The Sons of Efrafa

by ubernoner

Summary

Zootopia is home to many diverse species, and many diverse cultures. Among them, are the Efrafans; an ancient peoples from Asia Minor with a long, and bloody history. Jacob Emanuel Raibert is a young, bitter Efrafan hare growing up in the impoverished district of Foxburrough Parish, otherwise known as Happytown. This is his story.

Notes

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Prologue

Chapter Summary

History is the foundation upon which the future is built.

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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Campion, first son of Ruth who is called Rautha, sat astride his nild-hraynos (ostrich). His short bow, sword and lance were by his side, ready to be drawn at a moment’s notice. His general, Ephraim of the line of Ephraim who is called Stihrath-rah, or ‘General Woundwort’ sat astride his own mount next to him and looked down onto the encampment in the Plain of Issus. From far below they could faintly hear a booming sound, as of a vast host of lions.

The scarred brown hare leaned forward in his saddle. “Listen to that Campion.” Both of their ears cocked slightly. “Easily 10,000 of those monster southern nild-hraynosil. With the incompetence shown by King Darius’ various appointed governors, I wouldn’t be surprised if those are from Governor Yehezqiyah’s own garrison in Yehud Medinata.”

Campion desperately wanted to chastise his general for speaking that way about their King, but the current Nemean Lion king was a pale shadow of his predecessors. There was unrest and rebellion throughout the empire, largely due to Darius breaking many of the ancient covenants. Even the Hrair-lion and nild-hraynos cavalry under General Woundwart’s command were forbidden from practicing the ancient Hain and Methrah, on pain of being cast into the soup pot. Still, he had to try to bring Ephraim to reason.

“It matters not, my general; they are Charioteers, so we still equal them in effective units on the field. Add to that our Hrair-lions (light infantry legions) alone nearly matches the Macedonian’s total force. Combined with the Ionian Peltasts and the Immortals, the outcome of this battle is assured. We just have our cavalry sweep down this slope at speed, so we can avoid the worst of the Macedonian archers. Our Hrair-lions and Peltasts can press the center while cavalry prevents their Phalanxs from anchoring their flanks. By then, Darius’ ‘Immortals’ and heavy infantry should be moved into position across the entire plain.”

The general huffed. “We are of one mind about that Campion. Unfortunately, our King does not share that mind. His cousin in command of the Immortals has, impressed our King with another plan. We are to march east and south at dawn, so the Macedonians may see the full glory of Darius’ army. They are but sheep and goats and will surely run.” Ephraim saw the poleaxed look in his compatriot’s eyes. “I have already tried to reason with him, but ‘surely if sheep will be turned by our host, what can a hare know,’?” Ephraim spat and looked back at the opposing force. “If those really are nild-hraynos driven charioteers from Medinata or Kemet, they’ll run circles around us.” He
pointed to the ravine leading into the plain. “It’ll be like the Gates of Inle-Hlao with Xerxes a Hrair-hrudao ago. The Spartans of Macedonia bled us dry then, too.”

He side-stepped his mount towards Campion’s. “The night my son passed, I had a dream. A thorn bush stood between two great beasts; on one side, a Lion rested, casting a long shadow. On the other, an Auroch grew ever stronger, ever larger. The thorn bush, which had long separated the two, was now stunted from too long being in the Lion’s shadow, soon to be trampled under hoof. Now we face an Aegean host, marching under the Auroch banner of Alexander of Macedon, while an indolent tyrant fritters away the empire we have helped to build.”

Ephraim turned to look at Campion, his one good eye seeming to pierce directly into the younger hare’s soul. “Campion, I have no daughters to carry my name, and no sons to bear my sword. Were it only me, I would gladly charge this enemy and meet Inle-rah with my head held high.” Ephraim continued to turn, now facing the Achaemenid army camp. “But it isn’t just me.”

Campion was silent for a time. “Alexander has already swept through Phrygia and Cappadocia. If, if, we were to aid him in the coming battle, he might grant us a polis of our own.” He looked sidelong at his general. “Maybe Uchisar; a natural fortress mount, with wide plains surrounding it for grazing nild-hraynos and é marflay (agriculture).” He chuckled. “Maybe the hrair-lot can be é marflayai (farmers), instead of farmed.”

Ephraim didn’t laugh. “Maybe our daughters’ daughters will grow old in a land of their own, and the ancient Hain and Methrah will echo through the Wonderlands for ages to come.” He wheeled his mount around towards their camp.

“Owsla-ethile Campion I give it you strictly in charge,” the younger hare sat up in his saddle, while the general drew his polished bronze sickle sword; the symbol of his office. “…I have already secreted as many of our people amongst the hrair-lot as I could before we left. Take my blade, so your Hrair-lion will know that you speak with my voice. Assign one of your Owsla to take a Hrayfa of our cavalry, and one Hrair-lion and escort our kin as far towards Cappadocia as they can in one night, then wait there for word until the night of Ni-Inle. By then we will either have won our freedom or joined with Frith-rah and U Hrair.”

Campion reverently cradled the blade. “M’saia, General. And what of us?”

The scarred hare gave a wicked grin. “We are going to prepare to disappoint Darius! That is one lion who deserves no rest!”

An elderly brown hare sat in a plush seat while two rambunctious leveretts, a brown jill and a solid black jack, fidgeted at his feet.

“And then what, Con-Ni-Fa?” The jack all but vibrated in anticipation.

“Don’t be dumb, Inle-roo!” The jill teased her brother. “Ephraim and the Hrair-lion swept across the Ellil like Keharr! Semashka!” With that, she tackled him, and they began wrestling.

“Jacob, Amelia.” The old hare’s voice was stern, but without reproach. “Enough of that; your mother is resting.”

Their father came into the room with a sour look on his face.

“What are you two fighting about now?”
The jill responded without stopping her assault on her brother.

“Con-Ni-Fa was telling us about the founding of Efrafa!”

The working jack turned crossly to his father-in-law. “Again, with these, nonsense stories? How are tall tales about ‘mighty warriors’ and magical visions going help them get by in their future? Unless Jacob is going to punch his way through life, or Amelia plans a career as a psychic hotline operator, it’s all useless!”

The elder crossed his arms and looked pointedly at the bronze sickle-sword on the wall. “They need to know their heritage, that its light may show them the way westward.”

Nathan Raibert knew it was a losing proposition trying to argue with his father-in-law; Nathan’s wife Katarin would always back her father.

“Well, keep it down you two. I have an early day tomorrow; they’re making some big announcement at the factory first thing.” With that, he turned and headed back to the bedroom, and to his pregnant wife.

Amelia patted her grandfather on the leg. “Con-Ni-Fa, what happened to Campion and Ephraim?”

“Now who’s being dumb, Fu-Embleer?” The jack shouldered his sister out of the way.

The jill shouldered him back. “I'm not dumb, you’re dumb!”

The fight was nearly back on until the old hare clapped his paws. “I will answer both your questions.” He then stood and took down the ancient blade. “This is the first Methrah Mon (Our Story) of your line, the Kilic Hain (Sword Dance) of Campion.” With that, he began the ancient song and dance that told the history of the Sons of Efrafa.

Chapter End Notes

My envisioning of Zootopia and the world it occupies is somewhat complex and convoluted, as the world tends to be. I will be using this space to give insight into the world that Jacob inhabits. Please enjoy, and if you feel so inspired, write about your own little corner of the world.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

The end of one path opens the way down another. Jacob is confronted with the price of his decisions.

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Hracka! *

Five years I ran with the Sons of Efrafa, serving on their Owsla; I defied my marli and for what? To be left bleeding in the streets of Vulpington Commons the moment the cops show up to our rumble with the Lapin Kings? Hrair-thanhnless! And then Timo-Rah has the gall to send Eva, my jill-friend, to threaten my Marli-fa if I talk to the police! No one threatens my family!

‘If you love me, you won’t talk to the cops!’ Hah! Where’s the Nurse-Call button? Ah! Here we go.

“Can I help you mister Raibert?”

Wow, she’s one hot vixen…Focus Jacob!

“Hombo-fa, hli u Ni-pfeffä Owsla?”

“Uh, what?”

-sigh- Stupid painkillers! “The big cat officer who brought me in, Officer DuPrey, is he still in the building?”

“I think he’s still out in the lobby; would you like me to get him for you?”

“Vao! Yes please; tell him I’m more than ready to make a deal.”

Chapter one
Jacob didn’t wait long before a near jet-black mountain lion and a very tired looking hippopotamus, both in ZPD blues entered the room. Though he seemed short for his species, barely coming up to his compatriots’ hip, something about the little big cat demanded respect; he would warrant watching.

The hippo led off. “I’m Sergeant Waters, this is Officer DuPrey. Now, Mr. Rabbit, I…”

“Raibert.”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s Raibert; not Rabbit, Ribbit or Robot. Raibert.”

The water-horse grit his jaw and continued. “We have you on disturbing the peace, aggravated assault, and inciting to riot. Just because Happytown is…”

“Foxburough Parish.” Jacob mulishly interrupted.

“Look, I don’t care…”

“Obviously,” Jacob replied hotly, “…but I’m about to put my extended family in harm’s way by talking to you, and if you can’t be bothered to get simple details like my name or where I live right then I’m certainly not going to trust their safety to you. This conversation is over, good day.”

“Why you little…”

“Bill.” There was neither anger nor power behind the calmly spoken name, and yet the command was more than implicit. As the frustrated sergeant stepped back, Jacob could only chuckle to himself; DuPrey would definitely warrant watching.

“Perhaps we should start over; would you, for the record, state your full name and date of birth”

“Jacob Emanuel Raibert; August 23, 1994. You may call me Emanuel.”

“That isn’t at all pretentious,” snorted Waters.

“I had a platoon sergeant in the Aragonese Foreign Legion from Cyprus named Antonio Speranza Lleprevani. He insisted everyone call him Speranza, though I never understood why; most everyone called him Sperry or March Hare.”

“Lot of inle on that one?” queried Jacob, ears and interest peaked.

DuPrey paused in his writing and glanced up. “Inle?”

“Means a lot of things, though right now it means the color black like you and me.” Jacob leaned back in his bed with a fond expression on his muzzle and started to talk. “Efrafans and Lapinos have what we call ‘Honor names’; it’s always our middle name, and it’s usually the name of an ancestor. My grandfather’s is Abelard, who was his grandfather who fought in the Great War.” The hare shook his head. “Anyway, it’s something you’re supposed to live up to; but if you’re Inle-rooliti like myself, you’re sort of a bad omen. So instead, you get named something positive, like Speranza or Emanuel; it’s to, I don’t know, drive off the bad luck or something.”

If Waters had an ankle, he would have been tapping his foot with impatience. “Enough with the rutting street slang and tell us what you know about the SoE!”

Jacob was equally tired of the pretense at civility towards the bigoted megafauna. “It’s not street
slang, it’s *efrafan*, a language thousands of years older than this city! Why is Hungry-Hungry-Hypocrite here anyway?”

At this Officer DuPrey lowered his pad and paper and locked eyes with Jacob, and for the first time since his earliest fights as the SoE *Owsla* he felt genuinely afraid.

“Sergeant William Waters is here as the lead officer for the Gangland taskforce investigating the recent rash of violence between the Sons of Efrafa and the Lapin Kings, and I would ask that you show him the respect his position is due.” DuPrey coolly warned.

“*Vahl-ni Owsla.*” Jacob demurred, knowing he had crossed a line.

“I will take that as understood. Shall we continue?” DuPrey replied, and the interview began in earnest. Jacob held nothing back. He told how his father leaving when he was seven left him without a strong father figure, how Timo Andraste, a somewhat runty but charismatic brown hare recruited him into the SoE at the age of twelve. He spoke of his growing into the position of Gang Champion or *Owsla*, with the accolade’s associated with it, and finally the street fight where he was stabbed and left in the street, only for Timo to send Jacob’s jill-friend into his hospital room and threaten his mother and five siblings if he talked to the cop’s.

“Now look…” Jacob tiredly said, “I don’t care about me; you can hang me by my ears from the Horace Plaza clock tower as long as you keep Timo away from my family.”

Officer DuPrey handed his notebook and a small digital recorder to Sergeant Waters who stormed out without a backward glance or word of thanks.

“I can’t make any official promises, but personally I will see to your family’s safety until a formal agreement can be made with the DA. I don’t see any real problem with that at this point. I can say with a decent amount of confidence that for your cooperation you will receive a fairly light sentence, maybe finishing out the year in Juvie. The issue will be after. Did you have any plans post high school?”

“What you mean; like getting into the booming job market here in the Commons? All the factories except the Castorman Logging Mill and the Adame Textile factory on Lower Canal Street have been closed down and the only Zootopian Transportation Authority asset the city is still funding is the Green-line terminal at J Street, and that only swings through at two in the morning and two in the afternoon. *Inle-rah zorn Crixa.*” Jacob said with a defeated air.

As DuPrey stood to leave, he looked at Jacob with an appraising eye. “I know it seems bleak, but there are some good things on the way. They’re a little way off yet, but I was thinking of something a little more near term. Tell me, have you ever considered joining the military?”

Chapter End Notes

The Great Depression heavily impacted the State of Pacifica's Burgess County. Between the effects of the Dust Bowl and reduced domestic trade, the County's two major industrial centers, Haresburg and Foxburrough, saw a significant plunge in capital, even as unemployment and inflation were both on the rise. It was in this ripe environment that the Polis of Zootopia made the embattled County an offer: allow the Polis to administrate and tax the stricken communities while granting Burgess County tariff free access to Zootopia's ports.
The Pacifican State Governor was not willing to lose tax revenue from both communities, but the prospect of tariff free access to a third port, especially one so close to both Tri-Burroughs County and the Willamette Valley was too good to pass up. Eventually, Burgess County ceded administrative authority over Foxburrough to Polis Zootopia, and the community was renamed Foxburrough Parish.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Words without action are meaningless noise. Jacob faces his past and forges a new future for himself.

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Well, it’s taken the better part of two weeks but I’m finally out of the hospital. Ni-pfeffä* DuPrey has been good as his word too; there’s been so much pressure on the SoE they haven’t had time or opportunity to come after my family. In a happy coincidence, the Lapin Kings tried to take advantage of the chaos and only succeeded in bringing zorn on themselves when the community turned on them; tharn elil and good riddance.

Speaking of family, Marli-fa and grandpa Constantin-fa have been visiting almost every day, though that first day was a bit rough. I almost thought we’d lose Con-ni-fa to tharn inle as emotions swung from fear of losing me to my injuries, to anger and disappointment at my being arrested, and finally to elation at my severing ties with and helping to break the SoE. I… had genuinely thought they would not be able to forgive me. Damn embleer Timo to Inle-hlao!

Well today is the day I plant him in that hole: Me and the rest of the family are meeting with an Assistant District Attorney and Owsla DuPrey to hammer out the formal deal. I just have to figure out a way to convince Con - ni - fa NOT to bring the damned family sword!

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Chapter Two

“Marli-fa, I get bringing Constantin-fa and Fu-embleer…” Jacob ignored his sister Amelia’s snort at the childhood nickname, “…but did you have to bring the Hrair-roo too?” he petulantly
asked while gesturing to the four youngest siblings scampering about the police interview room.

“Aww, what’s the matter Inle-roo, worried the police won’t deal if your street cred is too low?” Amelia taunted as only a sister can.

“That’s enough from both of you.” Jacob’s mother responded tartly; her insistence in speaking only the mother tongue with family added gravitas to her words. “First don’t think I won’t box both your ears if you start fighting in here, and second you well know with school out I have to watch the little ones. Though I suppose I could just lock them in your room Emanuel; Frithrah knows you don’t stay in there much.”

The littermates lowered their ears in chagrin, suitably chastised. Trying to divert some of the attention from himself, Jacob turned to his grandfather and pointed at the linen wrapped object he reverently cradled.

“Constantin-fa, why did you bring the family sword? We’re in a police station; it’s not like anyone will attack us here, and if the cops figure out what it is we’re all likely to be in a lot of trouble.”

At this both Amelia and their mother Katarin glanced at the family relic with slight trepidation.

“Emanuel, if you had paid attention to me as a leveret you would understand why I bring this blade to ALL important events. You breaking away from those unruly and unworthy mongrels who falsely called themselves the ‘Sons of Efrafa’ and finally making something meaningful of yourself certainly qualifies. Phah, you were likely the only true Efrafan among them.” The elderly jack's voice, while hoarse with age, still rang with power and dignity.

“Oh Con-ni-fa, we did listen…” soothed Amelia.

“Yeah, it just didn’t always make sense. Seriously, we’re in the space age; what good is an old bronze sickle sword covered with hash-marks in the modern era.” While she shared his opinion, this comment earned Jacob a cross look from his sister.

“Ha!” the old jack barked in contempt. “The Bullgari thought the same thing in ’68 when those Red Hlesil tried to invade Constantinople; they came in their army trucks by the hundreds, with guns and cannon, and we held them off for three days with nothing but our Yataghan and working tools! Why…”

“That’s quite all right father, I’m sure there will be time for your history lesson later.” Katarin gently but firmly interrupted her father before he could unwrap the ancient family relic. “Besides, I believe the Zootopian Owsla is here. M’saion!” After sharply saying this, the family gathered up and arrayed themselves for the formal meeting.

Officer Jean-Pierre DuPrey arrived moments later, bearing a small armload of manila folders.

“My apologies for the delay; someone from the DA’s office should be joining us shortly. Hello again Mrs. Rautha, Mr. Rautha, how have you been since my last visit?” As officer DuPrey spoke, Amelia quietly translated for her grandfather.

“Nar-ni Owsla DuPrey, M’saion Frithrah narn.” the elder jack opined. DuPrey looked at Jacob curiously.

“It’s an old Efrafan saying, ‘We meet them at God’s pleasure’; basically, things happen when they happen.”

At that moment, the interview room door opened admitting a statuesque, whitetail doe in a tailored
charcoal pantsuit. As she turned to look at the assembled group she began saying, “Good morning, I’m ADA Jean…”

“Jeannette!” came a breathless whisper from DuPrey drawing everyone’s attention.

The doe gave a startled gasp.

“Iss…”

“DuPrey!” the officer said while suddenly rising to his feet, knocking his chair over in the process. “Jean-Pierre DuPrey, Officer Jean-Pierre DuPrey at your service Ms. Deaux!” the normally calm and collected panthera all but rambled excitedly.

The family looked on as if watching a major sporting event.

“Do you think we should give them a moment?” Constantin quietly wondered.

“Are you kidding? There must be one hell of a story behind them. This is better than Pay-Per-View!” Jacob responded equally hushed; this caused his sister to giggle.

The sound of the resulting slaps to the backs of their heads reminded the two larger mammals that they were not alone.

“We’ll discuss this at length later.” Jannette said to the flustered officer. She turned to the assembled family and said, speaking directly to Katarin, “In the meantime, we have more pressing matters at hoof.”

What followed was 20 minutes of instruction on what the state expected from Jacob as far as conduct and testimony, as well as what he could expect in return; clemency and protection for his family until Timo was in prison.

“Make no mistake, Jacob…” the ADA warned, “…if you fail to appear at your arraignment or reverse your testimony at Timo’s trial, not only will you not receive amnesty for your known crimes, you will be tried as an adult on RICO charges.”

Marli-fa Katarin’s stern glare was all the assurance Jannette needed to know Jacob would make his court dates.

…

Jacob’s arraignment and plea deal were a mercifully short affair later that week and paved the way for the trial against Timo in two months; two months which the DA’s office used to great effect in prepping Jacob for his day of testimony. No other event before this had come close to the emotionally grueling process which was ADA Deaux’s training him for cross examination. Many were the nights that found Jacob and Amelia weeping apologetically to one another: Jacob in shame and remorse at how his actions had harmed his family, and Amelia for her part in helping Ms. Deaux break his defenses. Never once, however, did he waver from the course, until finally…

…”This is Allison Hornsby of ZNN reporting live from the Superior Courthouse here in Savannah Central where we are in the fourth day of testimony in the trial of Timo Andraste. The 35-year-old brown hare is the assumed leader of the once feared gang known as the ‘Sons of Efrafa’ who, alongside the ‘Lapin Kings’, have until recently terrorized the impoverished district of Happytown…”
“Is it really that hard for them to call it Foxborough?” Jacob lamented as he awaited his time on the witness stand. “Why are you even watching the thing, Fu-embleer? We’re right here!” he whispered while pointing to Amelia’s smartphone.

“Because we’re trending right now and…” she started to tartly respond.

“We’re also rising right now; put that thing away!” their mother commanded; the electronic device disappeared.

An imposing grey wolf in a bailiff’s uniform stepped forward to address the assembled mammals.

“All rise! Polis of Zootopia vs. Timo Andraste, the Right Honorable Josephine Bellataxus presiding; court is now in session, take due notice and govern yourselves accordingly.”

With a rap of her gavel, the dowdy american badger began the proceedings. For three days ADA Deaux attacked Timo’s defense; the state provided a preponderance of anecdotal and video evidence linking him to a variety of crimes spanning nearly a decade, which ranged from local protection rackets to extortion, and even a case of sabotage which claimed the life of a city worker. One of the most entertaining and damning moments was on the first day when Jeannette asked the court assigned psychologist if Timo’s seeming empire building might be related to a Napomalin Complex due to his ‘Runt-like physique’; the resulting verbal explosion very nearly got Timo ejected from the courtroom.

To Jacob, the absence of Timo’s two Lieutenants, Andre Lagosian and Nikolai Zayatzov, either as co-conspirators or states witnesses, was quite telling. Jacob was certain they were well into one of the neighboring states and beyond Zootopia’s jurisdiction, while leaving Timo to his fate. Now it was Jacob’s turn on the witness stand. At Judge Bellataxus’ prompting, Jeannette turned to the assembled court.

“The prosecution calls to the witness stand, Jacob Emanuel Raibert.”

Words enough did not exist in the tongues of mammals to express the hatred in Timo’s eyes at that moment, though they were met with Jacob’s confident indifference born of months of training and the righteous desire to end Timo’s hold over him.

After the bailiff swore Jacob in, Jeannette began Jacob’s testimony.

“Mr. Raibert, would you please tell the court what your relationship to Timo Andraste was?”

“I was one of Timo-rah’s Owsla in the Sons of Efrafa.”

“I’m sorry, Timo-rah? Owsla? Could you explain those terms to the court?”

“Sure; rah is an old Efrafan honorific, it means Prince. Timo insisted everyone call him that. Owsla were the old warrior caste and the defenders of the ancient city-state. Timo wanted us to think of ourselves as the warrior princes of old, and Foxborough as our kingdom.”

“How did you end up in such a position?”

“It was five years after my father abandoned my family; I was always big for my age, but I was also bitter and angry. My grandfather used to tell us stories about the history of Efrafa and teaching us the old ways and songs of our people; so, when Timo came to me after I skipped school one day spinning stories about becoming like the Owsla of old; I couldn’t join up with him fast enough.”

“How old were you then?” Jeannette inquired.
“Just shy of 13.”

“So young! Why did Timo need a child like you?”

The jury’s concerned look at the rehearsed exchange spoke volumes of their already low opinion of Timo.

“He’s a grown jack, and I was easily as tall as him at that time. By a year later I was a full head taller. Being Inle-roo didn’t hurt, or help depending on your view.”

With another rehearsed and magnificently executed puzzled look she asked, “What is Inle-roo, and why would it matter?”

“No ma’am, but there was no guaranty that I would secure the position. There were three of us initially; we had to… earn the title.” Though they had rehearsed the question, Jacobs’ hesitance and discomfort were genuine.

“How were the three of you supposed to ‘earn’ the title?”

“As elegant and unfappable as ever Miss Deaux replied, “Your Honor, amongst the charges against Mr. Andraste are multiple counts of Corruption of a Minor; the state is simply trying to ascertain the reasoning behind such actions.”

“Order in the court; one more outburst like that Mr. Andraste and I will hold you in contempt of the court and have you summarily expelled from these proceedings!”

The defense team only barely managed to get Timo to calm down and not lose them the case on the spot.

Now Jacobs’ testimony started in earnest; no detail was spared in his recounting of his rise through the ranks of the SoE.

“You said you chose to be Timo’s Owsla; you implied earlier that he recruited you for that purpose, was this a lie?”

“All black hares such as myself are seen as something of an ill omen and are often called Inle-roo, Little death. Timo wanted that imagery at his disposal to cow any opposition; if he could be seen as having tamed death by having me at his beck and call, then his status as a hrairoo was diminished.”

“You shut your silflayvair mouth, punk, or I’ll show you what this runt can do!” Timo’s outburst could not have been more perfectly timed or executed if he had been directed to do so. The judge’s response was as immediate as it was calculated by Miss Deaux.

“Not all three of us; there would only be one Owsla. We were competing for the title; it was that or peddle drugs on the street. Timo made us duel each other; Timo has a mock coliseum set up at the gang’s headquarters in the old Tannerman Papermill warehouse on West River Road. He and his two Lieutenants, Andre Lagosian and Nikolai Zayatzov, watched the whole thing from a raised
platform like it was a sporting event.”

“You obviously succeeded.”

“Not without a cost. Jasper lost an eye, and William will need a cane and brace to walk for the rest of his life, and…”

“And?” prompted Jeannette.

“Timo required, trophies.”

“Need I remind you that full disclosure is a condition of your acting as states evidence.” Though seeming cold, the ADA’s statement was meant to deny the defense the opportunity to twist Jacobs’ testimony in cross examination, and the two had worked on this part of the interrogation for a full week.

With a not entirely rehearsed shuddering breath, Jacob continued.

“I had to remove the right ear from both of the other combatants; he demanded it from anyone I beat as Owsla. Timo kept them in his ‘throne-room’ in the old manager’s office.”

“Let the record show that states evidence items J-122 thru J-137 found at the afore-mentioned address corroborate this statement.” At this, a computer monitor displayed dozens of police photographs, including seven dismembered mammal ears.

“I find it hard to believe that your family was okay with this, savagery.”

“I didn’t tell them, not until the last couple of months.”

“Why is that?”

“I was ashamed, and terrified; Timo made us believe that no one would be able to forgive us for what we did in the gang, so we could only rely on each other for support.”

The testimony continued in this vein. Jacob openly discussed his duties as the SoE’s chief enforcer: fighting other gangs, such as the Lapin Kings, or the all-whitetail deer K Street Hooligans; or ‘leaning’ on business owners in the surrounding communities, whatever the species. When the time came for cross-examination, the defense could only muster anemic arguments to try and discredit Jacob as a witness. The final nail in Timo’s coffin, however, Timo drove in himself during the first few moments of ADA Deaux’s closing arguments.

“Ladies and Gentlemammals of the jury, you have heard and seen the evidence provided by both sides of this case. Despite everything presented, the defense would have you believe that Mr. Timo Andraste is nothing more than a poor, misunderstood bunny…”

“What did you say?! I’ll bend you over this table and show you which one of us is the whore!” Timo screamed as he tried to come across the bench at Jeannette, accompanied by the continuous hammering of the judge’s gavel and the gasps of both the jury and gallery.

“I will have Order! Bailiff remove him from my courtroom!”

The Jury only deliberated for one evening, and the next day, Timo Andraste was convicted on all counts and sentenced to 15 years in prison without parole.

As Jacob and his family gathered on the courthouse steps, Jeannette and Jean-Pierre came up to
them, and DuPrey extended his paw to Jacob.

“Jacob, I wanted to thank you. What you did was harder than most mammals can take; believe me, I know a thing or two about confronting hard truths about one’s past, but you have really made a difference in the lives of your community today. So, have you given any thought to what I asked?”

“You’re going to have to tell me your story one of these days,” Jacob said with a chuckle, “…but yeah, I have. I think the League of Nations Forces are more my speed than the Aragonese Foreign Legion though.”

The startled gasps from Amelia and Katarin were nothing compared to the bone crushing hug Constantin gave his grandson.

“Jacob, Jacob m’layth Owsla!” (Jacob, Jacob you are becoming Owsla!) There was pride writ clear on the old hares’ tear stained face.

“I think that will do just fine Jacob. You take care now!” Jean said as the oddly matched pair began walking towards a nearby carpark.

“Well, after all that now what?” asked Amelia, looking around at the family.

“Pawpscicles, get yer Pawpscicles!”

As the younger leverette’s bounced around their mother in excitement, she relented.

“I suppose that’s a start.”

Chapter End Notes

In the wake of rising inter-species tension resulting from the Wiemar Republic Civil War and the Austro-Hungarian War, a new political party formed in the Confederation of Amerigon States: The Green Party. Riding high on horror stories coming from returning Europan refugees, the party promoted a policy of social segregation based upon dietary needs. This was hampered by powerful political lobbies working through the Department of Agriculture, who saw this segregation as harmful to interstate and inter-Polis trade of agricultural goods; the DoA had been pushing an economic and dietary model of omnivorism for decades, to alleviate the strain on Amerigon farmers in the wake of the Dust Bowl. The Green Party very nearly died out with in the first year of its existence.

It was a young Mountain Goat from Polis Zootopia by the name of Sylus Tannerman who managed to save the party from extinction. In 1946 he wrote a series of articles for the Zootopian Gazette which painted the plight of Europan refugees as a struggle between the victimized herbivorous ‘prey’ and the attacking carnivorous ‘predators’. His evocative and inflammatory rhetoric sparked a wave of fear in the Zootopian population, and in 1948 he was elected mayor under the Green Party ticket with a 90% margin. While the Green Party has never held much power in the greater confederation, it has enjoyed almost uncontested dominance over Polis Zootopia for 66 years until the 2014 Mayoral election, and the swearing in of Mayor Leodore Lionheart.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

When moving blindly into the future, accept that you will stumble. Jacob discovers the cost of Hubris, and the price of forgiveness.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Okay, my uniform kilt and tunic are in order, my duffle bag is checked, my DTY bag is in hand, got my three year orders for League of Nations Forces (LoNF) Base Incirlik, Anatolia; what am I forgetting? *Hracka*, LETTER HOME! Where, where, where; there, Postcards… Dallas Cowgirls lineup no, Victory at the Alamo mural no, Aha! Republic of Texas Jim Bowie Memorial International Zeppelin Airdrome, perfect!

‘Marli-fa got orders to LoNF Military Police unit in southern Anatolia.

Tell Constantin-fa I’ll visit your home town in Edirne while I’m there. I’m glad Amelia-roo got the university scholarship; she deserves all the best.

Give my love to the Hrair-roo.

Love, Jacob.’

Okay, now for postage…what the hell’s the rate from the Republic of Texas to Polis Zootopia?!

“Attention all DELAG passengers, Flight LZ-282 service to Andalusia, Aragon and Anatolia now boarding priority service at Dock 7: again, that is Flight LZ-282 service to Andalusia, Aragon and Anatolia now boarding priority service at Dock 7. Please present your tickets at the gate. Thank you.”

Four stamps should do it, gotta go!
“Come on Rabbit, we’re gonna miss the flight!”

“That’s Raibert you Corsacan mongrel, I’m coming!”

Eight months of training leading up to this *Crixa*; here we go!

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Chapter three

The high-altitude zeppelin trip to Anatolia took nearly a week. While the Atlantic crossing from the RoT only took 24 hours riding the North Subtropical jet stream, the half-dozen layovers in southern Europa dragged the trip out. The long trip afforded Jacob the opportunity to get used to the subcutaneous ID chip in his left wrist, as well as to meet some of the other recruits on their way to various LoNF bases. Two stood out among the mammals Jacob met. Fivel Mousekewitz was from Fort Courage in the Ali Sonak district of the Navajo Territory. He was an enlisted aviator also assigned to Incirlik with the 140th Rodent Air-Trooper (RAT) Attack Squadron. While in Andalusia they picked up Boyan Hippelov, a Bulgarian red deer coming from the San Gregorio Combat Engineering school in Zaragoza. He was assigned to the Red Horse Battalion, also in Incirlik. They all agreed to meet up at the Enlisted Club on base once they settled in.

Upon arrival at the military Airdrome in Adana, Jacob’s on-post sponsor greeted him; she was a slight Persian King Fox vixen that his in-processing packet named Private First Class (PFC) Tarsa Shahrubah. “Private (Pvt.) Raibert?” she inquired.

Jacob couldn’t help but think the Class B service blue kilt and her small stature made her look more like a Reman Catholic schoolgirl than a veteran Military Police (MP) mammal, though he had the good sense not to say as much. “That’s correct ma’am; Pvt. Jacob Emanuel Raibert, 56th MP Battalion F Troop Det. 7 reporting for duty; you may call me Emanuel.” While most of that was said with full military decorum, he said the last with an easy smile and a friendly manual paw shake.

Tarsa was pleasantly surprised by the comfortable greeting. “I thought you were from Zootopia; everyone I’ve met from there comes across as an entitled prick who’d spit on me as soon as look at me.”

“You’re not wrong about Zootopains ma’am, but I’m not from there. I’m from Foxborough Parish.” Jacob said with a slight huff.

“Did you mean Zootopians?”

“I said what I meant and meant what I said.”

“Oh. How close is Foxborough to Zootopia?” Tarsa’s curiosity was peaked.

“Physically, as close as I am to you; culturally as far as Germania is from Catalonia.”

“Really? And how close do you think you are to me?” she asked with a coy smile.

“I suppose that depends on if you’re in my chain of command or not.” Jacob replied with a sidelong glance.
She threw her head back laughing. “I think you and I will get along fine. Come on, I’ll show you around the post.”

They spent the day touring and becoming familiar with the sizeable base; from the Airdrome to the parade ground, where Jacob would need to be the next day for morning colors and physical training, to his battalion headquarters where he would begin in-processing, including having his chip registered in the post database, then to base housing and visitors quarters where he would be staying until his billet was ready.

“Are those… stacked freight cars?” Jacob asked incredulously.

“Oh yes; the Red Horse unit gets them very cheaply, and then welds them together like you see. They have electricity, running water, even cable for TV and internet. About half the buildings on base are like this.” Tarsa replied matter-of-factly.

“I don’t know whether to be impressed with the ingenuity, or shocked at just how cheap our organization really is.”

Next was the chow hall, the post exchange, and on to medical and finance for more in-processing. Finally, it was back to the parade ground for evening colors. Once the official work day was concluded, there was only one place left to visit: the Enlisted Club (E-Club).

As they entered the establishment, Jacob found his two traveling companions. “Boyan, Fivel! This is Tarsa; she’s been rookie-sitting me today. Tarsa, these are Boyan Hippelov and Fivel Mousekewitz; we met on the zeppelin ride here.”

