confirmation that the Chancellor’s either dead or captured. We did get his fanatics though.”

“That’s good.” Scarlett replied. “I don’t doubt that he’ll receive proper punishment.” Coughing more violently, Scarlett whined in pain. “This sucks balls. There’s so much I want to do with you, so much I must make up to you.”

“Hey now.” Skye scolded. “Don’t you dare talk like that. Yes, I wish we could spend more time together, but look at it this way: Dad’s waiting for you.”

Laughing softly, Scarlett asked, “I wonder what he’ll say when he sees me.” Frowning, she added, “I wonder if he’ll still love me after everything I’ve done. I’ve done a lot of terrible things, you know. Some of them unforgivable.”

“That may be, but I’d like to think he will.” Skye stated. “I never knew him, but I wouldn’t be here if he didn’t love you. Plus, you know us foxes. We mate for life, both in this one and the next.”

“Yeah. You’re right.” Scarlett replied as she looked upon her daughter. “You are so much like him. I’m probably going to hear it from him. ‘How could you let our daughter turn out like me? I’d have hoped she’d be more like you!’.”

Snorting, Skye shook her head. “Heaven help Jaxon if I were too much like you.” Swallowing at the sight of her mother’s eyes losing that light within them, Skye asked, “Hey? Could you tell me something? Before you go?” Hearing her mother’s questioning hum, she inquired, “Did you get them all? The ones responsible for Dad’s death? Or are there still some out there?”

“There’s one last one.” Scarlett whispered. “I wasn’t able to find her, no matter how hard I tried. She was the one his parents had planned for him to marry. Her name’s Felicity Wightpaw. She’s the one who originally put the bounty on your daddy’s head.” Giving her daughter a serious expression, Scarlett warned, “If you plan on going after her, be on your guard. She’s a vengeful bitch. Intelligent and manipulative as Hell, too.” Gasping suddenly, she looked skyward. A smile crept across her muzzle as she whispered, “Always the perfect gentle-tod.” With those words, Scarlett Reddington passed away.

Skye tried her best to hold back the tears, but at the feeling of Jaxon’s arms wrapping around her after slipping into the container, she couldn’t any longer. Skye let out a wail of sadness that could be heard by everyone outside. The canids that were present let out a mournful howl to let her know that she didn’t mourn alone. Jaxon just held her tightly as she shook in his grasp, whispering words of comfort and understanding into her ears.

Relief Camp Zeta

Bonnie Hopps was delegating tasks to her kits when an older wolverine arrived at the relief camp which they had been assigned to by General Bogo. He was carrying medical supply cases in each paw and appeared to be searching for someone. Approaching him, Bonnie asked, “Can I help you, sir?”

Josef looked at the doe for a couple of seconds before smiling. “Just the doe for whom I was searching.” Setting down his medical supplies, he extended his paw. “I’m Josef Wolverin ma’am. I’m an…acquaintance of your daughter Judy.”

A bit surprised, Bonnie shook his paw. “I, uh, I see. Are you looking for her? If you are, she isn’t here.”
"No, ma’am. I’m not looking for her. I’m here because this is where she will be in due time.” Josef explained. Gesturing to his cases, he added. “I’m also here to deliver medical supplies. I had a surplus of them I didn’t end up using so I’ve been distributing them to all the relief camps.”

“Oh!” Bonnie stated with a big smile. “Thank you. I’ll make sure they’re put to good use. Do you have to leave now? Or can you stay for a bit?”

“I’m afraid I must take my leave for now.” Josef replied, a bit of sadness tinting his voice. “I have other relief camps I need to visit to deliver supplies. However, I’ll do my best to return here when I can. There’s a couple things that I must discuss with you concerning Bryan Jonathan Lapins.”

Leaving a stunned doe behind him, Josef quickly made his way to where Jameson had told him he would be. The wolverine had a feeling that things weren’t going as simple as they hoped.

Back at the camp, Rey Vulpes was getting bandages put on his wounds by fellow ZPA cadet Tasha Wolver. Letting out a hiss as she tightened the bandage she was currently tightening a little too much, Rey said, “Can you loosen it a little bit? I think you’re cutting off the blood flow.”

“Sorry.” Tasha muttered softly. Loosening the bandage just a tad, she said, “You got pretty banged up, didn’t you?” It was a rhetorical question that didn’t need an answer, but it was the only thing that came to her mind.

Rey looked at Tasha as she tended to him. Had it really only been a few hours since they met and became good friends? He wanted to call his parents and ask them why they were so dead set on him finding a vixen, but it would have to wait for now. His primary focus was easing the mental and emotional turmoil he could see plaguing Tasha. “Hey.” he whispered, causing her to lock eyes with him. “I’m alright. I’m still alive, and right here with you.”

Gulping, Tasha nodded. It was crazy, wasn’t it? Finding out that despite always thinking that you were only attracted to your own species you had formed an emotional attachment to someone of a different species, that is. Tasha had dated a few wolves growing up, but it was something she had done because it was expected of her. She had always had a bunch of friends that spanned across all species, or more accurately all canid species. Rey’s sudden appearance in her life had turned it upside down. Her mother’s lectures on purity reran through her mind repeatedly, but it no longer carried the same weight as before.

‘Wolves should only ever mate with wolves.’ her mother had told her. ‘As my daughter, I expect you to understand that to keep our family pure you’re to take a wolf of superior pedigree as your mate.’ she always reminded her. The memory of when her mother had found her in the company of males that weren’t wolves had Tasha mentally cringe. ‘I don’t care if you have female friends of different species, but you will not befriend males that are not wolves. If I find you in such company again, I’ll have you excommunicated from the pack.’

It was a painful memory, but one that had left an impression on Tasha she couldn’t erase. “Rey?” she forced herself to ask. “If…if we…you know…got together and my family forced me out, what would you do?”

Sighing, Rey looked up at the sky. “To be honest, my folds would probably do the same thing to me.” Seeing her downcast expression, Rey smiled, “However, as long as I had you, I’d be totally fine with that. We’d start a new life together free of the hatred and fear of our families. We’d go on adventures together, see new places, experience new things. It wouldn’t matter where we’d be because home would be wherever the other is.”

Cheeks burning, Tasha gave Rey a shy grin. “I’d like that a lot, but I want to keep it a secret for just a little while if we can. Not because I’m ashamed though. In one year, I’ll be old enough to declare
myself emancipated. After that, no matter what my folks say, I’ll be able to take my inheritance regardless of to whom I’m seeing.”

“That sounds like something a vixen would say.” Rey told her with a smirk. “I’ll even do the same thing. My folks have me lined up to inherit a big piece of land just north of the Meadowlands. I’ll be allowed to take ownership in only three months.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Tasha stated before giving him a lightning fast peck on the lips. She giggled at Rey’s flabbergasted expression. He really did look adorable like that.

The Chancellor’s Flattop Stone on the fringes of Zootopia

A funeral pyre was burning atop the flattop stone once used by the Chancellor. In the center of it was the body of Andrew Bellwether. Standing at attention around the burning pile, Liam, Doug, and Randolf watched the body of their friend as it turned to ash. Zebrina was also there, a few paces away, unable to witness the proceedings take place. Despite their best efforts, they had failed in saving Andrew’s life. Surprisingly, Zebrina had taken it the hardest, having been the one performing the operation to save him.

“The Chancellor is still alive.” Liam stated as he continued to watch the fire burn. “I mean, I haven’t heard anything that indicates otherwise. What do you all think we should do?”

There was a moment of silence as they all thought about what their options were. There weren’t that many available to them. No matter what they did from that point forward, none of them would ever be able to show themselves in Zootopia again for as long as they lived, knowing that they had played a key role in its destruction.

“It’s only the Chancellor left.” Randolf finally stated. “We’re Mammalia-Non-Grata here. There’s nothing more we can do. If we remain here, we’ll either be imprisoned for multiple life sentences or put to death.”

The reindeer’s words were harsh but true. Their only real option to evade either of those conclusions was to start new lives elsewhere. It wouldn’t be an easy thing to do; however, they didn’t have any other choice.

Parker and Liam clasped each other’s paws firmly. Randolf walked over to Zebrina, placing a hoof on her shoulder. Only Doug remained standing before Andrew’s funeral pyre, staring into the flames.

Doug had kind of expected himself to bawl his eyes out, yet that didn’t happen. Instead, he stood there feeling somewhat responsible for Andrew’s demise. True, it wasn’t his fault, at least not directly, but still, a part of him believed it. His decision on how he would move forward was simple: turn himself into the authorities. He wouldn’t reveal anything concerning Zebrina, Randolf, Liam, or Parker, but he would accept whatever punishment the courts deemed fit.

This would be the last time any of them saw each other. Exchanging hugs and paw/hoofshakes, they promised that if ever a time came that they needed one another, they’d answer the call. Parting ways, only Doug remained behind, saying a final goodbye to Andrew.

Standing at the edge of the clearing, far enough away that he wasn’t visible, Andrew Bellwether watched as his best friend mourned his passing. Zebrina had, in reality, managed to save him, but he had requested that she inform them all of his death. It wasn’t that he wished to see how they would react to the news of his demise. No, this was his way of moving forward. He wanted to call out to Doug, reveal that he was, in fact, alive. Yet, he refrained. Andrew knew that Doug wouldn’t face a
heavy trial, he had made sure of that. He had given documentation proving that all of Doug’s actions
were at his request.

‘Someday,’ Andrew thought to himself. ‘Someday I’ll come back here and answer for my actions. Until then, this will be my penance.’ He turned away, leaving everything that Andrew Bellwether is, was, and would ever be behind.

**Otterton’s Floral Emporium**

Kris Otterton and Martino held each other tight. They were tangled within the sheets of her parents’ bed and in each other’s arms. Neither of them remembered ever having experienced such intensity while mating. Maybe it was a result of the explosions happening around them that caused it. Perhaps it was the thought that this would be the end of them both. Either way, the resulting mating session had truly branded itself within their minds.

Cracking an eye open to peer at Martino’s sleeping expression, Kris smiled. It was times like this when she saw Martino without stress lines adorning his muzzle. A pang of sadness plucked her heartstrings as the thought of Martino’s lifelong pain entered her mind. She had listened to him weave countless tales of romance during their outings together. Each seemed so real, as if they had actually happened. It had led her to investigate Martino’s past. What she found had caused Kris to feel nothing but pure ire for the stupid sow of a female otter who broke Martino’s heart.

Carefully slipping from Martino’s grasp, Kris made her way to inspect the damage outside. Kris’s breath hitched as she saw the state of the city just past the threshold of her parent’s flower shop. The first thought that flashed through her mind was they shouldn’t have survived. The second was that she and Martino had to get out before the earth under the shop opened up and swallowed it whole. Racing back upstairs, she shook Martino. “Martino! Martino, wake up! We need to get out of here!”

It was the panic in Kris’s voice that woke Martino. Wearing nothing but his boxers and sleepshirt, Martino followed Kris downstairs to see why she was so panicked. After seeing it for himself, Martino agreed they had to get out quick. The only problem was that there was no way of knowing what sections of flooring were stable enough to cross. Spying some of the stones Kris’s parents used for gardening, Martino had an idea. Grabbing a few, he tossed them one by one at varying distances. Depending on how unstable certain areas were, even the slightest shift in weight would disturb the balance, revealing the areas they needed to avoid.

Following Martino’s steps, Kris felt herself on the verge of a panic attack. She wanted to get out now, not later. However, it was Martino’s words of promise that kept her from reaching the tipping point. They were a few steps away from the door when the sound of earth sliding registered.

“Run!” Martino ordered, grabbing Kris’s paw and taking off as fast as possible. The ground beneath their paws was beginning to shift dangerously. The two didn’t stop running, knowing that if they did, they wouldn’t escape the pull of the sinkhole that was forming just behind them. Martino only paused long enough in order to throw Kris onto his back before he resumed.

Watching as her parents’ flower shop sunk into the ground and out of sight, Kris could stop the tears that formed in the corner of her eyes. That had been her home, a place where she had made so many memories, and it was just gone. Kris recalled the day her father came back to that tiny little hovel they had previously called home, saying that he had found a sponsor willing to give him the start up capital to open his shop. She remembered the first time entering the place, knowing that it would be the place they’d call home from that point forward. So many memories: the first time she wasn’t embarrassed to invite friends over after school, her first real birthday party with classmates, all the times she and her father spent together making bouquets for weddings and making believing that it was her own.
Reaching the point beyond the sink hole’s reach, Martino stopped and set Kris down. He watched as she retreated a short distance back towards their starting position at her family flower shop. He had an idea of what she was going through, but let her be, knowing she was trying to come to terms with it all. “I’m sorry, Kris.” He knew it was lame, but it was the only thing he could think of saying.

Memories of last night entered Kris’s mind at Martino’s words. Those were the ones that hurt the most. She hadn’t just lost her home, but also the place that she had imagined Martino returning to her every night after work. That thought had only come to her the night before, yet it hit her harder than any other loss. Falling to her knees, she let out a broken sob.

It tore him apart seeing Kris in such a state, so Martino got onto his knees beside her and pulled her into a strong, heartfelt embrace. There was no way of knowing for sure how long it would take for the ground to resettle, if it would ever resettle. Martino knew that, and he knew that Kris knew it too. Even so, he found himself saying, “We’ll rebuild it. It’ll be bigger than before, and better too. When we do, we’ll be able to provide flora that you could previously. Rare specimens that one could ordinarily find in the most exotic areas of the world. It’ll take time, but we’ll do it.”

Her sobs turned to wet hiccups of laughter at Martino’s words, yet Kris couldn’t find the right words to express herself or her thoughts. To hear him say that was something like a dream, one she never thought would come true. ‘I fell in love before I even realized it.’

Otters weren’t one of the species that was known to mate for life, but that didn’t mean it never happened. It was probably why the few times that Kris had rutted with another otter other than Martino she always felt so sleazy. It made sense now that she thought about it.

“Martino,” Kris whispered softly. “I’m taking that as a marriage proposal.” She felt him huff in amusement, but he didn’t let go of her. “You’re not going to run away screaming?” she teased.

“Not a chance.” Martino retorted. “I was being serious earlier with everything I said. I may not have meant for it to be a proposal, but if you’re willing to take it as one, then it only means that I finally got something good out of my dreary, humdrum life.”

“Just so you know, I’m totally going to rub it in your ex-fiancée’s muzzle.” Kris told him, with a hint of her previous ire at the thought of that otter bitch. “I’ll make sure she knows exactly what she gave up. I’ll have her so jealous, she’ll try any- and everything she can to win you back.”

Giving Kris a look, Martino said, “Oh, I’m sure you will. Just promise me that you’ll take a ton of pictures of her face when you do if I’m not around. M’kay?”

“It’s a promise.” Kris vowed, kissing him. Pulling back before they did something indecent, Kris said, “We should try and somewhere safe.” Standing, Kris pointed off towards where she remembered the old church being. “Let’s head in that direction. The church should be that way.”

Taking Martino’s paw, the two of them started walking, wondering where their path would lead them.

**Coalition HQ**

The new base of operations for the coalition’s forces was quickly set up in the remains of the Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia, which turned out to be the sole surviving building that hadn’t toppled to the ground during the devastating, citywide explosions. Supreme Commander Deego and Attorney General Hoover were sitting across from one another holding a discussion that would determine the fate of Zootopia. The topic? The currently ongoing battle between the newly revived Cipher Squad and the Chancellor.
“You have a lot of faith in them, Supreme Commander.” A.G. Hoover commented. “How do you know for certain that they won’t fail? I’m not saying I won’t agree to leaving it in their paws, but I need you to provide something that will prove your faith in them isn’t just some gut feeling.”

“With all do respect, sir,” Deego replied, tone indicating no respect was intended. “You no longer have any say in the matter.” Slapping a sheet of paper and sliding it towards the chinkara, he stated, “An official inquiry was filed, without my knowledge, by an unknown party. It only took the Data Centre a very short length of time to confirm the accusations made against you. You’re no longer the Attorney General of Zootopia, nor do you have any of the authority that goes along with the title or station. Effective as of now, you’re just another civilian.”

Staring in utter shock at the canid that sat on the other side of the table from him, Hoover took the sheet of paper to examine it. It was indeed the findings of an official inquiry with him as the sole focus of investigation. Reading the findings, the chinkara knew that there was no way to deny allegations. Everything was there, in black and white, and highly detailed. “When did you get this?” was the only question he could ask.

“It was only delivered to me right before I came in here.” Deego answered. He glowered at the elderly chinkara with pure malice. “You share equal responsibility with Mervis Swinton for the events leading up to all that has befallen this city. If you had confessed to everything earlier yourself, this could have possibly been avoided.”

“Fat chance of that.” Hoover retorted. Sighing, he set the sheet down. “Things were very different back then. I had only just been graced with the position of Attorney General. I wasn’t expecting to be ensnared in Mervis’s web of deceit. By the time I learned of the truth it was far too late to stop it or even make a difference.” Raising his eyes to meet the canid’s evenly, Hoover said, “Shall I entertain you with a story? I’m sure you’ll find it most informative.”

“You see, it all started some twenty odd years ago. A young mammal named Mervis Swinton had the belief that all preds would one day revert back to their primitive, savage ways. So, he came up with a plan to rid Zootopia of them. The only issue he had to face was exactly how he’d get enough mammals to support him. Then, a thought came to him: Why not run for the Mayoral office? Surely, if he had that position, he could get the right mammals to follow him on his crusade. Gathering a few friends with similar beliefs, Mervis began his campaign.”

“Now, during that same time, there was another young mammal named Jacen Carno. He was a red wolf who preached pacifism to those who lived in the village of Shiregrove just beyond the limits of Zootopia. The village had been founded by his ancestors many generations back, and was considered a safe haven for preds who didn’t want to be subjected to the hate of prey. Jacen Carno had lost his wife to hate crimes during a visit to the city at the paws of mammals who supported Mervis. Jacen Carno and his daughters mourned the loss of their loved one, yet didn’t retaliate. This sparked another idea that Mervis would use later.”

“For many months, Mervis would campaign, all while plotting how to best purge predators from Zootopia. So many concepts were devised, but none of them seemed to be favored by his followers. Eventually, one of his close friends suggested an idea that was, at the time, viewed as ‘reasonable’. What was this idea? The answer is tame collars, which were in actuality shock collars designed to torture predators in the hopes of ‘revealing’ that they were still savages. All it took was one predator to step out of line for the citizens of Zootopia to ‘see the brilliance of the genius Mervis Swinton’. His party garnered more supporters than any previous campaign in history.”

“Back in Shiregrove, a young psychiatrist named Hannibal Hyector met and came to know Jacen Carno, who would one day become the madmammal known as the Chancellor. During a short stay
in Shiregrove, the two discussed many topics, none which seemed relevant at the time, simply small talk between to educated individuals. Another young doctor, Loretta Pouncer, met Mr. Carno’s young daughters, learning of their mother’s death, which hadn’t been properly investigated and her body remaining in cold storage. Upon returning to the city, Dr. Pouncer signed for the release of Mel Carno and promptly returned her remains to her family."

“Shortly thereafter, Mervis was elected to the position of Mayor. With a new mammal in office, it only seems fitting that changes would be made to who had what governmental position. He filled each spot with mammals he knew would back his plans. What he hadn’t counted on was the arrival of a young chinkara who was to take over the position of Attorney General of Zootopia. This led him to adapting his plans to a much slower pace to ensure it went how he wished. The Tame Collar Law went into effect only two weeks after he was in office. Predators, instead of behaving as he expected, held silent protests and filed lawsuits in every type of court that would accept it. Mervis wasn’t the least bit pleased, and so, he chose to make adjustments to his plan.”

“While that was happening, our newly appointed Attorney General had yet to make the acquaintance of Mayor Mervis Swinton. His first order of business was to acquaint himself with those whom he would work closely, such as the Police Commissioner at the time and the different Precinct Chiefs. It was a couple of weeks before his first run in with Mayor Swinton, who had done his research in preparation for their meeting. Mervis spun a tale that did little to sway the Attorney General. After their meeting, the young chinkara took his time in reading over all the documents outlining the Mayor’s policies and laws. Deeming them inmammal, he abolished them. Little did he realize that by doing so, he had made a grave error.”