The diminutive aviator was the first to speak up. “Emanuel, my mammal! How ya doin? This is Flight Specialist (Spc/F) Teresa Brisby; she’s my minder and my flight lead.” Fivel said this while gesturing to a tan and cream field mouse with the upright bearing that seemed the birthright of all well-bred Britton’s.

Boyan smiled and nodded. “Dobre se sreshtnakh (Well met), little Emanuel! And to you, Tariska. This is being my guide…”

“Superior!” The bull moose sitting next to him barked while sneering at his combined drinking partners; he seemed to spare especial disdain for the slight fox. “SPC Horace Oswald Hornblower the Third.”

“Jack Raibert.” Was Jacobs clipped response, earning curious glances from the three mammals he knew.

After ordering a round for the table, the six began to talk about their new home.

“So, I saw some of your handiwork earlier today, and I had an epiphany!” Jacob said while pointing at Horace with a pretzel stick, “Now hear me out; our clothes are military surplus, we survive by eating government subsidized meals, and we live in a shanty town made from converted freight containers… we’re hobo’s!” This comment resulted in a spray of beer covering the table and Fivel falling out of his chair laughing while Horace settled into a sullen glare.

Cocking his head to one side, Boyan asked, “What is Hobo?”

“I’ll let Hornblower explain that one.” Jacob responded while Fivel hauled himself back into his seat. “Hornblower, Hornblower… you any relation to the Zootopian Hornblowers?” Jacob asked
while squinting.

Horace began puffing himself up. “Indeed, my father owns the Bull-Horn Telecommunications group.”

“Yeah that’s right! You were all over the news about three years ago; stole one of your dad’s cars and drove through a liquor store to get some beer.”

At this Horace snorted and stormed off. No one made an effort to stop him, though there was an uncomfortable silence in his wake.

After a moment Fivel inquired, “So, what was the problem? I mean, the Navajo Territory has plenty of drive-thru liquor stores.”

Jacob returned to his drink. “Zootopia doesn’t have any.”

…

Jacob completed his in processing by the end of the week; it was time to join F-Troop. This unit was not stationed on the base, it turned out, but rather it shared space with the Anadolu Eyalet Polisi (AEP) Barracks which abutted the main gate. This was also where he was to be billeted.

This fifteen-thousand square-foot, four-story granite blockhouse served as the primary checkpoint for base access by Anatolian nationals, as well as issuing security badges and was the local station house for the AEP in the Incirlik district of Adana. Jacob now understood why the military linguistics specialists had shown interest in his command of Anatolian and Peloponnesian languages.

Coming through the base side entrance, it was like any other LoNF work center, neat and orderly rows of drab beige cubicles. It was here Tarsa handed Jacob off to his immediate Commanding Officer (CO), Warrant Officer (WO) Juan Javier Mendoza, a coyote from the Tenochtitlan Republic.

Tarsa turned and shook Jacob’s paw. “Well, Jacob, this is where we part ways.”

“Surely not forever?” Jacob melodramatically asked.

“We’ll always have the E-club, as long as you don’t try to pick a fight with the Zootopain again.” She replied with a chuckle.

“I didn’t try to pick one last time…”

“You damn well better not have, or any point in the future señor! Thank you private, for babysitting while we got things ready for him. You are dismissed.” It was a warm, if abrupt, interjection by the WO. Tarsa departed with a salute to Mendoza and a wink to Jacob.

As Jacob stood at attention to report in, he made a quick evaluation of his new boss; he was of average height at about five feet tall, with a friendly if calculating demeanor and a suspicious irregular hole through his left ear. “Sir, Pvt. Jacob Emanuel Raibert reporting for duty.”

“At ease private; with any luck, this will be the last time you have to report to me in this way. Allow me to welcome you to F-Troop, Det. 7.”

Jacob relaxed and accepted his CO’s offered manual paw shake. “If you don’t mind my asking sir, where the heck are we?”

WO Mendoza began guiding Jacob through the cube farm on a tour of the station house. “This is
Det. 7, a joint LoN/AEP police station. Per treaty, the LoN provides additional mammal power at all of its bases to help supplement local law enforcement. As you may have guessed already, command of the local language is a must for this assignment. You will be assigned to an AEP partner and go on local patrols. We have limited arresting powers in regard to Anatolian nationals, and the AEP has the same in regard to LoN personnel. I would ask if you have any difficulties working with carnivores, but your little display with PFC Shahrubah speaks volumes on that matter.” He commented with a slight grin.

“Not a problem at all sir. My neighborhood growing up was very mixed; mostly foxes, hares, wolves, goats, and boars. Whoever didn’t buy into the Zootopian mono-culture ideology ended up there.”

The coyote quirked an eye at Jacob. “Touchy subject I take it?”

“Nothing that will interfere with my duties, sir.”

“Good, see that it doesn’t.”

WO Mendoza gave a running commentary as they toured the building. The basement housed both the formal barracks for F-troop and the AEP on-duty officers, as well as the armory. The ground floor was for administration, processing and holding criminals, and any duties which might pertain to visiting mega-fauna. The second floor catered to larger mammals such as lions, tigers, and bears. There was also a locked room with a sentry outside which Juan pointedly did not mention, and Jacob pointedly did not ask about it. The third floor was akin to the second but tailored to mammals Jacob’s and Juan’s size. The fourth floor was the most unusual to Jacob; it contained the AEP’s Aerial patrol section maintenance hangar. There were four Anatolian rodent piloted fixed-wing surveillance aircraft, as well as six LoN Ornicopters; two RQ-19 Dragonfly reconnaissance aircraft and four MQ-12/D Hornet gunships. A glance at a nearby roster showed Brisby and Mousekewitz rotating in for a week every two or so months.

They then returned to the third floor to meet the AEP Station commander, Captain (Capt.) Kaan Tuna Buyuk.

“Capt.? I’ve got the new LoN patrol mammal.”

“Thank you, officer. Come in and let me have the measure of you.” the captain told Jacob.

Jacob met a middle-aged brown hare, maybe three inches shorter than him, but seeming to tower over Jacob in presence alone. His demeanor was calm and reserved, and he sized Jacob up with a world-weary gaze that left no illusion that he had seen too much. Finally, on the wall behind his desk, was an Efrafan Yataghan, inscribed in flowing Aramaic script. Capt. Buyuk was Owsla in the truest sense, and Jacob was in awe.

Capt. Buyuk waved a manila folder in Jacobs’ general direction and addressed him in Turkic. “I already know you, Jacob Emanuel Raibert of Zootopia, so let’s get right to it; I am Owsla Capt. Kaan Tuna Buyuk. You will address me as Capt. or Capt. Buyuk. I am the commander of AEP at this station house. As your duties will relate more to Anatolian civil law than LoN military law, you will be answerable to me. Do we understand one another?”

“A mul Owsla!” (I do sir!) Jacob replied in the common efnafan tongue with barely contained excitement.

The Capt. was taken aback for a moment, then a calculating look crossed his face. “Efrafan layai brali, Ephraim rooliti?” (So, you think yourself Efrafan, a Son of Ephraim?)
Now it was Jacob who was startled as he struggled with the more formal ancient form of his people’s language. “Laya Efrafan!” (I am Efrafan!) As soon as the words left his mouth, Jacob knew he’d made a mistake; he could almost hear his grandfather berating him for putting himself before the people, putting himself higher than Ephraim.

“Hraka!” Buyuk nearly spat. “Your family might be, but you are not so accepted until I say you are; until then you are silfesi (outsider).”

Jacob’s ears burned with shame as Buyuk called someone in on the intercom. “This is Sergeant (Sgt.) Natalia Adame.” He said, gesturing to a stocky red vixen in her mid to late forties. “I have served with her for 20 years, and as far as I am concerned, she is more Efrafan than you. She will be your partner for the foreseeable future. If your administration and billeting are taken care of, head down to the armory for your issue and head out on patrol. Dismissed.”

Jacob saluted and stiffly left, not trusting himself to speak.

...

It was two weeks later before everyone’s schedule lined up for a night together. In that time, Jacob had tried to find some way to impress upon Capt. Buyuk that he was Efrafan through diligence and persistence, but to no avail. When he met up with Tarsa, Brisby, Mousekewitz, Boyan and Horace it was again at the E-club, despite Jacob’s desire to head into Adana.

“I don’t know why we have to come back here when there’s an entire city of opportunities out there.” Jacob grumbled as he nursed his beer.

“Some of us have better things to do than wander the streets of some dirty little burg.” Horace’s reply slightly slurred.

Jacob looked over incredulously, “Dirty little… are you living in some alternate reality, cause I’ve been patrolling those streets and Adana is anything but.”

“Oh yay, here we go again.” Fivel gave a fatalistic chuckle.

“That’s right, I forgot you are a Happytown slum-baby; I suppose tent city must seem the height of opulence to you.”

“Like you can talk; too good for the bourgeois masses, but you can dig one helluva slit-trench latrine!” As Jacob said this, his ears began pointing straight back while his manual claws dug furrows into the table.

“Emanuel, calm down please.” Tarsa whispered to him.

“GRRR… I’ll have you know I have been studying for my degree and don’t have time to leave!” Horace thumped the table while pointing accusingly at Jacob.

“But you can spare the time to get hammered at the E-club every other night? You’re just butt-hurt that you don’t have a mammal servant here to dress you or wipe your…”

“That is enough!” Teresa barked. “Mr. Raibert I will not have this evening devolve into an exploration of your command of crass language.”

Jacob snapped his attention to his beer, intent on polishing it off in one swallow.

“Why bother; breeding will tell, and he’ll never be more than what he is.” Horace scoffed, but
Jacob didn’t hear.

He saw the face of his father reflected in his glass, lashing out at his family for the injustices of the life he was dealt.

“If breeding will tell Mr. Hornblower, then what is your excuse?” Spc. Brisby’s words faintly echoed in Jacobs’ mind as he set his glass down on the table and got up to leave.

“Jake, where you are going?” Fivel moved to follow him.

“Out; the last things I need right now are more alcohol or the judgement of strangers.” His friends’ silence followed him as he walked out.

The next day was Sunday, and Jacob felt lost. He was thousands of miles from his home and family, rejected by the very symbol of his people. Now he was becoming his father, one of the two people he most reviled in the whole world. That morning he resolved to hold the one tradition he had not lost yet.

With the Pope of the Reman Catholic Church and the Primus inter Pares of the Eastern Orthodox Church having reconciled in the last century, Jacob felt comfortable attending the Catholic Mass at the Base Chapel. In a near bitter irony, that day’s Gospel lesson and the sermon that followed, were from St. Luke: The Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The old Guatemalan white tail buck, who was a Lieutenant Colonel (Lt. Col.) in the Chaplain Corps, stood in front of the congregation and delivered his short homily in High Lapin: the diplomatic and trade tongue of the old empire, and now the language of the church.

“We often hear this parable used to try to entice a sense of forgiveness,” the chaplain began, “…that when others have squandered opportunities or trust, that we should yet again extend that trust; as the saying goes, ‘To ere is mammalian, but forgiveness is divine.’ While this is true, and we should aspire to such acts of charitability, we often lose sight of that salient truth of this story; that the Prodigal Son was in fact, forgiven, and for nothing more than the asking.

“Now in this Gospel passage, we hear two voices each saying that the prodigal is beneath forgiveness; the first is that of the prodigal himself, while the second is the elder brother. In the first case, the prodigal finds himself entirely destitute, so much so that he has to find work on a pig-owned farm; this is emblematic of a state of unclean-ness, as all cultures in that region of the world, even to this day, view pigs to be unclean and tainting all they touch. While toiling in this unclean state, the son contemplates that even his father’s servants are not considered this low. It is here that the prodigal son decides to return home; not to be forgiven, but simply to be taken on as a doulos, or servant in the ancient Peloponnesian text. This is not an uncommon attitude held by persons who have, for whatever reason, been forced to commit acts which society would disapprove of; as soldiers often must.

“The second voice is that of the elder son and is emblematic of the perceived judgement of society. The elder son remained dutifully serving his father, abiding the law, and thus remained clean and above reproach. Upon hearing that his brother has not only returned, but has been welcomed back with celebration, he challenges his father’s forgiveness. He reminds his father of his own status as dutiful and morally clean versus his brother’s wanton and wicked ways. He states that his service has never garnered him the accolades which are now
heaped upon his brother. This is not too dissimilar to how service members often feel that society judges us for our actions; they themselves did not need to commit such actions, so why should we be forgiven, much less lauded for such sin.

“It is a strange quirk of our psychology that we can often forgive others for heinous sins against ourselves, and yet cannot comprehend that we are deserving of that same forgiveness. It is this which tends to drive families apart; not distance or actions, but an inability to ask forgiveness for what we perceive as unforgivable. Yet if the Good Shepherd could forgive the disciples for falling asleep at Gethsemane, St. Peter for denying him three times, and even the Reman soldiers and crowds of Habirewe who had condemned him to die on the cross, if all of these were worthy of forgiveness, are not we all? Amen.”

After the service, Jacob sought out the Chaplain.

“Father Morales, could I speak to you in private sir?”

“Of course, son. Is this a closed-door conversation? You know that anything you say has the status of privileged information: there will be no repercussions for what is said here.” The Lt. Col. exuded a sense of calm Jacob hadn’t felt since his time as a chorister back home.

“No sir, I just…need some advice.”

Jacob visited with the Chaplain every day for the next week: he shared his life story, every laugh, every tear, every joy, and every disappointment. By the end of that week, he knew what he had to do.

That Saturday evening, Jacob went to Tarsa’s box-car, and knocked on the door.

“Coming!” When she opened up, Jacob saw she was dressed for a night of not going anywhere. “Jacob?!”

“Hey, Tarsa. Can…(huff) can we talk?” Jacob had not felt this small since his mother first found out he was with the SoE.

“Oh! Yes, yes come in.” She ushered him inside and closed the door. “I haven’t, we haven’t seen you outside of formation since last Saturday. What happened?”

“I had a bit of a revelation about myself. I’m… angry.”

Tarsa was taken aback by Jacobs’ intensity. “Well, we didn’t mean to…”

“No, not with you…” Jacob placated, “…not with Little T or Fivel or Boyan, not even with Lord Ponce von Fontlebottom the Magnificent Bastard! He just annoys me.” That elicited a soft chuckle from Tarsa. “No, I mean I’m angry, all the time. I’m angry with the mammals involved with the Spring Revolution of 86’ that caused my mother to leave Anatolia, and I’m angry with her for not returning when the Purrsian Shah finally put the revolt down. I’m angry with my grandfather for filling my head with stories of the Efrafan Owsla-fa of old while we lived in squalor, and I’m angry at myself for not being worthy of them. I’m angry at the city of Zootopia for turning Foxborough Parish into a slum 70 years ago, for telling us we should just forget our heritage and embrace their monoculture, and I’m angry at the citizens of Burgess County for not doing something about it. I’m angry at my sire for not being a better mammal, a better father, for leaving us because he decided life was hard! And I’m furious with myself, because last Saturday night, for a few moments, I was him!”

By this point Jacob was all but curled into a ball in one corner of the hooch, while Tarsa rubbed his
back soothingly.

“I’m just… so angry all the time and I don’t know what to do about it! So, I lash out, at anyone I think has wronged me no matter how meaningless or insignificant. But when I do, I end up hurting those close to me, and then I become angry with myself again.”

Jacob looked up at Tarsa, his eyes pleading for absolution. “Did I tell you I used to be in a gang up until a year ago? For five years, I was every inch the worthless mongrel thug Horace insinuates I am, that my father was, that the animals my grandfather says he fought were, and I have no idea how to ask forgiveness when I can’t forgive myself!”

Tarsa paused in her efforts, then tipped Jacobs head down and kissed his forehead. “Seni affediyorum. (I Forgive you.)” She whispered and held him as he wept.

... Over the next two months, Jacob apologized to every one of his friends, and even to Hornblower, though they both agreed to simply be civil to one another, ‘For the sake of the ladies, of course!’ As for work, he simply buckled down and learned the beat from Natalia and did his best to minimize his contact with Capt. Buyuk, letting the Sgt. deliver the reports. This arrangement worked for a while, until one day, during lunch at a street café...

“Now what did I say was one of the first, most important traits of a good patrol officer?” It was Sgt. Adame’s way to question Jacob at random about policing in general.

Jacob responded without looking at her, “Maintain situational awareness of your surroundings, to know what should and shouldn’t be there at any given moment, such as a trio of identically dressed, angry looking Fallow deer heading into a tailor shop run by an elderly Purrsian Lion.” He then wiped his mouth, got up and headed across the street to a shop sporting the sign “Arslan & Ece Terzi Tailoring” while turning his phone’s recording function on.

“Yes that’s… what? Wait!” She was up and moving after.

Within moments, the sounds of an altercation came from inside, spurring both into a run.

Jacob quickly evaluated the scene as he arrived; one of the three held an early middle-aged lioness at knife point, hurling insults at the elder lion while his two compatriots repeatedly kicked the elderly lion in the back and stomach. His training told him to announce himself and advise the assailants to surrender, but his years in the SoE told him that would be a futile gesture and that a more direct approach would be needed.

“You disgust me you uncultured savage! Predators like you should be dragged out into the street and shAAAAAAAAAGHHHH!”

Natalia came through the door with no time to stop Jacob; he gave no advisement, no warning or offer to surrender. He crossed the room to the ringleader and with a snap of his wrist lashed out with his collapsible baton against the cervine’s leading ankle, breaking several of the small bones of the pedal hoof and dislocating the joint. The agonized cry and release caused the lioness to give a startled yelp and leap back, even as her captor fell to the ground. The two batterers turned to the commotion in time to see their partner collapse to the ground screaming, only to be silenced as Jacob again brought his baton down, this time shattering the front of the deer’s muzzle with a spray of blood, mucus, and saliva; after that, the would-be tyrant was utterly still and silent.

Shocked by the sudden brutality, the other two were wholly compliant when Natalia began issuing
rapid fire orders, as well as calling the incident in to the station house. Meanwhile, Jacob went over
to the fallen tailor and his weeping daughter while pulling his phone out of its pocket.

“Pfeffa-rah, remain still; an ambulance is on the way. Can you tell me why this happened?”

“They are from… a local cult, they call themselves Nizari-Ismaili. I… I think these were to
become Fida’i.” the lion’s response was labored. Jacob bristled at the alarming similarities to his
own SoE initiation so many years ago.

“Fida’i you say? I would have expected someone from the Hash Ishim to put up more of a fight.
Are they remhmhmhmhm!!!” Whatever Jacob was going to say was cut off as the lioness scooped
him into a bone-crushing hug.

The responding LoN and AEP officers arrived to the sight of Jacobs’ feet flailing underneath the
lioness’s arms as she swung him back and forth.

“Thank you, bless you Kucuk Aslan (Little Lion)! Bless you for saving my father!” she continued
until Sgt. Adame finally got her attention.

“Perhaps you should set him down before he meets Allah for a more personal blessing.” Natalia
commented with an exasperated grin.

Jacob gasped for air when the lioness relinquished her grip.

“You okay there Pvt.?” Asked one of the LoN responders.

“As far as ways to go, smothering in the bosom of a beautiful lady isn’t all that bad I suppose.”

Natalia snorted. “He’s fine. Let’s get this rabble cleaned up. Emanuel, a moment.”

Jacob paused; this was the first time she had referred to him by his Honor name.

“Yes Sgt.?”

“Not her, me.” There in the doorway was Capt. Buyuk. Gesturing to the mammalian wreckage now
being loaded into an ambulance with police escort. “Why?”

Jacob simply played back the audio recording, from the street side until the tailor’s daughter
snatched him up. When the audio stopped, Jacob looked straight into the older hare’s eyes.

“We were never going to make a case against the ringleader any stronger than assault, and with
the clear socio-political bent of his rant, if Sgt. Adame had taken any initial action, they would have
simply twisted the entire event to fit their warped agenda as justification. If we had announced on
arrival, that one,” Jacob gestured to where the fallow deer had fallen.

“Ceren Sadik,” said one of the remaining LoN MP’s while looking at her notes. “The other two
are Devrim & Direnc Marangoz.”

At this, Natalia, Kaan and Jacob all snorted. Ceren Sadik meant Loyal Young Gazelle, while
Devrim & Direnc Marangoz meant Revolution and Resistance Joiner; they were aliases. Turning
back to Buyuk, ‘Anyway, ‘Sadik’ would have simply faded into the back and let the ‘Marangoz’
boys take the beating and subsequent jail time, while he surrendered. Then he would have, again,
spun the events to fit his political views. This way, his whole position is compromised since I’m not
an ‘uncultured savage’; well, not in the sense he had that all carnivores are such. As a bonus, if and
or when he returns to these Nizari-Ismaili pretenders, his broken visage will serve as a much more
potent warning and deterrent than any civic sentence.”

“And you are so certain of this how?” Kaan looked almost bored as he asked.

Jacob’s bitterness exploded. “Yes, I’m certain because up until a year ago that was me! This was an initiation and indoctrination; nothing more, nothing less. We can arrest all the soldiers we want, but until we hit their leadership they would simply recruit more young bucks and indoctrinate them to their cause. Are we done here, as I imagine I’m overdue for my CO’s dressing down”

“No, we are not done.” Kaan said simply. “Do you know what it means to be Efrafan? Not related to or descended from one, but to truly be Efrafan?”

Jacob huffed impatiently, “No but apparently it doesn’t mean me. I’ll tell you what I am though: I am an oath sworn member of the League of Nations Forces, a reformed gang member who will never tolerate such abuse of persons again, and a true and faithful child of Katarin Yasmin Rautha, the daughter of Constantin Abelan Rautha, and these are not things you can deny me!”

Natalia and Kaan both started and glanced at one another at the mention of his mother and grandfather. Buyuk recovered quickly though, “The Sons of Ephraim, the Efrafan Owsla, were the protectors of our people; no matter the personal cost, they kept those under their charge safe from harm. As you have done here today, young Son of Ephraim.”

Chapter End Notes

While powered, winged flight has been possible for most mammals since the first decades of the 20th century, the logistical restraints of trying to move mega-fauna prevents most such animals from taking air travel any way except in dirigibles. First produced in large numbers during the Great War, these craft have tremendous lifting capacity, as well as ample interior space between gas cells. Once the Graf Hindenburg finished her second trans-Atlantic flight, despite being diverted to Trenton during a series of thunderstorms, most governments of the world saw great potential in having fleets of such craft.

Now, with widespread use of microwave rectennas for national and global power transmission, modern dirigibles can utilize powered thermal coil systems to heat air chambers, rather than relying on volatile hydrogen, or limited helium gas for lift. Military airships will usually have a small fission reactor for both power and heating of gas, while ultra-high altitude lighter-than-air stations like the Amerigon Chaffee Memorial High Altitude Launch Facility have allowed the expansion of the global space industry to include larger mammals in its launch profile, such as Flight Officer Sharla Ewebanks, in support of the global power infrastructure of orbital solar stations.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

When we find it in our hearts to forgive, we make room in our lives to grow and become better than we were. Jacob finds new acceptance, and a chance to become who he can truly be.

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Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sweet! Care package from home! Show me the flayrah! * Let’s see; Mr. Alvaredo’s arepas, those would go nice with, Aha! Smoked river trout and hummus! Narn-ni marli-fa. OOH! Aunty Adame’s Lokum! Frith-rah bless you, beautiful Hombarli. What else, What else, What else! A letter from, Con-ni-fa? Huh.

“Hello Rah-roo.” Jeez, you haven’t called me that in ages.

“Your last letter home spoke of you reconciling with your Owsla Buyuk, and his offer to teach you our history and culture.” Yeah, I just had to get a Letter-of-Reprimand (LOR) and be withheld from promotion for six months for ‘Excessive Force’; no such thing with punks like that, but thems the rules; You pays yer dues, you takes yer chances.

“I have lamented that you would ever take interest in your heritage again, after falling in with those Vair-li pretenders.” Go ahead and rub it in why don’t you.

“I urge you, accept his offer! I could never have hoped that you would be able to walk on the plains of Issus where Ephraim Stihrah-rah led our people to freedom from the tyranny of the Nemean Aslani kings of Purrssia, nor seen the Kilic Methrah-Hain (sword song) in all its glory or leapt the flames or walked the ancient ways of Efrafia. I weep that I could not give you these things; and yet my heart sores even to Frith-rah, knowing that you shall have them, your birthen right as Efrafan.” Don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry!

“Your letter also spoke words of shame and doubt, that you felt yourself a disappointment; this is
not true! Your mother and I may have been disappointed in the choices you have made in the past, but never in you. You have always been worthy, you just had to realize it; and now you do.” -sniffle- 

“Go forth, young Son of Ephraim, and seize your place in this world.” -sniffle- M'saion! -sniffle-

Chapter 4

With his new-found acceptance, both of himself and by Owsla Buyuk, Jacob soon found it easier to open up to his friends. He also found, once he set aside his anger towards Zootopia, that Hornblower could be surprisingly insightful if still somewhat aloof. This newfound open camaraderie was what led him to gather his friends at a picnic table outside the base library to share in a soldier’s most prized possession: the home-made care package!

Horace came out of the library to join everyone, arms laden with books. As he set them down on a clear space between himself and Boyan, he noted the feast with interest and some slight melancholy.

“What is all that?”

Jacob grandly gestured to each item: “Corn flour arepas, hummus, Turkish Delight and smoked trout; as fresh from home as air-mail allows. Help yourself!”

“I get the rest of it, but I can’t see how you can eat that; it’s fish!” Horace stated with mild distaste.

“Yes, it is; and I can eat it like this!” Jacob replied while scooping a healthy portion of smoked trout onto one of the arepas and taking an exaggerated bite.

Desperately seeking support for his position, Horace looked aghast as Tereasa delicately nibbled a portion of fish and arepas.

“They’re not Kippers, but they’re not bad at all. Would your mother be willing to part with the recipe?” asked Ms. Brisby.

“Oh, Marli -fa didn’t make that; she made the hummus. The Bjorson’s made the smoked trout. They live on Upper Canal Street like, a block from the Castorman Mill and furniture factory, so it’s real easy to get the wood scraps for smoking. The trout they catch in traps in the canal. It’s a whole cottage industry; between little things like that and the community gardens, Foxborough and VT Commons are relatively food self-sufficient. Beats the hell out of the bland crap they gave us in the ZPS (Zootopian Public Schools).”

“Language, please.” Teresa stated primly.

“Sorry, but there’s no other way to describe it.” Jacob calmly retorted.

“You can still do better.” Tarsa commented between bites.

Jacob theatrically raised his arms in surrender. “Alright, alright! Gang up on me, why don’t ya. Help me out here Fivel!”

“I CAN SEE ETERNITY!”
Tarsa picked Mousekewitz up from the piece of Turkish candy he was devouring and handed him off to Boyan, while setting up a small portion of trout in front of him. “No more sugar for you my friend. Have some protein.”

“What is this! You’re all prey mammals, you can’t eat fish! Well except Tarsa.” Horace exclaimed.

Jacob set his food down and looked pointedly at Hornblower. “I have been many things in my short life, but I have never been anyone’s victim; and besides, I fail to see what that has to do with eating cooked fish.”


“I think he means herbivore, Emanuel…” Teresa interjected, “…and in that you are mistaken Mr. Hornblower; Ms. Shahrubah, Mr. Mousekewitz and myself are omnivores, so this is actually quite normal for our collective diets. Yourself, Mr. Hippelov and Emanuel here are the herbivores.”

“My mistake then, but it still doesn’t explain Jacob. You don’t see Boyan eating fish, do you?” he gestured to his fellow ungulate.

“Is Ramadan, I must fast until sundown.” Boyan said while keeping Fivel away from the Lokum.

“Could I impose to save some of this?”

“Oh, certainly! I think the Arepas are Halal, it’s just corn flour, salt and water cooked in vegetable oil.” Jacob replied while separating some of the food for Boyan, much to Horace’s shock.

“I can accept that you choose not to partake, but why do you think Boyan and Emanuel should not?” Tarsa asked while looking at Horace.

“They’re pre… herbivores! They can’t eat meat, we can’t digest it!”

“Yeah, the ZPS said pretty much the same thing while trying to get all us ‘Happytown rabble’ to tow the Zootopian line of ‘Anyone can be Anything’, as long as you keep to your species niche.” Jacob replied with some bitterness.

“That isn’t what Zootopia is about.” Horace defended. “The Polis was founded on the principle that every mammal can live at peace with one another; that the shackles of the old world nationalist ideologies are largely responsible for every conflict in recent memory.”

Jacob sighed. “With time, even the finest silver tarnishes. Zootopia gave up on those principles when they elected Tannerman in ’48. The whole shock-collar business wasn’t straightened out until the Confederation Continental Congress passed the Universal Mammals Rights Act of ’64.”

“... The Amerigon polis should be a collection of communities where every member has a right to belong. It should be a place where every mammal feels safe on his streets and in the house of his friends. It should be a place where each individual's dignity and self-respect is strengthened by the respect and affection of his neighbors. It should be a place where each of us can find the satisfaction and warmth which comes from being a member of the community of mammankind. This is what mammals sought at the dawn of civilization. It is what we seek today.” Lyon B. Johnson, 36th President of the Amerigon Confederation of States.”

Everyone turned to look at Fivel in surprise.

“What? Bachelor of Science, Poli Sci., class of ’11 University of Phoenix.”
“Well,” Ms. Brisby said after a moment, “…now I know why you have not sought further personal education. Why then are you two here?” she indicated Jacob and Horace.

“Business Management.” Horace pointed to his pile of books.

“Anger Management.” Jacob held up a copy of the writings of St. Thomas Equinus.

…

The next two months saw an easing of Jacob’s relationship with Sgt. Adame and Owsla Buyuk; though there remained a certain level of professional detachment due to the superior/subordinate relation Jacob shared with them, time spent off duty studying Efrafan culture and fighting techniques resulted in an almost sibling familiarity between Jacob and Natalia.

“ You’re quieter than usual today. May I ask why?” Natalia inquired while their car idled at a street corner.

“ Just a lot on my mind. ” Jacob said absently. “ Horace suggested I read ‘Meditations of Marcus Aurochius’, and he’s right; Stoicism has got a lot of good thoughts on mastering one’s emotions, understanding where they come from and how they affect you, as opposed to just trying to bury them in some masculine pseudo-stoic display or wallowing in them like a Pagan. That, and Tarsa just got her transfer orders; between the unrest with the Nasiri in southern Purrsia, her brothers ordination as a Zoroastrian priest, and her mother’s health issues, she’s decided to take a posting in Tehran.”

“ You look like a boy who’s first love is moving away. ” She said, smiling sympathetically.

Jacob chuckled, “ And you’d be right. ”

“ Truly? Your first love was a Purrsian vixen? ”

“ No, my first love was a Wallachian vixen who lived in our neighborhood; Zabrina Alescu. She’s related to the Adame family who sponsored mine for entry into Zootopia, back before the last round of plant closures across the river in Haresburg. Zabrina was a good seven years older than me, but you don’t care about those things when you’re 12. She’s quite beautiful; tall, graceful, fur the color of storm clouds and a tail that almost begged to be stroked. Say, you mentioned you had a daughter. ”

Natalia held an amused expression until the last, at which she took on the aspect of a protective mother. “ Yes. ” Her smile was all teeth and unspoken maternal warning.

“ Huh, good to know. ” He understood Natalia’s message.

The car’s base station radio interrupted any further conversation. “ All units, all units; domestic dispute reported at D-202 Isirgan Square of Yeni Mahalle. Be advised, possible shots fired. All units respond, over. ”

“ Juliet-Tango 117 responding; ETA three minutes! ” Jacob automatically responded, hitting the lights and sirens as Sgt. Adame screeched into traffic.

A search of the address on the car’s computer showed the location to be the residence of the Aksoys, a family of Golden Jackals with a history of domestic calls. The father, Mahzun, had recently been released from prison; he had been arrested for assault against both his wife, Naz and their son, Alp.

They heard screaming coming from the front room of the home, even over the noise of the patrol
car as they pulled up. Jacob and Natalia both readied their FN-FiveSeven’s before advancing on the house. As they stacked at the front door which was slightly ajar and the sound of violence and the crying of a child from inside built to a crescendo, Jacob looked to Natalia, who nodded and raised her weapon; they couldn’t wait for additional units to arrive.

Shouldering the door open, Jacob crouched low ready to spring forward and swept the room, while Sgt. Adame stood immediately behind and swept high; to the left, an entertainment center lay toppled over an as-yet unidentified canid, while an albino jackal pup of no more than 10 cried and called to his mother. He lay against the couch to the right, bleeding from the head. Straight ahead was a male jackal of medium height, only slightly taller than Jacob or Natalia: he was beating a wailing female jackal with the pommel of a knife while screaming insults at her. When the two LEOs simultaneous yelled, the male swiftly turned with the female in claw presenting her as a shield while pressing the knife blade to her neck.

“Back off! Throw down your guns or I’ll slit her whore throat!” Mahzun screamed even as tears poured down his face.

Natalia kept her weapon leveled on him. “It doesn’t have to be like this, Mahzun; let Naz go and we’ll -achoo- we’ll talk about this.”

“No! No talk! My wife bears me a devil son, I am scorned in the community. I am sent to prison for trying to drive the devil from them! When I come home I find her in bed with some stranger from the Base! Now you come to My Home and tell me I must submit? No, you will submit! Throw away your guns, NOW!” His agitation had reached a fever pitch, and now both Jacob and Natalia could smell an odd floral scent mixed with tobacco.

“Alright! We are -achoo- lowering our weapons; just let her go.” As Natalia raised her guns barrel away from Mahzun, she tapped Jacobs’ shoulder in one of the Efrafan silent signals: Strike at the first opportunity.

As Jacob moved to clear his weapon, Mr. Aksoy seemed to notice him for the first time.

“I see now! Malak Al-Maut (the Angel of Death) is come to claim his due! Here; take her and her devil spawn back to Iblis where they belong!” As he said this, staring straight at Jacob, he poised the knife to plunge into the side of his wife’s neck.

Before Mahzun could do more than prick Naz’s neck, Jacob threw his now empty service pistol at the deranged jackal. The sudden motion caused him to startle and take the blade from her neck and step back, slightly unbalancing himself. Jacob crossed the distance in a flash; by the time Mahzun realized the ruse, Jacob had seized his weapon arm and yanked him away from Naz. At the same time Natalia had also crossed the room, and before the jackal had finished falling, she tackled him to the ground. They had him restrained after a short struggle, and one blow to Mahzun’s head to stun him into compliance.

Jacob stepped away from the fallen assailant once they had him properly restrained, while Natalia was still fighting through her sudden hay-fever. He collected his weapon and began reviewing the scene; Alp had moved over to cradle his mother’s head in his lap, she apparently fell unconscious from the abuse. Jacob’s memories of his own father surged forward, and he was forced to pause and take a deep breath. Even as the urge to turn his wrath upon Mahzun rose, one of the passages he had recently read rose with it: “If it is not right, do not do it; if it is not true, do not say it.” After a moment, he was calm again; the anger was there, but he was its master, not its slave. Now he turned his attention to the canid under the television. He seemed familiar, but not someone Jacob knew. Checking his injuries, and scanning his chip, he found the individual was a dingo named Walter Brek, one of the infantry mammals from Anzac. He was alive but unconscious with several shallow
cuts to the face and abdomen, as well as a broken jaw. In moving the TV off the fallen mammal, Jacob noticed that Pvt. Brek was, in fact, quite naked. A quick glance to Naz and Alp confirmed that she was as well, seeming to confirm at least one of Mahzun’s ranting statements. Now, he needed to check on the rest of the Aksoy family.

As he approached the pair, he was startled when Alp began throwing things at his feet, precisely seven things, mostly coins and broken pieces of glass. Jacob remembered it was a tradition to fend off Malak Al-Maut. Alp was curled around his mother’s head as if trying to hide her from Jacob. It was then he saw a small boney spike coming from the back of his head. Another of Mahzun’s rants made sense now, as traditionally the Seear Singhi were seen as magical in nature. In the predominantly Sufi community, it would be seen as the mark of the Devil.

“Be at peace child.” Jacob soothed. “I am not Malak Al-Maut come to take you or your mother to Shaytan. I am a soldier, called Jacob Emanuel Raibert. You may call me Emanuel. Can you tell me your name?”

“Alp.” The terrified child’s voice was faint.

“And you are, heroic that is, trying to protect your mother as you have. Will you let me help her now?” Jacob asked as he knelt before the child at eye level.

Alp nodded and so Jacob set about providing what first-aid he could until the EMT’s arrived.

The drive back to the station house with Mahzun in the back was peculiar, to say the least. When they went to load Mr. Aksoy into the patrol car, Natalia made every effort to keep him as far from her muzzle as physically possible. At first, he thought that, like him, the idea of having to touch such a contemptible person was personally distasteful; then the wind shifted, and she began sneezing again.

Jacob took control of the prisoner. “Are you alright Sgt.? Should I call a medic over?”

She waved him off. “I’ll be -ACHOO- fine! Damned addict. I’m just allergic to -sniffle- his drug of choice.”

Jacob sniffed near the still addled Mahzun. “I can smell that he’s been smoking something, but it’s not Nip or Hash; what is it?”

“Cigdem Sheesha.” She said with some disgust.

Jacob looked at Mahzun curiously. “Tobacco mixed with pulped Crocus? I don’t remember anything like that being in the local narcotics brief.”

“It’s not a controlled substance, though it should be. -achoo- It’s used in a lot of religions as an incense; supposed to strip away the ‘falsities-of-the-flesh’ or some Hraka. It really just makes you susceptible to suggestion. Use too much, however, and you start to lose higher reasoning; you become paranoid and violent like this animal.” She said that while they loaded Mr. Aksoy into the back of the car. Once inside, Natalia rolled the front two windows down and turned the A/C on to full.

Jacob stood next to the drivers-side door. “Do you want me to drive? You can stick your head out the window as we go.”

She handed him the keys. “You just want to see me pant.”
He smirked and waited until she was on the other side of the car to respond. “Careful now; you know I like vixens. What would your family say?”

“Cheeky kit! Just get us back to the station and I won’t notch your ears for that remark.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Upon their arrival at the base, while Natalia began filing the appropriate after-action reports Jacob secured and processed Mr. Aksoy.

“Afternoon, Jacob!” greeted Sgt. Tannhauser, a grey wolf from the Weimar Republic. “What joy have you brought me today?”

“Only the finest, David: Mahzun Aksoy, age 30. Domestic violence call gone almost all the way wrong; three counts Assault with a Deadly Weapon, two counts Attempted Murder, and one count Resisting Arrest.”

The stocky lupine whistled in surprise. “That’s quite the tally. Would you like to walk him around the building a few times, maybe have him fall down a few flights of stairs?”

Jacob closed his eyes and took a deep breath, then whispered to himself, “If it is not right, do not do it; if it is not true, do not say it.”

David’s ears perked up. “What was that?”

“Nothing, just some advice from a friend. And no, I think there’s been enough suffering in this case; let the courts expose him for the monster he is and punish him accordingly.” Jacob looked sidelong at the muzzled and restrained Jackal beside him. “Besides, if I did start hitting him, I’m not certain when I’d stop.”

Once finished with processing, Jacob went to file his reports of the events, cross-referencing them with the copies Natalia had sent him. Within minutes of e-mailing his reports to Mendoza and Buyuk he was called to one of the third-floor briefing rooms. After knocking three times, Buyuk called him to enter.

“Sir, Pvt. Raibert reporting as ordered sir!” Jacob stood at rigid attention while observing his surroundings; WO Mendoza and Capt. Buyuk sat at a table under the projection screen, while Sgt.’s Tannhauser and Adame stood to one side. On the table in front of his commanders was a stack of papers which he assumed to be the compiled reports from the earlier call.

“At ease, Pvt. For the purposes of the record, this debrief will be conducted in anglican. We’ve read all the reports, and they are a part of the official record, so we’ll cut the preliminaries and get to the heart of the matter; I’ve seen your qualification scores, so I know what you’re capable of. This is the question: why didn’t you take the shot when you had the chance?” Mendoza’s mien was stern, but not accusatory.

“At the outset, there seemed the possibility to de-escalate the situation. By the time the extent of Mr. Aksoy’s agitation was apparent, Sgt. Adame and I had already cleared our weapons.”

“So instead you opted to bludgeon another perp unconscious?” the WO asked with a quirked eyebrow.

Jacob physically bristled, his ears pointing straight back. ‘Really, lectured if I don’t kill him, and then lectured for too much force?’ Before he could verbalize that thought, he took a deep breath and relaxed again. “No sir, I opted to use the resources at my disposal to subdue Mr. Mahzun with
Capt. Kaan spoke up for the first time, “Her son was ten feet away. What trauma were you going to save him from?”

“That of seeing his father killed in front of him; there had been enough misery and suffering in that house. Alp will always live with his physical condition, Naz will live out her life socially condemned as an adulteress, Pvt. Brek will likely be discharged for his injuries and his own adultery, while Mahzun will likely live out the next decade or two in prison. The only positive that has come out of this whole sordid affair is that the annulment Naz has been trying to get for the past three years is all but a done deal, sirs.”

Mendoza and Buyuk looked at one another, then to Natalia and David who nodded back.

Mendoza then gathered up the files on the table. “In light of the evidence filed by MCSI (Military Crime Scene Investigators) as well as the testimony of the responding officers and observers, I am inclined to find that there is no fault in your actions in this case. Well done Pvt. Keep this up and we’ll see about clearing your UIF (Unfavorable Information File) in time for next years’ promotion boards. Dismissed.”

Jacob snapped to attention, saluted the assembled officers, about-faced, and marched out of the room to turn in his kit at the end of shift. As he was making his way out from the barracks after changing for a planned evening with Tarsa, Capt. Buyuk called him over.

"Jacob, a moment of your time."

Jacob considered the Owsla for a moment, “Yes, but only a moment. Tarsa leaves soon and I want to make the most of the time we have.”

He smiled at Jacob knowingly, “I quite understand, this won’t take long. In three month’s my old regiment is holding a re-union commemorating the Battle of Edirne where your grandfather served. If you have enough leave saved up, I would like to invite you. We could tour the ancient Cappadocian capital of Efrafaj along the way and fill in some of the blanks in your heritage as it were. I would need to step up your training in the interim, after Tarsa has left of course; I don’t need you distracted during that period. What say you?”

Chapter End Notes

There has been some contention over the years within the League of Nations regarding the free trade and transport of Class C Botanicals, those plants with psychoactive properties and direct medical applications (Lophophora Williansii, Midnicampum Holicithius, et al). The chief non-medical importers of such products are religious groups such as the Ásatrá Lore Vanatrú Assembly centered in Albacete, Castile which imports nearly 10 tons of Mid. Hol. every year for rendering into ceremonial tincture and incense, while the Native Amerigon Church is one of the only non medicinal consumers of Peyote in the world.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The path to home is best viewed with the light of the past. Jacob learns of his grandfathers past, and his own potential.

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“Frithaes Constantin-fa,

“I don’t know how to better say this than to say, I never realized. For the last two months, Owsla Buyuk has trained me in preparation for this trip to Efrafa, and then on to Edirne for the Regimental reunion. Your persistence in instructing me early in my life has benefited me well; I have found that the years have not entirely taken from me the memory of the Methrah you taught, nor the ancient line of our people.

“I have indeed walked the ancient streets of our ancestral home of Efrafa; I jumped the fire at a demonstration by a cultural preservation troupe from the state university of Anatolia; I have even stood in the courtyard of the palace of our ancient ancestor, Campion Rautha. It is hard to feel worthy in the face of such history, but I take heart in the support of you, my family, as well as my friends here, even absent Tarsa, whom I find I miss more greatly than I thought I would.

“Buyuk and I depart in the morning for Edirne. I am assured it will be an eye-opening experience. I do not know what to think, knowing that I shall learn more about my grandfather in the coming days than I did while sitting on your knee. I must get to sleep now as we have some 800 kilometres to cover tomorrow. Give my love to everyone in the neighborhood.

“Frithaes, Jacob Emanuel Raibert, Rautha a Uzun rooliti vao.”

Chapter five
Dawn broke, framing the ancient fortress mount of Uçhisar, which stood at the heart of Efrafa. Morning prayers and church bells heralded the new day. Buyuk wanted to be on the road before long; they had a one-and-a-half-hour drive to Kaysiri, where they would take a 12-hour train ride to Constantinople. From there the Regimental veterans would meet up prior to making the final trek into Edirne for the commemoration and remembrances. Thankfully, Buyuk’s Regiment was paying for Jacob’s travel and lodging, though he had yet to get the elder Owsla to explain why.

“Get a move on, lad. We’ve a long day ahead of us.” Kaan shouted as he loaded his baggage into the trunk of their rental car.

“Yes, made all the longer by traveling in this god-awful POS. I know I shouldn’t complain about what is essentially a gift, but I think I’d feel safer in a Ford Pinto or a Yugo; at least those will top over 100 kph without shaking like a flag pole in a stiff wind.” Jacob groused while loading his own bag into the off-white Renault Alliance, while resisting the urge to sing Adam Antler’s, ‘Piece of Shit Car’.

“Well, the sooner we start, the sooner we can turn the car in.” Buyuk grunted as he slammed the driver’s side door several times before it finally stayed closed.

During the drive to Kaysiri, Buyuk drilled Jacob on the etiquette of a traditional greeting Kilic Hain, as well as the lineage he would be expected to recite to prove his identity. Jacob had come to detest the stainless-steel Yataghan he had been loaned, but the last few months had shown him the significance of the sword in formal Efrafan culture, so he dared not travel without it. Once in Kaysiri they turned in the rental car and boarded the train for Constantinople.

After riding in silence for an hour Buyuk looked over to Jakob. “You seem pensive boy; what’s troubling you?”

“Hm? Oh, not much, this is just the longest I’ve been out of uniform since joining 15 months ago. I’ve also not really had a chance to slow down in the past couple of months, and now that we have some time to ourselves I find I miss Tarsa. She has an exuberance about her; I think she would have liked this trek.” Jacob sat up a little straighter focusing on Buyuk.

“Remembrance is good, but don’t let it consume you.”

“Is that why you’ve been running me ragged the last two months?”

“To some degree, yes; but it’s mostly to get you ready. This is the 45th anniversary of the Battle of Edirme-nin Altan (the Red Dawn of Edirne), and you will be representing your grandfather at the event.”

Jacob was stunned. “Me? But this is for your Regiment, and I’m just…”

“The grandson of Owsla-fa Constantin Abelard Rautha and a lineal descendant of Campion Rautha, who aided Ephraim Sthrahth-rah in defying the Purrssian King Darius, thus leading to his defeat on the Plains of Issus at the hooves of Alexander of Macedon, as well as helping to found the Polis of Efrafia. If anyone not of the Regiment ever deserved to be there, it is you, Owsla Raibert.”

“Wait, wait, wait! ‘Owsla-fa Rautha’? When? How?!” Jacob was nearly frantic in his excitement.

“When was 45 years ago. How will be told in the Kilic Hain. That is why you must be diligent; your grandfather is worthy of the veneration by ALL Efrafil, but he is not here; you are. You therefore must BE worthy, so we will practice.”
For the next 12 hours, they did practice; by the time they reached Constantinople, Jacob could recite the line of his ancestors from Campion to Constantin in every language he could speak. What surprised Kaan the most was not Jacob's ability to recite the lineage, but rather his ability to write it in the ancient Purrsian cuneiform as written on his family's blade. Buyuk did have one question about the whole affair.

“You do realize what your grandfather's name means in this script don’t you?”

“Kaan Satana Tuna, the Devil Prince of the Danube River, Vlad Tepisch. I know, just like I know your name means the Prince from the Danube River and the Buyuk River.” Jacob said as he wrote out Kaan's name in ancient Purrsian. “Con-ni-Fa taught us using the script that was on the blade. He would not let me swing the sword, but he would allow me to copy the script so long as I spoke each name and word as I wrote it. It used to drive my dad up a wall.”

Kaan quirked his head. “You don’t speak about your father.”

Jacobs countenance soured. “I am endeavoring to keep this conversation civil.”

“And?” Kaan prompted.

“I have nothing civil to say about the mammal.”

“Very well then, back to work.”

It was close to midnight when they finally arrived at the hotel where they would stay before departing with the regiment in the morning. Kaan insisted that he would introduce Jacob to the rest of the regiment then.

When morning came the two hares descended to the lobby. They met a mass of hundreds of hares, as well as a few jackals and foxes. Jacob paused for a moment and then looked over at Kaan. “I thought you said this was a regimental reunion; by my count this is only slightly more than a battalion.”

“What you’re looking at is only one company, both active and retired; the one that was involved in this battle. Even our coffers couldn’t absorb the cost of trying to house 5000 animals. Come, I'll introduce you to Ata Cenk Burukgazi. He is the unit historian and served as 1st Sgt. under your grandfather at the Battle of Edirne-nin Altan.” Buyuk gestured to an aged hare sitting hunched over a cup of Turkish coffee. Much like his grandfather, time had worn away at what once was a powerful frame. It had not however diminished the presence that he commanded. He looked up from his morning libation and drew sharp breath as Jacob and Kaan approached.

“You tell me you are bringing a descendent of Owsla-fa Rautha, and instead you come to me with Inle-rah roolitifa.” He remarked as he stood and sized Jacob up. Buyuk looked pointedly at Jacob and waited. Jacob took a deep breath and squared his shoulders.

“M’saia Burukgazi-fa, I am Jacob Emanuel Raibert, grandson of Constantin Abelard Rautha, currently serving with the 56th MP Battalion F Troop Det. 7 assigned to LoNFB Incirlik. You may call me Emanuel.”

Ata perked his graying ears at this and looked over at Kaan.

“Really now? Has he made suitable proficiency in mastering his lineage, and is he properly vouched for?”
Buyuk stood straight. “He has, I vouch for him.”

“We shall see when he exemplifies his grandfather on the field.”

At that moment, the doors to the lobby opened admitting a hare in an Anatolian regimental dress kilt and tunic. “Alright you embleer Hlesil, form up and mount up!” At this the assembled soldiers filed out of the hotel lobby and formed up to board the military buses waiting to take them to Edirne.

During the 3-hour drive to the old battle site Jacob got to know some of the animals that he was riding with; among them was Ilkin Kadir Demirci, a blacksmith’s son who grew up with his mother, Katarin. It turned out that he joined the regiment in order to impress Constantin and his wife.

“Oh yes, I’m not ashamed to say I was in love with your mother; she was quite beautiful in our youth. I had hoped to marry her, but the regiment was called up to help quell the riots resulting from the Spring Revolution in Purrsia; I was away in Antakya when her Marli-fa Banu Dilan and their other children were killed in a bombing at their church. By the time the Shah had put down the rebellion and I could return home, your mother and Rautha-fa had already left for Zootopia.” It was plain to see that time had not diminished his feelings or Katarin, nor the pain of her departure.

Jacob considered the jack before him for a moment; Marli-fa and Con-ni-fa had raised him and the hrairoo by themselves. She had never sought to date after the divorce, and while she didn’t need a male in her life to make her complete, she had always had an air of melancholy about her. It was one of the many things he blamed his father for. Perhaps this was a chance to heal yet another wound of the past? He’d have to write home to find out.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, ‘was quite beautiful’; I’m going to have to give her your contact information so that she can give you a piece of her mind for that comment.” Jacob said with a smirk. Ilkin’s eyes lit up with delight while the entire bus laughed in celebration of his good fortune.

When they arrived in Edirne, they formed up and marched to Altan Square where a four-meter tall black Onyx obelisk stood as a monument to the battle. Surrounding it were several placards with facts about the battle, and even one picture of a hare officer in Special Warfare Department (SWD) combat kilt and tunic, holding a steel Yataghan with an M-1 Carbine strapped to his back; he was perched atop the burnt wreckage of a Soviet light tank in Bulgarian livery. The caption for the image read, ‘Lt. C. Uzun surveys the battlefield.’ A crowd was already there, as well as a news team from the Associated Press (AP) that Jacob had seen on the television in the barracks, though he didn’t recognize the brown hare following the reindeer anchor taking notes. From her dress and demeanor, he guessed her to be a Lapino student from one of the international schools in Europa.

The ceremony that followed was bog-standard civic and military fare; speeches honored the sacrifices made and implored the remembrance of the past so future generations could avoid such bloodshed. Survivors laid wreaths commemorating the fallen, more speeches were made, the Anatolian national anthem was played, and an antique Austro-Hungarian 88mm Anti-Air gun fired seven shots. After this the ceremony was largely concluded, though both Buyuk and Burukgazi told Jacob to meet them at the monument at a quarter to five, with his sword; until then, he was free to roam the city.

As he was departing the square, he bumped into a striking vixen.

“Please excuse me, the crowd is a little disorienting.” He said while offering a manual paw to help steady her.
“Oh, I completely understand; the noise and smells, it’s...” She looked up and startled. “I’m sorry but, are you Jacob Emanuel?”

It was now Jacob’s turn to be surprised. “I am so taken, but you have me at a disadvantage, Ms.?”

“Adame, Kiraz Adame; you work with my mother!” She smiled and pointed while waving excitedly at a small gathering to his left. There indeed, was Natalia Adame looking straight at Jacob; her smile was still all teeth and maternal warning.

“So, you’re Natalia’s daughter; huh, good to know.”

Jacob spent the afternoon with the Adame’s, including Kiraz’s fiancé, Levent. At the appointed hour, Jacob was at the monument along with Sgt. Burukgazi, Capt. Buyuk, and about thirty or so Efrafan hares of about his grandfather’s age.

Jacob looked over at the old Sgt. “When is everyone else coming?”

“They’re not. This will be U Methrah Bralante ( Memory Tale ) and is for the veterans of this battle alone.”

Capt. Buyuk drew a startled breath.

“Then, what are Buyuk and I doing here?”

Buyuk laid a trembling manual paw on Jacob’s shoulder. “You are here as the representative of your grandfather, and I am here because I vouched for you. I have only ever seen this once, when I was a child; I never dreamed I would have the opportunity to be a part of one.”

Jacob saw his own insecurities reflected in the senior Owsla’s eyes, so he laid his own paw on Kaan’s shoulder in return.

“M’saion Frithrah narn, Owsla Kaan Tuna Buyuk.”

The Capt. stood just a little taller.

“M’saion Frithrah narn, Owsla Jacob Emanuel Raibert.”

…

Where the drive to Edirne had been somewhat jovial, the bus ride to the battle site a few kilometers west of the city was silent. They arrived at a farm only a short distance east of the Border Checkpoint between Anatolia, Bullgaria and Macedonian Aegea. They greeted an elderly chamois family at a farmstead.

The aged bovid nodded to Ata, “Dobre se sreshtnakh, Efrafil. Everything is as you asked, and there will be a repast waiting when you are done.”

“Narn-ni, Sergei; we will try not to disrupt your lands too much.”

“That they are still My lands is because of you. I would never deny you this.”

With that, the assembled host began walking into the nearby fields. Eventually, they came to a pyramidal stack of wood, dry straw, and pine cones easily as tall as Jacob.

“Wait here.” Ata commanded. “If you truly are a child of Constantin-fa, you will know when and how to approach.”
The remaining hares, including Buyuk, arrayed themselves in a semi-circle opposite of Jacob, facing the wood pile. Ata stepped forward.

“Hyoa, ver sai methai, Owslafa laynt Constantin, olme Efrafil mai bralvao frangent.” (Once, so they say, before Constantin became Owslafa, he fought for the hope of his people.)

“M’saion Efrafil.” The gathered host solemnly intoned.

“We are gathered here to remember Edirne-nin Altan; to remember the fallen, both those we fought beside and those we fought against.”

“M’saion Efrafil.”

At this, Ata spun about drawing his Yataghan. Taking the scabbard from his belt, he raised both above his head.

“We remember, that memory might shed light on the mysteries of the past and illuminate our way forward.”

“M’saion Efrafil.”

Ata swung his blade and scabbard down towards the pile, striking them together. The resulting sparks caused the dry tinder to catch flame almost instantly.

“As fire consumes wood, so too does time consume memory. We must therefore feed the fires of memory, lest the past fall into darkness.”

“M’saion Efrafil.”

The fire was now well caught, with flames shooting more than twice Jacobs’ height. The heat was beginning to physically push him back; this was no university cultural preservation team campfire he would have to jump.

“Yet, the one for whom we celebrate tonight is not here with us. Who then will fuel this memory, and carry its light into the west, to light the way for our people?”

Jacob knew this was his moment. Drawing his blade, he bellowed out, “M’saia Efrafil!” On the last syllable, he stamped his pedal paw on the ground.

Ata turned to face the flames. “Who is this who calls out in the name of our people?”

“I am Jacob Emanuel Raibert, who is called Owsla. I am descended of the lines of Campion and Thlayli, and I call Constantin Abelard Rautha my grandfather, who is known to you.”

“He is indeed known to us, but you are not. As we have passed through fire together, so too must you pass through fire, that we may know you truly.” With this, the elderly hare stepped back into the semi-circle.

Jacob was certain he could clear the top of the wood pile, but he’d need all his paws for this. Taking several steps back, he grasped the blade in his teeth, so the curve swept over his left shoulder. Dropping to all fours, rushed forward, and leapt high into the flames. As he passed over the top of the pyre, Jacob thought he smelled diesel fuel and gunpowder, though he hadn’t smelled either before the pyre was lit. When he came down on the other side, he tucked and rolled so he came up with his left leg leading. Once he was up, he took his sword from his mouth and saluted the assembly, though for a moment it looked as if there were five times as many standing before him.
Was it a trick of the fire light?

Ata spoke from the crowd, “You have passed through fire to meet us, but you must still be tested before we can truly know you. Who here will vouch for Jacob, that he may be exemplified before us?”

Buyuk stepped forward and drew his sword. “M’saia Efrafil.”

“They come before us, as in the Halls of the Dancing Lords!” The group began rhythmically stamping the ground in unison, and the Kilic Hain began. For five minutes, Jacob recited the line of Owsla-fa of his ancestors, starting with his Maternal grandmothers’ line and the House of Campion Rautha at the Battle of Issus, through his grandfather’s line when Thlayli Uzun helped defend Constantinople from Sultan Mehmed the Second in the Fifteenth century, all the way to his grandfather’s grandfather Abelard Mucahit Uzun, who fought at Tripoli in the Great War. With each name and event, Jacob and Kaan swung their blades through progressively more complex forms, as the ancient Kilic Hain walked them through the sword fighting style of the Efrafan people. At the conclusion, both hares saluted and stepped back. Jacob heard a sharp series of staccato cracks, like gun fire coming from the circle of Efrafil, though they didn’t react. Maybe the crackling from the bonfire was reflecting weirdly off the crowd.

Burukgazi stepped forward. “Your skill and your zeal are truly laudable, but you have forgotten one name from your lineage: Owsla-fa Constantin Abelard Uzun, who is now called Rautha.”

“I have not forgotten this name, for light of this memory was never imparted to me. I come to you now, humble and destitute, seeking that light from the east, to guide my path forward.”

“Then let him receive that light, M’saion Efrafil.”

The troop began stomping the rhythm once again.

“On the Plains of Edirne, in the Spring of the Red Bull”

“M’saion Efrafil.”

Jacob was immediately caught up in the chant. The song kept on

“With their guns, And their army, The Bullgar Sought our conquest”

“M’saion Efrafil.”

Jacob felt tremors in the earth, as if a great host was on the move, but the song kept on

“But one son
of Efrafa

Constantin

Stood before them.”

“M’saion Efrafil.”

Above the chant, and the rhythm, Jacob thought he could hear shouting and explosions, but the song kept on.

“With a host

of Hrare-lion

he gave them

such a battle!”

“M’saion Efrafil.”

For Jacob, the song fell away.

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Lt. Constantin Abelard Uzun poured over maps and intelligence reports in the cellar of the Koc family farm, which sat midway between the city of Edirne and the Bulgarian border. It was, perhaps, not the most strategically ideal place for his makeshift headquarters, but the old chamois farmstead with its hewn stone foundation was as defensible a locale as he was going to find in this area. He was going to need that; if intel was right, the Bullgar Premier intended to use the chaos the Prague Spring reforms were causing regionally to advance across the Krali-Marco Defensive Line (KMDL) and seize the Bosphorus. To do that, they would first need to take Edirne. This was why the SWD had sent his company to scout this area, while the army mobilized the Third Corps in Constantinople.

The cellar doors swung open, letting in a cold damp blast of air. This was the last remnant of the Mediterranean storm that had turned the surrounding fields into a quagmire, as well as grounding the air-fleet that would normally have spotted any troop movements on the border. The disturbance admitted one of his Hayessil, Cpl. Teke.

“What do you have, Cpl.?” Uzun asked after glancing up.

“Sir!” The young hare snapped off a salute. “They definitely crossed the KMDL; looks like the 12th Armored Regiment. I saw a line of about 16 vehicles; four BA-3 armored cars, six T-20 artillery tractors with light field guns or heavy mortars and crews, and six ZIS-42M’s with infantry moving down the D-100/E-80 highway, but no real armor yet.”

Constantin leaned thoughtfully. “The 12th Regiments’ 3rd Battalion (12/3rd) is a reconnaissance battalion; the 12/1st and the 12/4th have both been confirmed on the Czech border, so that leaves the 12/2nd mechanized infantry and 12/3rd reconnaissance and no organic artillery. Were you spotted?”

Teke gave a derisive snort in response.
Constantin grinned humorlessly. “Huh, good to know. I’ll radio in your findings; get some rest. Sgt. Burukgazi tell Lt. Makar to prep the demolition packages on the D-100/E-80 overpasses, then pull back to the farm. When the Bull’s are between the two bridges, blow them both. I want Lt. Arap’s platoon southeast of the highway split to pin them in the killbox so Lt. Solak’s weapons platoon mortarms can rain hell on whoever doesn’t drown in the flood waters. Tell Yilmez to move the Marksmammals to the tree-line west of the D-100 to snipe any officers who peek out of their trucks. M’saion Efrafil.”

“M’saion Efrafil, Lt.” With a stomp of his foot, Ata moved off to convey the Lt.’s orders to the unit; it would not be a glorious battle, but it would be efficient.

…

The battle was not glorious, but it was quite efficient. The mechanized Company commander had not stopped his convoy to ensure the bridges were safe. He had also not spaced his vehicles, opting for speed over defense, and so the bulk of the force was trapped between the two bridges when they blew. Carl Gustaf Rifles brought down the two BA-3 vehicles which had not been caught in the blast, while sustained Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) fire and 60mm mortar bombardment swiftly dispatched all forces between the bridges; the engagement lasted less than three minutes. Of the forces deployed under Lt. Uzun, only Cpl. Yilmez was unsatisfied with the outcome, grumbling about being the only weapons specialist without a kill that day.

“Relax, Cpl.” Constantin said. “There’s plenty yet to do. The 12/3rd still has three companies yet to deploy, and the 12/2nd still behind that.”

“When can we expect re-enforcement, Lt.?” asked Sgt. Telki, the companies only fox.

“Not until tomorrow and the day after.”

“Tomorrow AND the day after?” inquired Lt. Solak.

“We will get a naval fire direction team sometime tomorrow afternoon; the Cruiser Yavuz will be steaming out of Constantinople tomorrow evening and be in position for shore bombardment by the next morning, around the same time that the bulk of 3rd Corps gets to Edirne. So, brothers; do you think we can show our erstwhile guests a taste of proper Efrafan hospitality for the next two days?”

“M’saion Inle-rah!”

…”

The only events over the evening were a supply run to Edirne, and a second probe by the 12/3rd, this time only involving four BA-3 trucks; this time, Cpl. Yilmez did make a kill when the vehicle platoon leader, a Red Deer Lt. with an absurd number of decorations for a reserve officer in a unit that had never seen combat, came out of the truck’s turret hatch to get a better look at the after effect of that day’s earlier battle. After that, Lt. Solak’s Anti-Tank (AT) specialists dispatched the four vehicles and their crews. Meanwhile, Lt. Makar’s platoon used the bridge rubble and vehicle wreckage to set up impromptu redoubts, and improvised roadside bombs using unexploded ordnance. All that was left to do was rest up for the coming fight.

That fight would not come until almost noon the next day, when Cpl. Teke once again burst into the command basement.

“Sir, they’re making a push. I saw three companies of armored cavalry; even mix of BT-5’s and 7’s, and twice that many BTR-152’s following what I guess is the rest of the Recon battalion.
They’re better spaced this time. They’re also yelling a lot.”

“So, 400 infantry and light vehicles and 16 light tanks; that only leaves them 16 tanks as a reserve force. Rusatil (Brothers) let’s move.” The assembled command staff headed to the nearby barn roof; the highest point in 10 kilometers. “You said they were yelling?” Constantin asked incredulously.

“Yeah, ‘Cast off your predator overlords, the will of the majority is the will of nature, prey of the world, unite!’, standard Bullshevik rhetoric.” The dirt covered hare spat at the thought. “We’re Efrafil! U Hrae-lion, ‘The Thousand Lions’! We are the hunters here!”

The Lt. grasped his subordinate by the shoulder. “It’s time to remind them of that fact; head out and tell Lt. Arap to pull back into reserve. Makar is to blow the road to eliminate the 12/3rd; don’t waste ammunition on survivors, or bombs on the 12/2nd.”

“Narn-ni, Lt.!” With that, Teke ran off to relay the orders.

“Solak, deploy north of the highway along the creek; once they’re within range of your mortars, you and Makar will focus AT fire on their north and south flanks and walk mortar fire up the middle of their formation.”

The ragged eared Lt. grinned and saluted.

“Narn!” He paused as he was turning to leave. “Why do you think it took them so long to act?”

“I don’t think they’ve actually seen who has been stopping them yet, and I want to keep it that way. Ignorance in warfare is lethal; also, you know these Reds can’t wipe their backsides without approval from higher headquarters, much less change their battle plans on the fly. Use that against them. M’saion Efrafil!”

“M’saion Efrafil!”

…

The afternoon’s battle was no less brutal, and no less efficient. When the remainder of the 12/3rd was entirely within their array of improvised explosives, including several salvaged 120mm mortar bombs, the Erafans sprang the trap; a quarter of the Bullgarian vehicles and their unfortunate crews were instantly killed by the blast effect of the mortar bombs. Another 14 caught ablaze as 45mm incendiary rounds detonated under their chassis, cooking their occupants alive. Of the remaining six, two attempted to flee to the south, only for the storm-softened earth to cause them to roll over, either trapping their crews in the flood waters or crushing them. Two vehicles ended up crashing into each other and were eventually caught in the growing bonfire. The last two vehicles managed to safely turn around, only to be fired upon by the advancing armor elements. Less than one day had seen the end of the 12/3rd.

With the road forward blocked, the 12/2nd turned north as a unit and drove into the muddy farmlands; their 35 kph advance had become a nine kph slog. As the battalion re-oriented itself to continue its eastward push, the hare commandos quietly re-positioned themselves to strike at the column’s flanks. After a kilometer of advance, the BTR’s became too bogged down, forcing their passengers to disembark; the tanks did not stop while this was going on, and so the infantry was out of position to support when Solak and Makan’s troops opened fire on the flanks of the tank sections; within five seconds, five of the armored vehicles were burning wreckage. As the infantry deer tried to get their medium machine guns in place to support the tanks, they came under sustained BAR fire, forcing the survivors to take cover behind their vehicles. The tanks began wheeling about to face the two attacks and fired their 45mm and 76mm cannons, as well as their heavy machine guns, but by
then the hares had moved. That was when the mortars began firing; the 60mm blast fragmentation warheads, normally not a threat to the frontal armor of either the BT-5 or 7, instead began raining down on the exposed side and engine armor, immobilizing or destroying another four tanks. Two more vehicles were struck by AT fire before the remaining five tanks withdrew to the infantry line. By now, the armored reserve had come up to reinforce the advance, but the momentum was lost, and the remains of the 12/2nd opted instead to bunker down.

The Efrafans did not come away completely unscathed, with two commandos struck by blind 12.7mm assault rifle fire, and one crushed under a tree struck by a lucky tank shot. The only other injury was when Cpl. Yilméz sprained his ankle jumping from his tree when tracer rounds caused it to catch fire. Lt. Uzun was satisfied with the results of the battle and pulled most of his troops back.

“Rusatil, M’saion U Hrair éveer!” (My brothers, hail the victorious dead!) He called to the assembled company that night. He stood beside the unit’s Lieutenants and Sergeants; they had divested themselves of all but their breechcloths and Yataghan and had covered themselves in dark mud and soot so that they were nearly black as night.

“M’saion Efrafil!”

“Our enemies have thought themselves safe behind their walls, their armor and their rhetoric. Now, they huddle in their encampment in OUR homeland, and think themselves safe in Morpheus’ embrace; we will show them how vulnerable they truly are.” He turned to his cadre, “Squad leaders, you have your quadrants; move in straight lines, and kill everyone you encounter from one end of the camp to the other. Leave the sentries, wounded and medical personnel; for everyone else, zhylai hraray!”