“Back in Shiregrove, mammals that were followers of Mervis’s administration were vandalizing the properties of the villagers. These occurred repeatedly over the course of several weeks, stretching into months. The upset caused by the Attorney General forced Mervis to react the only way he knew how: aggressively. He ordered what supporters he had desecrating the village of Shiregrove to do whatever it took to run them out of there. Mervis had plans for that land and the young chinkara’s actions had pushed him to accelerate his timeline.”

“One night, the Mayor invited the Attorney General to dinner with him and his family. Not sensing anything amiss, the young chinkara agreed. At the same time, a large force of Mervis’s followers launched an attack on the village of Shiregrove, unbeknownst to the Attorney General. As dinner reached it end, the Mayor informed the Attorney General of what was taking place. In a fit of rage, the Attorney General stormed off to file charges of corruption, not knowing that the officer taking his report was a firm supporter of the Mayor.”

“Days later, it is brought to the Attorney General’s attention that still nothing had been done concerning the Mayor. After having an epiphany, he decided to do the one thing that he felt could be done. Make it impossible for Mervis to gain ownership of that land he wanted so badly. Using a series of complicated legal maneuvers, he thwarted every attempt Mervis made to acquire the land. It was this that led the Mayor to confront the Attorney General. A heated debate ensued, which resulted in the Attorney General in forcing the Mayor into taking a trip out to his desired land, a trip from which the Mayor never returned.”

“Now, fast-forward twenty or so years. The Attorney General had retained his position for more years than any of his predecessors, thanks to the incredibly high opinion the public had for him. However, what he never imagined was that during those twenty years, Jacen Carno, the only survivor of the Massacre of Shiregrove, had plotted to destroy the city that had done the same to his home. He remained unaware that a series of low-level crimes were connected to a far larger conspiracy. It wasn’t until the disappearance of the Shadow Ledger that anyone knew that a storm was brewing just past the horizon line. In an unexpected turn of events, young up-and-coming
Mayoral candidate Leodore Lionheart garnered the affections of most of Zootopia, securing him the position of Mayor.”

“Dawn Bellwether, Leodore Lionheart’s Assistant Mayor and secretly a member of the then unknown anti-predator movement Predopurge, secretly began to carry out the Chancellor’s wishes. Through subterfuge and deceit, she, with the help of her co-conspirators, revamped Mervis’s ‘Savage Predators’ plan. What neither she, nor by extension the Chancellor, anticipated were the actions of a singular bunny doe and a red fox tod who worked together to expose Dawn Bellwether, albeit it took three months, but still. The rest you already know.”

At the conclusion of the former Attorney General’s story, Supreme Commander Deego found himself facing a dilemma. What was this dilemma, you ask? There was not a single soul that could confirm nor deny the chinkara’s tale. If it was up to him, Deego would have Hoover sentenced to multiple life sentences for every death that was a result of what happened all those years ago. However, it wasn’t his decision, it was up to the courts. Regardless, something about the chinkara’s story didn’t seem right. “Why didn’t you press charges against the Mayor back then?”

A wry chuckle passed through Hoover’s lips. “Believe me, I wanted to charge him for everything. Unfortunately, back then, you needed irrefutable proof that could in no way be misconstrued to favor the defense. Plus, Mervis was smarter than your average mammal. He made sure that nothing could be directly linked to him at all, in any way, shape, or form. I even contacted friends throughout the Zoolympian Empire for assistance. Not one was able to provide me with advice. In the end, I had to make a choice. Either I force him to face what he had done by going to Shiregrove, or kill him myself. I never in my wildest dreams thought that Jacen Carno had somehow survived. There was no evidence of the possibility. When Mervis didn’t return, sure there was an investigation, but nothing panned out. There was no body, no signs of foul play, nothing to indicate anything. It was as if he simply vanished.”

“Looking back on it all now, I should have suspected that there was at least one survivor. After all, that string of random low-level crimes clearly indicated that someone had survived the Massacre of Shiregrove. Yet, everyone simply turned a blind eye on those crimes, since nothing ever became of them. One might describe it as Chaos Theory. A series of seemingly unconnected and unrelated events that results in one singular conclusion. You often hear mammals say that if they knew then what they know now they’d have never let things happen the way they did. I’m of the same mind. If I knew back then this would happen, I’d have done something to stop it.” Folding his hooves in front of him, Hoover sighed heavily. “I don’t expect you to understand why I did what I did. I don’t expect forgiveness for it either. All I want, if I’m allowed it, is that I’m incarcerated for multiple life sentences and not given the death penalty.”

It was a reasonable request in the Supreme Commanders mind. After all, one could view that as a fate worse than death. “I’ll put forward a motion for that,” he stated, “No guarantees, though. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have other mammals to whom I must attend.” With that Supreme Commander Deego stood up and walked out of the room.

*Emergency Medical Center – Mystic Spring Oasis*

Delgato considered himself very fortunate. According to the doctor, if the piece of glass had only been a couple of millimeters lower it would’ve lacerated his kidney. He’d read reports where officers had received a lacerated kidney while on duty and perished en route to the hospital. Yes, Delgato considered himself very, very lucky. The sole complaint he had was the fact that the Emergency Medical Center they had brought him to was Mystic Spring Oasis. The memory of that dare from when he was in high school concerning this place had scarred him for life. That lioness still called him every Saturday evening.
“You’re looking better.” Grizzoli stated as he took a seat on the folding chair next to Delgato’s cot. “Thought you’d like to know, word is your family made it out okay. Your mom’s been calling me every hour on the hour demanding updates on your condition. I finally just told her you’d call her when you could.”

“Thanks, Griz,” Delgato replied. He looked around at all the other wounded mammals that were scattered around the place. “Hey? Would you think less of me if I admitted how scared I am?”

“Nope. I’d actually call you an idiot if you weren’t. Why?” The arctic wolf looked at his colleague to see a sad expression on the lion’s muzzle.

“I’m scared, Griz,” Delgato admitted. “I mean, look around.” He made a wide, sweeping gesture with one of his paws. “I can list exactly how many mammals were brought in after me, with wounds much more severe than mine, that they could have gone to help. Yet, they kept tending to me despite my insistence they go tend to others. I’m scared that I’ll be the reason someone doesn’t reunite with their family after this.”

“Why does that scare you? I mean, it’s not like they were operating on a lost cause.” His poor attempt at a joke was met with an expression that the arctic wolf knew too well. “Wait. Are you saying you’re dying?”

“Feline Leukemia,” Delgato answered morosely. “I’ve only managed to get a pawful of treatments within the same span of hours. The doctor said that there’s a good chance I’ll survive, but I need to be prepared in case I don’t.”

A heavy silence ensued between the two. Grizzoli shifted a little in his seat as he tried to think of something to say. Delgato watched as the trauma medics hauled another wounded mammal away for intensive care. Neither seemed to have any clue with how to proceed, so they simply observed the actions of those around them.

Clawhauser came up and sat in the chair on Delgato’s other side, a box of donuts in paw. “I heard that they got all of the Chancellor’s lackeys during the attack on the warehouse. Also, Nick, Judy, and the others with them are currently engaged in combat with the Chancellor himself. No one’s willing to get too close, seeing as how a single swing of one of Nick’s swords is powerful enough to create dust devils. Plus, Judy’s own sword strikes are only visible as a glint of light, reminiscent of a lightning bolt.”

Staring at the cheetah in utter shock, Delgato and Grizzoli whisper-shouted, “WHAT!” Seeing the cheetah nod once in confirmation, the two looked at each other with wide eyes. Both made a mental note that if Clawhauser was telling the truth, don’t mess with the fox or the bunny.

Passing a donut to the lion and the arctic wolf, Clawhauser asked “So, how’re we feeling? I know about Delgato’s ‘condition’ from Chief Bogo, but what about you, Grizzoli? Have you heard anything about your folks? Did they make it out?”

Not at all surprised that Clawhauser knew about his condition, Delgato chose instead to focus on the question concerning Grizzoli’s family. He had never met them himself, despite the few times they had gotten paired as partners. Delgato was always a little curious as to why Grizzoli never mentioned them to anyone. He was also curious about why Clawhauser seemed to know anything about them.

Heaving a heavy sigh, Grizzoli answered “Yeah, they made it out.” Scratching his throat, he said “It’s funny, you know. First, they want nothing to do with me because of that decision I made before I joined the force. Then, they’re all worried about me when the city’s gone to shit. Now, they’re back to wanting nothing to do with the child who brought shame to their family. They need to make up
their damn minds.”

“Uh, I’m a little lost here,” Delgato confessed. “Not to intrude or anything, you don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to, but what’s going on between you and your folks. I thought wolves were one of the more family oriented species.”

A barking laugh escaped Grizzoli’s muzzle. “Yeah, wolves are all about family. As long as you don’t bring shame to the family, that is.” With another heavy sigh, Grizzoli leaned forward with his arms resting upon his knees. “Look, you told me something personal, so I’ll do the same.” Swallowing nervously, Grizzoli admitted “I’m wasn’t always a male. I was born Henrietta Grizzoli. When I was 18 years old, I took what cash I managed to save in hopes of undergoing sexual reassignment surgery. I didn’t tell my folks, because I already knew how they’d react. I had just enough money to pay for it. When my parents heard, they were furious. They didn’t outright kick me out, but they did keep me a secret. Eventually I just moved out, got my own place, and enrolled at the ZPA.”

“Wow,” It was all Delgato could say after processing what he just heard. “That’s rough, and terrible. I take it that this is why you never shower with any of us.”

“Yep,” Grizzoli replied, popping the ‘p.’ “For all intents and purposes, I’m a male. Got all the equipment and everything. Just a bit self-conscious about how it looks.”

“I only know because I accidentally walked in on him while he was taking a shower,” Clawhauser explained. “It was a very long and very emotional conversation. Of course, the Chief had to be informed since it wasn’t something noted in his file. That was awkward, embarrassing, and stressful. But, everything worked out well in the long run.” Munching on another donut, Clawhauser added “I had to admit though, when I found out I about lost my mind. It was the first time I ever really interacted with a transsexual. Knowingly anyway.”

“Well, now that we’ve both revealed a secret about ourselves, it’s your turn, Benny-boy,” Delgato stated, smirking. “Make it a good one. After all, you know something about each of us only a few no about. It’ll only be fair that we know something just as guarded.”

Thinking for a moment about what to reveal, Clawhauser kept chowing down on his donuts. After some thought, he decided on what to tell them. Sighing, he thought ‘Here goes nothing.’ “So, you know how there’s always been talk about who at the precinct has the worst luck when it comes to relationships?” Seeing them nod, he steeled himself. “This will be a bit difficult for you to believe, but I swear it’s true, and I’ve got plenty of mammals, male and female, who’ll corroborate this if you want to verify. However, despite what many of you think, I’m actually the one with the worst record when it comes to dating.” Seeing their deadpan expressions, Clawhauser sighed. “I’m a virgin. I’ve never managed to have a relationship last long enough that we were comfortable talking about rutting or anything like that. I’ve had tons of boyfriends who ended the relationship because ‘it just didn’t have the magic anymore.’ My last committed relationship was with Tito Stripetower, who was my roommate until he became a backup dancer for Gazelle’s entourage. After that, I swore off dating, until just recently. My current boyfriend is going to remain a secret until he’s ready to out himself. If you really want to know how embarrassing this is for me, then consider the fact that I haven’t touched a single donut while telling you this.”

Both Delgato and Grizzoli heard every word Clawhauser just said. They even understood it all. The only part that stood out to them was… “You’re still a virgin?”

Glaring at them with a patented ‘Bogo Death Glare,’ Clawhauser hissed “That’s the only part either of you bothered to hear?” He watched as both Delgato and Grizzoli cringed under his gaze. “I didn’t give either of you a hard time about your secrets. Shouldn’t I get the same courtesy? You know
what? Screw you.” Standing up and marching off, Clawhauser left a totally stunned and mildly frightened lion and arctic wolf behind him.

Swallowing thickly, Grizzoli said “I think we screwed up royally.” Getting a nod from Delgato, he added, “We’re going to pay dearly for this, aren’t we?” Another nod from the lion beside him. “Any ideas on how we’re going to get ourselves out of this situation?” This time was a headshake. “Swell.”

Across the compound, Tobias Bogo had just walked in, running directly into Clawhauser. Seeing the cheetah’s expression, Bogo frowned. “What’s wrong, Ben? You don’t normally have such a sour look.”

Huffing, Clawhauser said “It’s nothing, Toby. Just…” Sighing, Ben looked up at the buffalo. “Secret swap didn’t go the way I hoped. I’ll get over it.” Hugging the buffalo, he asked “How’re you doing?”

With a heavy sigh of his own, Bogo patted Clawhauser on the back. “I’m…alright. Got a lot of work to do when this is all over.”

“What about Nick and Judy?” Clawhauser inquired worriedly. “Are they alright? Have you heard anything?”

A grave expression came across Bogo’s snout. “No. Which worries me.”

Chapter End Notes

So far, I've got a little less than half of everything reprinted. Net cost: approx. $500 U.S.

We saw my brother-in-law yesterday. He's ready to come home, but unfortunately has one more year until then. I doubt I'd ever leave. I'd live here if it wasn't so far from my favorite place in the world: the Nexus. It's this little store near my home where you can purchase almost anything media-related; movies, music, video games, and audio novels. They also have a wicked coffee shoppe inside as well.

Ian isn't happy. Since we're redoing everything, he has to start over. That isn't the issue though. His Opening Crawl, in his words, sucks.
Home Sweet Home

Chapter Summary

Title says it all.

Chapter Notes

How y'all doing? In good health, I hope.

The coven and I have returned home.

So, I figured it best to update y'all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Throughout the last month, I was essentially without any data. Though I have an unlimited data plan, its speed plummets once a certain amount is used. I typically use my phone as a mobile hotspot on trips. I'm certain you can deduce the rest.

Now, I have some announcements to make. There's good news, bad news, and worse news. I'll start with the 'worse news'.

First, I must explain something. I live a 'straight edge' lifestyle. No recreational drug use, and no alcohol. I maintain a strict exercise regimen, and can deadlift my own body weight. Except for Sundays, which is my cheat day, I typically eat meals that promote optimal health. Despite all this, not even I am beyond Fate's influence.

Worse news: I require open-heart surgery. Upon our return to the U.S., it was discovered I have myocarditis. It isn't severe, but potentially worrisome. Essentially, small areas of my heart's muscle have become necrotic and require removal. I'm not overly concerned though, as my cardiothoracic surgeon is among the best. However, I'll be out of commission for longer than I wanted. I'm actually typing this while en route to the hospital now.

Bad news: Unrelated to the above 'worse news', my luggage has apparently gone missing. I had three suitcases; one carry-on, and two for baggage claim. I have my carry-on, but my others are, according to Ms. Ruth, are still in Japan. I should expect them in 3 to 4 business days. This is bad news because all the research I did while in Japan is inside my travel chest.

Good news: My wife's little brother was issued an honorable discharge and came home with us. Five years overseas changed him, but he's still the same oddball we love. My problem is...guess where he's staying for the foreseeable future. If any more start living with us, my house will be considered a community home.

Due to my impending surgery, I won't explain the concept mentioned from my last post. It'll take more time than I have available to me.
My cardiothoracic surgeon promised me I'll get discharged Tuesday evening. So, expect an addendum on Wednesday.

Chapter End Notes

It feels so good to be home.
The addendum to my last post

Chapter Summary

This is the addendum to my last post. I'm posting it separately so that those subscribed will receive a notification.

Chapter Notes

Though temporarily limited to the confines of my own home, I'm doing remarkably well.

This post will explain some important things that must be announced.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

For those wondering, the surgery was a success. Despite having to excise more necrotic heart muscle tissue than originally expected, everything went accordingly. They managed to seamlessly blend the resulting scar into one of my chest-piece tattoos, so I've got no complaints.

Now, I'm planning to post the remaining chapters next Thursday (19 July). This will not include the filler chapters since those set everything for Arc Two. Due to the story undergoing a massive revision, they're no longer lineal.

I must establish communications with my editor once again. (I set them free until my return, and they vanished without a trace.) The moment that's done, we'll determine how to proceed onward.

The most challenging task any writer can undertake is remastering one of their own previous works. Each author has their own reason behind why. This is why writers have editors. Writers are incredibly biased regarding their own works. Though we are aware there are constant flaws, bias dictates we deny it.

In fanfiction, this task becomes exponentially more difficult. There are too many reasons to list.

For a writer to remaster a previous project, they're required to begin as though never having written it. Thus, starting over from the very beginning. This takes a great deal of time and patience. Therefore, many never attempt it.

During my family's stay in Japan, I spent some time pondering the potential path to take TZD. I wrote each one inside a memo booklet then discussed them with my wife. Her opinion is, and shall forever remain, the most important to me. Normally, these conversations happened in the evenings, and last well into early mornings.

Following a suggestion she posed to me, I had an epiphany concerning my predicament. This resulted in devising a concept meant to improve my writings. I proceeded to research it extensively,
and concluded its use would benefit me greatly.

The suggestion: *Let's play a round of D&D. It'll take your mind off it for a while. You can be the Dungeon Master.*

If you've ever played Dungeons and Dragons, understanding should dawn on you soon.

Therefore, my concept is to remaster this story using a DM's mindset.

Does this mean everything will change? No, but certain aspects shall.

I'll generate character sheets and create dossiers for each. Their backstories will receive minor alterations, though nothing too drastic.

In essence, nothing except the primary storyline shall get revised. I'll still have my OCs, though they'll undergo minor modifications. Each character shall get a subplot of their own, as intended.

My apologies concerning my excessive 'page break' use. I honestly don't really have a logical reason to use so many.

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Chapter End Notes

Final Note: Both my surgeon and physician have instructed me to rest a lot. I'm not even permitted to leave my bed, as per my wife. Normally, I'd view this as a dream come true. However, not this time. If it's by my choice: absolutely. If it's not: I'm likely to go insane.

Expect the remaining unremastered chapters on 19 July regardless.

Y'all have my apologies if this post isn't sensical. I'm exhausted, and probably shouldn't have taken my meds prior to typing this.

I missed y'all during my vacation. I wanted to tell y'all that.

See y'all later.
Chapter 25: This Ends Now (Part Two)

Chapter Summary

Part Two.

Chapter Notes

Last two uploads for pre-remastered version.
Research is kicking my a**. The more I do, the more I realize how out of practice I am, and how much has changed since I first started.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 25: The end of one adventure…

The Final Battleground

It had to be the nanomeds. That was the only possible explanation for why the Chancellor was still able to carry on fighting this long. Neither Nick nor Judy could be certain of that fact, but they had a feeling it was the reason. This fight had lasted a whole lot longer than either of them had anticipated. The one thing that concerned them the most, however, was the world around them. Scattered across the battlefield were the wounded forms of Harrison, Zannah, Fenrir, Carlos, and M. None of which had regenerated quite yet from the wounds given to them by the Chancellor despite their enhanced regenerative abilities.

The Chancellor, in spite of the heavy damage he had sustained, remained upright. With a wicked smirk, he said “I commend you for lasting this long, I would never have imagined that you’d manage it. Still, I don’t see you winning this.” Taking a step forward, the red wolf threw his head back as he howled in agony at the sensation of steel impaling him through his gut.

Jameson, visibly regenerating before everyone’s eyes from the massive mauling he received from the Chancellor’s claws, said “You shouldn’t have turned your back on me until making sure I was dead, pup.” Twisting the katana that he had lunged through the red wolf’s abdomen, Jameson stated “Just so you know, I’ve survived for 2,100 years. I’ve survived worse than this.”

Backpawing the black-furred tod and sending him flying a great distance, the Chancellor extracted the blade from his gut. Tossing it aside, he grumbled “Such a bloody pest.” Returning his attention to his more infuriating opponents, he stated “I’m tired of this. This. Ends. Now.”