“M’saion Inle-rah!”

At this, Constantin turned, gripped his Yataghan in his teeth, dropped to all fours and ran towards the Bullgari camp. By pairs, the cadre of 19 hares and one fox followed suit.

…

It was nearly midnight when the Naval forward observers arrived from Constantinople, a mixture of otters and roe deer; their squad leader, a buck Midshipman Tiryaki who was barely into his second points, was impatiently demanding to see Constantin.

“I don’t care about excuses, Corporal. I’m here on the Admirals direct orders. Now where is your C.O.!”

Cpl. Teke was about to tell Tiryaki what he could do with his Admiral’s demands, when the cellar doors swept open admitting a blast of cold night air, and the scent of smoke and blood. The midnight black seemed to disgorge blood soaked, blade wielding shadows as Uzun and the command cadre descended into the basement.

“Ah, Lieutenant! this fine…mammal was just inquiring after your whereabouts.”

“Inle-hlao. You were supposed to be here before nightfall.” The filth encrusted hare left the question implied, while gesturing for his soldiers to get cleaned up.

“The…uh…Yav…(cough)…the Yavuz took longer to come up to steam than normal, but she’s…(cough)…she’s on her way and should be in position by dawn!” It was clear the sailors were trying to avoid retching.

“Huh, good to know. If the Bullgari are still here in the morning, you are welcome to them. If not,
you will likely still be needed to deter any adventurism on their part."

“If...(cough)... they are still there? What’s been going on here?”

“Inle-rah flaye.” Sgt. Telki said as he passed the Midshipman. At the deer’s confused look he clarified, “The Devil’s Feast.” Though still confused, the sailors were reluctant to interrogate the SWD soldiers any further; with dawn would come the answers.

... 

The dawn broke bright and clear for the first time in more than a week. There was a strange contrast to the carnage left in the wake of the last two days, and the serenity of the surrounding countryside. Cpl. Teke came into the command center and reported that the Bullgar camp and vehicles were empty of everyone, save those who could not move on their own, whether it be from combat injuries or the previous night’s bloody work. The naval forward observers moved with the SWD Co. to survey the sight, taking pictures the entire way. When they reached the line of destroyed BT’s, Constantin climbed onto one for a better vantage. The wind and the clicking of the camera shutter were the only interruptions to the scene. Sgt. Burukgazi looked up at his commander.

“What’s troubling you, sir?”

Constantin sighed heavily, “Just wondering if I am worthy of her, now that my paws are stained with blood.”

“To shed blood so that others need not live in fear is a soldier’s lot, pup. You know that, so does Marli Banu Rautha and everyone in Edirne.”

The Lt. scoffed, “This was a soldier’s lot,” he said gesturing to the line of broken vehicles. “That was not; Telki had the right of it, that was the work of Malak-al-Maut, a feast for Inle-rah. I only hope my own children never live to see the like.” He hopped down from the tank and began walking towards the camp again.

The Bullgar had indeed left everything behind; the dead were left where they lay, while provisions, equipment, and even official documents lay forgotten. The naval observers ecstatically poured over the intel treasure trove, even if only to block out the carnage which surrounded them. All attention was soon drawn to the jarring sound of laughter, coming from the medical tent.

“HAHAHAHAHAHA! Zaïcheta, zagubikhme zaïcheta!” (Bunnies, we lost to bunnies!) The broken soldier began weeping. This was drowned out by the sound of armor advancing from Edirne; 3rd Corps had arrived.

“We’ve done it!” Lt. Arap suddenly whooped. “Constantin, we’ve won! M’saion Constantin!” Saying this, he slammed his pedal paw on the ground. The whole company soon took up the chant, stomping in time. “M’saion Constantin!” -STOMP-

“M’saion Constantin!” -STOMP-

“M’saion Constantin!” -STOMP-

“M’saion Constantin!” -STOMP-

...
“On the Plains
Of Edirne,
In the Spring
Of the Red Bull,”

“M’saion Efrafi’l”

The scent of death and burning vehicles slowly faded from Jacob’s nostrils, as the song returned, and he saw that he was by the fire, almost exactly where his grandfather stood all those decades ago.

“Where once stood
the Bullgari,
was left naught
but the fallen.”

“M’saion Owsla-fa.”

The old hares finally fell still and silent, as Burukgazi approached Jacob. Ata paused when Jacob looked at him in puzzlement, “But there was one left; his leg was broken, and they left him behind.”

The assembly started at that. The old Sgt. peered closely at Jacob, “Then tell me truly, boy; what did this survivor say?”

“He said, ‘Zaicheta, zagubikhme zaicheta!’ What does it mean?”

Burukgazi chuckled, “It means, Owsla Raibert, that you are indeed Owsla-fa Rautha’s grandchild.” he said while cradling his Yataghan in his arms. “It also means that this,” holding the sword out to Jacob, “is yours.”

“Mine?!” Jacob stared in shock at the alarmingly familiar blade now in his hands.

“Yes; when Constantin finally married Marli-fa Banu Rautha and took her name, he left the Uzun family sword, this sword, in my care. Long has it waited, but now is the time. Yours is a deep and storied lineage, and I have no doubts now that you will yet add to the song of your ancestors.”

Chapter End Notes

Sultan Mehmed the Second had initially intended to complete the unification of Anatolia under Turkish rule. What he and his army had not anticipated was the stiff resistance to both Turkish rule and occupation by the ethnic Efrafan population of Cappadocia. They practiced a derivative form of Orthodox Catholicism which integrated their own historical and cultural faith traditions: traditions the Sunni Ottoman Sultans would not allow. The harsh landscape and natural combativeness of the Efrafan people, combined with the direct military support of the Byzantine Empire made any attempt to cross the
region a death sentence for Mehmed's army. He instead chose to bypass Cappadocia and take Constantinople, cutting the Efrafans off from military and economic support.

Once Mehmed finally made it to Constantinople after detouring around Cappadocia, he found that the Pare inter Pares had called for an Orthodox Crusade. The first force to respond came from the Wallachian Prince Vladimir Tepisch, who sent an army of Teutonic Wolves and Bears, as well as a large number of foxes from the Romany tribes. When faced with so dire a force while at the extreme end of his supply line (which unknown to him had been cut off by Efrafan Ostrich Cavalry) he chose to negotiate a peace between the Ottoman Sultanate and the Byzantine empire. When the Ottomans fell to infighting during the next century, Constantinople seized the opportunity to retake all of Anatolia.

While most of the Wallachian soldiers returned to the Carpathians at the conclusion of the Ottoman Crusade, many Romany remained behind, both to seek their fortunes away from Teutonic persecution and to act as envoys with the neighboring kingdoms. Many such families have faithfully served the Anatolian nation in the intervening five centuries, with most settling in Efrafan communities, in order to enjoy the religious autonomy to be found there.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

It is not only the soldier who feels the impact of the bullet. Events abroad have ramifications at home.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is getting a little tiresome. What is Buyuk so worked up about?

“I’m telling you, it’s no big deal! I was just caught up in the moment.”

“Hraka ‘It’s no big deal’; veheeri!”

“I didn’t have a vision! You don’t see visions of the past while dancing around a fire any more than an angry bearded goat with fidelity issues living in the clouds is responsible for lightning strikes.”

How can someone tossing around such superstitious claptrap look so smug?

“Throughout our history, Owsla fae have been guided by veheer; even Ephraim Stihrath-rah had a vision during the Kilic Hain before the Battle of Issus.”

(sigh) “Alright, I’ll bite, Kaan; braltholme? (What did he foresee?) ”

“I’m glad you asked!”

Chrissakes! If he spontaneously breaks out in tweed, I’m jumping out the window; I don’t care how fast we’re going.

“How tells us that he saw a Stihrath bush, standing between a Nemean Lion, and a host of Aegean goats and aurochs. While the Stihrath protected the lion, his shadow stunted the bush so that it could not flourish and spread. Soon, the Stihrath became too sickly to hold back the onslaught, and the Stihrath was trampled and devoured. When the vision had passed, Ephraim knew that he
had to break from the Achaemenid and Nemean Kings. That was the first veheer; ever since, every Owslafa has had a vision. It is one of the signs that sets the lines of Kings apart from the Erafil in general.”

That’s, sort of what I remember Con-ni-Fa telling me, but, Hoo boy. “Alright, assuming a good Eastern Orthodox Catholic boy buys into magical King visions, are you saying I’m destined to be Owslafa because I had one of these veheer? I mean, mine wasn’t prophetic; I imagined…”

“Ahem!”

“…Saw the battle of Edirne-Nin Altan. That’s not prophetic, that’s a History Channel mini-series.”

“No, I don’t believe it means you are destined to be Owslafa. Not all veheer become Owslafa, but all Owslafa are veheer; the veheer are kept and preserved by their family lines for their families alone, so don’t bother asking about Campion’s or Thlayli’s. Those are for your family to know.”

“Sure, great. Any other side-effects of pre-Owslafa onset I should know about? Headaches, dizziness, an urge to conquer Europa or an insatiable hunger for the flesh of the living?”

“No, but veheer always precedes a time of great strife, a crucible if you will.”

“Great, another fire I have to jump over.”

Chapter Six

Amelia sat in her dorm room at Barkley Law School looking over a list of foreign outreach programs available for college students on the university website. It had been a month since Jacob’s last letter detailing his trip to Cappadocia and Edirne, and while she felt a little jealous of the opportunities he was having, to travel the ancient homeland, it stirred in her a desire to travel there herself; who knew, maybe she’d visit him while she was abroad.

While she was reviewing the application requirements for a cultural exchange program with the Anatolian State University, one of her classmates burst into her room.

“Amy, you gotta turn on the news!”

Amelia waved off the frantic bobcat “I know Danni, I’ve heard; Lionheart chose a sheep as his running mate. It’s just a gimmick, Granby is a respected incumbent with a proven track record as mayor; plus, Lionheart comes across as too aggressive. The voters are looking for stability, not social reforms.”

Dannielle emphatically shook her head, “Not that! Go to BBC Amerigo, your brother is on the news!”

Amelia opened the news service in a new tab, and saw the headline was a video report entitled, “Attack in Anatolia”. Her paws shook slightly as she opened the file.

“Welcome back and thank you for joining us. We are continuing our coverage of the developing situation and Anatolia. The Associated Press has just been authorized by the LoN Forces to release a video of yesterday’s attack on the LoNF Base Incirlik, taken by Valerie Coneja, a journalism student at the Schiller International University in Paris, Gaul. Viewer discretion is advised, as the following video contains graphic imagery, and may be
inappropriate for some viewers.”

Amelia began frantically calling her mother.

... 

Mrs. Horowitz was one of Katarin’s regulars at the J Street Fur Salon where she worked; the matronly Eweden had been coming to Katarin for more than two decades to get her wool shorn. Today’s subject of gossip was mayoral hopeful Leodore Lionheart’s choice of running mate.

“I would have thought that you would be more excited to have one of your own as a potential Assistant Mayor.” Katarin said in Greek to the sheep in the chair.

“Sadly, she and her family are no longer a part of the Flock; the Bellwether’s turned away from the faith during the Weimar Republic civil war, and the ensuing Holocaust. To this day, they carry such anger for what happened, and no matter how much we try to reach out to them, they feel that it is God who failed them; such a pity.”

The shop’s phone rang in the background and was answered by Matilda, a slight coyote and former classmate of Amelia and Jacob. “J Street Fur Salon, can I make a… oh hey Amy! Mrs. Rautha, your daughter’s on the phone. What? Okay, hold on.” She set the receiver down next to its cradle and walked over to the TV playing a ‘Dynasty’ re-run. “Amy says there’s something we need to see on PBS Newshour; What channel is KCTS again?”

“It should be channel 9.” Katarin turned to the television. By now, everyone had stopped what they were doing and had turned to the TV.

The scene shown was the inside of a beige, utilitarian foyer. A brown jill in denim jacket and skirt knelt facing what must have been a hand-held camera, due to its shaking; a cloud of smoke was visible through a shattered glass double door. A line of LoN MP’s and AEP officers in utilikilts, rifles and body armor were pouring past her through the wreckage. Katarin gasped when one of the MP’s turned to yell something back into the room; it was Jacob.

“Are you recording?” the Jill asked frantically.

“Yeah, just go!” came an equally agitated response.

“Okay, okay. This is Valerie Esperanza Coneja reporting…” Both she and the camera mammal flinched at the sound of automatic weapons fire, “…reporting from the front gate of LoNF Base Incirlik, where an explosion has just occurred. We’re going to move towards the door now, to try to get a better sense of what’s happening.”

As the camera and reporter began to move, everyone in the salon began reacting; most converged on Katarin with offers of support and assistance, both moral and practical. The Rautha matron pinched her eyes closed for a second and took a shuddering breath. She opened her eyes again when Mrs. Horowitz clasped her arm.

“Dearie, you need to call the Red Cross; give them Jacob’s name, duty station, unit and commander. They’ll get in touch with him and his commander will have him call you.” The elderly ewe’s eyes conveyed calm and sympathy for the mother’s plight.

The view on screen settled near the broken entryway; to the right was what appeared to be a large vehicle gate which had suffered the brunt of an explosion, though the structure remained largely intact. The still burning wreckage of what might have been a truck was tangled up in the middle of a
series of metal posts sticking out of the ground, effectively blocking access to the base. Mammals in LoN uniforms could be seen dragging victims out of the damaged portions of the gate complex, while the sound of gun fire continued.

“We can see what I can only guess was a car bomb caught in the, I believe they’re called Dragons Teeth, and though serious damage has been done, the gate is still intact. We can see that personnel are currently being evacuated…” Valerie stopped as a quartet of grey shapes buzzed overhead, causing her and the camera mammal to look up in time to see the LoN marked Ornicopter gunships break formation and began firing to Miss Coneja’s right.

“I don’t keep that information with me, it’s in my desk at home. I’ll have to go and get it!” Katarin began moving until Amanda Adame rested a hand on her shoulder.

“You stay here, I’ll go to St. Agnes’ and get your little ones. Matilda,” the last said almost as a bark, startling the weeping young canid out of her stupor, “…tell Amy you’ll call her back, then call up Mr. Rautha and tell him to bring Jacob’s contact information from Katya’s desk.” The young coyote seemed to rally, being given something to do. “We’re all here for you.” The Anatolian vixen said before departing to bring Katarin’s small children to her from the local Reman Catholic school. The report droned on.

…”

“RPG!” The shout was all the warning anyone had before a shriek filled the air, followed by a blast that rocked one of the cruisers and knocked one of the AEP officers into the open; before the enemy could capitalize on the opportunity, a black hare in LoN livery dashed over to haul the AEP red fox back into cover.

“What do you mean, ‘Granby put a gag order on the report’? That kind of censorship is not only a violation of the Civil Liberties Act, it’s a breach of our contract with the Polis; who does that toady little mule deer think he is to try and censor ME?!”

The camera view shifted back towards the gate, showing several armored mega-fauna rushing towards the gate, before a pair of elephants took a knee and hoisted large tubes to their shoulders.

“We’re seeing reinforcements from the base garrison, the Africorps’ UHI, or Ultra Heavy InfaAHHH!” Both the reporter and camera mammal jumped in shock as the heavily armored mega fauna discharged their shoulder-fired cannons, though they soon recovered and panned back to the left to show the shredded remains of several of the attacking vehicles. The military-police line was now advancing on the attackers under suppressive fire.

“I Know damn well how the public reacts in an election cycle, I’ve seen enough of them; you call Granby back and tell him I’m pulling Bull-Horn’s support of his campaign… not his office you
ponce, him! Have it delivered in a candy-gram for all I care!”

“SHUT UP!” Margret Hornblower was clutching her manual hooves to her ears while squeezing her eyes shut. “Our son could be dead and all you can think about are the election ratings and Civil Liberties violations, just shut up!”

Horace the elder was stunned into silence by his wife’s outburst; what was he supposed to do? The attack was 24 hours past now, there was nothing he could do about it; nothing he could do to ensure the safety of his only child, whom he had sent to the military to try and teach him a lesson. All he could think to do was deal with his company and hope that his son was still alive.

“I, I think the fighting’s over now; I can see the LoN and AEP forces coming back with some mammals in tow. I’ll try to get some interviews out. In the meantime, this is Valerie Esperanza Coneja, signing off.”

The scene shifted back to PBS Newshour desk as various pundits began weighing in on the attack, and its broader implications.

“Nate, first things first; find out how my son is doing… I don’t know, that’s what I pay you for, now get it done! And find out about that Coneja girl, see what it’ll take to bring her on with ZNN.” Horace hung up, threw his phone to the side, and scooped his wife into his arms, and tried to hide his own tears.

Chapter End Notes

With the establishment of the Continental Congress at the conclusion of the Amerigon Revolution, the new nation established it's overarching political philosophy: that each State in the Confederation was entitled to self rule without outside interference, so long as that rule did not adversely impact its neighbors, or interfere with inter-state trade. This policy was first put to the test during the Amerigon Civil War when, over a seven year period, several states and Polis' came into conflict over the practice of slavery. The industrial north, citing the threat of a general Europan embargo of Amerigon goods, began placing tariffs on goods from 'Slave States'. Those states in turn claimed such trade policies violated the Inter-State Trade Act of 1803.

The second time this autonomy was tested was during the 1950's and 60's, when large numbers of carnivores and omnivores began fleeing the Polis of Zootopia. Their tales of enforced segregation and mandatory shock collars for all so called, 'Predator' classed mammals were met with Zootopian declarations of Constitutionally protected autonomy. No official news moved across the Zootopian border for nearly a decade and a half.

The matter came to a head when a Yamatonese fox named Inari Ryugi, the second cousin of then sitting Emperor Shin of the Daisagi clan, was assaulted and imprisoned during a business trip to Zootopia for not having a shock collar on. The threat of open war with the Yamatonese Empire, as well as equal threats of trade sanctions against any state openly trading with Zootopia, finally gave the Confederation the leverage they needed to force Zootopia to open its lines of communication. While Zootopia did not lose its autonomy, it did gain a worldwide reputation for speciest policies, one which the office of the Mayor and the Polis Senate have waged an ongoing PR campaign to combat.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

It is the soldiers lot to stand in the breach, no matter the cost. Jacob faces his first true test.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Dear everyone,

Sorry for not writing sooner, but it’s been really hectic this last week. I’m doing okay right now. I’ve included a picture of the whole gang. Can’t say much else. Thank you for the warm wishes from everyone.

My love to the whole neighborhood, Jacob.

P.S. Con-ni-Fa, what can you tell me about Veheer?

Chapter Seven

Three days of continuous interrogations followed the attack, carried out in the second-floor intelligence section of the Barracks building. This was the seventh, and last mammal captured from the assault on the gate, a twenty-something fallow deer. Jacob was surprised at how banal the entire affair was; there were only three bio-metric chip controlled doors, with one of those being the main entrance. The only other obvious sign that this area wasn’t simply a random wing of the AEP Barracks was the presence of armed guards at several sentry points throughout the section. To be fair, the only parts he had been allowed access to where the interview room, where he was assigned interior security, the break room, the bathroom, and the lead’s office where someone debriefed him
after every session.

Jacob’s own training and experiences, plus his own trial interviews with ADA Deaux had prepared him for the realities of interrogation practices; no Tinsel-town clap-trap of ‘Good-cop, Bad-cop’, no hammering paws on the table to shock the interviewee, and certainly no threats of torture to extract information. Each mammal was escorted in and secured to the interview table, and then the interrogation team, an Egyptian Jackal named Amon El Masry, and one of a rotating pool of translators, entered; the only individual allowed into the room with any kind of weapon was Jacob, and he was ordered to keep out of arm’s reach at all times. He was also told never to speak where any of the interviewees could overhear.

As the interview dragged on for the fifth hour, Jacob heard something in the voice of the young cervine; a hitch in his speech patterns, a repetition of some local slang where another, more relevant idiom might seem more appropriate. It took all of Jacob’s willpower not to smirk; they got him!

Two hours later, the deer was escorted back to his cell and the team packed their equipment up and departed. Jacob headed straight to the leads office to report what he had heard.

“Pvt. Raibert, reporting Sir!”

When the door was opened, he was greeted by Director Tinley, a red panda from the Tibetan Empire and regional head of the Special Intelligence Directorate (SID), as well as W.O. Mendoza, who was sporting a sling for his right arm and a new hole in his ear. ‘Huh, so that’s what the other hole is.’

“Have a seat young mammal and tell me what got you so excited.”

“Sir?” Both Jacob and Mendoza looked curiously at the aged intelligence officer.

“The last two hours of the interview you could barely keep still, I almost thought I would have to send someone in to replace you. Oh, don’t give me that look; I was profiling mammals while your mother was in diapers. You might as well be a children’s book to me. So, out with it.”

“Yes sir.” Jacob shifted uncomfortably in his chair. “During the last quarter of the interview, I noticed Mr. ‘Sadik’ became tired; his speech patterns changed slightly, though still familiar, as well as his use of idioms and slang became more rote and repetitious than I would expect from a native Anatolian. I believe he received formal training in the Anatolian language. The hint of accent he has is very similar to a friend of mine who used to serve here; I believe our Mr. ‘Sadik’ is a Nasiri tribesman from Purrsia, and his language skill is university taught.”

Tinley quirked a bushy eyebrow at Jacob. “Interesting, we may have to look into that. Was there anything else?”

“Nothing of note other than his anti-carnivore rhetoric, which I think he wholeheartedly believes.”

“Very good. Obviously, the Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) you have signed is in full effect for the five years following your discharge from service, with the penalties for breach of that NDA as stated. Dismissed.”

Both Raibert and Mendoza stood; Raibert saluted, and when Mendoza winced at his reflexive attempt to salute, Jacob raised his own left paw over to his CO’s right temple in the saluting position. At the directors’ peculiar look, Jacob glanced knowingly at Juan’s sling, “Well he certainly can’t do it.”

The senior panda snorted, then returned the salute, dismissing them. Once they were back in the main barracks area, WO Mendoza turned to Jacob.
“Cheeky pup; don’t make me regret what I’m about to do Corporal.”

“Corporal?!” Jacob’s ears shot up in surprise.

“That’s right. Your conduct recently has been exemplary, and you acquitted yourself with distinction during the attack. That, plus Capt. Buyuk’s shining recommendations have given me the leverage to push through a brevet promotion; congratulations!”

Jacob snapped to attention, “Thank you, Sir! I won’t let you down!”

“See that you don’t. Sgt. Malvec in supply has your new uniform issue; head down there and get your insignia straightened out. If you want, you can request an issued NCO’s sword, as you are authorized to wear one now, though regulations do permit the wear of ‘culturally significant articles’. I understand you recently came into possession of an heirloom sword; you may wear that, if you wish. Take some time to yourself but stay on post; I’m going to be assigning you a detail in the near future, so stay sharp until then.”

The assigned detail came a week and a half later, when the entirety of F Troop was loaded up, along with a mixed squadron of RAT Recon and Gunship Ornicopters and a company of Red Horse engineers. All these units were arranged in Platoon sized units of one MP squad, one Engineering squad, and one RAT Flight with support crew. As luck would have it, Jacob’s platoon included all of his circle of friends. Trailing after the battalion-strength convoy was the AP news team, including Valerie Coneja.

They drove east for the better part of the morning until they reached the city of Antioch. They had orders to refurbish a series of redoubts set up near the Assyrian border; these were a remnant of the defensive works established during the Spring Revolution and the failed attempt to overthrow the Purrsian Shah almost 30 years ago. Leaving the AP news team at the command post, Jacob’s platoon, under the command of Sgt. Tannhauser, was assigned the northernmost post. The next nearest post was one-and-a-half kilometers southwest on the other side of a line of rocky outcroppings; it took them half an hour to drive around the terrain.

Upon arriving, they were met by a platoon of Efrafan’s from the local SWD battalion. They were in light field duty uniforms, with simple load-bearing harnesses for equipment, including a back-mounted retraction wheel connected to their Tactical AC-556; this was to allow them to swiftly secure their weapon should they need to run on all fours. Jacob appreciated the equipment that seemed to be designed with Efrafan tactics in mind. A quiet fell over the formation of hares, who could be heard repeating “\textit{Inle-roo}” in hushed whispers as Jacob was called over by Sgt. Tannhauser.

“Cpl., this is Lt. Yabani Tavsan. His unit will be providing perimeter security while we secure the post during set up; I’ll need you to stick with us to facilitate communications.”

“Yes sir.” Jacob turned to the Lt., mindful not to salute while in a potentially hostile situation. “\textit{I’m Cpl. Jacob Emanuel Raibert. You and your Hrare-lion may call me Emanuel.}”

Jacob noticed the brown hare seemed torn between showing deference to an Owsla such as Jacob, while maintaining military decorum.

\textit{“You carry Elil-zorn, but I do not know the name Raibert.”} The Lt. said while eyeing the sword at Jacobs’ hip.
“And well you needn’t…” Jacob replied calmly, “…it is my father’s name; I will be done with it once I am married. My mother is of the lines of Rautha and Uzun, and it is Thlayli Uzun whose Elilzorn I carry, as my grandfather carried before me.”

“I had heard the son of Constantin had come home. M’saia, Inle-roo Owsla Emanuel.”

“M’saia, Lt. Tavsan. We have much to do yet, shall we begin?” Jacob gestured to the redoubt.

As they went into the work area, Spc. Hornblower gestured to Jacob.

“Hey, what was that business about ‘Larue’?”

“Inle-roo, it means ‘little death’.”

Horace got a mischievous glint in his eye. “No, I’m pretty sure I heard them say ‘Larue’.”

Jacob snorted. “Ass, don’t you have a slit-trench to dig or something?”

It took the better part of two hours for the engineers to set up the temporary generator and microwave rectenna to power the ornicopters. As soon as it was operational, Mousekewitz and Brisby were airborne providing reconnaissance for the SWD detachment, with another gunship kept in reserve. No sooner had Boyan and Hornblower begun breaking ground on the outposts water and fuel tanks, when Mousekewitz called in to the command post.

“Jamboree actual, Raptor, over.”

Tannhauser picked up the radio handset. “This is Jamboree actual, go ahead Raptor, over.”

“Jamboree actual, we have a light vehicle approaching from home base and a dust devil 10 klicks due west, how copy over?”

“Standby, Raptor.” the germanian wolf turned to the razorback boar in charge of the radio equipment. “Pataember, did CP (command post) call anything in?” he asked.

“No sir, I’ll check in with them.”

“Raptor, Jamboree actual, keep eyes on, over.”

“Roger, Jamboree actual; holding at Angels 2 (two kilometers altitude).”

“Corporal,” Tannhauser turned to Jacob. “Take a fire team and intercept that vehicle.”

Jacob nodded and, after checking that his helmet radio and earbuds were in and working properly, departed with a Hibernian badger and a machinegun team of two Québécois mule deer in tow.

It wasn’t five minutes after setting up, that the truck in question rounded a bend; it was the AP news team. They stopped as soon as they were flagged down. Getting out, Valerie and her armadillo camera mammal looked slightly alarmed.

“Inle-Rah rooliti! (Son of Death) Are you trying to kill me, or just my career?!” The Lapino jill grasped her chest in shock.

Jacob motioned for the fire team to lower their weapons. “Jamboree actual, Scout one; false alarm, it’s the AP team.”
“Copy scout one, bring them in. Raptor, Charlie Mike (continue mission).”

Jacob turned to the flustered Lapina. “Sorry miss Coneja, but we saw a vehicle approaching, and we weren’t told you were coming; and call me Emanuel.”

The jill visibly relaxed at the cultural familiarity. “Frith a mes, (greetings/thankyou) Emanuel, but I heard them radioing you as we were leaving.”


Jacob shrugged at Valerie’s incredulous look. “Welcome to the military; home of the lowest bidder.”

Everybody piled into the news van and headed back to the redoubt. As they pulled into the little fort, a series of explosions knocked the truck onto its side. Everyone scrambled to get clear of the van. Jacob looked around at the scene; the small command post next to the generator was destroyed, with the combat engineers providing medical assistance to Tannhauser, Tavsan and Pataember. Every other able body was on the wall laying down fire towards where Brisby and Mousekewitz were firing.

Jacob bellowed out. “Ceasefire, ceasefire! They’re under cover in the Wadi, stop wasting ammunition!”

With the camps main radio taken out in the initial attack, Jacob got on his helmet radio as it was just powerful enough to reach the gunship. “Raptor, Scout one, return to base; you are bingo power!”

“Say again, Scout one, say again.”

“Raptor, you are bingo power; return to base.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Brisby replied. “Copy scout one, returning to base.”

With Mousekewitz and Brisby no longer in danger of being stranded without power, Jacob turned his attention to the deployed Efrafans. “Scout one to all units return to base; I say again this is Inle-roo to all units, returned to base.” Once he received an affirmative he turned his attention to the assembled mammals. “What were we just hit with, and what’s the damage?”

Boyan stood up from putting a compress on the engineering sergeant’s head. “Light mortar, I think, very sudden; all of our NCO’s are injured, and all our trucks are out of commission, though I think the rest of the equipment is OK. Pataember was trying to raise the CP when we were hit.”

Jacob began scanning the ridge line behind the base. “That’s awful accurate for no ranging shots they must have spotters up there. Raptor, any movement on the ridge?”

“Two mammals on foot; I see long arms.”

“Take them out, then bring it in.”

The only response he received was a sudden burst of weapons fire into the side of the mountains, and then the buzzing sound of the returning gunship. By the time they landed, the bulk of the SWD force had returned. Jacob called all that was left of leadership, Spc. Hornblower, Spc/F. Brisby, and Sgt. Arap, who bore a striking resemblance to the hare from Jacob’s dream, behind the berm the engineers had made while excavating.

“Sgt., will you need me to translate?” Jacob asked.
Arap responded in near-perfect Anglican. “No, I learned anglican at the International University in Timbuktu.”

“Huh, good to know. So, what do we have, what did we lose, and what’s our next move?”

“Well,” Brisby piped up, “…I would have to double check our gun camera footage to be sure, but that dust devil we saw looked to be a battalion strength convoy of light vehicles headed this way.”

“Military?” asked Arap.

Teresa snorted. “Not unless the Assyrian military relies heavily on multi colored Paykan and Bardo sedans and Pickups.”

The Sergeant shook his head. “The Assyrians hate the Shah and all he touches, they prefer Russo-Slav vehicles. Those you destroyed in the wadi were all sheep, and the Assyrian army is almost exclusively jackals.”

Jacob nodded. “So, a battalion strength force of herbivorous irregulars in technicals. Anything else?”

“Yes, they reeked of Cigdem Sheesha.”

“Chigger-Cheetos what?” Horace looked puzzled.

“A flower derived narcotic used in religious ceremonies; a little bit is supposed to bring you closer to your god, a lot makes you susceptible to suggestion; too much makes you paranoid and violent.” Jacob responded. “It means we’re dealing with religious fanatics, probably the same ones that attacked the base. So, what’s our status?”

“Whelp,” Horace leaned back, “…aside from Tannhauser, Tavsan and Pataember, we’ve no one who’ll be getting a Purple Heart yet, and the Redoubt’s structure is sound; the pillbox over there,” he gestured to a semi-recessed, fully enclosed concrete octagon, “…is where we put all of our munitions and demolition equipment, so that’s safe. I suppose with time I could repair the -86 generator, comms-gear and rectenna or I could fix up one of the trucks, but not both with what we have on hand.”

“Gear before vehicles.” Jacob shook his head. “Even our biggest truck couldn’t fit everyone, and I won’t leave anybody to those mad-mammals; I want to focus on…”

“Contact southeast! RPG!” a mammal still on the wall yelled, just before a projectile glanced off the side of the fortifications and tumbled into the redoubt.

“Batari!” Horace bellowed to a Sumatran tigress EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) specialist next to the pillbox. When she looked up, he pointed to the battered RPG in their midst. “UXO (Un-exploded Ordnance).” He then joined the rest of the unit on the firing line, 12.7mm rifle in hand.

Sgt. Arap was speaking into his own shortwave radio, when he looked up to Jacob. “Inle - roo, my hayessil (scouts) say this is a probing force; two squads with rifles and RPG’s, no more. They’re in the wadi.”

“That empties out onto that dirt road over there; think your Hrayfa can flush them out by the road?” Jacob gestured to a path leading out of the mountains about 100 meters from the fort to their left. When Arap nodded, Jacob turned to his LoN comrades. “Pridi, when I tell you, I want you to focus fire on the road where the scrub line ends.” The Thai muntjac and his jungle cat assistant gunner immediately repositioned their light machinegun (LMG) and awaited the command to fire. While all this was happening, Valerie and her camera mammal were setting up on top of the pillbox.
The counter attack was as swift as it was brutal. When Arap indicated his team was in position, Jacob raised his paw up and then swept it down in a cutting motion; Sgt. Arap gave the order, and chaos erupted at the bottom of the hill as half a dozen fragmentation grenades were hurled into the wadi, followed by short bursts of carbine fire. Nearly a dozen and a half sheep and goats armed with assault rifle stumbled out of cover onto the road, turning to face their unseen attackers. Once Jacob was certain all the assailants were in the open, he simply yelled, “Now!” At this, his two light machinegun teams opened fire. It was all over five seconds later.

Jacob turned to Sgt. Arap. “Sergeant, I want your mammals to rig up booby traps with whatever they left behind, then get back here to rotate with another squad. Pridi, back to normal fields of fire; what’s the ammo situation?”

After a short review of the assembled soldiers, Pridi replied, “500 rounds each for the LMG’s, and roughly five magazines each for all the long arms. Nobody has thrown any grenades, so full loadout there, such as it is. Not enough for a pitched battle.”

“We-well, why not use their stuff?” inquired the visibly shaken armadillo from atop the pillbox.

Pvt. Briosca snorted. “This isn’t a video game, pup; ya donna pick up a random gun when yours runs dry!”

“Eyes front, private.” Jacob said casually. “He’s right though; we’ve not trained with those weapons, and we don’t know their condition. We’re better off being cautious with our limited resources, rather than wasting time with unfamiliar equipment.” He became quiet for a moment as he looked at the camera. “How good is that thing?”

The flustered armadillo immediately perked up. “Oh, this is a GY-HM650 Mobile News Camcorder; it’s one of the best on the market right now! It’s got nph phrh !” Valerie put a manual paw over her partner’s mouth.

“How do you want to know? I’ll not have you endangering my friend…” Valerie demanded.

There was a general grumbling coming from the assembled soldiers.