Nick and Judy readied themselves for the Chancellor’s impending attack. Right before their eyes, they watched as the Chancellor’s body began breaking down and regenerating repeatedly. However, it was by no means in equilibrium. Exchanging quick, knowing looks, Nick and Judy could tell that the other had observed, deduced, and came to the same conclusion: it wouldn’t be much longer now until the Chancellor’s body finally reached its limit.
Switching to a reversed grip on the combat knife in her left paw, Judy spoke. “Hey, Nick. After all this is over, granted that we’re given some time for R&R, that is, you and I are going to spend a bit of time in Bunnyburrow, discussing how we’re going to move forward.”

Dropping into a battle-ready stance, Nick replied “Sounds like a plan, Love. For now, though, let’s focus on finishing this.” He slowly repositioned himself to best counter the Chancellor’s imminent attack.

Lunging forward, Jacen Carno went to strike the bunny doe with his claws at a downward left-to-right swing. His mistake was not keeping an eye on her partner, which resulted in him leaving an opening of which the tod took advantage. The feeling of cool metal slicing through his flesh rattled him for only a moment. The red wolf went to retaliate, intended to backpaw him, yet instead, this in turn caused the Chancellor to lose track of the doe. As the sensation of a sharpened blade slashing his eye, he let out a snarl of rage and pain. He whipped around to counterattack, but again his actions left him vulnerable to a retaliatory strike from the vulpine, which came in the form of a powerful crisscrossed strike that lopped off his left paw.

Following up Nick’s attack, Judy leapt up and over the red wolf, digging her combat stiletto into his back, using gravity to help her drag it all the way down to his tail. Nick’s follow-up assault was to evade the Chancellor’s retaliation by sidestepping and slashing his, now overextended and thus undefended, underarm. This cut deep enough to nick an artery, causing massive bleeding.

Fear. It was a poison, a virus. One that, in the paw or hooves of the right mammal, could bring even the most fearsome warrior to their knees, making them curl into a fetal position, crying, whining, and whimpering. It could be weaponized, used to force others to do one’s bidding, and cause mammals to go mad. Fear always worked.

For the first time in a long time, Jacen Carno felt fear. He had felt it before many times. He had felt it the day he went to ask Mel’s father permission to date her. He felt it the day of his marriage proposal to her. He felt fear when she had told him he was going to be a father. Felt it the day each of his daughters were born. Every time Jacen Carno had felt fear his instinctual response was ‘fight.’ Never had it been ‘flight.’ Here? Now? Jacen Carno felt a sense of fear unlike any he ever felt in his life. It was he who was the apex predator here, yet it felt as if he were the prey.

Neither Nick nor Judy paused in their assault. Moving quicker than the eye could naturally follow, they performed an exquisite dance of blades. They were completely in sync with one another. Each step, each strike that either of them made was instantly shadowed by the other. It wasn’t until the Chancellor fell onto his knees and paws that they halted their assault. Standing in a V formation, with the red wolf as the vertex between them, Nick and Judy awaited the Chancellor’s next move.

On his paw and knees, Jacen Carno stared at the ground, trembling. Going from pawlms flat against the earth beneath them to making fists, gouging the surface below, the red wolf steeled himself for the inevitable. He couldn’t help but chuckle softly, which led to him coughing up a good amount of blood. The nanomedics had reached the end of their effectiveness. The Chancellor could actually feel his body beginning to waste away now. “So,” he murmured, “This is it. I’ve reached the end, my final destination.” Raising his head to look at the two who were responsible for bringing him to this point, Jacen Carno asked “Can you tell me something? If it had been either of you in my position, would you have done anything different?”

Nick hadn’t expected the question, so he had to think about how to answer. Glancing over at Judy, the tod wondered if he himself would have done the same thing the Chancellor had if he were in his place. ‘I may not have done the exact same thing, but I surely wouldn’t have let mammals forget it,’ Nick admitted to himself.
As for Judy, the red wolf’s inquiry shook her to the core, if only because she didn’t have an answer. Both she and Nick had heard a little of the Chancellor’s story throughout this whole mess, so she knew what had happened to him. Would she have done anything different had she experienced what he had? Judy wanted to answer ‘yes,’ and yet, at the same time, the doe knew she couldn’t. There was no telling what she would have done, or how, without experiencing it firstpaw herself.

Despite not receiving a verbal answer, Jacen Carno could infer it from their expressions. A spasm wracked through him as his body suffered from the after effects resulting from the instability of the nanomeds. Looking down at his left paw, he watched as it slowly began to disintegrate into something reminiscent of either dust or ash. Thinking back on everything he had done, the Chancellor deemed that, in spite of not achieving his originally intended goal, he did in fact accomplish a similar one. Zootopia would never forget any of this, nor would it forget that from the event of which this all came to pass. Once more raising his head to lock eyes with the tod and doe, he gave them a smile full of melancholy. “Grant a dying madmammal one last request, and do it quickly before I turn to dust.”

In an instant, Nick and Judy struck simultaneously, crisscrossing as they did. Now standing in inverted positions from their original starting points, they peered over their shoulders to see the Chancellor’s body hit the ground completely, disintegrating upon impact. Gazing at each other, they put their weapons away and slowly joined in a comforting embrace.

It had finally ended, the chaos that had plagued the city of Zootopia. All across what remained of it, mammals found themselves experiencing an inexplicable sense of tranquility. A couple were able to figure out the cause of it, and breathed sighs of relief. It didn’t take long for word to spread like wildfire that it was all over, that the Chancellor had met his end, that Zootopia was once again [relatively] safe, though not quite sound.

**Coalition HQ**

It was a sight that would be remembered for many years to come. Supreme Commander Deego, General Andreas Bogo, Police Commissioner Terry Catlin, Interim Mayor Spencer Wolvenett, Major Barbeara Friedkin, Torbjörn Schwarzenberg, and Mr. Big all stood side by side as the members of their coalition cheered at the news of the Chancellor’s demise. The heroes had yet to make their appearance, but no one really expected it of them.

Sharing a look with the others, Supreme Commander Deego gestured for them to follow him inside. Entering the complex, he took a seat at the conference table. “We need to discuss what will happen now,” Deego stated. “Obviously, the city needs to be rebuilt. I’m certain that the Emperor will provide whatever you require. There’s also the topic of the those who fell defending the city. Not to mention we must decide how we’ll deal with those who were allied with the Chancellor.”

“Rebuilding the city will take time,” Spencer replied. “There’s a lot of wreckage to sift through so that we can see what’s salvageable, if anything. I’m certain the citizens who are architecturally inclined will be able to come up with some ideas on how best to rebuild Zootopia, and even better than before, too.”

“We’ll accept whatever assistance the Emperor is willing to provide us,” Commissioner Catlin said after a moment of consideration. “Clearly, this will be a monumental task. It’ll probably require more mammal power than we realize. Once we know what’s needed, we’ll let you know.”

General Bogo was the next to speak. “In the meantime, with regard to our fallen compatriots, we’ll hold a mass service in their honor. I’ll make sure not a single one is left out or forgotten.”

“In reference to the subject of those who were allied with the Chancellor, we no longer have a
mammal in the position of Attorney General,” Mr. Big pointed out, which was ironic and mildly amusing given his own position as a criminal kingpin and mafia don, “Nor does the city have a Mayor. Mr. Wolvenett was never sworn into office.” He watched as his words sunk into the minds of the others and the expressions that came of it.

Major Friedkin, who was standing in for Chief Bogo, clasped her paws on the table before her. “If my memory serves, Mr. Wolvenett was next in line for the position of Attorney General if anything were to happen to Hoover; Therefore, he is the de facto Attorney General. In saying that, it would be up to him to preside over the trials. As for the issue of who’d take over the Mayoral office, Mr. Wolvenett was also the projected winner of the mayoral election. I know of no law that prohibits him from accepting both positions simultaneously.”

When no one else went to speak, it was Torbjörn that broke the silence. “The agreement made on our behalf by Ms. Reddington was that we, the inhabitants of the Undercity, would assist you until things had gone back to normal. You held up your end of the deal in killing the bastard, so we’ll hold up our end. You can expect us to help you rebuild.”

At the mention of Scarlett Reddington, Mr. Big stated “Speaking of Ms. Reddington, what will happen to her remains? I know of a few mammals that would like for it to be released to them, if possible.” The arctic shrew would do his best for the vixen’s daughter to pay her mother the proper respects.

“I’ll have her body released into your care then,” Commissioner Catlin answered. “I’ll inform those in charge of identifying those who died that you’ll collect it in due time. As soon as we’re done here, I’ll personally pay them a visit. Besides, without her we wouldn’t have had the assistance of Torbjörn and his mercenary forces. It’s the least we could do to repay her.” His words were accompanied by nods from the others.

“If there is nothing else which needs to be addressed at this time, then I suggest we rejoin those outside for the festivities,” Deego stated. Standing, he proceeded to take his leave. The others followed suit shortly afterwards.

**Emergency Medical Center – Mystic Spring Oasis**

All the wounded throughout Zootopia had gotten relocated to Mystic Spring Oasis under the supervision of military troops and police officers. The members of the Hopps warren that had followed Bonnie to Zootopia were also relocated there. Much to the utter astonishment of everyone, Gazelle was there aiding the medical professionals in caring and tending those injured. Yet, that wasn’t the most shocking thing to those present. What left everyone bewildered was the arrival of a helicopter that landed directly in the center of the compound.

As the loading ramp at the back of the helicopter descended, Dr. Vanessa Aurora ‘Rory’ Wilde finished going over the checklist in her paws that listed the items in the cargo containers that she had with her. Once the ramp hit the ground, the vixen walked out saying, “Alright! Let’s get these medical supplies unloaded, distributed, and used, shall we?”

It didn’t take long for the helicopter to have its cargo unloaded. The medics began to immediately put it all to use, tending the wounds of those in their care. Soon, the helicopter, now empty of any cargo, took to the skies once more.

Bonnie Hopps and her kits were racing around, bringing what supplies were requested to those who asked for them. It was while doing this that Bonnie ended up interacting with Rory for the first time. Passing the heavy-duty gauze to the vixen, the doe said “I do believe that you and I should get to know one another better some time pretty soon.” She watched the vixen look at her in confusion
before an expression of realization took its place.

“You must be Judy’s mother,” Rory replied with a smile. “I must admit, she looks just like you.” Standing, the vixen approached the doe. “I agree that we should get to know one another better, but it’ll have to wait for a bit.”

With a nod and smile, Bonnie said “Yes, it will. I simply wished to make your acquaintance.” She turned to resume delivering medical supplies, but was stopped when the vixen took hold of her wrist. Looking back at her, Bonnie quirked an eyebrow questioningly.

“May I just inquire how you knew that I was Nick’s mother?” Rory asked. “That is the only reason you’d suggest we get to know each other better. I didn’t exactly introduce myself upon my arrival. So, either you overheard someone say my name earlier and pieced it together, or you figured it out some other way. Which is it?”

Smirking, Bonnie answered “To be honest, I didn’t have any way of knowing with 100% certainty. During Nick’s short stay with us, I overheard him talking a little bit about his family. When he spoke of you, Nick hadn’t said much except that he shared your fur colouration, that you were a veterinarian, you tended to treat your patients motheringly, and that you always seemed to end up taking charge of things. I figured a vixen veterinarian would be a rarity, so when you arrived, I deduced that you had to be his mother since you fit the criteria.”

Wide-eyed, Rory began to chuckle. “I stand by my earlier words, it’s clear that your daughter takes after you. You’re very observant and intelligent.” Letting go of Bonnie’s wrist, she added “Once I’m finished her, the two of us should go see if we can find something to eat and talk. I’d estimate an hour or so at the most.” Getting a nod of agreement, they parted ways, resuming their tasks.

Across the complex, Chief Bogo and Clawhauser were busy going from one wounded warrior to another, checking on them. It seemed as if each one they visited with had something they wished to say. So, the water buffalo and cheetah would listen to what they had to tell them. When they finally finished, Bogo and Clawhauser meandered over to a semi-secluded corner to rest for a bit.

“Ben,” Bogo began softly, “I know that our relationship has been a bit of a questionable topic, but I think should clarify a couple of things.” Gazing at the sky, the water buffalo took a minute to arrange his thoughts. “It’s always been something of a…complicated issue for me to admit my sexuality. I never had any interest in another male growing up. I was one of those males, who would regale the others in the locker room with tales of my exploits. Both of my parents had inklings that I wasn’t entirely honest with myself, but I was steadfast in thinking that I was straight.”

“Knowing that I’d never make it in the military like my father before me, I enrolled at the ZPA. I quickly climbed to the top of my class. I graduated among the top three cadets and was assigned to Precinct One as a result. It didn’t take long before I eventually got nominated to replace the chief that ran it at the time. Then, less than a year later, I was drowned in my work, unable to enjoy the things I did prior to joining the police force.” Sighing, Bogo closed his eyes. “One day, this newly assigned cheetah dispatch officer asked me if I would attend a Gazelle benefit concert with him because he had two tickets, his friend had bailed, and he didn’t want to go alone.”

“Do you have any idea how shocked I was when you did that? You were offering me a moment of reprieve from the humdrum that my life had become. Going to that concert with you ended being the thing I so desperately needed. I think it was then that I slowly started falling for you. Day after day, the two of us would interact more and more, getting closer. I started getting back into the dating game, but it never ended well. I found myself fascinated you never seemed to go out on dates with anyone. That isn’t to say I didn’t see people ask you out and feel jealous for reasons I had yet to identify. It finally took my mother and her constant nagging to make me realize why I felt that way.”
“Which is when you started being more open with me,” Clawhauser stated. He remembered the first day that Bogo joined him on his lunch break. It was an unexpected, but welcomed turn of events. Suddenly, Benjamin realized that was almost five years ago. “Wait! Have you been struggling with all this for the last five years?”

Giving Clawhauser a wry grin, Bogo answered “That I have. Fear really does always work. I didn’t know if we’d ever reach an understanding. My hoof was finally forced that day we had lunch at that eatery where that addax saved our hides.”

* Flashback *

“Will you go out with me?” Bogo asked Clawhauser, who sat across from him. “As my boyfriend, specifically.” The dumbfounded expression on the cheetah’s stuffed muzzle was what one would call a picture-perfect moment. When he got no response, Bogo asked, “Ben?”

“S-sorry, Chief. I-it’s just that…I was beginning to think you’d never ask,” Ben confessed, after somehow managing to swallow the large amount of food that had stuffed his maw. “To answer your question, yes, I’d be happy to be your boyfriend.”

Letting out a breath he didn’t know he had been holding in relief, Bogo gave Clawhauser a rare treat: a genuine smile. “Good. Now I can stress over this investigation without worrying about missing my chance to ask you that.” Picking up his garden burger, Bogo almost choked on it at Ben’s next question.

“Does this mean I can call you ‘Toby’ now?” Ben cringed as he watched his new boyfriend start choking on the bite he had just taken. “Sorry. Bad time to ask that, huh?”

Glaring at the cheetah, Bogo pointed at him in warning, saying “One: never call me that. At least, not in public. Two: I still need some time before I’m comfortable coming out. Three: wipe your maw. You’ve got sauce running down to your chin.”

Quickly grabbing a napkin and wiping the sauce dribbling down his chin, Ben asked “So? That’s a ‘yes,’ right?” He let out a tiny screech when Bogo pinched his ear. “Right! Sorry!”

Huffing in amusement, Bogo whispered “Yes, you can call me Toby, but only when we’re alone.” Letting go of Clawhauser’s ear, the water buffalo took a sip of his water. “I’m not ready to ‘come out’ quite yet. So, if it’s possible, I’d like us to keep this as our little secret for now.”

“I, uh, hate to break it to you Chief, but a bunch of those at Precinct One already think we’re together.” Clawhauser confessed sheepishly. “They’ve been discreetly asking me questions about what kind of relationship we have without your knowledge. I haven’t told them anything of course, since we weren’t an item.”

Eye twitching, Bogo stared off into negative space. He was struggling to not make a scene at hearing that tidbit of information. Seeing Clawhauser’s worried expression, he huffed and resumed eating his garden burger. It wasn’t much later when Wilde and Hopps arrived.

* Flashback Ends *

“I know I didn’t look it, but I was nervous as all hell,” Bogo admitted, quietly. He felt Clawhauser lean against him and wrapped an arm around the cheetah. They sat in comfortable silence for a couple of seconds before Bogo stated “I have no idea what we’ll do for housing while we rebuild the city. We need to solve that issue pretty soon though.”

“We’ll figure something out,” Clawhauser replied. “Let’s just enjoy this moment of peace for a teeny
bit longer. We’ll deal with that later.”

Former location of the Zootopian Skytree

Jameson sat on one of the larger fragments of transparisteel that littered the area which was formerly the location of the Zootopian Skytree, and he wasn’t alone. Harrison and Zannah were laying beside each other looking at the clouds in the sky, taking solace in the warm sunlight that bathed the ruined remnants of the city. Skye and Jaxon were a bit further away holding a discussion that concerned her mother, Scarlett Reddington. Fenrir was napping a couple of feet from him with Carlos and Josef leaning against each other not too far away. Shay Morrigan was getting what wounds he had received tended to by Honey, who was giving him a tongue-lashing about his reckless behavior. M was nowhere to be seen, but Jameson figured that the margay had already departed. As for Nick and Judy, the black-furred vulpine’s eyes observed as the two in question sparred only a short distance directly in front of him.

After being sent flying a couple kilometers away by the Chancellor’s backpaw, Jameson had found himself buried underneath a bunch of rubble from a collapsed building. The impact had knocked him unconscious temporarily and he hadn’t regained consciousness until only moments before the Chancellor had already passed away. His return to the scene was met with the sight of everyone surrounding a small pile of stones that Nick and Judy had erected in memory, not of the Chancellor, but those who had died therefore transforming the red wolf into the beast he had become. Afterwards, they had all retreated to their current location to bask in the momentary peace.

Shifting his gaze skyward, Jameson found himself lost within his thoughts. There was a lot of things he needed to handle. First, and foremost, was the Emperor. If what Supreme Commander Deego had told him was true, then the ancient mammal only had twenty or so years left to live. He also needed to tell Nick the truth that he had kept secret for so long. Ear twitching as the sound of someone approaching him registered, Jameson glanced in that direction.

Nick sat down with Judy in his lap next to his father. “Judy and I are planning on revisiting Bunnyburrow, given that we’re allowed time for some R&R. We were wondering if you and Mom would like to come with us. Of course, we both understand if neither of you do, but we just thought we’d offer.”

Releasing a small sigh, but with a smile, Jameson replied “Thanks for the offer, but I’ll have to decline. This time, anyway. I have business of a personal nature that requires my attention.” It really was of a personal nature. Jameson would have to travel back to the Imperial Capital, to ensure this wasn’t a trap of some sort. “I’m sure your mom would love to go with you though.”

Nodding, Nick looked out across the vast expanse of the destroyed city. “All this because of one mammal,” he mused aloud. His words brought everyone’s attention to him, but he just continued. “Our home was destroyed because of the bigotry, hatred, and speciesism of just one mammal.”

There was a moment of silence as they all paused to consider Nick’s words, for it was true. All it had taken was the bigotry, hatred, and speciesism of a singular mammal to set in motion a series of events that had brought the great city of Zootopia to ruin. This realization had each of them wonder exactly how much worse it could have been had they not gotten involved in bringing it to an end.

“So?” Shay inquired. “What do we do now? I mean, the city will eventually be rebuilt, but what about us? Do we just go our separate ways?” While not having been the most sociable, the painted wolf still found himself a bit sad at the thought of having to depart back for his homeland, leaving the others behind. He had grown somewhat attached to them during the extremely short time in their company.
“Well,” Judy began, “I don’t see any reason why we would do that. After all, we’re the newest incarnation of Cipher Squad, aren’t we?”

There were sounds of agreement from the others. They knew what the doe was trying to say. They were a team now, a pack, skulk, warren, whatever you wanted to call it. The only issue they had to face now was their next step forward.

“We should go see Chief Bogo,” Harrison stated. “I’m sure we’ll need to be debriefed. Plus, I’d guess there are mammals who wish to see us, make sure that we’re okay.”

Almost as one, they all stood and, together made their way to the Coalition’s HQ based out of the Metropolitan Teaching Hospital of Zootopia. They took their time, not really in a rush to be swarmed by the public, sure that someone had leaked the fact it was they who had defeated the Chancellor. When they did finally arrive, no one seemed to notice their presence, for which they were grateful. Slipping inside the building, they were greeted by Supreme Commander Deego, General Andreas Bogo, and Interim Attorney General and Interim Mayor Spencer Wolvenett.

“Glad to see all of you are alright,” Deego stated upon seeing them. “Not that I was worried, of course, but I wasn’t sure any of you would come.” Opening a box that was set atop the table, he extracted a special item from within then approached each of them. The Supreme Commander then bestowed upon each the Cross of Glory, the highest award permissible to those who were nonmilitary. “You deserve them,” he commended.

Fenrir, Carlos, and Josef all huffed in mild amusement. The reason for this was that they had previously served in the military as special forces under Jameson. Regardless, they did feel honored to receive the award, even if they hadn’t really done much.

“Usually there’s this long speech, but given everything that’s happened, I’ll skip it,” Deego told them. He stepped aside to let General Bogo take over. Turning back to the table, Deego focused on finishing his report for the Emperor.

General Bogo gestured with his head for Fenrir, Carlos, and Josef to leave. Once they had, he turned his attention to the newly reconstituted Cipher Squad. “This is going to take a while, so I suggest you get comfortable.” After everyone was seated, the General began to speak.

“I want to thank all of you for what you have done for Zootopia,” the General stated. “Nicholas Piberius Wilde. You are to report to the ZPA in order to undergo a final evaluation and assessment when you feel up to it. Technically, you’re still a cadet, which means you need to graduate before we can let you be a cop. I have no doubt that you’ll pass. Judith Laverne Hopps, your time as a cop was short-lived, but, as my son informed you previously, if you choose, you can have it back, effective immediately. Harrison Wolford, as you are no doubt aware, you were given guardianship of Hannibal Hyector’s two offspring. Your father had them evacuated to relatives of yours in Los Lobos. We’ll escort them back whenever you’re ready. Zannah Fangmeyer, prior to all this, you were trying to finish night college, so as thanks, the city and the college will consider your student debts paid in full. Jaxon Lapins, after conversing with the Director of the ZIB, you and Ms. Wintory will permanently be stationed here in Zootopia as liaison agents. Skye Wintory, same as Mr. Lapins, with the addition that you see Antoine de Medici-Borgia for something of a personal nature. Shay Morrigan and Madge ‘Honey’ Badger, from this moment forth you may consider yourselves citizens of Zootopia plus employed by the ZPD as fully ordained police officers. You’ll have to see my son, Police Chief Tobias Bogo, for further details.”

“Other than all that, each of you are to take three weeks of R&R,” the General ordered. “What you do during that time is your choice. However, I suggest that you use it wisely and actually rest. You are dismissed.”
Slightly terrified of what would happen if they failed to comply, everyone raced out of the room and outside. Although there were still some mammals celebrating, they could see a few beginning the process of cleaning up the city. Not knowing where to go, they all just started wandering around.

Judy’s ears perked when she heard a cacophony of voices holler her name. Quickly turning towards the origin, the doe found herself bowled over by a couple of her slightly younger siblings. “What are you all doing here? Are you insane?” She yelled questioningly.

“It was my idea, Bun-Bun,” Bonnie admitted as she approached. “When I saw the news broadcast, I simply couldn’t imagine not helping in some way. Plus, I didn’t like the idea of you being here without any familial support during it.”

“I had Nick here!” Judy shouted before clapping a paw over her muzzle. It seemed like everyone in their little group was now staring at her. “Oh, rutabaga!” She scolded herself under her breath. In front of everybody, Judy had all but stated outright she thought of Nick as family. Despite the fact they all already knew, it was the first time she had said something to that effect out loud.

“Even so,” Bonnie began, “I wanted you to feel like you had our full support here.” Looking to the others with her daughter. “I would imagine this has been quite the ordeal. I’d like for you all to stay with us in Bunnyburrow. I know that you’ve probably been granted some R&R. I think you’ll find it very peaceful.”

It was the thought of wide-open countryside that had them all accept without hesitation. Harrison added that he’d need to retrieve his orphaned wards first, but he’d graciously accept the offer. Everybody agreed to meet at the train station half an hour early for the first one out that direction. With everything seemingly in order, they parted ways until then.

Soon, it was just Nick, Judy, Bonnie, and the other Hoppses remaining. They didn’t see that Rory and Jameson were watching them from afar. The tod has his arm wrapped around the vixen’s waist.

“I’ve got to go,” Jameson whispered to his mate. “I need to confirm what I was told. I don’t know how long I’ll be gone, but I promise you I’ll return.”

Rory rested her head on his shoulder. “I don’t enjoy the fact you’re going to do this solo. I’d like it if you take someone with you to watch your six.” The thought of Jameson getting captured while covertly infiltrating the Imperial Capital was mortifying.

“I know, but I have no other choice,” Jameson told her, “I don’t want someone else to pay the price if we’re caught. Besides, this is between me and him, no one else.” Turning them to face each other, he repeated his promise and sealed it with a kiss. “Now, remember what we discussed.”

“I won’t forget,” Rory vowed. “Just make it back as quickly as you possibly can.” Giving him a tight hug, she scent-marked him. When they separated, she watched him disappear from sight faster than her eyes could register the movement. “Be safe,” Rory whispered. She then turned to join her son, his mate-to-be, and the Hoppses.

The group of them made their way to a small building from which foodstuff was being distributed. During the time they ate, everyone talked about little things, but neither Nick nor Judy revealed to much information since it was technically considered classified. Underneath the table, out of sight from the others, Nick’s tail was draped across Judy’s lap. The teeniest smile across his muzzle was the only evidence of that factoid. He knew his mother knew based on that smug smile she had upon seeing his expression, but he didn’t care.

Time seemed to pass in an instant. Bonnie rounded up the kits that had made the journey with her to
lead them back to the bus, given that it was still operational. Rory talked Nick and Judy to traveling back to Wilde Manor before the three of them made the trip to Bunnyburrow. After going separate ways, Rory, Judy, and Nick took their time walking back to the manor house of the Wilde Familial Estate.

“Nick?” Rory asked in a nervous tone. Receiving a questioning hum in return, Rory said, “There’s something important your father wanted to tell you, but something came up that he had to handle. He asked me to tell you in his stead.”

The three of them stopped as the vixen steeled her nerves for what she was about to reveal. Nick had a concerned expression as he studied his mother’s own. Squeezing Nick’s paw, Judy felt a strong sense of worry herself at the worried expression on the vixen’s muzzle.

“Nick,” Rory began. “Your father wasn’t exactly… born, more than created. He’s the result of countless experiments performed by the Emperor himself. Including him, there were 47 in total. Jameson was the primary, #0, or the prototype. I’m not entirely sure of the sequence of events, but the other experiments were planning an insurrection, prompting your father to slay his so-called siblings. When the Emperor discovered this, he declared Jameson a fugitive wanted for treason and mass murder. The reason I’m telling you this is because there’s something that you know. You see, Jameson is technically the Emperor’s child, an altered clone to be precise. One of the alterations made was that he was designed to be sterile. Meaning, you aren’t even meant to exist. When we learned that I was pregnant with you, Jameson started diving into research. Jameson surmised that the highly adaptive nature of his Izu Genes had resulted in a genetic overwrite allowing him to sire you. This means you’re a direct descendent of the Emperor.”

It was a lot to process for Nick. The tod felt Judy press up against him. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders and his tail encircled her waist. Nick didn’t know where to begin, so he just remained silent. Trying to wrap his mind around what he had just learned was similar to navigating a labyrinth.

“What does this all mean?” Judy asked in a soft voice. She watched as the vixen gave them a sad smile. It did little to ease that feeling of worry that had settled in her gut.

“Nothing, in all honesty,” Rory answered. “The main issue is Jameson learned something that he finds troubling. It’s forced him to return to the Imperial Capital in order to verify it. As for what has him feeling so troubled, he didn’t say. All I know is that it may or may not concern Nick in some way. He did, however, promise that it’s nothing we need to worry about for right now.”

“That’s a small relief,’ Nick thought to himself. He didn’t like having to deal with something like that right after dealing with what they all just went through. With the sun about to sink past the horizon and their train to Bunnyburrow arriving within the hour, he said “We should hurry. We’re on a rather tight schedule.”

Somehow, miraculously, Wilde Manor had survived the destruction of Zootopia relatively unscathed. It probably had something to do with the fact that it was Jameson who designed the place. Entering, the three found themselves staring at Ian, who was pathetically passed out drunk, a bottle of rum in one paw.

Rory carefully extracted the bottle and saw a letter in his lap. Picking it up and reading it, she felt a pang of sadness. The letter detailed that the vixen that Ian frequented for company had perished during the destruction of the city. It appeared that he had been her emergency contact, prompting those identifying the bodies of the deceased to notify him of her death. “Oh, Ian,” Rory whispered. ‘How much more suffering must you go through before you’re allowed to be happy?’ She wondered mentally. After covering Ian with a blanket, Rory kissed his head resulting in a whimper from him.
Ian had suffered a great deal already with the loss of his father. He had suffered health complications as a result of his operations that were a result from the crash. Now he was experiencing the suffering of losing the first female of whom he had grown attached.

Setting the letter upon the nearby table, Rory finally noticed the file that sat atop it already. Reading the contents, she found herself stunned. The name Jonathaniel Whiskerson wasn’t unknown to her. She had even met him on various occasions in Jameson’s company. As she continued to read what was in the file, she felt herself go cold. It detailed a list of crimes of which the melanistic lion was guilty. Looking over the compiled evidence, Rory knew why Ian had it. The reason was clear as day: Jonathaniel Whiskerson was responsible for the death of Ian’s father, her brother Walter. The memory of that night when Jameson came home covered in blood that wasn’t his own came to the forefront of her mind. ‘Jonathaniel Whiskerson is already dead, Ian. Jameson already took care of him for you.’

During all this, Nick and Judy busied themselves by divesting the armour they were wearing. Storing them within the armoury vault, the two of them entered the rooms that they had previously used when last at the manor. They gathered what little they had left behind following their prior stay. Since there wasn’t much, it didn’t take long for them to pack. Rejoining Mrs. Wilde, who had her luggage with her, in the living room, Nick asked “Are you ready, Mom?”

“Yep. Let’s go. As you said, we’re on a tight schedule.” Rory placed a small sticky note atop Ian’s file on Jonathaniel Whiskerson, telling him to call Jameson to talk about the melanistic lion. She then followed Nick and Judy out the door.

It seemed so bizarre, walking into the train station to catch the train to Bunnyburrow after everything that had taken place. The others were there waiting for them. Harrison had two young hyenas with him, each looking rather unnerved at their situation. Skye and Jaxon were near the cargo boxcar overseeing the loading of what appeared to be a casket, no doubt her mother Scarlett’s. Zannah walked up to Harrison and gave him a kiss before gracing the two young hyenas with a sandwich each alongside a boop on their noses, causing them to twitch once. According to Honey, who was back in her eccentric casual clothes, stated that Shay was already onboard sleeping in their compartment. With everyone ready, they boarded the train.

“Remember last time we were aboard a train bound for Bunnyburrow, Carrots?” Nick asked. “It wasn’t nearly as nice as this one. I’m kind of astounded that this train station is even still around after all those bombs destroyed everything in the immediate vicinity.”

It was true, in a sense. This train was far nicer. It was also more modern, using the most state-of-the-art technology. Unlike the one they previously took to Bunnyburrow, which was a type of bullet train, this one was a mag-lev. Even if the track were to have its rails fracture, that would do little to hinder the train’s progress. It was still a bullet train, just another type. As for the train station, there was no real way to understand how it had managed to survive the devastation that had happened all around it.

“The station was built as the city’s last escape,” replied a young voice from amongst the group. Everyone turned to look at the source: the young male twin of the hyena’s. “It was constructed to survive even the worst-case scenarios. While we’re currently aboveground, you'll soon see a rather peculiar sight.”

They didn’t hear the train begin to move, but rather, they felt it. Just as the young hyena said, they witnessed a rather peculiar sight: the train disappeared underground into a tunnel. It was a first for each of them.

“The inside of this tunnel was reinforced using magnetic metals to act as a two-way magnet with the
train. It repels the train, which helps stabilize it. At the same time, the train also repelled the metal used to support the tunnel’s internal structure. Also, due to all this, it allows the train to reach incredible speeds not normally achieved on a regular basis.” The young male hyena’s explanation was confirmed when the announcement that the train had reached its maximum safe traveling speed of 220 mph came over the intercom.

Traveling at such a high rate of speed had them arrive in Bunnyburrow much sooner than expected. Another thing that they hadn’t expected was that the train arrived at a small depot on the furthest edge of town. Unlike the train station, this place was more similar to a subway station.

“Well, I never knew about this place.” Judy admitted as they exited aboveground. It was wide-open fields as far as the eye could see. The passage from which they exited looked like some sort of dugout. Judy saw evidence of an old road in the grass. A thought of how long had this been here without anyone in town knowing of its existence.

A honk brought everyone’s attention to the fact that a tractor hauling a massive flatbed trailer driven by none other than Stu Hopps was fast approaching. “Howdy there, tourists. You all look like you could use a ride. Hop aboard.” Loading their luggage and other items, everyone piled onto the flatbed trailer and held on as Stu took off as fast as the tractor could manage. “Was a bit shocked when I heard where you’d arrive,” the buck stated over the roar of the tractor engine. “No one’s used that tunnel in years. It was once used to provide safe passage to the neighboring towns before it was bought by some type of government mammals. Never did I imagine they turned it into an underground train tunnel.”

No one was paying any attention to the buck’s words. They were too focused on the beauty of the countryside around them. Off in the distance, one could just make out the view of skyline of Bunnyburrow, made up of all the tops of the different burrows, farmhouses, silos, and barns. It was a beauteous sight.

“I’ve never visited the countryside before.” Rory voiced, almost to herself. “I can’t believe it’s this beautiful. If I’m ever allowed to retire, I’m definitely moving out here.”

“You’ll have to take up some type of farming,” Judy replied, hesitantly. “Everyone here in Bunnyburrow is expected to participate in some form of agriculture. Those that don’t have a rather difficult time dealing with those who do.”

“I was always interested in apiculture,” Rory admitted. “I doubt there are a lot of them out here. I’d expect no one wants to willingly deal with bees, especially when they’re farming.”

That thought had always made Judy wonder. Normally, honey was imported via a train from two towns over in Evergreen County almost 50 miles away. There was also the fact that Rory’s observation was accurate: No farmer willingly dealt with honey bees. Mostly because they couldn’t tell the difference. “I think that would be a marvelous idea, Rory.”

“Looks like we’re almost there,” Jaxon announced, spotting the Hopps Burrow just over yonder. “Wonder what they’ll think of all the predators,” he mused aloud. He took hold of Skye’s paw, knowing that she needed some form of comfort, and gave it a firm squeeze.

Judy did the same to Nick, who was whispering something into his mother’s ear. “Alright everybody, I want you to prepare yourselves. My family is rather…dynamic in their views on a lot of things. The biggest issue tends to be the presence of predators in town. Just don’t say anything until my mom greets and introduces us. We should be okay then.”

Nick remembered how terrifying it was his first visit. The kits had chased him around like it was he
who was the prey instead of the other way around. ‘Hopefully, they’ll be more intrigued by the others this time,’ Nick thought.

Stu, who was still talking, under the assumption his passengers were listening, drove the tractor to the back of the burrow. Use of the rear entrance wasn’t common, since it usually meant that one didn’t get greeted by the warren upon arrival. Bonnie had told him to use it, not wanting their guests to be overwhelmed by the large number of kits that would undoubtedly ambush them if they entered through the front. “Here we are. Home sweet home.”

Bonnie exited the burrow with a smile, followed by Michael, Ewan, and a couple of other [slightly] more muscular bucks, who proceeded to assist in unloading the luggage. “I’m so happy to see you all,” Bonnie greeted warmly. “Now, remain as quiet as you can. With how late it is, the kits are getting ready for bed. I don’t want them to reenergize at the sight of you. If you’ll follow me, I’ll escort you to your accommodations.”

Heeding the matronly doe’s warnings, the group followed her as silently as possible. Thankfully, they didn’t run into a single kit along the way to their rooms. Due to the size of their group, and the number of kits visiting for reasons yet to be made clear, they had to double up. Nick, Judy, Skye, and Jaxon were in one room, Harrison and Zannah were sharing a room together, alone due to their larger size. Honey and Rory were sharing since they were the only single females. Shay would be sharing with Michael because the buck’s room was the only other one large enough to fit him. The painted wolf didn’t complain, just grateful he wasn’t having to share with Honey.

“I’m sure you’re all tired,” Bonnie stated in that soft voice only a mother possessed. “I’ll wake you all up in the morning for breakfast. So just rest and relax.” She gave Judy, Nick, Skye, and Jaxon warm hugs, shook the paws of the others, then disappeared down the hall.

Hearing the word ‘tired’ had them realize just how true it was. Without a word, they entered their rooms and collapsed on the beds within. Oneiroi, the Divine Entity of the Dreamscape, claimed them the instant they impacted the mattresses.

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The ruins of City Hall – Zootopia

Spencer Wolvenett, Larry, and Gary sifted through the debris within the only room that had remained relatively untouched. Setting up a small desk from which Spencer would work, the three of them turned to look at who had just entered the room. Much to their surprise, it was Leodore Lionheart. The lion looked nervous as he stood there in the doorway. Spencer walked forward, standing across from Lionheart with his paws crossed over his chest.

“You’ve got a lot of nerve showing your muzzle here, Lionheart,” Spencer stated icily. “Did you think that disappearing without any warning, not letting anyone know how to contact you, and then coming back after everything was over wouldn’t result in consequences? No, you won’t get off as easily as you did following the Missing Mammals fiasco.”

Larry and Gary took up position on either side of Lionheart. Neither of them had truly forgiven him for the shit he put them through. The two had agreed that if they ever got the chance nothing would stop them from getting a bit of revenge.

Lionheart glanced at the two wolves with trepidation. “I was escort—” A paw across the muzzle cut him off before he could finish. Placing a paw on the struck cheek, he looked at Spencer, whose expression seemed far more terrifying due to how utterly composed he appeared.

“There is no excuse,” Spencer barked. “You fled like the cowardly lion you truly are. You sought to escape the dangers presented. You weren’t escorting shit. You were running away.” Keeping his

“With pleasure.” the two wolves replied. Each took a hold of one of the lion’s arms and walked him out. At the exit, they literally tossed Lionheart out on his ass. Folding their arms, they glared at him. There was no need to vocalize their thoughts, it was pretty clear how they felt.

Lionheart got up and dusted himself off, as if hoping to preserve some level of dignity. Swiftly taking his leave, Lionheart berated himself for his cowardly actions. He should have remained in the city during the chaos, but he had let his fear take control. There was no way he’d ever manage to redeem himself for it. Sitting atop a large stone, Lionheart watched as the mammals of Zootopia slowly began to clean up the city. There was nothing left for him in Zootopia.

At Zootopia Intercontinental, Kris Otterton hugged her parents as they stepped off the aeroplane. Martino was a few paces away, a smile on his muzzle. Emmitt and Octavia reciprocated their daughter’s embrace. Emmitt had a medical bracelet on his wrist. He and his wife had managed to locate a doctor outside Zootopia that oversaw him during their evacuation.

“I’m so glad you’re safe,” Octavia whispered to Kris. “I know we said we were okay with you staying here, but we were so worried as well.” She and Emmitt separated from the hug to look at their daughter. Octavia cupped Kris’s cheeks to look at her. “Now, tell me honestly. Did the shop survive?”