“At Ease!” Jacob bellowed. “Be at ease, Marlifa . For what I have in mind, you two are in the best spot possible; an elevated position with clear line of sight. I could only elevate you more by perching you in Hornblower’s antlers.”

“Well that’s not happening; dad wants me to be in the family business, but not as equipment. I’m not a camera mount or turret!”

Jacob got a thoughtful look on his face again, then shook his head and turned his attention back to the defensive jill. “What I need, is to know what the enemy is doing, in general; are they packing their vehicles, are they dancing, eating, are they…”

The camera mammal piped up, “Passing a sweet bong around while some gnarly goat stands on a car hood babbling at them like Hugh Mungus from that old 1970’s ‘Mad Yax: Road Warrior’ movie?”

As several troops started laughing, Jacob and Arap looked at each other with concern. “Is, is that … bad?”

Sgt. Arap looked with sympathy at the two civilians. “It means they will attack very soon, in force.” He then turned and began organizing his troops.

Jacob turned to the LoN forces. “Brisby, Hornblower, I need to know what we can have ready right now! I know the birds are grounded; is there any way to get the Metal Storm pods rigged up to fire
“manually, or by remote?”

“Not in the time we have; Damn it!”

“Language, Brisby.” Horace jokingly admonished.

“I will scale you like a mountain, crawl up your gigantic nostril and stab you in the brain!”

“Easy Teresa, we’ll need him; I have…part of an idea. First, Horace; you said demo equipment?”

“Yeah, a Giant Viper rocket launched mine clearance line charge system. Fine if we can get them to line up but otherwise…”

Jacob had a distant look in his eyes. “They’ll come along the road.”

“Emanuel, how can you possibly know that?” inquired Brisby.

“Memories of the East, lighting the path Westward.” Jacob closed his eyes and breathed deeply for a moment.

“Larue?” Horace and Brisby both looked at Jacob with concern.

“Uh, boss mammal? They really are going Road Warrior on us; they’re piling into their cars and circling now!” Valerie’s camera mammal informed. “Shouldn’t we, I don’t know, call for help?”

“Our radio equipment is destroyed, and no-one brings cellphones into a potential combat zone. Do you have yours?”

“Yes, but we don’t have any signal.” Valerie said as she looked at her phone.

Jacob huffed in resignation. “So, we’re on our own.”

A weak voice rasped from where the wounded were being treated. “Gunship.”

Jacob headed over and knelt next to Sgt. Tannhauser. “Easy Sgt. We don’t have a generator to power the air assets. The gunships are grounded.”

The timber wolf gave a sluggish shake of his head. “Fuel-cell, courier.”

Jacob stared blankly for a moment, then smacked himself on the forehead. “Thank you, Sgt.” He then stood and addressed the assembled mammals. “Lightner, Harvey, get your Hornet ready to fly; strip everything off that you don’t need to lighten the load. You’re heading to Redoubt # 2 over the ridge on fuel-cell backup to report our situation. Brisby, you and Mousekowitz mount up, have your Raptor’s weapons pods loaded up, then bring all the extras up to the firing line. Boyan!” The red deer looked up as mammals were scurrying everywhere getting into position. “Get the Giant Viper system down to where the Wadi meets the road facing west, then set it up to be activated from as far away as possible; when as much of the convoy as you feel comfortable is in range, fire and get back here. Sgt. Arap,” Jacob began stripping out of his armor, “…have your Hrare - lion strip all non-combat gear; we’ll be moving low and fast.”

The sergeant was about to speak when his eyes went wide “M’saia, Owsla! Hrare-lion, M’saion ell, sith-zhylon hraray!” He said this as he drew his combat knife and held it above him, to which the assembled Efrafans began chanting, “M’saion, Inle-roo!”

“Horace,” Jacob started towards the Raptor flight, “…you’ve always been an ass, now let’s see about making you a Bad-Ass!” Horace followed in morbid curiosity.
“How did I let you talk me into this?!.” Horace demanded as Brisby (or someone) strapped a neck brace on him.

“How did I let you talk me into this?!” Horace demanded as Brisby (or someone) strapped a neck brace on him.

“Come on, Zoo-U’s a party college, are you saying this is any weirder than your frat days?” Jacob asked while helping drag the hood from one of the wrecked military trucks over for Hornblower to use as a makeshift shield.

“No, I can safely say I never did anything close to mounting a gunship to my rack, so I could serve as an impromptu Turret!” Horace clenched his teeth in frustration.

“If you don’t stop wiggling, I will throw up on your head!” Fivel yelled through the com channel.

“Emanuel,” Valerie called out, “…they’re done circling, and heading this way!”

“Alright,” Valerie called out, “…they’re done circling, and heading this way!”

“Ach, you know the plan; once Boyan diverts them off the road, you sucker them in with light fire. Once they’re in the wadi, you focus fire on their right flank, over by the road, then walk your fire to the center but no farther than that gnarled olive tree; the Hrare-lion and I will hit them from the left flank. Everyone, secure comms three, check!” Once everyone had called in on the secure frequency, Jacob and the Efrafans headed out to the southern end of the Wadi.

A few minutes felt like hours as the LoN forces awaited contact. Soon, they heard the sound of engines coming up the road. From their vantage on the pillbox, the AP team recorded the battle for posterity. The convoy was 50 meters from the launcher when Boyan fired the mine-clearance rocket. Forty of the 100 vehicles were caught in the road when the 200-meter-long explosive line detonated, shredding some vehicles, while others were hurled dozens of meters in either direction. Those survivors who headed north off the road were now well within the range of the LMG’s and swiftly cut down; those who went south had some protection due to the Wadi. Their vehicles, however, were well inside the range of Horace, the living turret.

“Horace, look left, more, stop!”

-BLAM-

“OW! Sunnova…”

-BLAM-

“G#$E%$!”

“Alright Horace, kneel down; Reload!”

The survivors madly drove for the cover of the wadi, only for the first few to trigger the series of IED’s laid earlier. Of the more than 400 mammals who began the attack, only 50 made it out of the tree line. As they scrambled out of the ditch, they began firing wildly into the redoubt, but it was too little, too late. The soldiers poured fire into the enemies’ right flank, causing them to rush in the opposite direction, and that was when the Efrafans struck, Jacob in the lead; the Hrare-lion charged out of the low brush on all fours with blades clenched in their teeth. Half the unit paused mid run to pop up and begin shooting into the confused force in front of them, while Jacob and the few hares in the lead rushed in and lashed out at the ankles of the enemy with their blades. Those who followed washed over the remaining attackers like a wave. Only silence remained.

Valerie sat in shocked silence; it was one thing to hear tales of past glories, of the Efrafan Lapiniius Australis’ valiant, if failed rebellion, of the Legion of Janisarius marching with Marcus Aurochius
through Germania and Gaul, or dutifully standing guard on Haredrian’s Wall. But to see Jacob through the powerful lens of the camera, his Battle Dress Kilt (BDK) tattered and covered in the blood of his foes, she could not doubt that he was indeed Inle-rah Rooliti, the Son of Death and born for war. Just then a braying cry went out as Horace stood on the rampart, brandishing his car hood shield and carbine like his Vinlandic ancestors, a testament to the absurdity of warfare.

God, she needed a drink.

…

It took another two hours to cobble together a radio and contact CP, which was when they learned that simultaneous attacks had occurred at nearly all the redoubts, as well as against the regional cell towers. Jacob’s post, it seemed, had been the primary focus, with all the other locations being attacked by platoon or company strength forces. Once command was assured the area was secured, an airship was sent from Antioch to medevac the wounded, with a second airship bringing relief supplies and replacements for most of the damaged equipment. Repairs and refurbishment of the redoubt was not finished until the end of the next day, by which time the fresh combined LoNF/SWD Brigade which was to man the network of defenses arrived. With that, the Incirlik contingent returned to base.

It would be another week of debriefing and after-action reports before Jacob and friends, to include Valerie and her camera-mammal, had any time off.

“Relax, Turret! The rest of us have been to this place a bunch of times, it’s great!” Jacob commented over the sound of Mediterranean Disco music.

Horace snorted at the nickname. “The last time I went anywhere with you, I was shot at and you strapped a gunship to my head; Odin only knows what you’ll have me doing by the end of tonight.”

Brisby began banging her glass on the table. “Slippery Slope fallacy; one shot penalty, Horace!”

“What?!” the bull moose looked aghast as Jacob flagged down a passing waiter. “We weren’t even debating!”

“What are they going on about?” Valerie asked while looking over to Boyan.

“Is drinking game between Emanuel and Horace; pick topic to debate, then argue. If use logical fallacy, or reuse argument, is penalty and must take shot. If point is conceded get hors d’oeuvre. Winner has least empty shot glass or is still conscious. You said you are leaving for Amerigo?”

“That would make for some very lively and entertaining political debates, and yes but not until I finish my degree in a year and a half. A telecommunications company in northern Pacifica has offered me a contract and to pay my school loans.” She noted as a platter of dual-sized shots of Raki arrived at the table.

“OOHH, Horace!” Fivel bounced in his seat. “New reality TV show: competitive drunken political debates! You’re getting out, pitch the idea to your dad!”

“Nop[e. Horace said as he downed his shot. “Didn’t get past the censors.”

“Wait, wait, wait…” Jacob said as he drank a shot from the tray, “…did you say Wouldn’t or Didn’t?”

“Why?” Valerie asked while pointing to Jacob.
“He got off topic, which is also a penalty; and it was ‘Didn’t.’” Horace said. “There are some truly, painfully stupid shows that get pitched to my father’s company; what you see in syndication are the ones that are likely to have long-term profit. Besides, I think I want to focus more on reforms; get more mammals involved in the day-to-day operations of the city than has traditionally happened, especially more inclusivity for smaller mammals. From what I’ve been hearing, polls are showing Granby’s popularity has dipped below 50%. If my dad keeps backing Lionheart, Zootopia may see the first pred… carnivore mayor in more than 80 years. That’s a lot of political good will, and I intend to capitalize on it.”


“Yes, to Montreal; the border dispute between Acadia and Vinland is getting worse, and Quebec has requested the LoN to step in to mediate, or at the very least keep the fighting contained.”

Fivel looked up from his drink, “Well good luck with that. The Njords and the Gauls have been fighting each other since before the crusades, and I don’t see them stopping any time soon.”

Valerie pulled a tablet out and began typing on it. “You could always just show them this and tell them to play nice or else.” She turned the screen to the rest of the table, showing the still frame of Horace defiantly standing on the redoubt wall after the battle. Amidst the laughter and cheers of the assembled mammals, Horace tried to close the image. His attempts caused the screen to advance to the next picture; Jacob in his stained BDK standing on the bank of the Wadi, ears pointing straight back while gesturing with his Yataghan. There was silence for a moment, then…

“Damn, Larue! You are one scary little bunny.”

“What the hell have I told you about that word!” Jacob was standing in his seat, pointing an accusing digit at Horace.

“Enough to know it’s accurate in this case; you screwed the lot of them, and they sure as hell payed for it.” Horace tapped Jacob on the top of his head.

Jacob, stared for a few seconds, then sat down in a huff. “I…concede the point.”

As Horace was crowing his victory and claiming his prized snack, Teresa walked across the table to the tablet. “Boyan, could you get your camera ready?” Once the red deer had his phone out and ready to take pictures, Brisby swooned against the screen of the tablet; the result looked like a classic Furzetta painting. There was much rejoicing.

“Whelp,” Jacob stood in his chair and raised his glass, “… come what may, this day is ours. Let its memory light our way forward.”

“Here here!”

Chapter End Notes

Following the end of the so called, 'Tannerman Era', Zootopia made great efforts to rehabilitate its image. One of the ways it chose, was the dissemination of its advanced rectenna network. This system was capable of tracking individual RFID tags, cross reference them with known databases, and determine how much power to beam to said
receiver. This has allowed the Polis and others like it to utilize fleets of electric vehicles for a nominal fee paid by the consumer. That this network in Zootopia was completed five years before the Ryugi incident, and was specifically designed to track and power 'Predator Behavior Control Collars', has been a black mark on the Polis' self styled image as an egalitarian haven for all species.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

As one path ends, another begins. Jacob comes home.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Okay, Service Dress blouse, jacket, and kilt? Check! Duffle bag? Check! Terminal Leave orders? Check! Con-ni-Fa’s Yataghan? Check! Here goes nothing. -knock-knock-knock-

“One moment! Joseph, put that down right now! -click- Yes, can I -GASP- Jacob?!”

“M’saia Marli-fa, hlienes laya.” (Hello mother, I’m home.)

Chapter 8

Within an hour, nearly everyone from the neighborhood had arrived at the home of Katarin Rautha to welcome Jacob back. The gathering soon turned into a block party; Amelia and Matilda were happily gossiping while Matilda’s new husband, Alejandro Alvaredo, who brought his taqueria, was cooking up a storm. Naz Aksoy, who had successfully emigrated two years ago with her son thanks to Zootopia’s extremely liberal immigration policies, was working with the Adame’s to wrangle the neighborhood children, even as she half-heartedly fended off the attentions of Giuseppe Alagona, a Reman wolf of considerable charm and dubious heritage. Ilkin Kadir Demirci, who had also taken advantage of the porous immigration system, was paying court to Katarin, while she sat with her father; Constantin cradled his old sword and regaled the crowd with tales of the old country. Jacob could not remember his mother ever looking so happy, surrounded by her family. Finally, there were the venerable Mrs. Horowitz escorted by Rabbi Lowe; the nonagenarian lion was universally accepted as the defacto community leader.
Jacob did his best to be sociable, but by the third well-wisher to ask him what it was like to be in combat, his patience and calm were beginning to wear thin. What was he supposed to say, that the smell of cooking meat from Alejandro’s cart reminded him of a burned out Mosque he came across during an operation? Or how he kept reaching for his sidearm every time he caught a glance of the darkened culverts along the canals? He was very thankful for the distraction when a sedan pulled up, and out stepped Jean-Pierre DuPrey and Jeannette Deaux.

As Jeannette walked over to Amelia, Jean-Pierre came over to Jacob. “I’d heard that a trouble maker was spotted in town! How are you doing Emanuel?”

“Very well sir. I’ve a few months of terminal leave to get myself settled in, start looking for a new job. How about yourself?”

“Well, life is certainly looking up.” DuPrey said as he glanced towards Jeannette. “Also, Chief Winterhorn finally got approval from the Commissioner’s office to stand up a new station house here in the Seventh; it’s actually going to be in the old Commons Municipal Police building on Thurman Ave. As such, we’re trying to recruit smaller officers, since this is going to be a proper police station, not a TUSK block house or SWAT Barracks. You’ve heard of the MII?”

“Lionheart’s Mammal Inclusion Initiative? Yeah, Turret, a buddy of mine from Incirlik wouldn’t stop talking about it when it passed the council vote.”

“Well, it has its first graduate; a rabbit, Judy Hopps from Bunnyburrow, just started with the First Precinct this morning. If she made it, you shouldn’t have any problems.”

Jacob raised his paws, “Easy now, I only just started my terminal leave; I want to have a little time to myself before I jump back into a uniform.”

“Not a problem, it’ll be a few months before the next recruit training cycle begins. Enjoy your time, and your party.”

Jacob nodded and headed back into the crowd. As DuPrey was about to dive in himself, the wind shifted, carrying the scent of cooked meat. The catamount froze in place as he strained to control his emotions. He was jolted out of his fugue when he felt a firm but massive paw rest on his shoulder. DuPrey looked up to see Rabbi Lowe looking into the wind with a pained expression.

“I was but a cub when the Nazi party seized control of the Weimar Republic and tried to conquer all of Europa. Those bloody-minded wolves preached species dominance over everyone, but especially the Eweden, and the flocks which made up the body of the people. We had always been the targets of Europan fear mongering and hatred, but this was taken to a new level.

“The flocks were gathered into camps, where we were segregated; sheep on one side, all others on another. All were worked to death, but the sheep, when they could no longer work… there was an elaborate ceremony, with…”

Jean interrupted, “With fires and chanting, the smell of burning incense and abject fear, and the cry of innocence and helplessness cut off by a knife stroke!” by then DuPrey was openly crying, though he dared not blink.

Rabbi Lowe stepped around and knelt in front of Jean-Pierre. “But we are not in that place anymore. We are not the product of such savagery; we are its survivors, surrounded now by good mammals who have embraced us for our virtues, and will not condemn us for the sins of our forefathers. Come!” he said while clapping the smaller felid on the shoulder, propelling him towards the crowd. “There is much to celebrate, and I would have you introduce me to the lovely young doe you arrived
O’dark-30 is a euphemism used by many to signify any time before what is considered reasonable to be up and active; for military veterans like Jacob, however, it was the time one awoke to start the day. He had told Fivel and Boyan before he left, that the first thing he would do when he got home was sleep in. Much to his frustration, he found himself wide awake at 5:15, making his bed and wondering what he was going to do that day. Within minutes, his nervous energy demanded some form of release, and so Jacob headed out for a run; down to Abram Square, then along Canal St. to the edge of Little Yamato, and finally home; it was about four miles and should take about half an hour, by which time the household would be awake.

As he ran, he thought about some of the conversations he’d had the night before. He was still uncomfortable with the fact that Buyuk had gotten Jacobs’ name engraved on his grandfather’s blade, but to see the venerable hare reverently trace the line of his fathers and declare that Jacob did indeed belong among them, assuaged a great many of his personal doubts.

“Owslaфа is a burden, not a calling or a title.” He had said while smiling and grasping Jacob on the shoulder. “You led our people to victory in battle, in defense of a holy city, against an oppressive and cruel foe; how could you be anything other than Owslaophe?” The old hare said with tears in his eyes.

From there, conversation turned to plans for the future. It turned out that Amelia had powered through her courses and was only a year away from a law degree. Janet Deaux worked directly under the Executive ADA, and as such had some sway on who was hired. Amelia had a job as a Paralegal waiting for her when she graduated from Barkley Law, and Jacob could not be prouder or happier for his sister.

This helped galvanize his decision to apply for the next recruit training cycle at the Zootopian Police Academy (ZPA). His online search on the matter netted an odd discovery; applications for ZPA admission were hard copy only and needed to be picked up from the Police administrative offices at the First Precinct. Jacob resolved to give Jean-Pierre a call and see if he would be willing to chauffeur him downtown later.

As he entered Abram Square, he noted the early preparations at the Basilica of Our Martyred Lady for the upcoming wedding of Francesca Bagnoli; he remembered her from his time at the Catholic School, and that was one shrew not even Petruchio could tame. After rounding the square and passing the Shalom el Shabbat Temple, he came to St. Augustin’s Orthodox Cathedral where he was joined by Father Niko Tatapolis, who was also in jogging attire; the middle-aged Aegean goat had christened every member of the Rautha family born in Foxborough Parish and was a bit of a health nut.

“Good morning, Emanuel! Care for some company?” the priest asked as Jacob approached.

“Of course, Presbytera; I’ll even match your pace, so you can keep up!” Jacob joked, knowing full well the old goat was in better shape than most half his age. They both set off for Lower Canal St. Early morning fishers dotted the canal shore, both on Upper and Lower Canal Street; Lapino’s, Reman Wolves and Boars were trading friendly barbs and wagers with Efrafan Hares and Foxes and Aegean Goats on who would land the largest perch or the most trout. They paused to wave and greet the two runners by name. The smell of fresh baked bread drifted towards them from the shops on Upper Canal, while several of the factories lining Lower Canal, which had stood empty for more than 60 years, opened their doors again. Everywhere he looked, Jacob saw renewal and hope.
“Father, when did this happen; how did this happen?” Jacob asked.

The priest chuckled. “It happened over the last three years, and it was because of you, my son.”

“Me? I’ve been gone for more than three and a half years, and before that I was part of the reason no-one wanted to open a business here; how can I be the reason for all this?”

“How could Saul, who was a zealous persecutor of early Christians, almost single pawedly be responsible for the survival and flourishing of all Christendom?”

Jacob huffed. “By being called by God to be an apostle; I was arrested and joined the LoNF. Big difference.”

“Is it?” Tatapolis asked. “A miracle is when the seemingly impossible happens; no-one believed Foxborough Parish would ever again be anything other than a Zootopian slum. Then you stood up to the gangs, and the people had hope again. They believed in the community, and fought for it, and it thrived! You gave them that hope. From incorrigible gang-banger to the Hero son of Vulpington Commons seems just as impossible, yet here you are. If that isn’t a miracle, then I don’t know what one is.”

As they came to the end of Lower Canal, they came to Usahito park on the outskirts of the Ko Yamato (Little Yamato) neighborhood, where they turned up Tenno Ave. Bridge onto Upper Canal to head back. Jacob noted several new shops bearing signage with Yamatonese swords. “Those are new.” He commented to his running partner.

“Artisan swordsmiths and associated craftsmammals; they moved in last year.”

“I’ll have to visit them later.” Jacob noticed a group of mammals leaning on motorcycles, eyeing the two of them as they passed.

Father Tatapolis noted Jacob’s scrutiny. “They moved in last year, too. With the increased police presence, they don’t come any farther then Tenno Ave.”

“Let’s hope I don’t have to visit them later.”

…”

Upon returning home, Jacob called DuPrey to see if he would be available to help him in his quest to Join the ZPD; that ADA Deaux groggily answered the phone before handing it off caused him to chuckle.

“(ahem) DuPrey speaking.”

“Ni-pfeffa, it’s Jacob. I was wondering, if it didn’t cut too deeply into your plans today, if you might be able to help me out with something?”

There was a stirring in the background and a short conversation in Cajun Patois.

“Sure; what did you need?”

“A ride downtown; I need to hit the DMV, so I can get my International Operator’s License converted to a Polis Zootopian Driver’s License, and I need to go to Precinct One to pick up an application.”

“Hah! I knew you’d cave.” Jacob could all but hear the smirk on the catamount’s face. “Let’s swing
by the Seventh first; let you meet your future boss, get her recommendation. Do you have a degree? It’s not necessary, but it’ll go a long way to getting your application approved.”

“I have an Associates of Applied Science in Criminal Justice Degree through the Von Clawswitz International War College.” Jacob said with a certain amount of pride; his sister may be more ambitious in her educational goals, but he got his degree first.

“Good, that’s better than a lot of applicants. That should put you in better standing for consideration; between that and the Chief’s recommendation, you should be a shoo-in. I’ll pick you up at your place.”

Jacob thought a moment. “Actually, I’ll be at Podanski’s Deli; I smelled fresh Paczki being made as I was jogging this morning, and if I’m going to be a cop, I should get used to a cop’s diet, right?”

“Cheeky brat! Just for that, you’re buying!”

…

After letting his family know about his plans for the day, Jacob dressed for success; ironically, this involved the suit he had worn for Timo’s trial four years ago. Jacob had never liked Zootopian style; dragging tailored pants and Oxford-style shirts against the lay of one’s fur always irritated him, but he needed to make a good impression today. Once he arrived at Podanski’s, he began the arduous process of convincing Petra and Mikhail that he was not accepting a dozen Paczki gratis. He had finally haggled them up to paying the cost of a half-dozen for the baker’s-dozen they insisted he take, when Jean-Pierre arrived. Collecting his confections, they headed to the Seventh Precinct headquarters building at Block-House 13, located directly between the Foxborough Municipal Aquifer pumping station and the Aberdeen Dr. electrical substation. The 13 Block-Houses that made up the Seventh Precinct were concrete brutalist monstrosities, and alongside the city-wide network of microwave rectennas, were a stark reminder of the Tannerman Era of Zootopia.

Once inside, Jacob caught himself listening for Capt. Buyuk or W.O. Mendoza; for all the seeming mammalian chaos inside, there was a comfortable familiarity and almost military precision to everything.

“Winterhorn served in the Pacifican State Revenue Cutter Service (SRCS), before marrying and moving to Zootopia. She joined the ZPD almost as soon as she arrived and worked her way up. She was assigned Chief two years ago. She runs a tight ship; a hell of a lot better than Trotterman ever did.” DuPrey almost snarled at the mention of the prior, late but not lamented Chief. “Shoot straight with her, and she’ll have your back all the way.”

They arrived at a fire door with the words, ‘Chief G. Winterhorn’, sprayed onto it using stencils. Their knock was immediately answered. “Enter!”

They entered a horse-sized space as square and Spartan as the Block-house itself. A large wrap-around desk occupied the center and right of the office, while on the left wall stood several fireproof file safes. A pair of computer monitors, a keyboard and a picture frame were on the right wing of the desk and all were turned away from the door. There was a window, which Jacob supposed, looked out over Foxborough, though he could barely see over the desk. In the center of the room sat a late middle-aged female reindeer whose summer antlers were only now coming in.

“It’s your day off, sergeant. Shouldn’t you be at home or out with Ms. Deaux?” Her tone was businesslike, but without censure.

“It is ma’am, and I would be, but something came up. I’d like to introduce you to Jacob Emanuel
Raibert, recently of the LoNF Military Police Corps.” DuPrey gestured to Jacob, who had reflexively assumed Parade Rest. “He is considering joining the ZPD; specifically, the Seventh Precinct.”

As soon as she looked at him, Jacob snapped to attention. She quirked an eyebrow and huffed slightly. “Stand at ease.” Jacob’s shoulders immediately relaxed, though his focus remained on his prospective boss. “Raibert was it? I seem to remember a RICO case about four years ago that involved a hare named Raibert. Was that you?”

“That is correct ma’am.”

“Well then…” Winterhorn steepled her hooves in front of her, “…tell me why I should consider hiring a former Happytown gang-banger?”

Jacob bristled slightly but kept his composure.

“You don’t like to be reminded of your past misdeeds, do you mister Raibert?” the chief asked sharply.

“My past deeds and misdeeds are a matter of public record…” Jacob replied with disciplined calm, “…I just detest the name ‘Happytown’. No one from Foxborough Parish calls it that.

“As for my consideration, if it truly is the intent of the ZPD to police Foxborough, not just occupy it, you will need mammals who are familiar with the community, not just the city layout.”

Winterhorn rested her manual hooves on the desk. “Explain.” She gestured to the large step stool equipped chair next to the door. When Jacob turned to mount the chair, he noted the wall around the door was festooned with diploma’s, citations from both the ZPD and the Pacifican SRCS, as well as several professional portrait photographs detailing her rather long career. Jacob thought it telling that they were arranged more for her benefit, than to impress visitors.

Once seated, Jacob locked eyes with the chief. “There are six major cultural groups that live in and around the Vulpington Commons neighborhood of Foxborough, seven if you count the Zootopians who live in the Abernathy Heights and Williston Park neighborhoods.”

“You don’t count them.” Winterhorn asked.

“Your existing cadre of officers are, mostly,” Jacob glanced at Jean-Pierre, “…from Zootopia and already familiar with Zootopian culture. Issues have always arisen from Zootopian authorities neither acknowledging nor respecting the cultural differences in the rest of the community.”

“I see, and the other six?”

“The Aegeans and Eweden live in the Meadows out by Abram Square, while the Erafans, Lapinos and Remans live in Poco d’Arago around Upper Canal Street. The Yamatonese are all in Ko-Yamato, west of Usahito Park and Tenno Avenue. Aside from the Yamatonese, the communities all have a long, inter-related history that I don’t think either of us has time to go into.”

“What about species, predators and prey?” She raised an eyebrow when Jacob bristled again.

“What about species? The old Reman Empire spanned all of Europa, from the Balkans west, as well as Anatolia and Northern Africanis, and so included all the species found throughout the empire, while the Yamatonese are largely made up of four species linked through a Byzantine network of cross-species marriages meant to unify them as one people. As for Tannerman’s propaganda language, Zootopia should have abandoned it in ‘64 when they did away with ‘Predator Behavior-Control Collars’.”
Winterhorn sat back, letting her hooves rest in her lap. “You feel that Zootopia is to blame for the social injustices faced by your people?”

“I used to, ma’am. I can’t say I’ve abandoned all of my old prejudices, but I’d like to think I’m self-aware enough to learn from my past mistakes.”

The chief sat up. “All well and good, but why should I hire you?”

“Because you need mammals under you who understand the community they are serving: I do. You need someone with experience with the local gang culture, I have that; and you need to be able to put them to work as soon as they arrive. I was with the MP battalion at LoNFB Incirlik which was part of the Treaty Exchange forces, so I worked alongside the AEP as a beat-cop patrolling the neighborhoods surrounding the base; as such, all I need are the training and certifications specific to the ZPD and you could drop me right in the beat without tying up veterans to wet-nurse me through my rookie-period.”

“One last question then. If I hire you, and you serve under me here in the Seventh, could you arrest someone from your community?” Her gaze was piercing as she asked.

Jacob hadn’t thought about that until she asked, and so he paused for a moment.

“Yes ma’am, I believe I could, if the circumstances warranted it. Everyone is both equally protected and accountable under the law. When Officer DuPrey brought me in,” Jacob nodded to the little-big cat, “…I was arraigned and sentenced, with time served for testifying. ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ is not just a catchy phrase to me. I also know the community, and they won’t hate me for doing my duty.”

Winterhorn considered Jacob for a moment, then turned to Sgt. DuPrey. “What about you, Sergeant? Do you think he’s got what it takes to serve in the Seventh?”

“Without a doubt ma’am.”

Turning back to Jacob, the towering reindeer leaned forward. “Tell you what, I’ll do a little digging of my own today; if I like what I see, then I’ll have you come by tomorrow and I’ll attach my letter of recommendation to your application. Dismissed.”

Jacob and Jean-Pierre saluted and left; they still had a long day ahead of them.

…

It was a little before ten when they reached their next stop, the First Precinct Station house in Savannah Central. Despite himself, Jacob was awed by the grandeur of the brand-new edifice. Jean-Pierre gave him a moment to gawk, then patted him on the back.

“Come along Emanuel, you’ll have plenty of time to stare once you’re hired on.”

Once inside, Jacob noted that everything was scaled to mega-fauna, including the reception desk in the main atrium. A portly cheetah in service blues was seated in front of them, grinning at something while humming to himself.

“Excuse me, officer?” DuPrey called to the mammal before them. “Officer? Officer?!” He squinted at the mammal’s name badge for a moment. “Clawhauser!”

The Savannah cat jumped at the summons, nearly launching his smart phone onto the lobby floor. Compared to the military sense of the Seventh, Jacob was somewhat dismayed by this first
impression of the ZPD’s flagship precinct.

Once the desk officer took notice of the two in front of him, he clasped his manual paws to his cheeks. “O M Goodness, another cute little bunny…” At the frustrated look on Jacob’s face, he looked somewhat apologetic. “Oh, I’m sorry! I know I’m not supposed to call bunnies cute.”

Jacob snorted. “If you call me cute, I’ll suggest you get your eyes checked. You call me a prostitute again, and I’ll scoop them out and check them myself.”

Jean-Pierre tapped Jacob on the head while Clawhauser started at the threat.

“I… I’m sorry, sir!” He looked at Jacobs partner, grasping for support.

“You’ll excuse my friend here. He’s recently returned from abroad, and some of his things were lost in transit; his manners for one.”

“My apologies, officer.” Jacob said. “In my neighborhood, the term bunny refers to sex traffickers.”

“Oohh, okay. So, what can I do for you today?” What he lacked in fitness, Clawhauser seemed to make up for in exuberance and a desire to be helpful.

Jacob took a calming breath. “I understand this is where I would pick up a Police Academy application?”

“Yes sir! I have one right here!” Putting words to motion, Clawhauser gave him a single page, pre-printed form.

Jacob paused while considering the form. “I was given a more in-depth questionnaire by the church welcoming committee about potluck Thursday.”

“Don’t worry about that, this will serve as a cover sheet and starting point for your clearance review. It’s all digital and online; save the landfills, save the planet!” the Cheetah perked up. “Once you have that filled out with a copy of your resume, driver’s license and at least three affidavits, just bring it back here and we’ll get started on processing it right away. The next trainee inlet cycle is in four months, but you should know in about two.”

“Thank you officer.” Jean-Pierre drew out his badge. “Could we have the visitors log? I want to show our prospective around the building.”

Once forms were filled, and a temporary pass issued, DuPrey escorted Jacob around the building. As the tour was winding up on the mezzanine level, there was a commotion at the front desk as what looked like an inner-tube bounced up to the front desk.

“I Popped the Weasel!” A grey rabbit in ZPD blues cheered from the atrium doorway.

Jacob and Jean-Pierre could only look on in shock and dismay.

“HOPPS!” A large water buffalo roared from the other side of the mezzanine.

“Aaaand that’s Chief Bogo.” Jean-Pierre indicated.

Jacob blinked owlishly for a moment. “Huh, good to know. Come on, let’s get some lunch before we hit the DMV.”

…
Jacob had always assumed the tales of woe regarding the Zootopian Department of Motor Vehicles were hyperbole; but no, three-toed sloths entirely staffed the DMV. Jean-Pierre insisted that it was because of a fair-hiring initiative, but Jacob was certain it was social engineering by the city planning board; if no-one wanted to go to the DMV, then no-one would have a driver’s license, thereby increasing the use of public transportation by the citizens. He’d have to invite DuPrey and Deaux out for drinks, so they could debate the matter properly.

It was nearly 5:00 when his license was ready for pickup. As he was reaching for his new city identification, the agent in front of him was interrupted.

“Hey…Priscilla.”

“Yes…Flash?”

From two booths over, Jacob and Jean could hear a familiar female voice frantically trying to prevent the impending glacial conversation. Jacob was so thankful the day was almost over.

…

Jacob spent the evening talking to Presbytera Tatapolis and Horace Hornblower III on social media, apprising them of his choice and how the day went. While he had no doubts of the Father’s support, he was pleasantly surprised when Horace offered himself as one of Jacob’s character references. He also insisted that he be present to ‘mediate’ when he and Jean-Pierre debated the true reason for a sloth-run DMV. That was going to be one hell of an evening.

The next day Jacob walked to Ko Yamato, with a linen wrapped bundle in hand. As he had no need to be interviewed that day, he chose a utilikilt and loose linen shirt, rather than the Zootopian style. He had thought he might need to argue his case to his mother, but once he explained his plan she simply shook her head.

“These blades are your birthright. I have no doubts that you will do right by them and your ancestors. You do what you must; I’ll keep Father in line.”

He arrived at the row of swordsmiths, and after some asking around, some pantomime, and one thinly veiled bribe, he was finally directed to the shop of Inaba Kitsuhito, who was the master sword engraver on the street. Outside was a slight Yamatonese vixen in traditional garb, sweeping the sidewalk.

“Excuse me, miss?” When she looked up, Jacob continued. “I don’t mean to be rude, but do you speak Anglican?”

She smiled and bowed slightly. “Hai!” He hoped that meant yes.