Emmitt watched as Kris’s expression became crestfallen. Brushing away her tears, he said “Hey now. It’s alright. We’ll simply rebuild it even better than before. There’s no reason to cry over it.” As if something told him to shift his gaze from his daughter to over her shoulder, Emmitt saw someone he never imagined he’d ever see again. “Martino?”

“Hello, Emmitt,” Martino replied as he walked up to stand behind Kris. “I’m glad to see you’re doing well.” It was a surreal thing, seeing the otter that he had, at one point, paid to provide flowers for a wedding which never happened. “I, uh, I want to thank you for the beautiful bouquets you made.”

“I-it was my pleasure,” Emmitt stated. “I’m sorry that the wedding never took place. You seemed like such a fine couple.” Eyes flitting between his daughter and Martino, Emmitt saw that the pain that hid in the male’s eyes was no longer present. Likewise, his daughter had a brilliant light in her own. It didn’t take him long to figure out why. A part of him was happy that his little girl found someone. Another was sad because it meant she wasn’t little anymore.

“Well, I think we should go see the damage,” Octavia announced, “We can talk along the way.”

Finn, his mother, and Stacey, along with the kits in their care, stepped off the same plane the Ottertons had disembarked. Director Badgerheim was also with them, though moving a bit slower due to age. Finn held Stacey’s paw as they exited their terminal. Agatha was being carried by one of the large kits on his shoulder.

“I’d say it’s good to be home, but…” Finn trailed off as he looked at the city. Somehow, it seemed to be much worse than when they had left. He felt Stacey give his paw a squeeze, which he returned. “Alright, it’s rather late. Let’s see if there’s a place for us to stay.”

After asking the right questions, they discovered a place that not only had enough rooms available, but wouldn’t hear of payment. The tanuki refused to make profit off the suffering of kits. He did admit that the rooms weren’t in the best of shape, but ensured that there would be no problems.
Finn took one look at the room and thought, ‘Well, he did say it wasn’t in the best of conditions.’ Finn felt it was adequate, but it lacked that ‘wow’ factor one usually found when first entering a hotel room. The one thing that stood out was the bed. It looked as if though it could hold an elephant. Stacey helped the kits onto the bed before helping Ms. Fennixon. The kits fell asleep quickly, leaving the adults to converse quietly.

“What do you think Director Badgerheim has planned?” Stacey asked in a whisper. “I don’t think we’ll have an office to work out of for a while. I’m a tiny bit concerned what’ll happen to the kits if we have no place to shelter them.”

“Knowing that old badger, she’s got a plan,” Finn stated. “She always had a plan back when I knew her. No matter what, she’s got something up her sleeve. There’s no way that old badger will let anything happen to these kits.”

“You two need sleep,” Agatha told them both. “Neither of you had much rest, what with the kits driving you crazy. Rest. I’ll look after them in the meantime.”

Moving to a corner of the mattress, Finn and Stacey collapsed next to each other. They hadn’t had much time to talk about ‘them,’ but that didn’t stop them from draping their tails over one another. Agatha saw this and shook her head with a tiny smile upon her muzzle. ‘A good way of knowing you’re with the right mammal is when your subconscious does something like that.’

On the other side of Zootopia, Mr. Big was welcoming his daughter, Fru-Fru, and granddaughter, Little Judie, home with open arms. Fru-Fru sobbed into her father’s embrace, telling him how scared she was that she would never see him again. Mr. Big whispered words of comfort into his daughter’s ear as he held her.

Kozlov watched all this with sad eyes. He had yet to hear from any of his family. When his mobile started ringing, Kozlov glanced at the Caller ID: Barbeara. Answering, he asked “How are you?”

“Don’t do that, Bearnard,” Major Friedkin ordered. With a sigh, she said “He’s fine. Shaken up a bit, but otherwise okay. I’m calling because of Grandpappy.”

Hearing that something had befallen his father, Kozlov closed his eyes. “What’s wrong with him? Is it his heart?”

“He’s dead, Bearnard. He had suffered a myocardial infarction. The doctor thinks that it was probably a culmination of stress, his high blood pressure, and his high cholesterol. Gran is the one who called me. I wanted you to hear it from me first,” Major’s voice was melancholy.

“When’s the service?” Kozlov inquired. “So that I know when to send the flowers,” He and mother never really saw eye-to-eye. It had always been his brother, Barbeara’s father, that she favored. It was understandable, since he had been the one their father favored.

“They don’t know yet,” Major answered, “They’ve yet to return to the city. I’ll let you know when I do. Oh, and call your son. He’s been calling me every thirty minutes asking if I’ve heard from you,” The call ended before Bearnard could reply.

With a heavy sigh, Kozlov scrolled through his contacts. Finding his son’s, Kozlov hesitated. Looking at the ceiling, the polar bear pondered what he would say. He and his son were on opposite sides of the law. Sure, he had a goodish relationship with his niece, but this was very different. Yes, he had encouraged his son to be a cop. There was a part of Kozlov that kept this particular son a secret from Mr. Big. Pyotr was his only illegitimate offspring, born from a female that had entertained him one night. His wife hadn’t raised a fuss, surprisingly, since the female had died in
childbirth. Instead, she had taken Pyotr as her own. His wife was the one who told him to have Pyotr become a cop, free of any direct association with Mr. Big. It was humorous to him how much like his mother his wife was.

Selecting Pyotr’s contact info, Kozlov put his cell to his ear. When the call connected, Kozlov said “Hey. How are you? … No, I’m fine. … Yeah, I know. Listen. If you want to talk about it, you know where to find me, and when. … I love you, too.”

Inside one of the emergency housing units provided by the city, Tobias Bogo and Benjamin Clawhauser were sitting on the bed, watching the tiny television. It was tiny enough that one could consider it pawheld. On the screen, they watched as Gazelle, along with her backup dancers and her two companions, was holding a small press conference announcing a benefit concert that would be broadcasted live to aid the reconstruction of Zootopia.

“I’ve been meaning to ask,” Bogo began, “What’s the deal with Mr. Stripetower? I know that he’s an ex of yours, but what’s the whole story?”

Clawhauser blushed neon red. “Well, uh, we were boyfriends and roommates. We both auditioned to be a backup dancer for Gazelle after one of her originals quit. I was the favorite until his turn came. Afterwards, the other three chose him since he was a tiger.”

Huffing, Bogo stated “That’s just wrong. Regardless, what’s the story between you two? You seemed to be on good terms despite having ended your relationship.”

Rubbing the back of neck, Clawhauser said “Tito and I were good friends as kits. Grew up together in the same neighborhood, only three doors down from each other. We had an on-again, off-again type of relationship until college. Then the audition thing happened and we kind of just…drifted apart. We stayed in touch, but it wasn’t the same. The two of us decided to simply remain friends. He’s the one who sends me concert tickets. Probably the biggest thing is that Tito and I ever did was kiss. We never went any further than that.” Under his breath, Clawhauser added “Never went any further than that with anyone.”

Bogo kept his gaze on the miniature television. He had plenty of experience when it came to rutting. It pained him a bit, knowing that though he would be Ben’s first, Ben wouldn’t be his. ‘I really should have listened to my mother.’ Bogo mentally scolded himself. Bogo never thought of himself as a romantic soul, but he was finding that, when it came to Benjamin, he wanted to be.

“Once we’ve managed to reconstruct a fair portion of the city, I’m taking you on a date,” Bogo announced resolutely. “A nice restaurant, a stroll, and then we’ll come home, where you take the lead. Sound good?”

Ben couldn’t help but scream “YES! YES, YES, YES!!” He glomped the buffalo in a massive hug. “THAT SOUNDS PERFECT! SIMPLE, YET PERFECT!!”

Patting Benjamin on the back, Bogo stated “Alright, alright, that’s enough. It’s late and we have a lot to do tomorrow. We should get as much sleep as we can.” Clicking the light within the unit, the buffalo laid down and pulled the covers over himself. He felt Benjamin snuggle up against his side. It didn’t take long for him to hear the soft snores coming from the cheetah. The sound aided Bogo in falling asleep himself.

For the Ottertons, their sleeping arrangements were simplistic. Emmitt set up a small family tent near where the flower shop had been. Martino assisted him, having once been a ranger scout. The two males could hear the females chattering a short distance away. Looking at each other, Emmitt and Martino quirked a brow as the phrase ‘don’t they have nice butts?’ reached their ears.
“Whatever you do, don’t turn around,” Emmitt whispered, “You definitely don’t want to see their expressions. Last time I heard my wife say that, I looked and felt fear unlike ever before.”

Martino only nodded once in understanding. Still, he had to smile just a bit, knowing it wasn’t the first time he had heard the phrase from Kris. It was usually during mating, but he wasn’t about to tell Emmitt that. Martino didn’t think it would be wise to tell him that Kris was no longer ‘pure’.

Kris, however, was quietly confiding everything to her mother, who’d giggle a bit hearing the details. Neither knew exactly why they felt open enough to share all this with one another, but it felt good. At least as long as Kris wasn’t told anything about her parents in the act. Octavia had to cover her muzzle to stifle her laughter after hearing a rather funny tidbit.

“Oh, my gosh! Did he really?” Octavia asked, trying to contain her laughter. Seeing her daughter nod, Octavia said, “Oh, gosh. I’d have never…” She shook her head vigorously to rid herself of the mental image her mind had constructed of herself and Emmitt in the same position.

“It was really, really nice,” Kris stated, dreamily. “He was so gentle when doing it. I had no idea what was going to happen until it did. I thought I was going to die of laughter. That poor guy never saw it coming. I ended up dragging Martino into one of those back rooms afterwards.”

“Your father would never have been able to do anything like that,” Octavia admitted. “I’ve never even seen your dad get angry at anyone. He’s too much of a sweetheart.” Sighing, Octavia gazed at her daughter. “When did you and Martino… you know?”

Shifting around nervously, Kris whispered “The night after my 18th birthday, when I went on that date that ended up going south. I wound up at the bar at which he’s a barkeep.”

“I won’t say anything to your dad,” Octavia promised. “He still likes to see you has his little girl even though you’re a young adult. However, you will have to tell him eventually. He deserves to know.”

“I will, Mom,” Kris replied, still whispering. “I just… I don’t know. I don’t want to see his crestfallen expression when I tell him.”

“He’ll get over it,” Octavia said. “Just like he got over the fact that his parents got a divorce after our wedding, and how you got detention for backtalking the teacher, and like the time I forgot our anniversary because I was in labor.”

Laughing, Kris remembered when her father had told that story. He had everything set up for a nice wine and dine evening at home when he got the phone call that her mother was in the hospital. He arrived only moments before the veterinarian rushed her to the birthing room. When she got out with Kris bundled up near her chest, her dad had said that the day was now special for two reasons. Her mom had asked why two, which had left her father depressed. It was only after he had gone home that her mother remembered that it was their wedding anniversary.

Octavia giggled herself at the memory. Oh, how she had hated herself for forgetting their wedding anniversary. Albeit, the drugs were still in her system at the time, so she had a slim excuse. Even so, it had taken her a lot of planning and a lot of work to pull off a late wedding anniversary wine and dine as an apology. She had somehow managed it, surprising Emmitt, who had a big old grin on his muzzle. They hadn’t had the planned end to it, but given that she was still healing from the caesarean section she had at the hospital giving birth to Kris, it was understandable.

“Hey!” Emmitt and Martino shouted, “The tent is ready. Let’s settle in for the night. We’ve got a lot to deal with tomorrow.”
Alone in a small makeshift shack made from some of the debris that littered the streets, Duke Weaselton quietly sobbed his eyes out. After finding a legal job, the destruction of the city had probably resulted in his future employment ending before it really started. A single, sharp rap of knuckles on his improvised door drew his attention. Feeling it didn’t matter anymore, he stood and opened it. What he saw had him blink a couple of times before it dawned on him it wasn’t an illusion.

“Gods, you look positively awful. May I come inside?” It was the female polecat bar owner for whom he would have worked.

“Uh, yeah. Just pardon the mess,” Duke answered, opening the door to let her enter. “I, um, don’t have anything to offer you. Sorry about that. What brings you here at this hour?”

“I’m here to confirm you still want a job at my bar.” The female polecat answered. Seeing his shocked expression, she clarified “Yes, the bar was destroyed during the bombings, but I fully intend to reopen at the earliest possible convenience. So, do you still intend to work for me?”

“YES!!” Duke shouted, before clamping his paws over his muzzle. “I-I mean, yes, I do. I still intend to work for you, miss.”

Nodding, the female polecat said “Splendid.” Taking a look at the living conditions of Duke’s abode, she grimaced. “Get only the essential things you need. You’re coming to my place. I can’t, in good conscious let one of my employees live like this.”

Realizing she wasn’t joking, Duke grabbed his only spare set of clothes. There was nothing else he needed to grab. This place was just a place for him to stay, it wasn’t a home. Duke followed her out, wondering if, just maybe, something good would come out of all this.

As the moon reached its zenith above Zootopia, a serene sense of tranquility descended upon the city. Oneiroi, the Divine Entity of the Dreamscape, walked the mortal plane for the first time in eons. Taking the form identified with him, Oneiroi manifested as a vampire bat. He wasn’t alone though. A maned wolf walked just ahead and to the right of him. Oneiroi never spoke, awaiting to hear what the maned wolf had to say.

However, the maned wolf had nothing to say, as he looked upon the devastation all around him. Shifting his gaze in the direction of Bunnyburrow, the maned wolf snapped his digits, vanishing from his vampire bat companion’s sight. Now standing within the room which Nicholas Piberius Wilde and Judith Laverne Hopps slept, he gazed tenderly down at them. Kissing two of his fingers, he touched those same fingers to their foreheads. Fading from existence, the maned wolf’s ethereal voice whispered “Sleep well, my kits.”

Chapter End Notes

Turns out, I only had two chapters left in Arc One. This is the penultimate chapter. Next chapter is Arc One Finale.
Chapter 26: Finale

Chapter Notes

Last Chapter for unremastered version. This is it. The finale.

It sucks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 26: …is the beginning of another.

Hopps Warren Farmstead – Bunnyburrow – Early Morning

The crisp morning air was filled with the smell of coffee being brewed in the Hopps Burrow. The warren had woken like usual as Stu and his workforce comprised of other Hopps bucks readied themselves to tend their fields. The difference this particular morning was the inclusion of Judy, Nick, and the others all sitting at one of the long tables partaking breakfast alongside them. Bonnie and the family chefs were busy preparing a substantial breakfast for everyone. They were also cooking tofu for their predatorial guests.

Judy was sitting in Nick’s lap as they waited for food. She ignored the looks of concern and confusion that the siblings who weren’t here last time sent her way. The only one that bothered her was Pop-Pop, who had been kicked out of yet another retirement home. If it wasn’t for her mother’s intervention on her behalf, Judy would have thwapped her grandfather hard upside the back of his head.

Jaxon was once again swarmed by does wanting to know if his stripes were real. Fortunately, the fact that Skye had a paw wrapped around his shoulder was enough of a deterrent to keep those who were looking for a mate away. There were a few bucks he glared at for trying to hit on Skye. He found it humorous to hear all the different ways she shot them down.

For the others, they felt overwhelmingly outnumbered. Harrison kept his new wards close with Zannah right at his side. Funnily, neither Shay nor Honey looked distressed, just uncomfortable, almost claustrophobic. Out of all of them, it was Shay who held the attention of the warren. No one had ever seen a painted wolf before now, so it was he who had the most eyes upon him.

“Isn’t he pretty?”

“Look at all the colors in his fur.”

“Are they natural? Or do you think he dyes it that way?”

“Do you see that little teardrop shaped bit of fur under his eye?”

That last one made Shay cringe. The teardrop shaped bit of fur underneath his eye often had others ask if he ever killed another mammal. While he had killed others, it wasn’t of his own volition. Contract killings were a way of life back in his former homeland. It was how many supported their
families. In his case, the reigning governing body had raised him to kill on their behalf. It had taken him a long time to break free of their control, but it had been so worth it.

Bonnie walked up carrying a large assortment of protein-rich food. “Here we go. I hope it’s to your liking. None of us have ever really cooked tofu before, so it was a challenge most welcomed.”

“Thank you, Bonnie,” Nick replied, skewing a piece with his fork. “I’m sure this will be a surprise when my mom gets here.” As he said this his mother walked into the room led by Ewan. Her eyes got about as wide as dinner plates upon seeing the tofu and other protein-rich foods that were visible upon the table.

Rory took a seat next to Nick, who had a grin on his muzzle at her still shocked expression. “What’s all this? You didn’t have to do this. I would have cooked something for us.”

“Nonsense,” Bonnie rebuked, “You are our guests. Besides, nothing we made smells as bad as bug-meat or fish. Plus, it gave us a nice challenge.”

Breakfast ended on a positive note. Everyone had a full stomach, no one was complaining (with the exception of Pop-Pop about the preds in his burrow), and it seemed the food had been well received. Stu and the other Hopps males left to tend the fields, leaving the females to care for the kits, house, and guests.

Nick and Judy sequestered themselves within their room. They had a lot to talk about, especially their relationship. With how fast everything took place, they hadn’t gotten a chance to have discuss it. Laying atop their bed feet at opposite ends, heads resting beside one another’s, they decided it was time to have ‘the talk.’

“So,” Judy whispered. She didn’t know what to say to initiate the conversation. It was important, but she was frightened. Judy had no experience with any of this.

“So,” Nick repeated. Like Judy, Nick was frightened a bit about having this discussion. This was all new to him as well. He had had entered fake relationships with vixens for cons, but this was wholly different. This was Judy, his One, his soulmate. Clearing his throat, Nick stated “What do you wanna do? How do you want us to move forward?”

Judy had thought about it frequently. Nick was the one mammal she wanted to be with eternally. She hated her lack of relationship experience. It would have been so much easier if she had any. Gazing into Nick’s eyes, which thanks to Jameson’s tutelage, had reverted to the civilized round pupils. Although, Nick could change them to feral slits at will whenever he desired. “I… I don’t know, honestly. I mean, I know I want to be with you for as long possible, but I don’t know how we’ll move forward.”

Humming in agreement, Nick said “Same. I want us to be together for eternity and then some. Problem is, I don’t know how we’ll move forward either. Do we go on dates? What do we do about the courtship process? I don’t know how to answer those questions.”

“We’ve completed a few steps within our own respective courtship rituals,” Judy pointed out, “I’d at least like to finish a few more of them if we can.” Her thoughts turned to what a doe was expected to do during lapine courtship. She identified a few that wouldn’t be difficult to complete.

Thinking of which courtship rituals that wouldn’t clash with the lapine ones Jaxon had taught him about, Nick decided to give those a try. He leaned in and kissed Judy upon her lips. Nick felt her stiffen in surprise before melting into it. Pulling away slightly, he whispered “Dance with me.”
“We don’t have any music,” Judy whispered back, eyes still closed from the kiss. “To what would we be dancing?” She felt the bed shift as Nick got off. Opening her eyes, Judy saw Nick standing with one paw behind his back and the other extended towards her. Giving him a small smile, Judy also got off the bed and placed her paw in his.

Nick pulled Judy close, placing her paw upon his chest just above his heart. “We’ll dance to this, to the beat of my heart, which beats only for you.” All too soon, they were gliding and twirling around the room in time to Nick’s heartbeat. Nick hummed a tune that captured Judy’s attention.

“Sing for me, Nick,” Judy requested. Her ears were then filled with Nick’s angelic voice as he sang [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSQk-4fddDI]. Judy smiled brilliantly and joined in right when it was time for her part.

Everyone in the burrow paused what they were doing as the sound of Judy and Nick singing reached their ears. They felt goosebumps erupt all over their bodies. A sense of wonder claimed all of them as they continued to listen. The song conjured up memories within each of their minds, reminding them of the dreams they had let die.

Back in Nick and Judy’s room, the tod and doe’s little dance came to an end as the song reached its final note. Smiling at each other, they shared a kiss then embraced each other tightly. Neither moved from their position, content where they were.