“I was told this was the shop of a Horomonshi?”

“Horimonoshi, sword engraver.” She gently corrected with a bow.

“Yes, thank you. I have a blade I wish to be engraved. Is the master in?”

“Hai!” She bowed again and gestured inside, at which Jacob followed her in.

The lobby of the shop was also its workspace, and all around were both tools of the craft, as well as what he assumed were examples of the master’s work, such as metal blocks with finely detailed scenes, both pastoral and martial, as well as floral and calligraphic patterns. This was the shop he was looking for, now he just had to convince the master to take on the job.
The master in question was an ancient white hare seated at a bench in the back, huddled over what appeared to be a dagger in a vice. The hypnotic sound of hammer and chisel was interrupted when the young vixen spoke quietly into the old master's ear. Jacob was almost thankful for his time in the DMV the day prior, as the slow approach of the old hare was nothing in comparison.

Once seated, Jacob found himself under the master’s scrutiny while the young lady, whose name Jacob assumed was Kitsuko from half understood conversations, prepared tea. Once everyone was settled, Master Inaba Kitsuhito spoke while Kitsuko translated.

“Grandfather wishes to know why you are here?”

“My name is Jacob Emanuel Raibert. I am recently returned from abroad and wish to have a sword engraved, as a gift for my grandfather.” Jacob lay his package between them, still in its linen wrapping. He also pulled out a sheet of paper with Constantin’s name in Purrsian Cuneiform on it. “This is what I desire to be put on the blade.”

There was a short exchange. “Please pardon, but grandfather says he does not engrave tourist trinkets.”

Three years ago, Jacob thought to himself, he’d have come across the table at the mammal; how times change. “Nor would I ask such of him. This is…” Jacob was cut off as the shop door was slammed open, and the shop began filling with mammals in biker pleathers. There were 30 seconds of sharp verbal exchange between Kitsuko, Inaba Kitsuhito and what Jacob assumed were Bosozoku enforcers for the local Yakuza boss. He quickly determined the raccoon-dog in the middle of the crowd was the gang’s leader, based on how everyone kept glancing his way through the conversation. Eventually they noticed Jacob’s interest and lack of concern.

Their leader barked, “You, gaijin! What do you think you’re doing here?”

Jacob slowly stood and turned towards the gang, the wrapped sword still in hand, interposing himself between the bikers and their prey. “You’re on the wrong side of the world to be calling anyone foreigner,” there was a general gasp at that, “… as for your question, I’m here in the shop of a sword engraver, to have my sword engraved.”

Jacob’s calm clearly unsettled the gang, but fueled by youthful bravado the leader of the seven-mammal strong squad pressed on. “Oh really, well if you give it to us, we might let you walk out of here with only a few bruises.” To add emphasis to the threat, the gang began drawing knives.

A lifetime of fighting and four years of training and actual combat made getting to the ringleader laughably easy, and for the first time in centuries, the Rautha blade tasted blood, if only just a taste. The ancient but lovingly maintained bronze sickle sword rested against the base of the right side of the leader’s jaw, at the end of a one inch freshly shaved strip of the mammal’s neck. Stepping in while keeping the sword on his foe’s neck, Jacob calmly addressed his prey. “I am here to conduct business. You are interrupting that business. I will kindly ask you, once, to wait outside until we are finished.” The scent of fear and urine told Jacob that they understood. Once he withdrew his sword from the mammal’s neck, the gang made a hasty and clumsy retreat.

After reseating himself, Master Inaba gestured to the blade now cradled in the black hare’s arms. The ancient master reverently took the sword and began scrutinizing it, from the forge-tempered edge, to the minute cuneiform script, which covered most of the blade. Once he finished, he solemnly addressed Jacob through his granddaughter. “Grandfather says it is his honor to work on such a blade and wishes to know where you wish the passage to be placed.”
As Jacob stepped out of the shop empty handed, the Bosozoku gang met him. Their leader had apparently emboldened them, as they were arrayed in a semicircle with weapons out, a mixture of knives, pipes, and chains. The rat on his left with the chain was too close to the building’s awning to get a good swing; that would be his starting point.

“Well, I waited outside. Now I think a few bruises is not enough to remind this town who runs it. Get him!” The tanuki yelled as he stepped back; his compatriots advanced menacingly.

A swift stutter step brought Jacob on top of the rat, whom he kicked in the chest; the rodent was launched five feet before slamming back first into a fire hydrant, the chain falling from slack digits. In one move, Jacob was no longer cornered and surrounded, but flanking and facing only one opponent. The pipe wielding fox was too slow to turn, as Jacob immediately moved behind him. Placing a manual paw against the canid’s right elbow to control the weapon arm, Jacob looped his left arm under the fox’s left armpit and across his chest to grab a fistful of neck ruff. While sliding his right paw down his opponent’s right arm to the pipe, Jacob wrenched his left paw outward, throwing the todd to the ground while disarming him, and tripping the hare next to him.

The momentum of the fight stalled with the sound of a motorcycle engine, as the raccoon-dog ring-leader started to leave. Seeing half their number dispatched in less than five seconds while their leader ran, broke the fight for the remaining bikers; they promptly dropped their weapons and ran. Jacob dropped the pipe and retrieved the rat’s chain, which he hurled as a ball at the retreating motorcycle’s rear tire. The rider was thrown when the chain became tangled in the rear wheel and stalled the motor. Stalking over to the fallen gang leader, Jacob calmly spoke while digging out his phone.

“Time was, I would have cut off one of your ears and nailed them to a telephone pole as a warning. I’d like to think I am a better mammal now, so I will simply wait here with you for the cops to come.”

“911 dispatch, what is the nature of your emergency?”

…

Had it not been for the shopkeepers along the Yamato side of Lower Canal Street vouching for him and filing copious charges against the captured Bosozoku, as well as heaping praise on Jacob for dealing with their leader, Jacob was certain that Chief Winterhorn would have arrested him on the spot.

“I know you’re trying to help the community, but if there are any more vigilante stunts like this, I will personally shred your application.” She handed him a signed page filled with text. “Don’t make me regret this.”

Katarin met Jacob at the door when he got home.

“Emanuel, this came for you by courier, right after Presbytera dropped this letter off.” The envelope bore the monogram of Bull-Horn Telecommunications.

“Narn-ni! These are some of the things I need for my application.”

With a quick call to DuPrey, Jacob was off on another day of driving around Zootopia, though this time there was neither frantic rabbits, nor enraged water buffalo. Jacob was back home well in time for the church’s potluck dinner.

The next morning, Jacob awoke with a new dedicated sense of purpose. As he was sitting down to
breakfast, his sister came downstairs, she looked shell-shocked while addressing the family.

“Brala veth nahli! (I can’t believe this!) Lionheart-rah olme zorn daynt ZPD lédant! (Mayor Lionheart was arrested last night!)

“Bleth?!” (What?!) The whole family was up and surrounding her as she showed them a live stream of a press conference on the arrest.

“The animals in question; are they all different species? Yes, yes they are.”

Chapter End Notes

The current social structure in Yamato can be traced to the end of the Sengoku Era. With the defeat of the last of the so called, “Hakenden”, the wolf Samurai in service to the surviving Red Elk courts which had held regency under Mongolian rule, the red fox noble Iyeyasu Tokugawa, formerly of the Kitsutada Clan, had swept aside all functional opposition to the re-institution of the Shogunate. The alliance of fox, hare, racoon-dog and rat clans were now free of the oppression of the larger mammals which were summarily expelled from Yamato. In order to prevent interclan warfare from weakening the fragile nation, he instituted a policy of marrying the second-born children of clans of differing species, while fostering children from others as he had been fostered to the Hakenden Nobunaga Clan.

This has since created a byzantine network of familial ties between not only differing clans, but different species. To the common Yamatonese citizen, outside of the need for offspring, there is no recognizable difference in species, and so hetero-species relationships are commonplace, even outside of arranged marriages. Some outside observers, especially those from cultures which consider hetero-species relationships to be deviant, have used this system to try and paint the Yamatonese as hedonistic and sub-mammalian. This unity of culture has resulted in the Yamatonese to view only two distinctions: Yamatonese and Gaijin.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Light from the east will always shine through, for those who look for it. Jacob, and the neighborhood, adapt to the times.
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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

What… the Hell?

Who put that tharn nyalto in front of the camera?

Where was the media relations officer?

Hraka, the whole city will have heard that m’vaire methrah. Let’s hope City Hall is on their game and gets on top of this; the polis needs to know this is an aberration, not what the common mammal feels.

Chapter 9

In the days following the press conference with Officer Hopps, Jacob concluded that City Hall was in fact, not on the ball. As cases of so-called ‘spontaneous primal reversion’ began to increase, so too did incidents of targeted violence against the carnivore and omnivore population of the city. During an Antler Cooper interview, one TV pundit made a comment about shock collars and, ‘…the sense of stability and safety felt during the Tannerman Era…’. After that, many of the older Foxborough natives began asking if the tunnels on Lower Canal St., which had been used to smuggle mammals out of the city during that era, were still intact. Amidst the chaos, life, in all its little absurdities, continued.
The night after the press conference the Rauthas were hosting the Aksoys, when dinner was interrupted by a knock at the door.

“I’ll get it.” Jacob rose and headed to the door, ruffling Ata’s head fur as he passed. Glancing through the peep-hole, he saw a hare and a fox in austere black suits. He addressed the pair without opening the door. “Can I help you?”

The hare responded, “We represent Tanuyama Chisame sama, the head of the Ko-Yamato Business Council. Is Jacob san available?”

Jacob considered for a moment, then stepped out, closing the door behind him. “I’m Jacob.”

The fox spoke this time. “You visited one of Tanuyama sama’s businesses recently. He is deeply shamed by how you were treated and wishes to extend his apologies for this disgrace. Rest assured, such shameful actions will not happen again.” Both bowed deeply at the waist, while the hare handed Jacob a business card. “As a token of his respect and thanks, Tanuyama sama extends this invitation to you and your family to dine at Shiki.”

“Oh, thank you!” Jacob stuttered as he took the card. It was simple white-card stock with what looked like a hand-painted calligraphic word. He had heard of the restaurant; one of the rooftop establishments at The Palms in Sahara Square. If Jacob saved two weeks of pay he could probably eat there himself, as long as he didn’t order any wine.

The two business mammals bowed again, the hare speaking once more. “We hope you will continue to patronize the Ko-Yamato businesses. Have a pleasant evening.” With that, they departed.

“Who was that?” Jacob’s mother asked upon his return.

Jacob handed her the card as he sat down. “The Ko-Yamato Business Council; we have an open invite to eat at Shiki.”

Both Katarin and Naz gasped at this. “What did you do for them?!”

“Just chased off some ruffians who were harassing a shopkeeper and his granddaughter.” He shrugged his shoulders. “I guess I made an impression.”

A week after the visit by the representatives from the Ko-Yamato Business Council, Jacob met with DuPrey at Fang’s Garden, a Qinese noodle shop that specialized in Buddhist dishes.

“Seriously, Jean; this is the best little noodle joint in the city!” Glancing around the shop, he noticed Kitsuko, the vixen from the sword engravers shop, leaving with a parasol and a take-out bag. “See, even the Yamatonese like this place.”

The catamount crossed his arms and looked at Jacob skeptically. “Really? Then why didn’t you order any noodles?”

“I just like their pan-fried tofu; it’s the only way I can eat the stuff.”

DuPrey cocked his head in confusion. “There’s like, a hundred different ways to make it: Tofu dogs, Tofurkey, Tofish…”
Jacob wrinkled his nose in distaste. “I respect that you don’t eat meat; please respect that, aside from fried in peanut oil, I don’t eat fake meat.”

Whatever response DuPrey might have made was cut off by distressed yelping from outside.

Jacob leapt from his seat and bolted for the door. “That’s Matilda!”

DuPrey was only a few steps behind him. “How can you know that?”

“I’ve heard that cry before, and these ears aren’t just for show; come on!”

Jean-Pierre was calling into the station when the coyote calls were replaced by deer bleating. When they rounded the corner onto Upper Canal heading towards Abram Square, they saw a crowd a block away. A mule deer buck from either the Meadowlands or Savannah Central based on his attire, was surrounded by a flock of Eweden Yenta’s. A group of Eweden were bustling off towards the Synagogue with a pair of canids in tow. As they drew closer, the distressed bleating crescendoed when the muzzle and limbs of a second deer arced over the flock, followed by a bright yellow skirt and petticoats; the deer arced over again before slamming into the sidewalk. Another deer briefly tried to crawl out of the flock on the other side before suddenly being dragged back in. Above all that, they could hear the flock berating the lone standing buck, who was now openly weeping in distress.

DuPrey turned to Jacob when he slowed to a stop next to a fallen bag of ‘Fang’s Garden’ take-out, about 10 feet from the flock.

“Come on, we need to help!”

“I’m not getting in the middle of that; besides, they seem to have the matter well in hoof.”

“We have to do something!”

Jacob thought for a moment. “You’re right. Mrs. Rabinova?” A dowdy brown ewe from the crowd turned to face Jacob and DuPrey. “We heard Matilda cry out. The police are on their way; do you need anything?”

“Bless your heart Jacob, no.” The matronly sheep shook her head. “We have these, these brutes… this was punctuated by her swinging her purse at the despondent buck, “…well in hoof. We have Marta, Rebekah, and that lovely vixen from down the road to keep this lot in line until their mothers or the police arrive. Pray it is the police first! Imagine, four young bucks’ ganging up on poor Matilda, and saying such awful things. You should be ashamed…” The Yentas renewed their harangue as Jacob turned to go to the Synagogue.

“Wait, where are you going? We need to stay and file a report with the police!” Jean-Pierre demanded with some panic at the thought of being left alone with the irate flock.

“No, you need to stay as you called it in. I didn’t actually see what happened, so all I have is hearsay. I’m going to check on Matilda.” Jacob continued walking.

Jacob arrived at the Synagogue to find Matilda, her mother Maria Suarez, and their Eweden escort rapidly conversing with a frantic looking badger in a prayer shawl and Yarmulke. It took a moment for him to recognize Iosef Yasser as the scruffy teenager who regularly hung out with Francesca Bagnoli’s brother Abboti while discussing religion and philosophy. It seemed as if both mammals had followed their callings to the cloth. The last Jacob had heard, Abboti was a Supplicant working in the library at Polis Vatican.
Jacob lowered his ears and put on one of the guest caps near the door and stepped inside. “Pardon my intrusion, but I wanted to check up on Matilda, and let you know the police were called. EMT’s are also on the way; do you need a doctor, Matti?”

The group turned to Jacob as one; Maria spoke up. “Thank you, Jacob; we’re only a little shaken up. Who called the police?” There was a hint of fear in her voice, as the whole community was concerned with the current anti-predator sentiment pervading the city.

Jacob smiled easily. “Officer DuPrey made the call. We were at Fang’s when the ruckus started, and it was pretty much done by the time we got there. If you’re all right, I’ll head out and make sure nobody’s tying the bucks to a raft to dispatch down river. It might be best to meet the police when they arrive.”

When everyone went outside, it looked as if half the town was out by the canal. The police and EMTs were already on site, with Chief Winterhorn towering over the assembly. Jean-Pierre and a wolf Jacob had seen at the station house spoke to the Eweden while patrol mammals tried to calm the growing crowd. It sounded as if the Yenta’s were trying to take all the credit for dealing with the ruffians, and with it, all the blame. That made sense to Jacob, since if the Marta mentioned by them earlier was Matilda’s mother-in-law, Marta Alvaredo, AKA La Rayo Roja, the Red Lightning of Bullivian Lupadora fame, he could easily see the bucks making claims of a savage attack by the maned wolf. Thankfully, with Rebekah Daveed in the fight, any claims of injuries could be directed her way; Jacob didn’t know her personally, but the few members of the LoNF whom Jacob had met that also came from the Judean Army were excellent fighters.

Winterhorn took notice when Alejandro rushed over to his wife Matilda. “Raibert.” Her voice carried over the din of the crowd. “I would dearly love to have an explanation for what went on here.”

“I’d be delighted to give you one, Chief; and if I had been here for any of it I’d give you one.”

“DuPrey?” The chief turned to her subordinate.

“Sorry, ma’am, I arrived slightly behind Jacob. All I saw was the crowd, and a mass of limbs and yellow petticoats.”

One of the Patrol Mammals, a boar of Mediterranean descent, piped up. “Were they yellow like a lemon, or like a banana?”

“Zuckerman!” The Chief barked out. The Patrol Mammal ducked his head and returned to his duties. Snorting in frustration, she turned back to Jacob and Jean-Pierre. “You expect me to believe that they…” she gestured to the assembled flock, “…did that?!” She then gestured to three bucks being treated by the EMT’s: one was moaning while being loaded onto a backboard with a neck brace, another was being limply secured to a stretcher with a tiny trickle of blood coming from his snout, while a combination of officers and EMT’s tried to untangle a third bucks’ pedal hooves from his own rack without dislocating any more of his joints. “I want the truth, not excuses or jokes.”

Jacob paused for a moment, then turned to the assembled mammals. “You know DuPrey; he trusts Chief Winterhorn.” Jacob noticed the mountain lion flinch slightly at that. “I ask that you do the same.”

There were a few seconds of quiet murmuring, then three mammals stepped out of the crowd; an intense Aegean Ibex in her early forties, a late middle-aged Maned Wolf in a bowler hat, bright yellow dress and shawl, and a young red Vixen in traditional Yamatonese Kimono and obi carrying a parasol. The Ibex spoke for the group.
“I’m Rebekah Daveed. This is Marta Alvaredo,” she nodded to the Maned Wolf, “… and, I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name miss?”

The Chief spoke up. “Inaba Kitsuko, we’ve met.” She waited patiently.

Rebekah gave a curt nod. She motioned to the gathered Eweden, “We were leaving Temple when we noticed Matilda being followed out of her job by these four mammals.” She pointed to the ambulances that were leaving, and to the fourth deer who was openly sobbing about how terrible a mammal he was. She then nodded to one of the ewes in the crowd. “Harriet called Maria and Marta to let them know what we were seeing; apparently they were going to meet Matti for dinner at Fang’s Garden. That was about when the deer accosted her. I won’t bother repeating what they said, but several of us heard it.”

“I recorded it!” piped up a roe deer doe from the flock. She moved to the edge of the crowd and handed her phone to one of the officers.

“Thank you. Please continue.” The Chief urged.

“Right. They pushed her to the ground and began threatening her. That was when we moved to intervene; that was also when Marta, Maria, and Miss Kitsuko arrived. I can’t speak for what the others did, but I know I used appropriate force, given the situation.”

The Chief arched an eyebrow. “Tying him in a pretzel knot was your idea of appropriate force?”

“It was that or tear his leg off and kick his ass with his own hoof.” Rebekah snorted in disgust.

Winterhorn took the phone and watched the amateur video while rubbing her jaw. Once she was finished, she looked up at Rebekah. “I’ll need you three, as well as Mrs. Suarez and Mrs. Matilda Alvaredo to come down to the station to fill proper reports, as well as file formal charges, if you so choose. I would ask anyone who witnessed the altercation to do the same. As far as I am concerned this was a case of civic and self-defense. The rest of you, I would suggest going home.”

As the crowd dispersed, Mrs. Daveed pulled Jacob aside. “You say you trust DuPrey?”

“Yes.” Jacob was slightly alarmed at a relative stranger coming to him like this, as the Daveed’s had moved to The Meadows while Jacob was abroad.

“How well do you know him?”

Jacob considered the ibex carefully. “I know he’s a vegetarian, and that he served honorably in the Aragonese Foreign Legion. He has retained dual citizenship; DuPrey’s not his birth name, and I doubt he’d have kept it if he wasn’t still considered Aragont, or if he wanted his old life back. I know he is from somewhere in the Delta region of the Louisiana Territory, and that is likely where he knows ADA Deaux from. Lastly, I know he is oath-sworn as an officer of the law, and if he has any secret, Jeanette trusts him enough not to report him. In the end, I trust him because I choose to do so, as I choose to trust you. How well I know him, or you, has little bearing on that.”

She considered Jacob, then seemed to come to a decision. “Very well, I’ll put my faith in him, and in your assessment of him. That was, quite well argued. Do you debate often?”

“Only when Taquitos and Tequila shots are on the line.”

…

The attack on Matilda and the community’s response got Jacob to thinking. When his brother Joseph
said that some of his classmates were talking about banding together ‘for protection’, both he and his mother became very alarmed; this was precisely how gangs formed, and organized crime began to take hold of a neighborhood. However Jacob started to get an idea.

“I’ve already nearly lost one son going down that path, I’ll not risk you on some foolish notion…”

“He’s not entirely wrong, Marli-fa.” Jacob interjected.

Before Joseph could take advantage of the turn in conversation, Katarin sternly rounded on Jacob.

“You cannot be serious! After everything you have been through, you will blithely advocate a new gang?!”

“I said that he was not entirely wrong, not that I agreed with the idea.” Jacob stated calmly.

“Matilda wasn’t saved by a single person or a gang, but by the community. We lucked out that Chief Winterhorn is sympathetic to our situation.”

Constantin sat forward and stared at Jacob. “What are you proposing then, if not a gang?”

“A community watch, or civic defense force; I don’t know yet, but it has to be everyone, not just a small group. Look, Joseph, you, Annelise, Cynthia and Michael have been learning from Con-ni-fa and Owsla Demirci, right? Not just how to bust heads, but the Efrafan philosophy as well?” When his siblings nodded, he continued. “I think Foxborough has a tremendous pool of knowledge, and a desire to protect our own. If we all participated, we would be the stronger for it; the vigorous and impassioned youth…” he nodded to his siblings, “…would bear the burden of defense, the learned elders…” he looked to his grandfather, “…would teach us the best way to do so, and the wise of the community…” he looked at his mother, “…would guide our hands to the path of righteousness, not just to wrath.”

“You wish to start an Efrafan school?” his grandfather asked.

Jacob shook his head. “Not just Efrafan; Aegean-Reman Wrestling, the Yamatonese fighting arts; hell, we could have the police participate in giving self-defense courses as well as lessons on legally permissible force. We get everyone involved…”

“Like the Pot-Luck dinners!” Jacobs littlest sister Annelise chirped excitedly.

Katarin smiled ruefully at her children. “Frith-rah knows you fight enough at the dinner table as it is, at least this way there will be referees.”

…

Jacob discussed the basics of his idea with his mother and grandfather through the rest of the evening. It was agreed that any plan had to include the police, so Jacob would go to Winterhorn in the morning while Katarin and Constantin pitched the idea to the community. The next day after breakfast Jacob was once again sitting in Winterhorn’s office. He left that meeting re-invigorated. The Chief not only approved of the plan, she had several ideas to contribute; she had been trying for some time to coordinate with community leaders to set up Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) classes, and the Foxborough Civil Defense Council (FCDC) would be the perfect venue. She didn’t want to train civilians in police combat techniques, but she agreed that talks on legally permissible force and citizen’s arrest would be a must. Once there was a set schedule, she could start a rotation sign-up sheet for officers to volunteer as speakers or instructors.

Jacob turned his cell-phone back on as he was leaving the precinct house and found more than a dozen messages waiting for him. Word had traveled fast in the short time he had been in the meeting,
and now he had six people offering to teach, three venue options including the Reman Catholic school gymnasium, several messages praising his efforts, and one message which could either be an offer of support or a marriage proposal; Google Translate and AutoCorrect were never meant to work on the same problem at the same time.

By the end of the week, the FCDC advisory board was formed. Jacob had bowed out of the process, as he would be heading to the academy soon. By the end of the next week, they had a syllabus and schedule with two meetings on weeknights, and one meeting Sunday afternoon to give everyone a chance to participate. The first official FCDC session at the end of the month was attended by nearly 300 people. Jacob looked on with pride at what the community was able to do.

…

Six weeks after the FCDC’s inaugural session, Jacob received a certified letter from the office of the Mayor of Zootopia.

“I don’t know,” Amelia said while peering at the letter over Jacob’s shoulder, “… seems fishy to me. There’s no reason for Mayor Bellwether to be calling you personally. Are you sure it isn’t a scam?”

Jacob nervously rubbed the back of his neck. “Not sure, but I have a week till the meeting. I’ll call the City Hall front desk and confirm the appointment; otherwise, I’ll just see how it goes.”

The public relations office at city hall confirmed the appointment, and so, once again in his court suit, Jacob made his way to meet Mayor Bellwether. He was shown to an office that was obviously sized for a larger mammal, probably ex-Mayor Lionheart. A massive red oak desk in front of a glass wall dominated the center of the austere office. Tucked into one darkened corner were several posters bearing Judy Hopps’ likeness.

“Jacob, it’s so good to meet you!” An ewe about a head shorter than him came up and shook his paw. “Wow, you’re taller than I thought. Come, let’s sit somewhere more comfortable.” She quickly made her way to a pair of low chairs in the back corner of the office and took her seat, gesturing for Jacob to do the same. As he was climbing into the chair, Jacob noticed a framed copy of the Zootopian Gazette cover proclaiming Lionheart’s arrest, right next to the one proclaiming Bellwether as mayor. Both were mounted on a display table against the office wall, along with several awards and diplomas. Once seated, he saw Dawn looking at him; her lips were turned up in a smile, but her eyes were filled with a cold light that instantly put Jacob on edge.

“Shalom, madam Mayor.” Jacob saw her flinch slightly at that. “To what do I owe the honor of this summons?”

Jacob watched as Bellwether took a moment to recompose herself. She pushed herself back into the chair and assumed an almost imperious air once she looked up again. “I invited you here to discuss your future, and that of Zootopia.” The ewe projected a wounded air. “When your application for the academy came across my desk, I knew you were something special. I would like you to be the public face of the ZPD; after you graduate, of course.”

Jacob furrowed his brow. “Wouldn’t an established officer be more appropriate? I’ve seen Judy Hopps on the news a lot recently. She seems quite photogenic.”

Jacob saw Dawn glance almost involuntarily towards the posters in the corner before snapping back.

“Well, we had considered her, but…” the mayor looked down for a moment and steepled her manual hooves and sighed, “… she had to take an emergency leave of absence and head home to Bunnyburrow.”
Jacob’s features hardened; there were too many coincidences lining up for him to be comfortable. His work with the SID during Operation Noble Garden in Anatolia had allowed him to witness dozens of interrogations, some of which had led to the creation of double agents. This conversation felt alarmingly similar. By comparison to those sessions however, Bellwether’s efforts seemed amateurish and ham-fisted. Her demeanor, however, was nearly identical to a service member he had arrested and questioned for murdering his spouse and child. Now, he wanted nothing more than for the interview to be over.

Jacob stood from his chair and assumed a military ‘At-Ease’ posture. “I will take what you’ve said into consideration. I still have a couple of months before the next academy inlet cycle, so let’s see what happens between now and then. Thank you, madam Mayor.”

With that, Jacob turned on his heel and left while she was still getting out of her seat. Once he had closed the door to the office, he began to relax; his ears, which had subconsciously begun laying back in preparation for a fight, finally came up. As he stepped away from the door he faintly heard, “Damn!” from inside the office.

Jacob had felt nervous anticipation on his ride into city center; now on the return trip, he felt nauseous and concerned, as if he had just brushed against something truly malign. Glancing around the subway car, he saw fear in the faces and heard tension in the voices of the mammals around him. A business goat across from him read a paper whose cover proclaimed, ‘An epidemic of Terror!’ with new reports of savage predators. The low droning of animals whispering to one another, as well as the dull glow of sodium lamps combined with the rhythm of the train-tracks to create a hypnotic atmosphere. As the car entered a tunnel, Jacob’s senses blurred; a black shield, bordered in gold with the upraised blood red manual paw of a carnivore was illuminated by firelight. He heard a multitude of voices chanting, “Wir sind Jaeger!” , but not loud enough to drown out the terrified bleating. His nose was assaulted with the bitter scent of Cigdem incense. Above it all, was a sense of foreboding and abject terror.

The train came out of the tunnel, and Jacob was startled by daylight reflecting off a nearby hi-rise. Glancing around the cab again, he saw nothing out of place. Shaking his head, he tried to clear his senses of the imagery, but it was as persistent as the rustling of the paper in front of him. He pulled out his smart phone, opened the note and art apps, and recorded what he had experienced; it was a habit he had gotten into since his time in Anatolia. Though he might not understand the language, he knew enough Austro-Hungarian expatriates to know Germanic when he heard it. A quick trip to the translation program netted the phrase, ‘We are Hunters.’ Jacob decided he would have to talk to his grandfather, to see if this meant anything.

That evening, Jacob accompanied Constantin to his workshop in the building basement and told him about his experiences.

“My father fought against the Huns during the Austro-Hungarian War,” Constantin looked thoughtfully at the drawing of the shield, “…helped chase those mongrel wolves out of Poland. He never said what they found there, but it haunted him. He had a banner he brought back from the war that bore this symbol.”

Jacob took his phone back. “Did he ever say what it meant?”

“No, only that it represented an unspeakable evil.” Constantin picked up and began polishing a stone serving set he had been working on. “I imagine some of the Eweden flock might know. They and their families lived through that nightmare; but in this case, I would counsel against bringing it up. As a people, they have suffered greatly; best to tread lightly on their grief.”

Jacob refrained from sighing in frustration. “So, what should I do then.”
“Tell all of this to your mother; she is the keeper of our family’s record of Hyaontil Veheere. She has a record of every vision in our family since the days of Campion and Ephraim, so future generations may have the path westward illuminated; be aware of your veheer and be ready for events to unfold, but do not let it consume you. Wiser mammals than you, I, or your mother even, have driven themselves mad trying to interpret Veheer. As for Bellwether,” Constantin began setting a new river stone on the turning lathe, “...let it go. You have enough to worry about with the FCDC and your impending entry into the Police Academy; she won’t be your superior on the force, so she doesn’t matter.”

As it turned out, Bellwether was even less of an issue than Constantin thought. Two weeks after Jacob’s meeting with the Mayor, Judy Hopps leapt into the forefront of the media scene again; this time to expose Dawn as the architect of the so called ‘Night-Howler Conspiracy’. Jacob could only shake his head in wonder; why was the Cigdem flower at the center of every evil in recent times.

Despite his personal introspection, the family was in a good mood; the city was no longer gripped in fear, Amelia was going to start internship with the Seventh District Attorney’s office in two weeks to finish out her degree, and Jacob had received his letter of appointment to the academy with a start date the week after his enlistment officially ended at the end of the next month. There was a celebratory air about the whole neighborhood; the latest FCDC meeting had been little more than a block party. As for the Rauthas, they knew exactly how they planned to ring in the new era.

The family was quite the sight to see as they arrived at Shiki that night. Constantin wore his second best royal blue silk pantaloons and waistcoat over a white linen shirt, with a red satin sash and red fez, while Jacob wore a charcoal silk vest and red satin sash over a white linen mandarin collar shirt and a charcoal utilikilt. Amelia was trying out her LBD: a long-sleeved, knee-length, V-neck pencil dress with a red dickie. Kadir was in his grey silk Nehru Jacket and trousers with a red silk cravat, while Katarin wore a black hijab style dress and red silk ear scarf. The Hrair-roo, all being 14, ran the gamut of all the present styles.

When they stepped up to the Hostess station, a pretty sika deer greeted them. “Welcome to Shiki. Do you have a reservation?” Jacob presented the card he had been given, and the family was immediately ushered in, much to the shock of several of the waiting mammals who had been looking at the Rauthas’ with disdain.

They were seated in a semi-private alcove with a panoramic view of the city. The family was stunned by the opulence; they had one waiter to take their before dinner drinks, another for their meal, a third for their desert and one just for serving wine. The head chef, a boisterous Yamatonese raccoon dog name Hiro, came out and personally offered samples of a new recipe he was trying out. Jacob took a chance and asked if there were any traditional fish or fowl dishes he would recommend for a hare’s palate; the look on Hiro’s muzzle was one of pure joy. He assured the family he had just the dish in mind. What they were brought was a platter of near paper thin, delicately seared Ahi Tuna with crispy sesame green beans.

As their entrée was being brought out, the grumblings started again, this time from the alcove across from them. “Jeez, I thought Shiki had standards! I come here to get away from immigrants. How could they let them order meat by mistake? What’s next, they going to use the potted plants for the bathroom?”

The Rauthas bristled, while the staff looked absolutely horrified. Jacob thought there was going to be a real scene when he heard one of their neighbor’s getting up. There was some murmuring from that corner. “Come on boss, no need to go over and stare.”
Their servers drew themselves up as the mammal approach. Jacob was at his wits end and was pointedly ignoring the individual lest he start a fight.

“Raibert, is that you?”

Jacob’s head snapped around and he came muzzle to muzzle with a face he hadn’t seen in more than two years. “Horace!” Jacob all but leapt out of his seat to shake his former comrade’s hoof. “It’s good to see you mammal. How’ve you been?”

The bull moose beamed at his friend. “Fantastic, all thing considered. This your family you were always talking about?” Horace turned his head to the assembled hares.

Jacob beamed at the group. “This is my Marli-fa , Katarin Rautha and her émarthae Ilkin Kadir Demirci, my sister Amelia, the hrair-roo : Joseph, Michael, Annalise and Cynthia,” Jacob then turned with pride to his grandfather. “…and this is my Grandfather, Owsla-fa Constantin Abelard Rautha. All that I am, I owe to them.” Jacob gestured to the towering ungulate next to him. “M’rusasitha, laye Horace Hornblower Desthile .” (My family, this is Horace Hornblower the Third.)

Horace inclined his head to the family. “A pleasure to meet you all. Jacob spoke of you often, and your care packages were much coveted treats for everyone.” He turned to Jacob. “So, what brings you here tonight?”

Jacob settled back into his seat. “Celebration; Amelia’s starting with the DA’s office next week on an internship, I received my letter of acceptance to the Zootopian Police Academy (ZPA); let’s see, what else? Oh yeah, we’re on our third Mayor in as many months! Hopefully this one keeps the corruption to something mundane; embezzling, or a good old-fashioned affair. So, what about you? What brings the scion of the Hornblower dynasty to the top of the world?”

“Much the same.” He waved someone over. “One of our interns just finished her one-year probation and was picked up full time. I’d introduce her, but that would be a little redundant.”

Horace stepped aside and revealed a brown European hare jill in a very flattering two-piece black pantsuit. Jacob shot back to his pedal paws, jostling the table in his haste. “Valerie!”

Everyone at the table stared at Jacob with varying degrees of knowing happiness. Katarin’s ears rose in polite interest. “Well Jacob, are you going to introduce us?”

Jacob jolted from his shock and repeated the introductions. “Everyone, this is Valerie Esperanza Coneja.”

Katarin and Amelia stood. The Rautha matriarch smiled at the Lapino Jill. “Frithaes, marli Coneja. A mi bralant u Methrah des hrudaao. I bralvaont, hralmi franoa.” (Truly a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Coneja. I remember your news cast from three years ago. You were quite brave, rushing out to face the chaos.)

Valerie beamed at hearing her native tongue and responded in the more formal Efrafan tongue. “Methrah methant, mi rooliti franent.” (I simply reported what was happening; it was your son who was in the thick of it.)

The family smiled back at the Jill for her gesture of speaking in Efrafan. Amelia stepped forward, a smirk on her face and her manual paw extended. “Hi, Marli-fa keeps the embarrassing leverette pictures safe, but I have all the awkward teenage stories.”

Valerie got an almost wicked grin on her face as she took Amelia’s paw while handing her a
business card. “Really? Care to give me an exclusive?”

Jacob stared daggers at his littermate. “Oi! That’s privileged information!”

Amelia sat down while pocketing the card. “I know, but your going to be gone for six months and we have to keep her interested somehow.”

Constantin waved to his two oldest grandchildren. “Now now, marli-roo stop torturing the boy. This is the first respectable Jill he’s introduced us to. Ms. Coneja was it?” When she nodded, he turned to his daughter. “Didn’t Isabelle Nevaja say she had cousins back in Castille-Leone named Coneja?”

Katarin broke out in a happy smile. “That’s right? It shouldn’t take more than a week to track down your Marli-fa. I would simply love to learn more about the young Marli who has caught our little Owsla-fa’s interest.”

At that, Valerie’s ears began to flag. Flirting and teasing were a fine way to get to know someone, but if the family matrons got involved she’d never hear the end of it.

Horace cleared his throat. “While I would love to get to know all of you better, the staff are giving me the stink-eye. We’ll let you get back to your meal. It was a pleasure meeting you all.” With that, both he and Valerie returned to their table, but not before Valerie gave Jacob one of her business cards.

From there the dinner continued in a more jovial vein, with Jacob receiving well meaning teasing from everyone. He thought back to how the family had responded to his ex-jillfriend, Eva, with either disdain or outright refusal to acknowledge her. Valerie’s speaking to the family in the proper tongue was a sight better than Eva’s casual informality. He hoped that meant they approved, as he did like the fiery Lapino jill.

As they were all preparing to leave, Horace called Jacob over to his table. “Jacob, Valerie had an idea and I want to discuss it with you. Could you come by the Bullero Tower tomorrow, say around 11 o’clock?”

“Is this going to be a suit and tie type thing? Mine’s gotten a lot of mileage recently and needs a cleaning.”

A woodchuck near the back of the table was about ready to say something, when Horace directed a look her way that promised demotion or unemployment if she spoke. “Nah, just a working lunch; my treat.”

“All right, I’ll be there.”

He was there at 11 o’clock as promised, though the beige utilikilt and loose linen button up shirt with sleeve garters did draw some attention.

The sow at the front desk looked askance at him. “Can I help you ma'am?”

“It’s sir, and no. I’m waiting for someone.”

She raised her manual trotters in a placating gesture. “I’m not judging.”

Jacob pinched the bridge of his nose. “Yes, you are. You see me in something other than trousers and make assumptions.” He stopped her before she could interject. “You don’t have fur, so let me explain; having any woven fabric dragged against the lay of my fur is very irritating and having it against my fur all day as I move causes it to pull on my fur, which is painful. This,” Jacob motioned
to his attire, “…does neither of those things.” Jacob nodded at her dawning look of understanding. Just then, one of the elevator doors opened.

“Larue!”

Jacob smirked at the gobsmacked look on the receptionist. “Just for that Turret, I’m ordering the most expensive thing for lunch.”

Valerie was following close behind. “As long as you two don’t blow anything up, we should be fine. Are we ready to go?”

They headed to a corner café and settled into a private booth. Once everybody ordered, Horace settled into business. “Emanuel,” Jacob sat erect at Horace's use of his honor name, “...the MII is in danger of being struck.”

“What!? Why?”

Valerie leaned forward. “Politics; the last two mammals who were directly involved are now in jail.”

Horace steepled his hooves. “Yeah, put there by the only mammal to benefit from the program to date, and Hopps isn’t exactly a fairytale story. They’re trying to spin-doctor the whole thing as some kind of sting, but people aren’t buying it, what with her press conference and all.”

Jacob screwed his face up. “Yeah, what was that about? You know they never should have put her on the podium, much less let her talk to the press without a script and prompting from the media relations officer. I’d like to think Bogo’s smarter than that.”

Everyone paused when their lunch was brought out, then Valerie continued. “Sources say Bellwether played on his ego to get the conference set up that way.”

“What ego? The entire force got shown up by a rook on her third day!”

“Exactly!” Horace commented around his watercress salad. “He was appointed chief as a compromise with the Green Party after Lionheart was elected; they feared having ‘predator’ heavy leadership of the city, so he’s always been very image conscious. Word is, Bellwether had dirt on his conduct towards Hopps and threatened to out him if he didn’t play ball.”

Jacob’s eyes went wide. “Jeez, I knew something was wrong with that ewe but, this is a special kind of hateful.”

Valerie leaned in. “Yeah, we’d heard she called you in for an interview; what was that like?”

“Like tunnel clearing on the Purrsian/Assyrian border, but without the comfort of a machinegun. So, the MII is political rabies now because of her?”

Horace sipped his tea. “Pretty much. There are some city Aldermen stumping to get a bill passed to repeal the program entirely. That’s where you and Valerie’s idea comes in.” Horace motioned to the jill.

“We need to get public support on our side; focus on the need for the program, not how it came to be or what it’s resulted in. We want you to do an interview on the O’Mauley Report: talk up the program, how it could benefit the city. Talk about your FCDC, and how it works with the police to fill gaps in coverage. Do a fluff piece, win hearts and minds and all that. What do you say?”

Jacob said yes, and two weeks later, found himself back at the Bullero Tower, sitting across from TV
“Thank you Zootopia and welcome back to the O’Mauley Report, live. It’s been almost a month since the arrest of former Mayor Dawn Bellwether, and the city is still in turmoil.” Screens behind them showed stock footage of the protests and rallies following Bellwether’s arrest. “Some in City Hall are beginning to question the wisdom of continuing the policies of not one, but two disgraced former mayors; specifically, the controversial Mammal Inclusion Initiative, or MII championed by former Mayor Lionheart. With me today is one of the programs beneficiaries and Happytown native, Jack Raibert. Welcome to the show, Jack.”

Jacob tried his best to not grit his teeth at the condescending red wolf. “Thanks for having me, Mr. O’Mauley.”

“Please, call me Tom. So, you were accepted into the ZPA under the MII, is that correct?”

“Well, I’d like to think my own merit weighted the decision to accept my application, but it was the MII which allowed me to apply in the first place.”

O’Mauley leaned forward in his chair. “How does the program enable you to apply? I mean this *is* Zootopia: anyone can be anything! And what did you mean by ‘your own merit?’” Jacob was somewhat unsettled by the look in the wolf’s eyes. He almost felt like he was back in Bellwether’s office.

Shuffling a little straighter in his chair, Jacob locked eyes with Tom. “Well, as for the MII and associated programs, they allow for more merit-based hiring practices in fields which have traditionally had fixed size requirements, such as the Fire Department, EMT’s and the Police; as certain species could never achieve those size requirements, any applications from members of species such as hares, rabbits, foxes or raccoons were automatically disqualified. Under the MII, those applications receive the same weight in consideration as their larger compatriots.”

“But shouldn’t those requirements be considered? If you’re trapped in a burning building, or on the wrong side of a shootout, shouldn’t we want the biggest animals we can get?”

“For those tasks requiring brute strength, absolutely. But with drive by wire rigs, you don’t need an elephant to drive or operate a fire truck, and that frees up the elephant for those tasks requiring strength. As far as police work is concerned, 90% of it is evidence collection and investigation. You don’t need to be a lion or a reindeer to do those things. As long as an individual demonstrates the necessary skills, and can complete the tasks assigned to them, then species, and with it, *size*, shouldn’t matter.”

Jacob’s ears started to lay back when O’Mauley licked his chops before asking the next question. “But surely there have to be limitations; I mean, could you see a mouse in the fire department?”

“A friend of mine is just that. He flew ornicopters for the LoN in Anatolia, now he does the same for the Alpine Fire Jumpers in the Sierra Madres.”

“That’s right, we have some footage of that.” O’Mauley looked over Jacob’s shoulder. “Can we roll that LoN footage?”

Jacob’s ears snapped straight back as the screen next to them lit up, showing the attack on the Incirlik gate. The studio was filled with the peculiar droning of LoN MQ-12 gunships and the chattering of small arms fire. The noise suddenly died down, but Jacob could still hear the echoes of weapons fire and screaming mammals, could still smell cordite and fear. He remembered *Nizari-Ismaili* and *Nasiri* fanatics butchering whole communities, either for being carnivores, or simply not being hateful
enough to carnivores. He remembered two years of operations on the Asyrian border; tunnel clearing, house to house running firefights, and the devastation war brings with it.

He saw motion near him; the wolf was still asking questions, something about the operation. That’s classified! The wolf wanted classified information! Jacob needed to get out. The wolf was asking about troop deployments and numbers; the wolf cannot know this, it’s classified! Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape; Jacob was alive and unrestrained, the wolf was unarmed. Jacob had to escape!

There was new sound, new motion; the wolf was leaving. A new mammal was there, holding his face and trying to block out all other stimuli. They’re repeating a word, over and over: his honor name, Emanuel. Who knows his honor name here? He focused and saw a brown hare he thought he knew. She asked him his name.

“Jacob Emanuel Raibert.”

She paused for a moment to breathe.

“Layi thum, Emanuel. Layi yao?” (That’s good, Emanuel. Where are you?)

That seemed a silly question; he was… not sure. This place was familiar, but he didn’t know it well.

“Layi yao?”

A skunk in a paisley skirt started crying. What unit is she with, why is she out of uniform?

“Emanuel, layi yao?”

Jacob thought, and then remembered; he was in Zootopia. When did the fighting reach Zootopia? It didn’t, that was Anatolia, the fighting ended last year. He was home. He looked into Valerie’s tear-filled eyes and wrapped her in a desperate hug.

“Hlienesi, hlienesi!” (I’m home, I’m home!)

“That’s right. It’s over, you’re home.” She gently petted his ears, laying them down along his back as he took breath after shuddering breath until he was calm again.

The reverie was broken when they heard Horace bellowing from the producer’s room. “Then don’t you ever, EVER go off script AGAIN!”

Valerie looked at Jacob. “Do you think you could continue the interview.”

Jacob clenched his paws. “You put that mammal in front of me again, and I can guarantee the studio a serious ratings hike; violence sells after all.”

Valerie shook her head. “No, I’ll be finishing the interview.”

Jacob hesitated for a moment, then nodded.

Valerie looked over his shoulder, gave a thumbs-up, then settled into the interviewer’s chair.

“Welcome back to the O’Mauley Report. I’m Valerie Coneja, standing in for Thomas O’Mauley. Tom had a family emergency; we send our hopes to him. We’re here today with ZPD hopeful Jacob Emanuel Raibert from Foxburough, discussing the embattled MIL. You mentioned a comrade of yours who parlayed his piloting experience into a career as a fire spotter, is that correct?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”
“You had also mentioned being accepted into the ZPA on your own merit. Could you elaborate on that a little more, please, and how this polis might benefit from a broader spectrum of mammals in the workforce?”

…

After the interview, Horace came to apologize, but Jacob waved the matter off; he could see that Horace was just as affected, if not as deeply as Jacob had been. There seemed no need to belabor the matter; Horace would discipline his own. Jacob just wanted to go home. Valerie told him to call her if he needed anything. He paused before leaving.

“Actually, if you could, I’d like you to research something while I’m at the academy.” Jacob texted his notes on his waking dream. “It’s not much, just the symbol and the phrase, but it’s been bugging me for awhile. I know it might not make sense, but…” Valerie silenced him by kissing him on the cheek.

“Owsla-fai; veheeri (You are Owsla-fa; you are one who has the gift of second sight). I’ll see what I can dig up.”

As he was riding back to VT Commons, he received a call from Kitsuko, telling him that his grandfather’s sword was ready. When he arrived at the shop, he was greeted by Kitsuko, Master Inaba, and another white hare around Kitsuko’s age whom he assumed to be the master’s apprentice.

No words were spoken as the kneeling mammals bowed and reverently passed the sword to Jacob. He noted the new inscription on the blade; the script of his grandfather’s name was precise and clear, with no blemishes or marring. Jacob lovingly re-wrapped the blade, bowed to his hosts, and made his way home.

Chapter End Notes

During the first period of their existence, before they became the Efrafan people, the Nemean Kings purpose bred their hares for size and strength, but weeded out those who did not possess a fearless quality. Jills, being crucial to the continuance of the bloodlines, were not sent into battle. As years and generations wore on, the jills began to resent being made to breed with which ever males happened to return from battle, only for their children to be taken from them as soon as they were weaned.

Eventually, the jills revolted, refusing to breed unless they were given a choice on which jacks they were mated to, and allowed to raise their young. This put both the Nemeans in a quandary as there was no effective punishment that could be applied, and once they understood that they would be able to form true families, they jacks abstained as well. The kings breeders agreed, and within one generation a new line of hares were raised.

Being allowed to choose their mates, the jills sought out not only the strongest and fastest, but also the most cunning and resourceful jacks. The hares resulting from these unions were taught by the hares who sired them, and so once old enough to be pressed into service, were well versed in the tactics and strategies of their fore bearers. New generations began developing their own tactics and strategies, and soon the Hrair-lion, the Thousand Lions, were the terror of Purrzia and the Levant. To this day, Efrafans defer to the family matriarchs on all matters dealing with the family itself, and no marriage is acknowledged without consent of the Marli-fa.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The familiar can always be found in new paths. Jacob begins a new journey, and meets new faces.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Finally found the cafeteria! Thank god for this nose, Nick old boy. Glad that polar bear let us get the day to ourselves before we really started training. I still can’t believe that crazy rabbit pulled it off; I really thought they’d just laugh and shred my application. Well mom, Carrots; I’ll make you both proud! After Bellwether, there’s nothing at this academy I’m not ready for!

“I’m not asking for one of your kidneys or your firstborn, I just want a fish patty sandwich!”

…

Except, maybe that.

Chapter 10

If there was one thing that Jacob felt was a constant in his life, it was the ignorant judgement of strangers. A fine case in point was the brown bear serving in the ZPA’s cafeteria.

“Look, rabbit, just get some carrots or a veggie-burger and move on; you’re holding up the line.”

“First of all, if anyone needs carrots it’s you. If your eyes were working properly you’d know I was a hare, not a rabbit. Secondly, I’ve got sweet potato fries, so I don’t need extra sugar; I need protein.”

The ursine leaned over the counter at Jacob. “Why are you even ordering fish; you can’t eat it.”
“Why? Did you not cook it correctly?”

The bear lurched back as if he had been slapped. “What!? Of course, I cooked it correctly!”

“Then I can eat it just fine.” Jacob crossed his arms and looked at the mammal across from him like a teacher lecturing a stubborn student. “Ever since mammals discovered fire, the line between carnivores and herbivores has become meaningless! Cooking breaks down the tough cellulose fibers that carnivores can’t digest, as well as the long chain proteins that herbivores can’t digest. Tyson and Kellogg figured it out; I mean, those fish patties are already 10% wheat binder, while the veggie burgers you’re serving have chicken meal as a protein supplement.”

A sow a head taller than Jacob tapped her manual trotter on the tray counter.

“Lands-sakes just give the boy his sandwich already! It’s his problem if he can’t eat it.”

There was a general murmur of agreement from the serving line. The bear grudgingly placed the sandwich on Jacob’s plate. “I’m not cleaning it up if you throw up.”

Jacob took his tray and headed towards the only table sized for mammals his height, while mumbling to himself. “You’re barely willing to do your job back there, why should you do it out here.”

As he was getting ready to eat he noticed two mammals hesitantly approaching his table: the sow from earlier, and a red fox. He motioned for them to join him when they looked at him questioningly. “Just because it’s a cafeteria, doesn’t mean it’s high-school cafeteria rules. Have a seat.”

“I don’t know,” the fox smirked at Jacob while taking a seat, “…carnivorous lagomorph in a confined space? I could lose a digit.”

Jacob grinned back. “Nah; ‘Night of the Lepus’ is the third Tuesday after St. Crispin’s day, so you should be good for a few months.” Jacob put his lunch down and extended his manual paw. “Jacob Emanuel Raibert, you can call me Emanuel.”

The fox took the proffered paw. “Nicholas Wilde. Call me Nick.”

Jacob turned to the now seated sow. “And my lovely savior?”

“Pearl Swineart.” She blushed delicately as she shook Jacob’s paw. “I hope I’m not overstepping, but was that display necessary?”

Jacob paused for a moment. “Probably not, but I’ve never really had much patience for the willfully bigoted.”

Nick lazily chewed on his Waldorf salad. “Yeah, I can see how someone from Happy…” he paused at a glare from Jacob. “Excuse me, Foxburough, might have issues with the common Zootopian mammal’s opinion.”

Pearl glanced between her two dining partners. “I thought you two didn’t know each other?”

Jacob finished his sandwich and began working on his fries. “Not that I know of, though your voice is familiar. You ever come into VT Commons?”

Nick looked down at his salad. “Once, for business, a lifetime ago.” He looked up with a strained smile on his muzzle. “But that’s not it. Our friend here is something of a minor celebrity, what with being in the news three times and all.”
Pearl looked at Jacob with surprise. “Well, I do declare! What ever did you do?”

Jacob looked at Nick thoughtfully for a moment before the memory hit him. “Pawpsicles! That’s where I remember you from, you were outside the courthouse!”

Nick looked relieved. “Yeah, guilty as charged.”

Jacob snorted. “So was I, but that record is sealed now.”

Pearl began theatrically fanning herself with a napkin. “Goodness, what sort of ruffians have I fallen in with?”

Jacob gestured with one of his fries. “Reformed ruffian, thank you very much.”

Nick chuckled. “I somehow doubt the niece of Arthur Swineart is going to be put out by a couple of reformed ruffians such as ourselves. Your extended family is more than a little famous in certain circles.” When Pearl looked slightly alarmed at that, he continued. “Not as famous as your father and grandfather, Dale Jr. and Sr., but still.”

Pearl shrugged. “And you’re familiar with Arthur’s circles, how?”

Nick set his fork down. “I, may have, brokered some deals for parties within those circles.”

Jacob glanced sideways at Nick. “Deals in Foxburough?”

Nick closed his eyes and took a calming breath. “Only once, and that one fell through, thanks in no small part to you. Then life and a rug happened, and I had to seek new employment.”

One of Jacob’s ears perked up. “That’s an awful frank admission. That must have been hard.”

Nick visibly relaxed. “Thanks. A friend of mine got me this chance, contingent on full disclosure. This would have all come out eventually, so I’d rather be in control of when and how people learn. I want,” Nick looked fiercely at something only he could see, “I NEED my coworkers to know they can trust me!” Jacob gripped his shoulder and nodded.

Pearl pursed her lips. “Pardon me, but, what’s so significant about Foxburough?”

Nick picked up his fork again. “The Basilica of Our Martyred Lady.”

Jacob continued at Pearl’s puzzled look. “It’s the only Reman Catholic school in 300 miles of Zootopia. The Capo-Y-Capo of the Cosa Nostra for the west coast, Anthony Bagnoli, wasn’t going to trust his children to the public-school system, or any school he couldn’t get to in under an hour.”

Pearl leaned in and whispered conspiratorially. “And you know this, how?”

Jacob finished his fries. “I went to school with Francesca and Abboti; she was a year ahead of me, while he was a year behind. Plus, I was in a gang which, apparently, ” Jacob looked at Nick, “…had dealings with ‘Mr. Big’.”

Pearl leaned back. “That must be one scary mammal.” Nick and Jacob both nodded. “So, what were they like?”

Nick smiled fondly. “Abboti is a sweetheart; takes after his grandmother. He’s in Rome now, I think.”

Jacob folded his manual paws on the table. “Polis Vatican, he’s studying to be a priest. Fru, on the
other paw, is every inch her father’s daughter. I have never seen a mammal turn a crowd on someone faster than her.”

Pearl shook her head. “Well goodness, aren’t we just a set?” she pointed to Jacob, “… a gangland tough,” then to Nick, “… a Consiglieri,” finally to herself, “… and a wheel mammal from a family of rum runners. We’re our own little mafia.”

“La Familia!” Jacob did his best unintelligible Marlon Brando impression while Nick tried to whistle the theme to “The Godotter” without laughing. Pearl didn’t bother trying not to laugh.

…

After a week of basic orientation, uniform issue, and in-processing to get the cadets settled, they were finally standing before their first real challenge: the confidence course. The staff called it the ‘Variable Environment Course’ or VEC, but that wasn’t what Jacob called it. He had already been through basic once; he was here to learn and be certified in the particulars of working in Zootopia, not to discover that it was possible to overcome obstacles put in front of him. He stood in a relaxed parade rest stance and waited for their Senior Training Instructor (STI) Maj. Friedkin to give them the go signal. He looked around and noted the attitudes of some of the other cadets. Some cadets were excited, but a lot were nervous, Pearl among them. Nick, like himself, was relaxed, if a bit more flippant. It made sense, as he was a city native, and in his thirties; he already knew what he was and was not capable of, so the VEC wouldn’t be a surprise to him.

Jacob nudged Nick and nodded towards Pearl, then glanced meaningfully towards the VEC. Nick seemed to understand, as after looking at Pearl and the course, he nodded back, his smirk was replaced with a look of determination. Once the Maj. told them to form up at the ice wall, Nick and Jacob went to stand beside Pearl.

Jacob put a paw on her shoulder. “Don’t worry about the course, Nick and I will help you through it. Just get across the ice flow to the base of the wall, we’ll help you get over the top.”

She took a calming breath and unclenched her trotters. “Okay, but I don’t want to slow you two down; and what about the rest of the course?”

Nick’s easy grin was back “Relax. Frau Blucher over there,” there was a rumble as the rest of the class started running, “… just said we had to complete the course, not that we had a time limit. As for the rest of the course, we’ll deal with it one obstacle at a time.”

The STI looked over at them. “La Familia get a move on!”

“Yes Ma’am!” The three yelled in unison and broke out into a fast jog towards the wall. As they were approaching, Jacob glanced at Nick.

“Corners?”

Nick nodded. “Corners.”

At that the two of them headed for one of the sides of the wall, and climbed up by gripping the corners, rather than trying to scale the flat face. Once at the top, they both grabbed onto the top edge with one manual paw and hung down with the other paw towards Pearl. She made it to the base of the wall and tried to jump up to reach their paws but fell just inches short.

Before Pearl could lose hope, Jacob noticed Beatrice Samuels, a timber wolf who seemed to keep to herself, also struggling with the wall.
“Samuels!” She looked over when Jacob bellowed her name. “Give Pearl a boost!”

She hesitated for a moment, then rushed forward and silently got under the struggling sow. In short order, Pearl was at the top of the wall. Jacob looked at Nick.

“One more, buddy, then it’s our turn.”

It was Nick’s turn to look hesitant, but he stayed where he was and turned to their erstwhile comrade. “Alright, Bea, your turn!”

Her jump reached the two dangling mammals, who grabbed her wrists. Jacob and Nick were about to start pulling, when Pearl grabbed them by their now quite frigid paws. With a cry of, “Hold on tight!”, she simply fell backwards, allowing her greater mass to pull the other three over the top. They slid down the other side and landed in a pile. They paused in their efforts to untangle their limbs when they saw the Maj. looming over them.

She waited for a moment, then spoke. “The hell are you lot waiting for, engraved invitations? Get your tails in gear and up to the Sandbox!” They were on the move three seconds later.

As they approached the Sand Storm Simulator (SSS), they saw a number of cadets already trying to make their way across. The size of the mega fauna gave them some advantage, as the wind turbines couldn’t move them. The smaller mammals, however, were having more difficulty. Beatrice whimpered when one of her fellow wolves was blown from the SSS.

Jacob and Nick were trying to come up with a solution, when Pearl piped up. “Drafting!” All three of her comrades looked quizzically at that. Pearl huffed. “We tuck in behind one of the big mammals and let them cut the wind for us!”

Nick chuckled. “Not the most ideal phrasing, as we will be literally behind some big mammal’s behind, but I suppose I can get behind that idea.” Everyone groaned at the collection of puns and set off to conquer the next obstacle.

Pearl’s idea was a success, and they came out the other side as the only non-mega fauna to not be exhausted thanks to Timothy Hathi Jr., a bull Indian elephant with a rather unruly mop of head fur. Upon seeing the troop following in his wake, he struck up a peculiar Britannian marching tune, and stayed on the ground until Jacob and company were past the obstacle. Not having to fight the environment gave them the strength needed to stay on the bars in the Rainforest district simulation area. In the end, they were the only mammals to complete the entire course in one run; and since they didn’t have to re-try any obstacles, they were also the first to complete it. Jacob made it a point to cross the finish-line shoulder to shoulder with Pearl and Nick, at which Samuels paused to join them.

Once the last cadet had crossed the finish line, Maj. Friedkin had them all take a knee around her. “Alright cadets, somebody tell me what happened out there today.”

A Bengal Tiger named Samir Rajasthan spoke up while pointing at La Familia. “That bunch cheated!” There was a general murmur of assent, though it was not universal. “If those two hadn’t helped, that sow would never have finished.” He glared at Pearl, causing her to wilt a little. The three with her sidled closer in a show of solidarity, and Beatrice bared her teeth in a silent growl. Tim Hathi Jr. openly rumbled his displeasure at the young tiger.

Friedkin looked around at the assembled mammals. “Is that what you all saw?” There was a round of nods and some grumbling from most, but not all, of the cadets. “That’s funny, cause what I saw was several officers coming to another officers’ aide!” Her look quickly became a glare. “Get this through your heads mammals: you are here to Pass this course, not Win it! Out there on the beat you will
NEED to rely on the mammals beside you, and they will NEED to rely on you. If you can’t do that, if the other officers on the force feel that you don’t have their backs in the field? Guess what, pretty kitty? YOU’LL BE DEAD!

…

It took little while for the cadets to really buy into Friedkin’s words, but slowly, the mammals in the class came around.

…

La Familia was gathered in the dorm common room, as Pearl looked at Nick in shock. “What do you mean, ‘you can’t drive’? You need a license to get into the academy!”

Nick looked chagrined. “Yeah, full disclosure: I only passed the road test because I’m friends with the proctor."

Pearl huffed. “Land sakes! Well, we have a couple of hours before lights out each night; let’s get down to the driving course and start getting you passable.”

La Familia and a few cadet spectators went down to the track. The three settled into one of the training vehicles: Nick in the driver’s seat, Pearl in the front passenger seat, and Jacob in the back. Once everyone was buckled in, Pearl looked over at Nick.

“Now I want you to do the course once, at whatever speed you feel comfortable. I need to see what I’m working with. These Land Rover Evoque series trucks are designed to move at speed with more than three tons in them, and the lot of us barely weigh in at 300 lbs., so she’ll feel a little tippy. Be gentle when going through the turns.”

Nick nodded and started through the course. Once he finished his run through, Nick looked back in pride: not one cone on the course was out of place.

Jacob leaned forward. “Astounding! We may have reached speeds of up to 35 mph!”

Pearl looked sharply at Jacob when Nick’s ears flagged. “Oh hush, you! It’s his first time.”

“And as such I need to make sure that it’s suitably awkward.”

Pearl made a shushing motion with her trotter, then turned back to Nick. “Nick, honey, you’re going to need to be comfortable going faster than that. There are, as you know, some very capable drivers who will be very aggressive. You need to be even more so. Let’s try again, but this time, don’t go any slower than 55 mph. Don’t be afraid to hit a few of the cones; that’ll tell me what we need to work on.”

Nick took a calming breath, then took out a small can Binaca aerosol spray from his pocket. Something in his posture made Jacob reach for the Jesus Handle, just before Nick madly sprayed his maw and screamed, “WITNESS ME!” Nick took off.

Once he finished his second run, Nick looked back in pride; only three cones were still standing. Jacob gurgled inarticulately while brandishing the Jesus Handle which had broken off in his paw. When he looked over to Pearl, she only shook her head.

“Mediocre.”

…
Their little troop was in the gym, helping Pearl with what she felt was an impossible task: The Enormous Criminal test. Some of their fellow cadets came along, either to help or to spectate. Jacob stood in the sparring ring with Hathi.

“This isn’t about technique, it’s about realizing that you can do this. It’s no different than the Confidence Course, and you managed that just fine.”

Pearl nervously shuffled her pedal trotters. “Yeah, but I had you guys helping me with that.”

Beatrice rested a paw on Pearl’s shoulder. “And we’re helping you with this.” Her voice rasped from what turned out to be a childhood injury.

Pearl nodded, then turned to watch Jacob and Timothy. There was some trepidation in the elephant’s demeanor; Jacob had received a serious warning earlier that week for injuring one of the TI’s during Enormous Criminal training. The injury had not been as much of a concern, as the fact that Friedkin had to physically restrain Jacob from continuing to pummel the lioness’ temple once she was unconscious.

Jacob turned around to face the Indian elephant.

“The key here, is to not try to take on the entire mammal. You ready?”

When Hathi nodded, Jacob took a flying leap and kicked him in the chest. Unsurprisingly, Timothy didn’t move. Jacob repeated the attack, with varying techniques for 30 seconds before he stopped and turned back to Pearl.

“Once an opponent gets to be about four times your mass, trying to brute force them into submission becomes nearly impossible. The solution,” Jacob faced Hathi again, “… is to break them down into manageable chunks. You ready?” Hathi nodded. “With opposition this time. This will hurt.”

Timothy assumed a basic fighting stance, then stepped forward while sweeping out with his trunk. Jacob rushed in the direction Hathi was swinging, but just out of his reach. Once he was behind Hathi’s lead leg, Jacob spun and punched Timothy’s hamstring. The bull collapsed onto his manual hooves and knees with a pained trumpet. Jacob darted up to Timothy’s head, which was now at Jacob’s eye level. He threw Hathi’s ear flap forward, so it covered the ear canal, and slapped hard. With another pained trumpet, Timothy fell over.

There was silence for a moment as everyone stared at the fallen elephant, then Nick looked at Jacob. “What… the Hell? That was nothing like what you did to Tomlinson!”

Jacob walked around to look into Timothy’s eyes.

“Ancient Efrafan fighting technique. You alright, buddy? Do you need a medic?”

“No, I just need to sit for a moment. Where did you learn that ?!”

“Anatolia; like I said, ancient fighting techniques my ancestors developed.”

Pearl looked between Jacob and Timothy. “Developed for what?!”

Jacob turned to his friends and looked quizzically at them. “For fighting elephants, and tigers, and aurochs,” he said as if it should have been obvious, “… basically, anything more than twice my size, this is what we do.”

The group boggled, and asked in unison, “Why?”
“Because my ancestors were bred for war.”

Beatrice threw her arms wide. “Who in their right mind would breed hares for war?!”

Jacob went to the edge of the ring and leaned on the ropes. “We don’t know his name, only that he was the youngest son of a dynastic line of Nemean lions in ancient Purrsia. Our histories call him Elll-hrair-rah, ‘the Prince with a thousand enemies’. He wanted a fearless killing force that could slip into an enemy camp unnoticed. It worked too; we killed off all his brothers and helped him extort the throne from his father.”

Timothy sat up. “So, what happened?”

“He was assassinated on the anniversary of his assent to the throne.” Jacob shrugged when everyone looked incredulously at him. “Well, he did have a thousand enemies. Anyway, the Nemean Kings kept us as shock troops, so we have a great store of knowledge on how to kill all sorts of creatures, but most of it boils down to: never attack head on, always keep moving, immobilize and overwhelm. That is what I want you to take from this, Pearl.”

“Yeah,” Nick shook his head in amazement, “… not the part about how lagomorphs are all, apparently, terrifying engines of destruction.”

Jacob glanced over at Nick. “Oh no, remember that part too. Anyway, it’s your turn Pearl.” Jacob looked out into the crowd of mammals. He motioned to one of the Hippos in their class. “Hawthorn, you want to step in and… hey, where are you going?”

…

A crowd of cadets watched as Jacob squinted at Nick. “Seriously?” Nick crossed his arms and all but glared at Jacob. “You can’t have not heard of the Miranda Laws.”

“I’m not talking about compelling a confession without making sure an individual understands their rights, but anything said without prompting after the arrest is made should be admissible. At the very least, it should be usable to secure a warrant.”

Nick shook his head. “It’s all in the phrasing: ‘Anything you say, can and will be used against you in a court of law.’ A judge’s chambers qualify, so a warrant secured based on testimony given before the Miranda rights were read and understood, becomes inadmissible, as does any evidence secured under that warrant.”

“So, if I have a perp doped to the gills on his own product rambling about his boss’ operations, I can’t act on that information? That’s insane!”

Nick relaxed back in his chair. “That’s getting more into the realm of probable cause; you’re talking about using confessions, coerced or otherwise, made before Mirandizing the individual to secure legal authority to search. That sort of situation is precisely why the Miranda Laws exist.”

Rheinman, a reindeer and one of the assembled cadets loomed over Nick. “You seem to know a lot about using the law to get out of paying the consequences.”

Nick looked up. “You’re right, just like I know that looming over me as you’re doing right now could be construed as ‘Atavistic Harassment’ under 18 Zootopian Municipal Code 247A. Theoretically, I could file assault charges; and whether or not they stick ZMC as well as the ZPD’s own regulations preclude anyone with assault charges, or accusations of speciest discrimination against them, from ‘serving in a position of public trust’. Nick smiled at the cervine’s look of alarm. “But this is all hypothetical, because no one here would ever stoop so low, right? I mean, we’re all
here to serve every citizen of the city, not just the ones we feel are sufficiently deserving, right?”

A general hush fell over the room, until Jacob spoke up. “If police work doesn’t work out for you, I know a couple of people at the DA’s office who would kill to have you as a prosecutor.”

Nick scoffed. “Please, I’m seen as villain enough as it is.”

…

Jacob shook his head while holding his salad fork like a stylus. “I’m sorry, but I just don’t buy into the whole ‘Judy Hopps Mono-myth’.”