“We should have probably closed the door,” Judy whispered, “There’s a good chance that everyone inside the burrow heard us.” She felt Nick’s chuckle softly and joined him. “I love you, Nick.”

“I love you too, Judy,” Nick whispered. After a moment of silence, he said “We just completed a step in vulpine courtship, by the way. Foxes don’t normally sing for others until they find their soulmate.”

Nick and Judy opted to just remain in their room for the rest of the day. Neither Nick nor Judy realized exactly what their actions had done to the others in the burrow. The two would find out shortly, however.

Inside another room within the burrow, Skye and Jaxon were seated on a sofa, lost in thought. Originally, the two of them were discussing if they could request permission to bury Scarlett on the farm, wanting it to be near family. Bonnie had all but adopted Jaxon, and since he was Skye’s fiancé, by extension, Scarlett would be considered family as well. When they heard Nick and Judy singing, it had given them pause. The feelings and memories it had evoked resulted in Jaxon and Skye unable to look at each other.

“That was beautiful,” Jaxon mused. “Are all vulpines such good singers? Or is Nick simply that talented?” His questions were more aimed at himself than Skye, but didn’t realize he had spoken them aloud.

Skye opened her maw to answer, but closed it quickly. A song had welled up within her that was dying to abscond itself from her soul. Hearing Nick sing to Judy had caused Skye to have an epiphany. She had always told herself that Jaxon was her soulmate, but hadn’t done anything about it. Now, Skye steeled herself, because she had no idea how she’d sound, having never sung before, even when alone.

Taking a deep breath, Skye began to sing [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjzIHq56NYE]. Much like with Nick and Judy, Skye’s voice could be heard throughout the burrow. Skye saw Jaxon’s stunned expression, which made her smile as she continued to sing.
Nick and Judy’s ears perked up as they heard Skye singing. Knowing what was happening, they smiled at each other. The two closed their eyes as they listened to the song, feeling that it applied to them as well.

As the song reached its end, Jaxon leaned into Skye to hug her. He had never heard her sing before, but he found it beautiful. He had no words to express his thoughts, so he settled for giving her a passionate kiss. Separating, he whispered “After we speak to Mr. and Mrs. Hopps, the two of us are kicking Nick and Judy out of the room.” The almost indiscernible huskiness was all Skye needed to know what he had planned.

The day went on rather uneventful with everybody doing their own thing. There was little to do, whether inside or outside of the burrow. It wasn’t until a knock on the door let everyone know that someone was visiting that thing went crazy. The kits squealed in excitement that there was now another guest. The older Hopps kits tried to corral the younger ones into an area away from the front door. They outright refused until Nick and Judy intervened, stating if they didn’t leave the new arrival alone mom would be mad and punish them all, that the kits complied.

Bonnie peered through the peephole to see who it was. It was a familiar mammal, one that had visited a lot when Judy was younger. A sense of worry filled Bonnie wondering what would happen when their guest learned of Judy’s relationship with a fox. Despite this, Bonnie opened the door to greet their visitor. “Hello, Sharla. What brings you here?”

Sharla Blackwool lived up to her family name, possessing black wool. Ironically, only she possessed wool of that color within her family. Sherman Blackwool, Sharla’s late great-grandfather had it as well, but after his death Sharla became the sole member to possess the trait.

“Hello, Mrs. Hopps,” Sharla greeted with a smile. “I happened to hear Judy was visiting. I missed her last time, so I hoped to make up for it this time. Is she available?”

Keeping her discomfort out of her expression, Bonnie said “I’ll have to check. She’s entertaining some guests right now. If you’ll give me a few moments.” The older doe let Sharla into the mudroom, but requested that she wait there. Calmly making her way to where Judy was, Bonnie pondered how to tell her daughter about Sharla’s… ‘activities’.

“Judy? Will you come see me privately for a minute or two?” Bonnie asked upon arriving at her daughter’s location. Stepping into a small room just down the hall, Bonnie said “Sharla’s here.” Seeing Judy’s expression light up, Bonnie stopped her from racing to see her friend. “Now, hold on a minute. There’s something you need to know first,” Noticing she had her daughter’s attention, Bonnie stated “Sharla isn’t the same mammal you knew when y’all were younger. She’s very outspoken against the presence of predators in Bunnyburrow and neighboring towns. She’s led anti-predator protests during the town festivals. Sharla even spoke out in opposition of letting Gideon open his pastry shop.”

Hearing this had Judy’s ears droop. Sharla had been another one of Gideon’s regular targets to bully. ‘This could be bad,’ Judy thought as she slowly made her way to greet her old friend. Sharla was the sole prey mammal in Judy’s small group of school chums. If Sharla was as bad as her mother claimed she was, Judy didn’t see this going well.

“Hey, Sharla,” Judy greeted the black-wooled ewe, a mask of excitement concealing her worry. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it?” She gave Sharla a hug, adding the question “What’ve you been up to recently?”

Sharla could smell something slightly off about Judy’s scent, but couldn’t place it. Still, she answered “Oh, nothing much. How about we take a stroll and catch up?” With Judy’s acquiescence, the two
walked out of the burrow towards the old trail they used to hike when younger. “I haven’t really been keeping up to date with all the news about Zootopia, but I did hear about that ewe named Bellwether. While I agree with her, I don’t think she approached it in the best possible way.”

“I honestly can’t believe you said that, Sharla,” Judy replied. “Besides, she’s dead now. Killed by the same mammals who were supposed to be her allies because she failed.” She watched Sharla freeze at her words. “Her ‘allies’ were all prey mammals, Sharla. It isn’t only predators who can be savages.”

“No, I suppose not,” Sharla conceded. Kicking a moderately sized pebble, Sharla stated “I was surprised that your parents partnered with Gideon Grey for business. Did they tell you about that? I protested against the town even opening his bakery. I guess it was for the best, though. I’ve heard a great deal of positive reviews on his pastries.”

“I heard,” Judy told her. “I think it’s great myself. Gideon seems to be trying to make amends for his kithood actions.”

“Ha! Yeah, that’s got to be it,” Sharla snarked, “I still have trouble even looking at him. He’s got everyone thinking that he’s changed, but I can tell it’s just an act. I’m planning on exposing him as the fraud he is. Then the town will have no other option than to run him off.”

A bit disturbed by her friend’s words, Judy asked “Why would you do that? That doesn’t sound like the Sharla I know. She would give him a chance to prove he isn’t lying.”

“All foxes are expert liars, Judy,” Sharla explained, waving her hoof as if dismissing Judy’s argument. “Plus, you can’t honestly think that Gideon’s changed any. You can’t be that naïve.”

“I’ll have you know that while I was in Zootopia I met a fox that had gotten abused by prey on what should have been a special night,” Judy stated crossly. “Don’t give me the ‘mammals can’t change’ spiel either. Not with you acting like this.” Pointing at the ewe, Judy poked her in the chest. “You had better start explaining what happened to make you act like this. Otherwise, I’m going home.”

Sharla quirked a brow. Never had she seen Judy like this. “You’ve got to be kidding me. Are you telling me that you believe a fox that prey abused him? I’ve never heard anything more ridiculous in my life.” Sharla never saw Judy’s fist coming. Blinks in utter shock at seeing Judy standing over her looking like wrath incarnate, Sharla cowered in terror.

“I suggest you get off my parents’ property asap.” Judy growled out, sounding like a rather powerful predator. “Leave and never come back. If you do, expect to be eviscerated.”

Getting ready to shoot back a retort, Sharla felt the presence of others surrounding her before she saw them tower over her. It was a sight that would be burned into her memory forever. Two foxes, a buck, two hyenas, a tigress, a honey badger, and two wolves all stood behind Judy as if she were their leader. Terror flooded her, as she stood shakily. “J-Judy, what have you done?”


Sharla took off as fast as her hindhooves could carry her. She didn’t look back. The ewe was too afraid of what she would see if she did.

Nick placed a paw on Judy’s shoulder. “Sorry, but I got worried after your mother came to talk to me when you left with that ewe. So, I gathered everyone, and we followed you just in case something like this happened.”

Sighing, Judy replied “It’s okay, Nick. I’m actually thankful that y’all did. If not… I don’t even want
to think about what would’ve happened if you didn’t.” Leaning into him, she whispered “Let’s go home.”

Picking Judy up and placing her on his shoulders, Nick said “As you wish.” Nick then led the procession back towards the Hopps burrow. No one spoke as they made the return trek. However, Nick was making plans on how he would raise Judy’s spirits. It would take a bit of time, but he was determined to pull it off.

Zootopia

Working out of a large storage container taken off a cargo ship wasn’t how Chief Bogo expected to spend his morning. Still, it was all they had for the time being, so he’d have to accept it for the next couple of days, or at least until they rebuilt a proper precinct. Good news was that he shared the space with Clawhauser. The cheetah was rather excited about it as well.

“Chief!” Clawhauser said excitedly. “I just got word via text that they’ve cleared most of the rubble in Tundratown. Although, since the structures were mainly made of ice, it makes sense.” His mobile phone was his primary form of contact with what was going on throughout the city as electricity had yet to be restored.

“Good,” Bogo replied. Picking up a report, he stated “Do you mind explaining what this is? I’m having difficulty understanding it.” Honestly, Bogo was being kind by not saying that it looked like a kit who just learned to write was the one who wrote it.

Taking the report, Ben scanned it and said “Oh, this is from one of the kits that you rescued. He says that he wants to grow up to be a police officer like you. Isn’t that just the sweetest?” Giggling at his boyfriend’s flabbergasted expression, Ben asked, “Surprised?”

Turning away to hide his blush, Bogo admitted “Maybe a little bit.” He had never gotten fan mail in all his time as a cop. “Set it somewhere safe for me please.”

Spencer Wolvenett walked into the unit with Larry and Gary bringing up his rear. “Morning, Chief. How’re things here? All well and good?”

“Mr. Wolvenett, unless you have important business to attend with me, please make yourself scarce.” Bogo replied, “I have a lot of reports I need to read followed by going out to oversee some of the city cleanup. If your only here to visit, make it short.”

“Right,” Spencer sent Larry and Gary to stand outside. “I got word that Supreme Commander Deego departed late last night. On his way back to the Imperial Capital.”

“Indeed,” Bogo stated. “He’s taken the list we compiled of what we need. Said he’d return in approximately a week.”

“Hmm,” Spencer sat in the only other available chair. “I received a call from Zootropolis a few minutes ago.” The wolf watched the buffalo lower the file he was reading to look at him. “I was caught off guard as well. The Prime Minister himself was the one with whom I spoke.”

“Why do I get the feeling that you’re about to tell me something that’ll make my life a whole lot more difficult than it already is?” Bogo asked. Zootopia’s relationship with its sister city of Zootropolis had always been one of those things that was only discussed in the direst of times. If the Prime Minister had placed a call, then something big was either going down or something big was about to happen.

With a sigh, Spencer said “The Prime Minister is sending a representative. Apparently, word reached him that someone in Zootopia hacked into their database of known criminal offenders. Specifically, a
target of immense interest named Jonathaniel Whiskerson.

That named cleared up a few things for Bogo. Ian Wilde had requested permission to search their database for a mammal of that name while he provided his technical knowhow. “What do they want from us?” Bogo inquired. “Do they expect us to help them find this mammal? We’re not exactly in the best position to do that.”

Licking his lips nervously, Spencer answered “No. They know our current situation. What they want is for us to provide everything we’ve compiled. They’re giving us one month to get everything together before the representative arrives. We’re also expected to spare a couple of officers if we can.”

Grunting, Bogo stated “That’ll be problematic. With the city the way it is, I doubt I’ll be able to spare any. Do we know the name of the representative? Or what officers he’s requested?”

“You actually know the representative,” Spencer answered. “Artemis Howle, the former ZPA cadet that disappeared midway through his time there. As for the requested officers, he’s asked for Harrison Wolford, plus whoever Harrison wants to accompany him.”

It was a name that Bogo hadn’t heard in a long time. He had been one of the officers involved in the investigation surrounding Artemis Howle’s disappearance. It was decided that the wolf had simply moved away after an incident while at the ZPA. However, Bogo had his own thought on the matter. It had been his belief that Cadet Howle was forced out of the Academy by his fellow recruits.

“So, Artemis ended up in Zootropolis,” Bogo mused. “What exactly is his role there? I doubt he’s just one of the Prime Minister’s lackeys.”

“I looked into that,” Spencer replied, “He’s one of the Prime Minister’s private investigators. Rumors have it that he’s the one responsible for catching the Angel of Death. He’s made quite a name for himself over in Zootropolis.”

Sighing, Bogo mused “He would have been a great cop here, if not for prejudiced tailholes.” Pinching the bridge of his snout, Bogo stated “I’ll see about getting everything ready for when he gets here. Now, if there’s nothing else?”

“There is one more thing,” Spencer stated. “I’ve been hearing whispers that mammals saw an unusual sight late yesterday evening. A vampire bat and a maned wolf wandering around. There was something about them that seemed strange, almost otherworldly.”

Bogo too had heard about these whispers circulating around. He didn’t take stock in supernatural phenomena, but last night he had felt something odd in the air. “What exactly did you hear?”

“That the maned wolf vanished into thin air,” Spencer answered. Pulling out his phone, he selected the VidTube app. Finding the video, he pressed it and gave his phone to Bogo.

Bogo watched the video. It appeared to have been taken using someone’s cellphone. He replayed it thrice before returning it to Spencer. “You want us to investigate whether this was a prank or not, correct?”

“I simply wish to know what the devil those two were,” Spencer replied. “I could care less if they are some type of paranormal phenomena. The thing that has me concerned isn’t so much the maned wolf, but the bat. From his appearance, he almost looks like how Oneiroi is depicted in images found in the Book of Divinities.”

After a moment of thought, Bogo said “Don’t expect too much, but I’ll assign someone to look into
it.” He watched Spencer nod then walk out the door.

Clawhauser looked at Bogo for a few seconds, trying to find out what to say. When nothing came to mind, Ben went back to his work. Ben’s mind wandered to the impending arrival of the Prime Minister of Zootropolis’s representative, Artemis Howle. ‘Donut sprinkles. I hope he doesn’t intend to make matters worse than they already are.’

**Zootropolis**

Artemis Howle walked out of the Prime Minister’s office, shutting the door behind him. The wolf was not pleased about his next task regarding his assignment to locate Jonathaniel Whiskerson. The Prime Minister had ordered him to return to Zootopia for a brief stint. The only good thing was that he was given permission to request whatever officers he wished. There was only one he cared about, but it was proper to give a total of at least five.

Exiting the building in which the Prime Minister of Zootropolis had his office located, Artemis strolled down the street towards his favorite corner café. Taking out his wallet, Artemis pulled out an old photo that was taken a long time ago. The picture was of him and his good friend Harrison Wolford. The two wolves had their arms around each other’s shoulders and big smiles, fangs of full display, wearing their ZPA cadet uniforms. Often times, Artemis wondered what Harrison was doing back in Zootopia. Other times, he hated himself for just up and leaving without so much as saying goodbye to his friend.

“I’ll be seeing you soon, Harry,” Artemis told the picture. Putting it away, the wolf smiled as his favorite waitress approached. “Hey! Good morning. I’ll have my usual as usual.” The waitress smiled and nodded then went to get his coffee and scone. Opening the folder that he had with him, Artemis reexamined the contents. Little to no new information on Jonathaniel Whiskerson had been discovered in the last couple of years. The file contained the last known photograph of the melanistic lion, his last known location within Zootropolis, and a report of the last crime committed by him in the city.

The waitress set down his coffee and scone down before him, and Artemis politely thanked her. Rereading the reports, Artemis couldn’t help thinking that it only made sense that Whiskerson skipped town. Learning that someone in Zootopia was also looking for Jonathaniel Whiskerson, Artemis felt it was too good to be a coincidence. ‘Of all places he could have gone, it had to be Zootopia,’ he grumbled mentally.

Hearing someone take a seat across from him, Artemis raised his eyes to see that Inspector Wolfgang had joined him. “Well, this is certainly a surprise. I thought you didn’t like associating with me.”

“Watch yourself, pup,” the Inspector barked. “I’m just here because I heard you’re to head for Zootopia in a month. I hope you don’t let your personal feelings get in the way of your investigation.”

“You should mind your own fucking business, old timer,” Artemis growled. “Why don’t you do everyone a favor and die already? From what I’ve heard, they’re considering ordering you to mandatory retirement somewhere you won’t be trouble any longer.”

Leaning in close, Wolfgang stated “Watch your goddamned maw. I’ve still got more pull than you here in Zootropolis. I don’t give a damn if you’ve got the Prime Minister’s favor. I’ll kill you. Do you understand?”

“I understand you just painted a big ass target on yourself,” Artemis informed him with a wicked smirk. Revealing his mobile, which was on an open call, Artemis said, “The Prime Minister heard
every word. I suggest you start running.”

Pale as a sheet, Wolfgang shot off like a bullet from a gun. He didn’t make it very far before his fear overwrote his common sense. Not paying attention, he didn’t see the 18 wheeler.

Artemis shook his head. The supposedly open call was simply a screenshot he made for instances like that. He looked at the waitress, who appeared fearful of him. Sighing, Artemis stood placed a hundred on the table and walked away. Making his way to his apartment, the wolf waved at those he visited with regularly on the street.

His apartment wasn’t the best in the city, although he could have had any he wanted after the Prime Minister hired him. Artemis scanned the place with a careful eye. Something was off by the tiniest degree. Drawing his sidearm, he crept forward checking around corners carefully, going room by room. Finally, only one room remained: his bedroom. Slowly opening the door, he sighed upon seeing his best friend sprawled out on his bed. Holstering his weapon, Artemis walked over and started shaking her awake. “Hey! Wake up,”

The she-wolf stirred from slumber and looked up at her boyfriend. “Hey, you,” she whispered with a smile on her muzzle. “Sorry for breaking in, but I didn’t know where else to go.” Rolling over to give him room to lay down, she said “I, uh, have news. I know we never knotted, but I’m pregnant.” Her voice was almost inaudible as she spoke the words.

Drawing in a sharp breath, Artemis laid down next to his girlfriend. “When did you find out?” The last time they rutted was just over two weeks ago. Besides, Artemis knew he was one of two males with whom she was seeing intimately.

“Today,” she answered. “The veterinarian said that I’m six weeks into my pregnancy. Working backwards, you were the only male I was sleeping with at the time.”

“You didn’t notice that you missed your period?” Artemis inquired softly. He caressed her arm soothingly. It was clear to him she was frightened. If you were the daughter of the Prime Minister and having a secret relationship with one of his most trusted subordinates, it was understandable.

“I’ve always been a bit irregular,” she admitted sadly. “So, no, I didn’t notice.” Gazing at him with a frightened expression, she asked “What are we going to do? If my father finds out, there’s a good chance he’ll have you imprisoned for life.”

“We can’t keep it from him,” Artemis told her. “I’ll speak to him about us. See if we can come to an understanding. When it comes to either of us, he tends to keep an open mind.”

“Please be careful, Artemis,” she whispered. “I don’t want to raise the pup by myself. I need you there.”

“I will. I promise,” the wolf kissed her on the brow. “You rest now. I’ll go back to your dad’s office to talk to him. I won’t be long.”

**Gideon Grey’s Really Good Baked Stuff Pastry Shoppe – Bunnyburrow**

The smell of all the different pies permeating through the place had Nick’s maw watering. Judy had brought him there wanting Nick to try some of Gideon’s pastries, her treat. Nick wasn’t one to turn down such an offer, so he jumped at the chance. They were the only customers in the establishment since it was so close to closing time.

Just outside the window, the sky was being painted in beautiful shades of dark blue, purple, red, orange, and yellow, due to the sun setting below the horizon. It was a truly beautiful sight to behold.
Thanking Gideon for the pies, Nick and Judy departed for the Hopps burrow.

“IT sure is beautiful out here,” Nick mused as he took a bite of blueberry pie. “I could see us living out here when we retire.” He felt Judy box his arm and chuckled softly. “Oh, that’s right. I forgot. We’re never going to retire, are we?”

“Oh, we’ll eventually retire. Just not out here,” Judy replied. Looking at the sky, she conceded “It is quite beautiful though. I’ll give you that.”

“Hmm,” Nick saw the stars just starting to become visible overhead. “I’ve started designing our den. I had to ask your brother Rube for draft paper to do it, but I’ve got a couple ideas drawn out.”

“Already planning our lives together, Slick?” Judy teased, boxing him again. “I thought there were still a few steps to our courtship we wanted to take.” She cried out when Nick flicked her forehead. “Hey!”

Chuckling, Nick said “I just want to be prepared, Love. If I have it already designed, then the contractors won’t give us grief about it when the time comes.”

They walked a little further before Judy grabbed Nick’s paw. Nick looked at her curiously, getting a nervous smile back. Judy then guided him to a small section of her parents’ property where there was a pond.

Judy was ever so nervous about what she was about to do. Taking a deep breath, Judy turned to Nick. “So, one of the most important steps in lapine courtship is a bit bizarre, but it’s something I want us to do.” Gesturing to the wide-open expanse of fields around them, she explained “It’s considered traditional for a buck to chase the doe of his choosing. I’ve seen some of my sister get chased only to sock the buck chasing them in the jaw. That’s actually a combination of two separate courtship rituals. So be prepared for it, alright? Now, chase me.” She took off at breakneck speed.

Nick gave chase immediately. She was always just beyond his reach, but he was determined to catch her. Instinctually, Nick dropped to all fours, attaining even more speed, only for Judy to do the same. Regardless, Nick started gaining on Judy. When he saw an opportunity, Nick lunged forward, tackling her. They rolled a short distance from their combined momentum. The two ended up with Nick positioned over Judy breathing a little harder than normal. There were smiles on their muzzles as they gazed at one another.

“Got you!” Nick whispered, leaning close. He saw her nod with a smile and heard her soft giggle. Leaning in closer, Nick gave her a tender kiss, which Judy reciprocated. Pulling away from their kiss, Nick softly told her, “I love you, Judy.”

“I love you too, Nick.” Judy replied just as softly. “Thank you for indulging me with this.” Remembering what she had planned to do, Judy softly nudged his jaw with her fist. She felt Nick chuckle in response.

The two laid there under the stars, embracing each other. The night was comfortable enough that they could have fallen asleep right there. However, Nick and Judy knew they had to get back to the Hopps burrow soon, otherwise others would start looking for them. So they stood up, took ahold of one another’s paw, and resumed their stroll back to the Hopps burrow.

Within his mind, Nick started thinking about what vulpine courtship ritual they could do tonight. He decided which one the moment they stepped inside. Nick had gifted her puzzles, provided her with nourishment, and sang for her. He even gave her a bouquet of flowers per lapine traditions. Nick had just performed an important ritual in lapine courtship, so it was Judy’s turn this time.
Judy followed Nick at his request. The moment they were in their room alone, Judy squealed as Nick pressed her up against the door, kissing her. “Nick! Stop that!” Judy exclaimed giggling.

Laughing, Nick booped her nose with his own. “I took part in a lapine courtship ritual. So, it’s only fair you take part in a vulpine one.” He saw Judy’s eyes become alight with curiosity. “Normally, it is the vixen that scent-marks the tod first, signifying that they accept them as their future mate.”

Having read about that in *The Young Vulpine’s Guide to Maturity*, Judy understood the importance of such an act. Lapines also scent-marked their chosen mates, but Judy knew there was a clear difference in the act for vulpines. Judy leaned in close and began rubbing her chin from in-between his ears down his muzzle then on either side of it. “There we go. Now, everyone will know you’re mine.”

Smiling radiantly, Nick then reciprocated the action. He rubbed his cheeks along the sides of her face then swiped his chin down the center of her muzzle. “Now, everyone will know you are mine, too,” he stated. Nick could see the blush in her cheeks and ears. “You’re cute when you blush. Did you know that?” He teased.

“Shut up, Dumb Fox,” Judy whispered, hiding herself in Nick’s neck. “Don’t let my family hear you calling me ‘cute,’ ‘adorable,’ or anything similar. They’ll burn you alive.”

“I’ll be careful,” Nick replied. He laid Judy on their bed then positioned himself atop of her. “I think that we’ve completed all of the most important rituals in courtship for both of our species,” he whispered.

“I think you’re right.” Judy told him in a voice that was equally as soft. She closed her eyes as Nick leaned in and kissed her. When he separated, she said “Let’s go to my room. I have a lock on my bedroom door, unlike these guest rooms.”

*Temporary City Hall – Zootopia*

Larry and Gary said goodnight to Spencer as he turned in for the night. The two wolves weren’t tired just yet, so they settled themselves onto the couch. The temporary City Hall had a generator that provided the place with electricity. Larry turned on the television and started surfing through the channels. Gary leaned into Larry, a bottle of water in paw. With Spencer living out of the building, it only made sense they did as well.

Eventually finding a television movie to watch, Larry wrapped an arm around Gary, pulling him in close. “Gods, I’m happy it’s all over,” Larry said wearily. He started leaning into Gary. “I think we’ve had enough excitement for a long time. Don’t you agree?”

“Well,” Gary whispered as he turned to kiss Larry’s cheek. “That depends on what type of excitement you’re talking about.” Gary licked the cheek he just kissed. “But you are right. I wouldn’t want to relive these past few days.”

Larry turned to Gary and kissed him. “How long has it been since we’ve last been one?” He asked in a whisper. For him, the answer was far too long. Apparently, Gary was in agreement with him because he was pulled into a much more feverish kiss. Dragging Gary onto the floor with him, Larry rolled them over so that he was on top.

Feeling Larry press down on him felt wonderful to Gary. It really had been far too long since the last time they mated. There was nothing he wanted more at that moment than to unite with Larry as one.

Spencer opened his eyes as the sound of sex pervaded throughout the building. Rolling out of bed,
he opened the door and walked down the short hallway. Entering the room, Spencer found Larry and Gary in a severely compromised position. “I don’t mind you two reveling in intimacy, but would you please keep the noise to a minimum?”

Gary looked up at Spencer from where he was underneath Larry. His expression was one of embarrassment. “Sorry, sir. We’ll try to be quieter.” Watching as Spencer returned to his room, Gary looked at his mate.

Unable to look at Gary, Larry kept his muzzle buried in his mate’s neck. “Sorry,” Larry whimpered. He felt Gary pet his head soothingly. “Maybe we should’ve gone to our own room.”

“Kind of late to do that now, mate,” Gary replied, “It ain’t like we can move much with your knot lodged in my ass. We’re gonna have to wait until you can pull out.”

Whining in embarrassment, Larry asked “How much do you think he saw? Only a little? Or everything?” Larry wasn’t usually self-conscious, but he wasn’t one to let anyone else except Gary see him nude.

“Larry, I’m pretty sure he saw everything about both of us.” Gary answered. He heard Larry whine again and rolled his eyes. “You’re partially to blame for this, you know.”

“Yeah, I know.” Larry complained. Pushing himself up to look down at Gary, Larry said “I just thought of something. Why hasn’t Spencer found anyone yet?”

Pursing his lips in thought, Gary said “I don’t know. I don’t think we should pry or get involved though. Whatever his reasons are, they’re his own.”

Spencer was laying in bed, but he could still hear Larry and Gary talking, if just barely. He had a very good reason for why he didn’t have anyone to share his bed. Spencer stared at the ceiling, thinking back on what his veterinarian told him back then. It had come as a shock, finding out he was sterile. There was no way of siring pups of his own someday, so he didn’t see any reason to find a mate. What little interactions he had with those of the feminine persuasion showed him that having pups in the future was nonnegotiable. He couldn’t give them that, so why try? Certainly, there was adoption, but he wanted pups of his own, and that wasn’t possible. He closed his eyes and felt himself drifting into dreamland, where his pups awaited him.

**Hopps Warren Farmstead – Bunnyburrow**

Jessie and Jamie Hopps were cuddled together when it happened. Jessie gasped at the pain that came from her lower abdomen. Jamie whispered comforting words. With bunny pregnancies typically lasting a single month, it was almost time for Jessie to give birth. Sharing a worried look, the two decided to go talk with their mother. Exiting the room, they wandered down the hall towards the master bedroom. Knocking softly, Jamie and Jessie waited.

Waking at the sound of someone knocking on their bedroom door, Bonnie heard Stu grumble. “I got it, Stu. You can continue to sleep,” Bonnie told her husband, kissing his temple. Shuffling towards the door, Bonnie slipped out to come muzzle-to-muzzle with Jessie and Jamie. Seeing their worried expressions, Bonnie guided them back to their room. Once they were seated on their mattress, she asked, “What’s wrong? Something clearly has you worried.”

“I had a feeling of intense pain,” Jessie confessed, “Here,” she added, placing a paw right where the pain had been the worst. “It scared me, Mama. It really hurt.”

Bonnie placed a paw atop Jessie’s. “You experienced Braxton Hicks contractions, dear. You’re only
a week or so away from giving birth. It’s perfectly normal. If you’re really that worried, I’m sure Dr. Rory wouldn’t mind checking on you. Would you like me to see if she’d examine you?” Getting a nod, Bonnie said “I’ll ask her tomorrow. M’kay? You should just rest for now.” Kissing her kits goodnight, Bonnie left the room and wandered her way to the kitchen. She blinked finding Rory sitting at the table fiddling with a tablet. “You’re up late. Or is this considered early for a veterinarian?”

Smirking at the doe, Rory answered “I’d say this is normal for me. What about you? Why are you awake at this hour?”

“Jamie and Jessie,” Bonnie replied. “She experienced Braxton Hicks contractions, waking her up, and frightening the poor dear. She asked me to ask you if you’d examine her later.”

“Sure, I don’t mind,” Rory told the doe. “I was going to inquire about them over breakfast actually. How have they been so far? Besides the Braxton Hicks, anything else that had her worried?”

Bonnie shook her head. “Not really. Jessie has been having more gas, which she finds embarrassing, but nothing I haven’t gone through.” Preparing a pot of tea, Bonnie said “If I’m honest, I wasn’t prepared for this. I mean, there have been other cases in both the Hopps and O’Hares of incestuous pregnancies, but I never thought my own kits would join those statistics.”

The vixen watched the doe closely, noticing her discomfort on the subject. “Are you concerned?” Rory asked. She saw Bonnie pause. “You are, aren’t you?”

“A little,” Bonnie admitted with a sigh. “As I said, we’ve had incestuous pregnancies in the family before. The offspring born of those incestuous unions haven’t had any birth defects, but I’ve heard of cases where it has occurred.”

“It’s not uncommon for it to happen,” Rory confirmed. “You forget though that in ancient times, before we evolved, incestuous pregnancies did occur every so often. The progeny of those unions didn’t suffer from birth defects. It wasn’t exactly regular occurrences, but it did happen.”

Sitting across from Rory, Bonnie took a sip of her tea. “Oh, I know. It’s just that nowadays no one tends to hear about such things anymore.” Taking another sip, the doe added, “This might seem like a surprise, but lagomorphs, despite being known for our high sex drives, don’t often engage in such acts.”

The sound of the door opening drew their attention. Rory and Bonnie watched as Zannah stumbled into the room. Her funny way of walking told them all they needed to know. The two smirked once Zannah realized their presence.

“Uhm, hi,” Zannah said. “Didn’t think anyone else was awake.” Joining the two at the table, she nearly collapsed onto the bench.

“A little exhausted from all the sex?” Rory teased, making the tigress groan. “Oh, come on now. You’re in a bunny burrow. You think Mrs. Hopps hasn’t heard worse?”

“Believe me,” Bonnie added, “I’ve heard and seen a lot of things you probably never imagined. Trust me, nothing you say could surprise me.”

Slumping into the table with her head resting on her paws, Zannah said “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I’m not in heat, but it sure feels like I am. I mean, I’ve never gone more than two rounds and Harrison and I just went five.”

Rory and Bonnie shared knowing looks then smirked at the tigress, who grew scared at the sight.
Rory was the closest to her and simply patted the tigress right where her would was located. Zannah’s eyes widened at the gesture, immediately placing her own paw on that area. Glancing between the two older females, the tigress asked that silent question: ‘Am I…?’ The expressions of the doe and vixen all but confirmed the tigress’s suspicions.

“Ooh, boy.” Zannah stated under her breath. “How am I going to tell Harrison?” She didn’t know the answer.

**Home of Kristofferson Reynalda**

Kristofferson watched as Fatima spoke to her son Bahman on the landline. She was trying to get information on her husband Ma Li. Kristofferson had managed to locate Bahman for her, but hadn’t been able to do the same with her husband. While the tod hated the stallion, he knew it was something Fatima needed, especially since she was pregnant. He jumped when Fatima let out a cry of anguish.

Rushing to her side, Kristofferson asked “Fatima? What’s wrong?” He was shocked when the mare pulled him into a strong hug. Returning the embrace, he repeated his questions softly.

“H-he’s… Li’s dead,” Fatima sobbed. “Ba-Bahman was one of the body finders and came across Li’s body.” She continued to cry as Kristofferson held her tighter.

The tod hated himself for feeling happy at the death of another mammal, but couldn’t find it in himself to care. The knowledge that Fatima was in emotional pain, would end up having to care for two offspring without the aid of a father, and that she had lost her mate had Kristofferson focused on comforting her as best he could. This mare was the one his heart had decided on to be his own mate, but he wasn’t going to take advantage of her in this state.

“I’m so sorry, Fatima,” Kristofferson whispered. “I’m so, so sorry. I know how much you loved him.”

A wet chuckle escaped Fatima. “You’re a terrible liar for a lawyer,” Fatima whispered back. “To be completely honest, I did love him. I just wasn’t in love with him. I somehow convinced myself I was, but I wasn’t.”

Blinking, Kristofferson pulled away to look at the mare. “Wha-what? What are you saying?”

Fatima gave him a sad smile. “All the way here, I was thinking back due to something I heard Dr. Wilde say. It brought back memories that I had forgotten. I remembered that there was another mammal that I loved for a long time, but never noticed. I was in love with this mammal, and I’m still in love with him.” She said all this while looking directly into the tod’s eyes.

Kristofferson couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Was she saying what he thought she was saying? Could it be true? “Fatima…” He whispered.

“Look, it’ll take me some time and I know that it’s rather late, but I… I want to give us a try,” Fatima told him softly. “That is, if you’re also willing to give us a try.” Looking at him worriedly, Fatima asked, “Are you?”

Unable to stop himself, Kristofferson kissed her cheek then whispered, “Hell yes. I’m more than willing.” Pressing his cheek to hers, he added “Take your time though. I may not have liked your husband, but he still deserves to be mourned.”

They stayed wrapped in each other’s arms for a while before Fatima finally decided to go to bed. Kristofferson remained awake, watching television. When his landline started ringing, he answered
to avoid waking the mare. The voice on the other end of the call had only one thing to say: “It’s me. I need your help.”

**A private airfield in Zootropolis**

As M stepped out of the helicopter, he shouldered his rucksack and looked to see who had graced him with their presence. It wasn’t often that the Prime Minister came to greet him upon return. Usually it meant that something important needed his attention. Walking up to the old wolf, M asked, “What is it, Sir?”

Frowning at the use of the term ‘sir,’ the Prime Minister of Zootropolis, Sir Sirius Blake, a wolf with pitch-black fur, answered “I’ve got a job for you. Don’t bother unpacking. You won’t be here long.” Gesturing for the margay to follow, the Prime Minister stated “This task is of the utmost importance, and needs to be dealt with swiftly. What do you know of the Lord Regent of Animammalia?”

“I know that for the past couple of years there have been rumors that he’s been struggling to remain in power,” M answered. “Supposedly, there are those who wish to see him overthrown. If any of these rumors are to be believed, the Lord Regent was found to be plotting to mutiny against the Zoolympian Empire.”

“If I told you those rumors are true?” Sirius inquired. “What would you say to that?” He watched the margay’s expression darken as they continued to walk.

“I’d say that this needs to be nipped in the ass before war breaks out,” M replied gravely. “How trustworthy is your source? Has his claim been verified?”

“It has,” Sirius answered. “For the past several years, the Lord Regent has secretly met with various rebel factions, trying to consolidate them into a single entity. I’ve contacted an old friend over there who’s identified a worthy replacement for the Lord Regent. The only issue we face is that the Lord Regent has yet to act.”

“Which is where I come in, correct?” M queried. “What exactly is it you want me to do, Sir? You’re going to need to clarify specifically what it is you want from me.”

Stopping and turning to M, the Prime Minister ordered “You are hereby ordered to do everything within your abilities to stop the Lord Regent’s insurrection from taking place. Use whatever means you deem necessary. I don’t care how you complete this assignment as long as you do complete it. Am I understood?”

“Yes, Sir,” M answered, saluting. “When do I leave? It’ll take some time for me to gather the equipment I’ll require.”

“You leave at dawn’s early light two days from today,” the Prime Minister replied. “I want hourly reports from you throughout this assignment. My inside man will collect you upon your arrival. He’ll be the one to get you whatever you need while you’re there.” Having done what he came to do, Sirius Blake entered his vehicle and told his chauffeur to drive.

M stood there considering what he had just been told. First rumors of the Emperor dying, and now rumors of the Lord Regent of Animammalia plotting an insurrection. Things were beginning to look exceptionally grim. Zootopia had just finished dealing with its own crisis, but it appeared a far greater one, one that would affect the entire Zoolympian Empire, was on the horizon. ‘Oh, I’ve got a bad feeling about this.’

**Zookuulantiapolis, the Imperial Capital of the Zoolympian Empire**
The Emperor, Dartz Valkorlycanidaeus, sat on his throne, eyes closed. The maned wolf kept his eyes closed even though he heard someone approach. Taking a sniff, he recognized the scent as that of his mate, Kiyah. Opening his eyes slowly, revealing his emerald green eyes, he saw his mate and gave her a weak smile. “I’m sorry if I worried you. I just needed to be alone.”

Kiyah knelt before her mate and rested her paws on his knees. “I know, my love.” Raising a paw to brush his muzzle, she smiled when he leaned into it.

“I’m so tired, Kiyah,” Dartz whispered. “Yet, I can’t sleep without suffering through the nightmares that have plagued me so.” He brought his own paw up to lay it upon the paw she used to caress his cheek. “I erroneously assumed that I was beyond the power of Malthael. I now see that even I cannot defy one of the Divine Entities.”

Shedding a tear, Kiyah whispered “You aren’t dead yet, my love. There is still a chance that you’ll overcome this.” Never had she seen her mate in such a state. He looked as though he was precariously walking between this world and the next. His eyes, which she was so used to seeing aglow with vitality, seemed ominously dim. His fur had lost its magnificent sheen. Not to mention that he now sounded his true age instead of the youthful appearance he possessed.

“I saw him, you know,” Dartz whispered to his mate. “I saw Nicholas.” Carefully extracting a photograph that Deego had managed to take of the tod, he passed it to his mate for her to examine.

Gazing at the photo, Kiyah’s breath hitched. The tod in it looked like a perfect miniature doppelganger of her mate. “He looks just like you,” Kiyah marveled. There was no reply, prompting her to look at her mate, who was now fast asleep. At first she was worried, knowing of his nightmares, but after noting the smile on his muzzle, she knew that this time he would enjoy a peaceful slumber.

Zootopia – Just before dawn

The city was bustling with life as mammals went every which way as they endeavored to begin the process of rebuilding Zootopia. Few had taken a break to rest, working throughout the night, not wanting to waste any time. It was thanks to the efforts of these mammals that the urban planners and structural engineers were able to begin their work, drawing up the new designs for the city’s buildings. It was among these mammals that, if one were to look closely enough, you’d see a lone, elderly chinkara.

Having been stripped of his title of Attorney General, Hoover was now an ordinary citizen of Zootopia. He had no home, no finances, nothing except the clothes on his back. Everything the chinkara had once owned had been repossessed. He didn’t mind. After all, he deserved it for his role in everything that happened. So, after pleading for a sketchpad and a pencil, Hoover sat atop a large piece of stone and began to sketch out a building design. Despite the lack of sunlight hindering his vision, Hoover had drawn quite a few. The chinkara glanced to the side, hearing the sound of gravel crunch as someone approached. When they got close enough, Hoover saw it was General Andreas Bogo. “General. This is a surprise.”

Taking a seat a few paces away, Andreas said “Thought it would be best to check and see what you were doing. You’re being monitored, by the way. Someone’s always watching you.”

Chuckling, Hoover replied “I figured as much. Not like I don’t deserve worse.” Passing the buffalo the finished sketch, he asked “What do you think? Do you think it would make a good building?”

Examining the drawing, Andreas said “It’s not my approval you need. Mr. Wolvenett has a team to make those determinations. Give it to them.” Passing the sheet back, he added “Did you ever think
about it? What you did?"

“All the time,” Hoover answered as he began another sketch. “I thought about how I could have
done something differently, how I could have stopped it all from happening in the first place. I came
to the conclusion that no matter what I did, I ultimately made the only viable option at that time. I
only wish that I had learned of Jacen Carno’s survival far sooner.”

The General glanced over Hoover’s shoulder to see the officer currently shadowing the chinkara, it
was Officer Delgato. Looking back at the former Attorney General, Andreas said “Take care of
yourself, Hoover. Stay out of trouble as well. If I find out that you’ve gotten yourself arrested, I’ll
come after you myself.” That last part was a warning to let the chinkara know that it wouldn’t be to
help.

“I understand, General,” Hoover replied. “I think I’ve caused enough trouble. Don’t you agree?”

Snorting, Andreas got up and walked over to Officer Delgato. Stopping just out of reach, the buffalo
asked “Officer Delgato. How are you? Any improvement on your condition?”

Shrugging, Leon answered “About as much as can be expected. Can’t really get treatment without
the proper supplies, but I’ve been making do with alternatives. They seem to be doing the job for
now.”

“Good. I’d hate for my son to lose a fine officer,” Andreas stated. “As for Hoover, keep a close eye
on him. Understood?”

Delgato nodded once before saying “As you say.” He watched the buffalo walk away then returned
his attention to the chinkara. A few minutes later, Grizzoli joined him in leaning against the cruiser he
was using. The streets were pretty much cleared now, but there was a lack of functioning police
cruisers available. The only reason he had one was due to the fact he wasn’t to overexert himself.

“Got you some red clove tea,” the arctic wolf told the lion, offering him the cup. “I happened to hear
it’s good for cancer patients. Supposed to help with chemo, not that you’re undergoing chemo, but
it’s the thought that counts.”

“Thanks,” Delgato replied, accepting the cup and taking a sip. “He’s been sitting there for two hours.
I’ve lost track of how many sketches he’s made.”

“Still got to surveil him. Those were the Chief’s orders,” Grizzoli opened the bag of turkey jerky he
had bought with the coffee. “I’d think you wouldn’t want any excitement after all that’s happened.”

“I don’t. I just wish I could be doing something else. I already hated having to do stakeouts. This is
so much worse.” The lion looked at the cup after taking another sip. “This stuff tastes really good. I’ll
have to look into purchasing some for at home.”

“Speaking of which,” Grizzoli began, “What are your folks going to do about lodgings? They going
to rebuild? Or are they relocating?”

Delgato sighed heavily and ran a paw down his muzzle. “My mom wants us to relocate to a better
area of the same district. Found a nice portion of land not too far from where our house was
originally too. My dad, on the other paw, wants to rebuild the house where it was. The deciding vote
was cast by my grandfather, who, despite being my dad’s dad, sided with my mom. So we’re
rebuilding the house 0.1 kilometers away from the site it once was.”

“I bet your dad was pissed,” Grizzoli replied with a grin. He had met Mr. Delgato on a few
occasions. His perception of the old lion was that he was used to being the one in control. The very
idea of seeing him having to admit defeat was amusing.


“My parents are letting me stay with them,” Grizzoli answered. “Supposedly, they had a moment of revelation during the evac. Said if I wanted to, I could come home. I think I’ll accept their offer, if only just to placate them.”

They fell into silence, continuing to watch the old chinkara draw on his sketchpad. The sun had almost completely risen past the horizon when they saw him stand, dust himself off, and begin to move. Getting into their cruiser, they tailed him all the way to another section of the city, where he sat down and started drawing again. The lion and arctic wolf settled down knowing it would be a while before they’d move again.

**Bunnyburrow – Midmorning**

The sun had yet to reach halfway into the sky when a knock on the Hopps burrow entrance echoed throughout the dwelling. Not expecting visitors this early, Bonnie readied the empty flintlock to drive the solicitor away. She had to remove the firearm that originally stayed in the drawer there after one of her kits tried to use it recreationally. Peering through the peephole, the doe saw that it was Sharla again. A weary sigh left her lips as she set the gun aside and opened the door.

“What do you want Sharla?” Bonnie inquired. “If this is about Judy’s band of predators, then I’m sorry but I will not allow you to force them out. This is my home and I can entertain the guests of my choosing.” She folded her arms across her chest as she said this.

Sharla kept a deadpan expression as she gave the older doe a sheet of paper. “This is a…” She didn’t get to finish as Bonnie proceeded to rip the sheet up and toss the pieces in the air like confetti. Dumbfounded, Sharla asked, “Are you out of your mind? That was a court order for you to…”

“I think I made myself clear, Sharla,” Bonnie stated threateningly. “This is my home. I choose the guests I entertain. You have no say in the matter. Your little court order was drafted by your brother, who I must say is a horrible judge both in and out of court.” Leaning in close enough that despite their size difference it would appear to anyone passing by that the doe was the one towering over the ewe, Bonnie finished by saying “Also, need I remind you that it was my former warren, the O’Hares, and the Hopps warren that founded Bunnyburrow. I’d say that no one in town would be daft enough to even attempt to side with you on this matter if you tried to march on us. Now, good day.” Slamming the door with enough force that the gust of wind it created knocked poor frightened ewe down, Bonnie went back to her business.

“Sharla again?” Stu asked as Bonnie reentered the kitchen. Getting the ‘what do you think’ look from his wife, Stu sighed. “What do you wanna do about it, Bon?”

Kneading the dough that she had left unattended to deal with the ewe at her door, Bonnie said “I’m weighing all my options, Stu.” She had even made a list of ways to end this ordeal with Sharla permanently.

“If I may make a suggestion,” Jaxon began, “Has this Sharla ever seen a bunny go savage?” Everyone in the kitchen stopped to look at the tiger-striped buck, who was currently slicing carrots julienne-style. Feeling the eyes of everybody on him, he looked up with a devious grin. “No? Then I say we let her. Right after brunch, that is.”

It was a couple of hours later, almost noon, when Sharla was walking along the outer edge of the Hopps warren’s property line. Since her last failed attempt to force the predators staying at the Hopps
burrow out, she had spent time planning her next attempt. Walking had always helped her think, so that’s what she did. However, she stopped when she saw a buck she didn’t recognize walking towards her.

“Who are you?” Sharla questioned. A prickle of fear jolted her spine as he got closer. “Answer me damnit! Who are you?”

Jaxon smiled, “Now that’s not very polite, Miss.” He held up a Night Howler as if examining it. “To answer your question though, my name is Jaxon Lapin, a relative of the Hopps warren, and we have met. You just don’t remember, but allow me to remind you. I was among the predators that were with Judy yesterday.”

That fear Sharla felt flared. Something about this buck didn’t seem right. Her eyes kept glancing back to the Night Howler he held delicately in his paw. ‘What is he planning?’ she wondered.

“Now, I’m sure you know what this is,” Jaxon stated, displaying the Night Howler. “I’m sure you know what it does, too.” He brought it close to his maw and pretended to take a nip, making Sharla flinch. Raising a brow with a smirk, Jaxon said “I want to make this perfectly clear to you. You will leave Bunnyburrow.” His expression, despite being a polite smile, was anything but. It was the same expression that one would expect of a savage serial killer. “You will leave and never come back. If not…” He held the flower’s bulb in the pawm of his paw. “I’ll show you how savage a jackrabbit can become.”

Sharla’s body reacted on instinct, racing away from the mad jackrabbit. A sense of doom hung thickly in the air prompting her to run. Never had she felt such a thing from another prey. Sharla couldn’t understand, couldn’t figure it out. Why? Why had it seemed that that jackrabbit was more dangerous than any predator she previously encountered. She wasn’t about to stick around to find out.

Jaxon grinned as Sharla raced away at top speed. The Night Howler in his paw was a nigh-flawless facsimile to the real thing. He had made it using coloured rice paper. Skye had often teased him for knowing origami, but as he just proved, it had its uses.

Hearing his phone ring, Jaxon pulled it out of his pocket to see who it was. The Caller ID showed nothing, not even BLOCKED NUMBER. Warnings started blaring in his head as he answered it. “Hello? This is Agent Jack Savage.”

“Hello, Agent Savage,” the electronically disguised voice on the other end of the line began. “I fear that my time is limited. I’m calling to let you know that your mate Skye Reddington is in grave danger.”

End of Arc One

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed. I'm swan-diving back into research now. I have no estimated date for the first chapter of the remastered version shall be posted. I'm going to try typing it all out for editing prior first.
News and Announcements

Chapter Summary

For those still subscribed, I'm very much alive. This is my long overdue update. More details inside.

Chapter Notes

My apologies concerning my tardiness.

News

I haven't updated in a long time, and you have my sincerest apologies. Things have gotten...complicated in my offline life. The good news is school started yesterday, and my wife's maternity leave ended as well. I'm quite lonely without them home in all honesty.

However, that's not the point.

Though I'm still writing, things aren't progressing as I initially intended. My time is being monopolized by two huge projects that both began simultaneously: renovations and construction. No I won't explain, as it's too complicated to give an abridgement. Therefore, let's move along to more important information.

I've got everything prepared to begin typing the remastered version. Researching was a long, arduous process and yet so worth it. I learnt so much, but there's still a lot left.

Now that Ian is enrolled in public school, and no longer getting homeschooled, I'm drafting new SWZ concepts in my spare time. He's still intends to write it, but research ain't happening since time is limited.

Onwards to Announcements!

~

Announcements

wrecker159753 invited me as a special guest in 'wreckers corner' here on AO3. It emulates Q&A talk shows in a written text style. The basis is to answer questions readers have regarding his stories. They are very interesting, and I enjoy them greatly. His writing style is still evolving (as is every writer/author's own unique styles), but I find them exciting.

If you have questions regarding either his stories (and I recommend you read them) or mine, we're planning to answer next Saturday.

Here's the way it'll work: everyone must submit their questions as comments starting next Friday
(Exact start time TBD). Everyone is limited to FIVE questions AT MOST. Each question must include the name they're directed towards (this is mandatory). Then, on Saturday, wrecker159753 and I will answer them throughout the day. MAXIMUM TOTAL: Not yet determined.

Let's get one thing straight: there's life and time beyond the internet. Everyone possesses a 'Second Life' [insert laugh track here]. For provide a prompt answer is improbable due to the massive time differences everyone's got.

wrecker159753 and I are still ironing out the quirks. Expect more info posted later.

My next announcement is the youngest twin set have spoken their first words! I was honestly getting a bit nervous since they took so long. My son's was 'Mal' [points to self as it's my pet-name courtesy of my wife], and my daughter's was 'pa' [again me]. My wife was positively livid about it. I was ecstatic.

Chapter End Notes

I intended to post this earlier today, but time got away from me.

BTW, my proxy over on FF.net (ApatheisticDevil) is no longer going to post TZD.
Chapter Notes

Felt I had to post something. Figured I'd update everyone to the reason I'm so delayed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

First and foremost, I hope everyone is doing well. Things on my end are hectic as hell. Never expected even half the issues that have arisen. I'll start at the beginning.

I had hired a local, and reputable, contractor to oversee both projects. Had no problems until I visited the sites in person. I noticed minor inconsistencies that bothered me. Doing some investigation, I found the materials purchased weren't the ones I specified. Instead, he was falsifying purchases and keeping the monetary difference to fill his pockets. Needless to say, I reported him.

The next issue was locating another contractor and deal with these inadequate building materials. Not finding a contractor had me dig out my structural and architectural engineering certifications. I collected some favours and got a construction crew better than most professional firms. Thmaterials became labelled "Contingencies".

From that point, thing began moving along quite smooth. However, as with life, there were more complications to appear.

The construction was halted upon learning my building permits were under investigation. Therefore, I had everyone redirected to the reno while handling the permit problem.

My attempts to negotiate were ineffective. So, I decided to play a much different game. In the end, I got my permits approved again.

During this time, the reno was put on ice because the local Historical Society got involved. I had a long conversation with its chairman, and after many hours, received permission to continue.

Following all that, my wife was sent on a business trip and left me as a single parent until her return. My attention divided, I wasn't aware there were now new complications to handle.

Upon my wife's return, I immediately began attempting to rectify these issues. Except, every single time one was fixed, another arose to take its place.

The most problematic soon became my health. I was stressed, exhausted, and beyond frustrated. I hadn't an outlet to release it, and I did something incredibly moronic.

There's a strong military presence in my area since most are generationals. Thus, military training is a requirement in youth. There's a MMA facility near me. I, a 50ish year old man, entered with every
intention to instigate a brawl. I KO'd approximately 80% of those present prior to getting KO'd myself. Not bad given my age.

I began by saying "first and foremost", which indicates there's at least a second point I must make clear.

Second: everything is back on track. I'm getting more and more free time to write, but still nowhere near enough to make any real progress. I'm adamant I'm going to finish this. However, until the reno and construction are 100% complete, my attention is on them.

Finally, and I normally don't ask for things like this, please pray. Ian's bio-mom (my late older broth thoughr's widow) isn't doing well. Her condition has gotten much worse, and the doctors still haven't any idea regarding what it is. She's isolated in quarantine right now and not permitted visitors, except through special procedures and protocols.

That's all for right now. I'll try to update more regularly. No promises though.

Chapter End Notes

For those still there, you have my gratitude. It's a difficult time right now. If things were simpler, there'd be a snippet post today.

Until next time, whenever that is.

O.G.
Life can be hellish

Chapter Summary

Major life update courtesy of Ian on Uncle's insistence.

Chapter Notes

I ain't gonna lie. It ain't good news.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This update text was written by Uncle, but I'm transcribing in his stead. Thus, the text reflects this. I've edited some details out or changed them to avoid uncertain issues yet handled.

First, Uncle extends his most profound and sincerest apologies. This wasn't the way he, or anyone, expected this to happen.

Second, I'm extending my apologies since it seems proper.

Third, the situation is as follows. They say stress can have adverse effects on one's mental, physical, and emotional state. If you factor in preexisting conditions, it's not unlike a nuclear fallout.

For Uncle, it was as though everything rested on his shoulders. My own accident didn't help matters. That's a story for another time.

Things never stopped compiling into a larger mess, which culminated with Uncle having a nervous breakdown. This resulted in massive consequences that changed things quite a bit.

His behaviour initially gave no indication to the changes taking place. However, they soon became evident, and scary.

Uncle isn't a violent man. Not any longer at least. His rage was our first indicator. The yelling, throwing breakables, and destroying things gave us pause. Though aware Uncle would never lay a hand on us, these were frightening displays.

He became reclusive, staying in seclusion and wasn't even attempting to interact with us except as necessary. Over time, Uncle started rejoining us. It appeared the storm was near its end. This was an erroneous deduction.

Things got worse in some aspects as other became better. He began whispering to no one in particular. Though not strange given Uncle's tendencies, it had us pay more attention due to the previous incidences.

It wasn't a secret our family is plagued with various mental health issues, but everyone thought Uncle the black sheep since nothing ever manifested. This was either a miracle or through pure willpower.

Uncle began putting everything in order, a typical task seen if one is dying. The exception here is
that he's soon to admit himself into the semi-local psychiatric center. Duration is not determined until the initial evaluation upon admittance.

Finally, with all that stated, I'm instructed to announce that Uncle's hiatus is extended until further notice.

For my own projects, they are suspended as well. Everything is through Uncle's accounts and, as I don't possess the necessary info to access it, I'm without a way to post anything more.

Uncle installed a lockout program with a timer. Tomorrow, at 8 in the morning, no one will possess access to any private electronics that belong to Uncle (mobiles, laptops, desktops, tablets, or consoles). Therefore, this post is the last until the program is deactivated via voice-print passcode.

I, again, apologize.

My greatest apologies, Ian.

Chapter End Notes

Important addendum: Should anyone possess a FF.net account as well, I must inform you all my Uncle's proxy (ApatheisticDevil) was involved in a vehicular accident and didn't survive. This was a contributing factor in my Uncle's spiral.

R.I.P. ApatheisticDevil, may your memory continue.
I'M BACK!!!!

Chapter Summary

I've written this entry in something similar to a letter format. It's not my best attempt at transcribing thoughts, but it's better than the others. I apologize if it seems uninteresting and pointless.

Hey, everyone! I’m back!

I’m still not 100% yet, but that ain’t going to stop me. I won’t lie to you. I’ve had some serious issues getting back into writing since my release. However, I’ve dedicated at least sixty minutes to writing practice drabbles (which I won’t post since they aren’t even worth any attention).

I want to provide everyone with more details concerning my reasons behind taking this last hiatus. Please, remain patient with me as it’s a long explanation.

So, as most are aware, I had numerous ongoing projects requiring my attention. I was overseeing my new estate’s construction; my former one’s renovation; my life consultation clients; raising my five children; and a chronic clinical depression relapse. There were many other reasons, but those are the primary ones.

There is another reason I experienced my breakdown. I hadn’t heard anything from my proxy on FF.net (ApatheisticDevil) in quite some time. I attempted, multiple times, to establish contact without success. Eventually, I managed to locate a mutual acquaintance that told me ApatheisticDevil had perished in a vehicular accident about a months following our last conversation. In losing them, I lost something that left me feeling a bit hollow inside.

It was as though everything had begun to collapse, trapping me without any way out. Knowing I required professional help, I tasked my lawyer with getting the necessary things prepared. Then, I got admitted into the best mental health institute in my area.

The therapy was very long and arduous. They had me participate in various group sessions that required I voice my issues. My private sessions were with a somewhat high-functioning autistic cognitive scientist two decades my junior. He and I forged a strong bond which helped immensely. My last month saw tremendous improvement.

The night prior to my initial scheduled release, another patient lost control and began attacking a nurse. I was quick to intervene. In the struggle, we both went over the landing’s railing. I managed to survive, but the other patient wasn’t so fortunate. I was subjected to yet another psych evaluation and had to submit a voluntary statement about the event. My release was postponed until the Monday prior to last.

I’ve spent every moment since my release getting everything back to normal. I’ve kept my laptop open to a fresh, new document the entire time. It acts as my own siren song, attempting to get me writing again.

I haven’t yet written anything new except some one-shots I’m not going to post since they’re not worth it. I have every intention to continue my works, though it’s going to require some more time.
no longer have any recollection concerning the direction they were heading. Thus, I must restart
rewriting everything once again. I've purchased new legal pads, pens, pencils, post-it notes, and
memo-booklets since my previous ones were trashed.

I feel it’s important to tell everyone that there isn’t a set release schedule any longer. I shall update at
my own pace. It’s a lot less stressful if there isn’t a deadline to meet.

Live long and prosper,

0P3RaGh05T

P.S. I rewatched the original Star Trek with Leonard Nimoy yesterday. That’s why my farewell is
worded so.

End Notes

Welcome to the first book to the largest project I've ever undertaken. This is just the first of 5
books that i'm in the process of writing. Any and all constructive critiques are accepted. After
being away for almost two decades, I'm trying to get back into the game so my writing style
is a little wonky. I hope you enjoy it, but if not i'm totally okay with that. This is just me
having a little fun and hopefully an interesting read for you all.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!