Nick leaned over his Ambrosia salad. “I’m not asking you to become a born-again Zootopian, I just want to know where all this resentment for her comes from.” The gathered class nearly all nodded and murmured in assent.

“If you really don’t buy into it, I mean. I grew up with the Hopps; they may be small town, but they’re not small minded. They even work with the fox who attacked Judy as a kit.”

“Really!” Pearl delicately dabbed her lips. “I mean, I grew up with the Hopps; they may be small town, but they’re not small minded. They even work with the fox who attacked Judy as a kit.”

“Yeah, but...” Nick started to argue, but he was cut off by Jacob. “I’m sorry, but I just don’t buy into the whole ‘Judy Hopps Mono-myth’.”

“Whoa whoa whoa, they slapped a time limit on solving a potentially violent crime? I know I’m still working on my civil code, but that’s so far outside legal…”

Nick grit his teeth for a second. “Because they had no faith in her, all right? Bogo tried to fire her for taking the Otterton case, but when Bellwether made it a matter of the Mayor’s Office, he made Judy’s job contingent on solving the case in two days. It’s just…”

Jacob pushed his plate away. “Whoa whoa whoa, they slapped a time limit on solving a potentially violent crime? I know I’m still working on my civil code, but that’s so far outside legal…”

Nick shook his head. “Not they, He: Chief Bogo.”

Jacob boggled for a moment. “Sonova…, I’d heard Bellwether had dirt on the bull, but I didn’t know she had his balls in a vice! No wonder he caved on the conference.”
A pronghorn sheep named Bramton gaped. “But, why? Why would the Chief of Precinct One… just, why?”

Nick looked at the ceiling. “For the same reason I tried to get her to quit and stop bothering me: because she’s a rabbit, and how dare a rabbit be anything that might upset the status quo.” He looked around at the assembled class. “I know I’m not the only one to have their prejudices, or to have to endure those of others, but she managed to overcome them all, by herself, and that deserves respect.” He looked pointedly at Jacob.

Jacob settled back in his chair. “I don’t give respect to people I haven’t met, but you and Pearl know and respect her, so I’ll give her the benefit of the doubt. Still, I lived my whole life being called ‘slum-baby’ and being told my heritage was a disgrace to mammal kind by people like Bellwether. When things like the Press Conference happen, and you’re told half the people you grew up with are un-evolved monsters, you get resentful.”

Nick seemed about to press his argument when Pearl interjected. “Hey now, you were the one who just said we each endure our own burdens but let’s not forget that it’s how we deal with them that defines whether we’re good mammals or not!

“I grew up a tomboy, the daughter of a racing family. I wanted to race just like my daddy and granddaddy, but I was, ‘just a girl!’ I should, ‘be more demure and feminine if I wanted to marry well!’ But when I tried that, I found out the ugliest of truths’: I’m a pig! I can be pretty, ‘for a pig’, or talented, ‘for a pig’, but as far as society is concerned I will never be anything but a fat, ugly sow!” Pearl was in tears at this point. Several of the female mega fauna in the class seemed ready to join her, while nodding their heads. “Do you know what the happiest moment in my recent memory is? It was the day I helped a stranger get a fish sandwich, and he called me his ‘lovely savior’. ” She turned to Jacob, whose ears were back in distress. “You didn’t attach any modifiers, no ‘for a pig’, certainly no ‘what are you doing here instead of in the home whelping a new litter’. I was just your ‘lovely savior’, and I don’t think you understand what that means to me. I don’t agree with your anger towards Judy, but I can’t help but think it’s just that you don’t know her.”

There was a chuff of bitter laughter from the back. Everyone turned to look at Eveline Whitall, a whitetail deer from the Meadowlands district. “Believe me, being pretty isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.” She looked around. “Oh, don’t give me that look! I may not have his ears,” she said while pointing at Jacob, “…but I still heard you whispering behind my back, when we first arrived. ‘What’s the supermodel doing here?’ or ‘What does she think she’s trying to prove?’ God forbid that one of the ‘entitled prey’ should just want to do the right thing, or even just do something meaningful! It’s been a while since I’ve heard that, not since I owned the lot of you at the firing range.” She glanced back at Pearl. “Thanks for the pointers, by the way.”

Eveline clenched her hooves in her lap. “Did you know there’s a reg that says if you turn down three acceptance letters in a row, you can’t re-apply to the academy, ever? I didn’t know, until I came to the personnel center to find out why I kept not being notified one way or another. Turns out, I had been accepted, twice before, but my aunt kept shredding the letters!” She looked up and glared defiantly at the class. “She had the gall to say she was doing me a favor! ‘You can do so much more with your life.’ Yeah, like work for her agency as a model, or an actress, or a singer. If I wanted to go into business, she would send me to the best school to learn to be a secretary so I could work for some rich, handsome buck, and spend the rest of my life as just another pretty, meaningless face.”

Samir rumbled in his seat while staring at the floor. “Family IS the worst for that sort of thing. ‘You’re a Rajasthan, an A’s not good enough!’ ‘How dare you only get silver in the Nationals, you’re supposed to be the son of Kings!’ All my life, I was almost good enough. Then I got here, and in the first week, I was shown up by a hare, a pig, a fox, and a wolf, and I can almost hear my
father disowning me for that disgrace.” When he looked up, it was with a cold sneer. “And you know what? I can almost bring myself to care.”

Samir stood up, and everyone took note of the regal bearing that seemed the birthright of Tigers. “You accepted me, crap attitude and all. You dragged me, kicking and screaming, into your confidence, and for the first time, I am good enough.” His voice boomed through the cafeteria. “WE are good enough, worthy enough, smart enough to be counted! Not you, or me, or her, but we are!”

The hall shook as the class cheered. Nick looked over at Jacob. “What were we arguing about again?”

“If I don’t know, I probably said something stupid. I can’t keep track of an argument unless there’s booze involved.”

…

As the academy progressed, so too did the comradery of the class. The cadets shared not just their skills, but also their lives, their fears and hopes. Hathi talked about always trying to live up to the reputation of his father, ‘The Colonel’, while Samuels spoke about her sense of isolation growing up as a wolf who couldn’t howl. By the time exam week arrived, many in the class admitted that they felt closer to their fellow cadets than to their own family. Through all this, they improved, as a team.

…

Pearl all but strutted out of the ring, while TI Tuskerson massaged the end of his trunk where she had grabbed his septum and marched him around the ring like an unruly child on a minder leash. She sat down next to Jacob, as Nick headed into the ring to face off against TI McHorn.

Jacob glanced at his friend’s beaming face.

“Nice work in there; I knew you could do it.” He noticed something about Nick’s sparring partner. “Oh, this won’t end well.”

“Hmm?” Pearl looked to the ring, then blushed. “Well, I never!”

“I should hope not. Anyway, did you get your posting yet?”

Pearl primly demurred. “You know they don’t hand out assignments until we actually pass.”

“And you know that’s just formality; all that’s left is this, and our last run through the Confidence Course. Everybody else already knows where they’re going. Eveline and Samir were hilarious when they found out they were being assigned to the Third together. It’s like they keep forgetting everybody knows they have a thing for each other.”

“Too true.”

There was the sound of a single punch, then McHorn collapsed like a felled tree. Jacob shook his head in disappointment, while Nick calmly walked back out of the ring. “Pride goeth before the fall; he should have just worn his cup.” Jacob turned back to Pearl. “Anyway, stop avoiding the question. Where are you being assigned?”

Pearl huffed. “If you must know, I’m going to the Zootopian Highway Patrol.”

Nick settled in beside his friends. “Nice! Good to know that the bureaucracy didn’t get in the way of rational placement.” Nick glanced at the ring once the rhino had been helped off, and saw the next
TI, Lt. Leona Tomlinson step up. “I think it’s your turn, Emanuel.”

The African lion visibly flinched at the elated expression on Jacob’s face. Jacob all but skipped into the ring.

“Oh relax, TI! Friedkin said I’d fail if I used excessive force this time.”

…

Maj. Friedkin looked over the assembled cadets standing at Parade Rest on the graduation field.

“When I first met the lot of you, you were little more than an unruly mob, and I didn’t have high expectations. Truth be told, on paper, you’re not really outstanding: you didn’t beat or set any course or program records. In fact, your collective scores are so close to one another’s, that some of the Precinct Chiefs wondered if we were somehow padding our numbers.” She growled in disdain.

“Then they saw you all in action, and they saw the one other thing you did, that no other class has done in 33 years: you did not lose one, single cadet; no washouts, no injuries, no disciplinary discharges! You are the first class since before I joined the police, where the entire cadre is graduating!” Every cadet stood a little taller at that.

“I want you to remember that lesson: you are a part of the Police Force, and where ever you go in the future, you will always be a part of this family, and we will always be with you.

“Class 243, Aten-Hut!” The ground shook as the class snapped to attention. “Attention to orders: let these presents be to all here present, that by the order of the Commandant of the Zootopian Police Academy, and the authority of the Commissioner of Police for the Polis of Zootopia, do hereby authorize the commissioning of the following persons, they having demonstrated skill, determination, fortitude and honor in the discharging of their obligations, as Officers of the Law, with all the rights, privileges, and obligations pertaining thereunto. And having been duly sworn and witnessed, may now receive the Badges of their office. Signed on this day by my paw, Singh Kali Bagheera, Commissioner of Police, and Roderick Wendell Price, Commandant of the Zootopian Police Academy.”

She set down the document she had been reading and stepped back from the podium. She was immediately replaced by Judy Hopps, who had only moments earlier, given the class’ commencement speech.

“When your name is called, please come up and receive your shield. Pantherton, William J.”

One by one, the cadets came forward. The smile on her face almost seemed to split her skull when she said, “Wilde, Nicholas P.” Then came Jacob’s turn. He ascended to the stage and stood ramrod straight in front of the smaller rabbit, while his family and several others from the neighborhood cheered him on. To her credit, her ears only flagged for a moment, though he did hear her mutter, “Frithrah, a keth vaorah, a mitéath blair than u léao.” It was a traditional Lapino prayer of protection against Inle-rah.

‘Oh well,’ he thought to himself, ‘…it’s not like we’ll be working in the same precinct.’

Chapter End Notes

Due to the financial burden the maintenance of an active Navy would have if each
member state needed to maintain one, the Amerigon Confederation of States' Articles of Confederation stipulate that a part of the federal tax revenue will be used to fund a Navy to protect the international interests of the Confederation. With the advent of air power, the scope of the articles was expanded to include various forms of combat and logistical aircraft.

To offset this, each state is requested to maintain a militia at LoNF standards which is to be able to be activated within one weeks time, with an additional month for refresher training. This means that each State and Polis must maintain a training center. Some states, like Alecsena and Pennsylvania, contribute substantial mammal power to the Confederation Navy and Air Corp. Others, like Utah and Zootopia, contribute through monetary logistical support while relying on their neighbors for martial defense.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

All paths lead to Rome, eventually. Jacob's life takes a detour.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(One month ago)

Gladys, what have you gotten yourself into now. “Lead paint and asbestos?”

“That’s correct ma’am. The entire building needs to be remediated before we can continue.”

“Why are we only finding out about this now?”

“Well ma’am, between the buildings status as a Pacifican State Heritage site, plus the contract bid process, we couldn’t start work until three months ago. Before now, we were more concerned with ensuring the building’s structural stability. We only just started digging into non-load bearing walls in preparation to install modern secure phone, Wi-Fi and electricity, plus getting the place up to modern fire code.”

-Snort- I swear to god, if this fat-tailed river rat is trying to price gouge the city… “So, how long is this remediation going to take, and what will it cost?”

“Couldn’t say, ma’am. My company’s not certified for that kind of work. I could point you at a few mammals I’ve worked with in the past, if this were a private contract. But this is a government contract, and that means it has to go out for bid again.”

“What?!”

“Hey, I’m not happy about this either. My company’s on hold waiting for this matter to be cleared up, which means I’m losing out on much more lucrative contract work. If, however, I cancel the
contract then I run a serious risk of losing out on future city contracts, plus this job goes back out to bid. My company’s reputation is on the line, to say nothing about the livelihood of my workers.

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a whole track field of legal hurdles and circus hoops to jump through to avoid losing work and workers.”

God dammit, I should’ve stayed in the Revenue Cutter Service.

Ch. 11

(now)

Nick walked into the atrium of the First Precinct, tall and proud. While his first day had been, interesting, what with catching Flash at his street racer best, today he felt a different sense: a sense of belonging. He wasn’t here on a one-off; he was a brother police officer, he was worthy. Officer McHorn nodded to him in greeting, Wolford and the Fangmeyers offered congratulations for his and Hoppers’ work yesterday, Jacob was waving frantically at him… Jacob was posted to the Seventh Precinct, so what was he doing standing next to Clawhauser?

As Nick walked towards his classmate, he saw Jacob had on a smile so fake Duke Weaselton wouldn’t have tried to sell it. His eyes, though, were those of a mammal desperate for rescue. He must have been caught in the vortex that is Clawhauser’s obsession with Gazelle. Nick decided that he might as well throw Emanuel a bone; he could milk it for a favor or two later.

Nick walked over to the pair with a casual swagger. “Well, brush my tail, if it isn’t Precinct Seven’s own Jack Savage! How you doing buddy?”

Jacob’s face split into a pained grin “Little Red Robin Hood! I’m doing great pal!” he pulled Nick into a masculine paw-shake/hug, complete with precisely two back slaps while whispering in his ear, “Save me!”

Nick whispered back, “You owe me.” The two friends took a step back from one another. “So, you need the grand tour?”

Jacob shook his head and held up a small cooler bag. “Nah, just got to get my lunch squared away.”

Nick eyed the bag with no small amount of jealousy: the care packages Jacob received at the Academy were the stuff of legends. “I can take you to the break room, but are you sure that’s going to be safe? There’s apparently a lunch-box bandit in the building.”

Jacob gave a smug grin. “Got it covered, buddy. See for yourself.” He handed Nick his lunch bag.

When Nick opened the bag, he was assaulted by the overpowering scent of cinnamon, causing him to drop the bag and begin sneezing violently. “Ow! What is that?”

Jacob picked up and closed his lunch bag. “Essence of Cinnamon. You know those little Velcrow™ things you can stick on pencils to hang them on the fridge? Well, they also hold scents really well. I just attached one to each of my food containers, then put a drop of Essence of Cinnamon on them and voila! Instant deterrent to opportunistic scavengers, like dorm room-mates and off duty cops.”

At that moment, the lobby doors opened to admit a small grey rabbit in a Police-blue Nomex™ bodysuit. Jacob wondered how she could stand wearing that thing. “Good morning Clawhauser! Hey Nick, are you ready to make…” She rushed over when she noticed her partner, coughing and
teary eyed. “Nick! What happened?”

Nick used Judy to help himself stand up straight, and gasped out, “*Ab hac te prandium, Carrots!*”

Judy’s ears flopped in confusion. “What do you mean, ‘Save yourself from lunch’?” She turned to the reception desk. “Benji, do you know what heeeEEP!” She jumped slightly when she finally noticed Jacob standing next to her.

Jacob nodded towards his classmate. “He’ll be fine; just got a snout full of cinnamon.” He shifted his lunch into his off paw and extended his right paw in greeting. “We haven’t really met. Jacob Emanuel Raibert, you can call me Emanuel.”

Judy visibly relaxed and took his paw. “Judy Hopps. It’s nice to meet you. Nick talked a lot about you and Pearl. It was good to see her again.”

Both relaxed their arms, and Jacob turned to start towards the break room. “Likewise. Nick thinks very highly of you, and I put great store by his opinions.”

Judy turned to her partner with a saccharine grin. “You were dishing about me at the Academy? Aw, that’s so sweet!”

Nick stood up straight and noticed the jubilant expression on Clawhauser’s muzzle. “Truths! How dare you slander me with these verifiable facts!” There was chuckling all around. “But seriously buddy, what are you doing here? I thought you were assigned to the Seventh?”

“I am, but the new station house has some serious problems, and it’s going to take a while before the building’s ready for occupancy. All the officers who were going to be stationed there have to stay where they are. Since I don’t have a precinct, and the higher ups feel that Precinct One has the most experience with small officers, they sent me here until the Seventh is ready.”

“Well then,” Judy perked, “… lets get you settled in. Welcome to the First!”

…

Jacob thought the First Precinct’s Bullpen had the air of a high school sports locker room. The two dozen or so officers seemed to be revving themselves up; for what, Jacob wasn’t certain. He did know that if this was the environment he was going to be working in for the foreseeable future, that he couldn’t wait to be working in the Seventh. The raucous din crescendoed to wordless chanting and banging when Chief Bogo entered.

“All right, all right, settle down. SHUT UP! Now, we have two items on the docket: first, with the issues concerning the new station house in Precinct Seven, the transfers there are on temporary hold. That means officers Lupinski and Winters will be with us for a little longer.” There was some cheering and back patting for a wolf and a lynx in the back of the pen. “Quiet down. Also, we have a temporary new officer, but who cares.”

Jacob remained quiet and unmoving, though he bristled internally at the casual dismissal by his new superior.

The Chief continued. “Second: Hopps and Wilde managed to bring their first case together to a close in record time, and they deserve some recognition,” there was a pause, “… by someone who cares. Assignments…” Jacob tuned the laughter out and waited to hear his named called so he could get his assignment and leave. “Raibert: Parking duty, stick around after assignments. Fangmeyers’…” Jacob tuned out again. Once the pen had cleared, Bogo looked pointedly at Jacob.
“I want to make one thing clear; my assigning you to parking duty is not an attack on your capabilities as an officer. I learned that lesson already. I simply have no officers available to serve as your Training Officer at this time. Parking duty keeps you busy and brings revenue into the department coffers. Once I have a Master Patrolmammal (MPM) available to mentor you, I’ll put you in the field; so you can stop mean-mugging me.”

Jacob took a breath. “Permission to speak candidly, sir?”

The buffalo quirked an eyebrow. “This is new. Alright, let’s hear it.”

“If I’m mean mugging you, sir, it’s not because of my assignment. You’re my CO: you say jump, I’m in the air before the echo dies down. You say I’m on parking duty until one of us retires, then so be it.”

The Chief leaned back looking pleasantly surprised. “But?”

Jacob scowled slightly. “But, you also set the attitude for this precinct. Your officers don’t just follow your orders, they follow your lead, and you just told them that I’m not worth your time or consideration; that you don’t care. How am I supposed to trust my CO to have my best interests at heart under those circumstances? How am I supposed to trust my fellow officers to have my back, if their commander just told them that I don’t matter, sir?” Jacob sat back and waited.

Bogo drew a breath as if to speak, then seemed to think for a second. After a moment, he took off his glasses and leaned on the podium. “Raibert, this is the First Precinct. We are the best officers, who receive the toughest assignments. We see a lot of officers applying to come here. Most don’t make the grade; of those who do, most buckle under the pressure in less than a year. I don’t have time to get invested in any officer who won’t be here in a year. You, Officer Raibert, didn’t even want to come to this precinct, and will be leaving as soon as Gladys’ house is in order, so I’m even less inclined than normal.

“That being said, it was not my intention to draw into question your value as a mammal or an officer. For that, I apologize.” The Chief gathered his papers and glasses off of the podium. “If you tell anyone I said that, you really will be on parking duty until one of us retires, and I have at least a decade left in me.”

Jacob snorted a laugh at that and saluted. Bogo nodded and turned to leave. “A question, sir.” Bogo paused for a moment. “Judy can’t have enough time to be considered an MPM, so why are Hopps and Wilde partnered together? Is this about size, or public visibility?”

Bogo sorted. “You’ll do well with Winterhorn. Not that it matters to you, but it’s a PR decision. I want you to put in four hours of parking duty per day, then come in and take care of your administrative in-processing. Dismissed.” With that, he left.

As Jacob left to begin his own duties, he thought that Precinct One might not be that bad a place after all.

…

Jacob soon settled into a routine: four hours of parking duty in the morning, during which he would practice what Sgt. Natalia Adame had taught him about learning and knowing his environment, then back to the Precinct house for lunch, and finally four hours of administrative in-processing, including filing his reports from the morning. Initially, Bogo seemed annoyed at the additional report to read, but after seeing that one vehicle Jacob noted as suspicious, which was listed on a BOLO for a hit-and-run, the Chief simply told him to keep a copy of all his reports for future records.
Jacob also began developing a rapport with his fellow officers.

“What are those, they smell wonderful?!” Judy all but bounced next to Jacob as he snacked on a collection of golden puffy objects flecked with spices. Nick was across from them, whimpering and drooling slightly.

Jacob considered her for a moment, then passed the plastic container towards her. “Try one, tell me what you think.”

She gingerly picked one up with her claws and was about to pop it in her mouth, when Wolford came in sniffing. He saw the dish and all but lunged at them. “Oh boy! Puffed Grubs!” Judy squeaked and almost dropped the morsel at that statement.

Jacob slammed the dish closed. “I will end you and all that you love, Wolford.”

The timber wolf joined Nick in whimpering. “But you gave some to Judy?”

Jacob stared the wolf down. “She. Asked.” Conversation stopped when there was a crunching sound coming from Judy.

“Hm, tastes a little bit of butter and sweet nuts. Is that saffron?” When everyone gaped at her, she shrugged. “What? Like the song says, ‘Try Everything’.”

Jacob smiled and thought to himself, ‘Well now, I’m impressed.’ “Here, have another.”

As Judy began her second grub, Nick groused. “I’ve been trying to get the recipe out of him for months, but…”

“Not even on my deathbed.” Jacob picked one of the treats up and took a bite. “I’m not risking Hombo-fa Adame’s wrath by giving away her recipe.” He grinned mischievously. “She does have a niece, though.”

Six weeks after starting at Precinct One, as Jacob was making his morning traffic rounds, he came across an oddity. A sedan was in a live parking zone in front of an apartment complex; a sedan which, like clockwork, dropped off a well dressed, if out of shape wolf every Tuesday and Thursday at 10:00, and picked him up again at 11:00. Today, however, was Wednesday at 9:15. Jacob knew that legally, the car could remain there for 10 minutes to load and unload, but it had been there for eight minutes already. Jacob called in suspicious behavior, and moved towards the car, switching on his body cam, and had his ticket writer at the ready.

As Jacob approached, a frantic looking bobcat in a driving cap jumped out of the driver’s door. “I know this is a loading area, I’m just waiting for my passenger; he should be out any minute now!”

“Well, if he’s not out in the next,” Jacob looked at his watch, “…42 seconds, then I’m afraid I’m going to have to ticket this vehicle for blocking a loading zone. 35, 34, 33…”

As Jacob began counting, the flustered cat climbed back into the car and pulled out, likely to go once around the block. A minute later, the wolf passenger came out of the building. He was out of breath, and Jacob could hear his heart racing. When he looked up, he saw Jacob, but no car. “Where the hell is my car!”

Jacob stepped forward. “Sir, your car was very nearly parked illegally. I simply advised your driver to relocate. Given traffic conditions and construction he should be back in,” Jacob glanced at his
watch, “…10 minutes?”

This was a gross exaggeration, but Jacob wanted to test a theory. He felt he was proven right when the wolf seemed to fly into a rage. As the mammal stormed towards him, Jacob began laying his ears back, and re-positioning his pedal paws. The wolf jabbed a claw at Jacob. “You toady little rodent! Do you know who I am?”

“Not at all sir, though that could be remedied quickly. Could I see your identification?”

As far as Jacob was concerned, the mammal couldn’t have telegraphed the blow any more if Western Union had delivered it. Jacob easily turned with the blow, letting it glance off of his jaw with just enough force to bruise lightly. The wolf being taller than Jacob, as well as not a real fighter, greatly overextended. This allowed Jacob to put him in a particularly painful arm-bar and wrestle him muzzle first into the sidewalk.

“Sir, you are under arrest for assaulting a police officer: you have the right to remain silent…”

The sedan pulled around the corner as Jacob was Mirandizing the wolf. Upon seeing his passenger’s predicament, the bobcat pulled back into traffic and drove away, all the while the wolf swore any number of curses on Jacob and the driver both.

As Jacob was cuffing his assailant, he noted a few details about the wolf: his suit was slightly torn, his manual paws and sleeves were wet and there were tufts of black, curly fur or wool under his claws. Once secured, Jacob called in the attack.

The responding unit turned out to be Nick and Judy. Nick strolled up while Judy helped wrangle the foul-mouthed mammal. Nick was about to speak when his nose flared, and his easy-going demeanor switched to cool professionalism. “What happened, Officer?”

“Suspicious circumstances, and a car parked in a loading zone. When I asked for ID, the mammal, one,” Jacob looked at the driver's license taken from the wolf’s wallet, “…Byron Howlton, became violently aggressive, at which time I subdued, restrained and Mirandized him. That’s when I called in the arrest.”

Nick took another short sniff. “I smell blood. Do you need medical attention?” At that comment, both Jacob and Judy looked at each other as they heard Byron’s heart rate spike.

“It’s not my blood, he didn’t hit me hard enough for that, and it shouldn’t be his; I just grappled him to the ground.”

“Hold him still.” Nick leaned in and closed his eyes as he took a deep sniff. “I smell sheep.”

Jacob loaded Mr. Howlton into the back of Nick and Judy’s cruiser.

“He had what could be black wool under his claws, and his clothes exhibit signs of a struggle. He was in this apartment building for about 10 minutes. I’ll babysit Byron here.” By this point, the wolf had become all but catatonic.

Nick and Judy called in their situation and headed into the building. Five minutes later, they called for Child Protective Services, a criminalistics team, and a coroner. Not long after that, the front of the apartment was a riot of official city vehicles, as well as curious onlookers. It turned out that there was a dead ewe, one Candice Scherer in a third-floor apartment: she appeared to have been strangled. A lamb of only a year was found in a crib in the back of the apartment. The neighbors commented that they suspected the ewe was a prostitute, given the pedal traffic and noises coming from her apartment.
Byron had long since been brought in for processing when Jacob, who was acting as crowd control, was ordered to return to the precinct and report directly to Chief Bogo. When he arrived, he was greeted with congratulations by every officer he met. Upon entering the Chief’s office, he saw Nick, Judy, and a Clydesdale detective named Oates he had only met in passing. Once he was seated, the massive equid leaned in.

“Officer, could you please explain to me why you decided to harass one of the founders of Knight Howlton Security Services?”

Jacob raised a paw when both Nick and Judy seemed about to leap up to his defense. “Suspicious circumstances, sir.” Jacob turned to Bogo. “Chief, could you pull up my daily reports for every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday? I could run back to my desk if you need.”

“Not at all, officer.” Much to Nick and Judy’s surprise, Bogo simply typed for a few seconds, then spun his monitor around for everyone to see. Jacob then took over.

“You’ll note, detective, that for at least the last six weeks, Byron visited the complex for one hour, every Tuesday and Thursday, between 10:00 and 11:00 AM, but never on a Wednesday, and never before 10:00 AM. This deviation in behavior, combined with the agitated nature of the driver, led to my decision to intervene. Forensics has my body cam, so the footage should corroborate my testimony on both the driver’s and Byron’s suspicious behavior.”

Oates and Bogo looked at each other, before the detective spoke. “We’ve already seen it, and we have the responding officers report to confirm your actions.” Judy and Nick both looked poleaxed at what Oates said next. He put on his coat and turned to Bogo. “I might want to use him for my investigation, if you can clear it with his Chief.”

“I’ll see what I can do, Nathan. Officers, excellent work. Dismissed.”

When the three junior officers left the office, Judy was all by vibrating in excitement.

“Detective Oates is with the Special Crimes Task-force; do you know what this means?”

Jacob ran a paw down his ears. “Yeah, it means no gore fests for ‘Bad Movie Night’ for the next while. I was a military cop, remember? I’ve done all this before.”

“What I don’t get,” Nick scratched his head, “…is how that guy managed to land a hit on you.” When Judy looked strangely at him, Nick continued while pointing to Jacob. “Carrots, this guy missed your Enormous Criminal take down time by like, two seconds, and that because he was using it as a teaching moment. Leona Tomlinson almost refused to spar with him.”

They were passing Clawhauser on the stairwell when Judy looked Jacob up and down.

“Maybe you’d like to try me some time?”

Jacob looked at her appraisingly, before grinning. “Sure, could be fun.”

Nick piped up. “Just let me know when you guys are gonna go at it: I want to film this.”

Judy looked over at him “Okay, but only if you’re participating. You keep turning me down when I offer, and I want to see what you’ve got.”

There was a crashing sound behind them. When they turned, Benjamin Clawhauser was lying unconscious under a pile of files.
“Ben!”

“Benji?”

“I’ll go get a Medic!”

Chapter End Notes

For all Zootopia has one of the most diverse, complex and largest populations of any Polis or Metropolitan center in Amerigo, it is surprisingly food self sufficient. This is largely due to domestic food industries. Some would be surprised to find the seat of that industry is not in the lush farmland of the Meadowlands District or Ratite ranches of Savannah Central, but rather the vast ichthyo-farms of the Rainforest District.

One of the most lucrative ichthyo-farms is the Vague Vert Company, which operates multi-tiered hydro farms on more than 30 miles of island coastline throughout the district. They produce edible seaweed and shellfish, while the Bubba Hump Shellfish Company operates more than a dozen Crayfish and Lobster farms for processing, supporting local chains such as Crabby Cakes and Buggaburga.

There has been some concern raised by Pacifican environmental groups as to the ecological impact of Zootopia's ichthyo-farming industry, particularly from the Gillian Taylor Memorial Cetacean Institute. As Zootopia has not formally signed the International Declaration of Cetacean Sapience, these arguments fall on deaf ears.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Bright lights cast deep shadows. Jacob begins to find a pattern.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

‘Oh, oh oh oh ohhh, Try everything!’

Another beautiful day! Let’s see what I have to start? Filing to case records, filing to personnel records, Detective Crossman meeting with Jason Howe representing Byron Howlton; monster, I hope you rot in… deep breath Benjamin, have a donut, file, and forget. I wonder if today’s going to be as exciting? OOH! It’s Judy, Nick, and Jack!

“Jesus, how many times did you two go at it last night? I ached just watching you two?”

“What can I say Nick? I’m a rabbit, we have a lot of energy and stamina!”

-gurgle Oh…Em…Goodness! -

“Hey Clawhauser, how… are you doing okay?”

-AH! - “I’m fine, Emanuel!”

“Are you sure? You look pretty peeked. Maybe you should join us sometime; it’s good exercise and…quick, catch him…

Ch. 12

The trio of officer looked on with concern as the precinct medic examined an unconscious Clawhauser for the second time in 24 hours.
Judy shook her head. “I’m really starting to worry out Benjamin. Maybe someone should get him on a diet?”

Nick watched as the portly Cheetah was carted off. “Careful now, ‘diet’ is a four-letter word to Ben.”

Jacob looked at his compatriots. “So is ‘tomb’, which is where he’ll end up sooner rather than later if he doesn’t start making changes.” He turned and headed towards the Bullpen. “So anyway, those were some pretty fancy moves you two put on last night. There’s a civic defense group that meets in my hometown three times a week. Think you’d be interested in teaching some self defense classes?” He continued at their skeptical looks. “There’s a potluck dinner at every meeting.”

Wilde excitedly jumped in front of Jacob. “Will there be Grubb Puffs?!”

Judy snickered. “Maybe this vixen Emanuel mentioned will be there, and you can marry into the recipe!”

Nicks’ friends were slightly concerned when he didn’t move. Judy rested a paw on his arm.

“Nick?”

“Quiet, I’m thinking.”

Jacob snorted and grabbed Nick’s other arm. “Come on, Petruchio; let’s get to work.

…

“Fangmeyers, Savannah Central patrol: West Broad St. to Appaloosa Blvd. Wilde, Hopps, Savannah Central patrol: Appleton St. to Appaloosa Blvd. Higgins, Grizzoli…”

Jacob had learned the chief’s workaround for Nick and Judy’s rookie training vs. PR issue: always keep them within two blocks of a veteran patrol team. It was quite elegant, really.

“Raibert, see Oates in Major Crimes (MC). Dismissed!”

Jacob had been expecting to be called up after the conversation the day prior, but he was still surprised at how quickly it happened. There was a mix of congratulations and condolences from the various officers for, ‘being invited to the breakfast club’. This bit of gallows humor was due to Major Crimes handling any crime that started with the word ‘serial’.

Jacob had no small experience with the sort of crimes that MC handled: mammal trafficking, smuggling of all types, as well as particularly heinous hate crimes. These were all crimes he had investigated for the SID during Operation: Noble Garden. Maybe when the NDA he signed for that operation came up for reclassification review in four and a half years, he’d get the chance to sit down with his fellow police officers and commiserate. That was going to be a two-drink ante conversation.

Oates and the MC unit were on the second floor, along with the other special crime units: the Vice, Gangland and Organized Crime task forces. This was also the location of the Strategic Law Enforcement Coordination Center (SLECC), or Sleek as it was called, which oversaw all integrated investigations throughout all twelve Precincts. Jacob thought the entire affair was quite overdone. When he contrasted it with the intel center in Incirlik, the ultra-top end computer systems made him feel like he was walking through a Gala™ computer store, or some kind of modern art expo. The MC work center itself was close to the rear of the building. The offices and workstations were arranged in a semi-circle around a central briefing area, at this moment dominated by Det. Oates and a white board covered in evidence photos and notes.
“Ah, Officer Raibert! Good, let’s get started.”

... 

The MC was living up to the moniker, ‘The Breakfast Club’; the case Jacob was being called to assist on was that of a serial rapist. The individual, either by contempt or intent, was now also wanted for murder, as two of his victims had died due to injuries sustained during their assault. At present, what was known was the perpetrator was a caracal of average size, well dressed and well spoken, and was targeting successful female herbivores and prey-classed omnivores. Jacob’s role, in what he found out was to be a sting, was to act as bait. This was how he found himself in a salon chair with an undercover makeup and wardrobe specialist hovering nearby. Much to his chagrin, it seemed as if half the precinct, including Nick and Judy, were there to see his ‘debut’.

Nick glanced at his partner. “You sure you’re okay there Fluff? You seemed pretty hot when you heard what this was all about. We all heard you threatening to bring the Equal Opportunity Office down on the Chief’s horns.”

She looked at him for a moment, then gave a pained smile. “Yeah, I’m okay. It just smacks of sexism: they needed a young female prey mammal to act as bait in a sting, and instead of tapping the young female prey mammal they have on the force, they go with Jacob in drag.” She huffed. “I may be within my rights, but I might have overdone it. I guess I should really just learn to...”

Nick snorted. “What, settle? Accept the status quo? That’s not what got you this far, so don’t slack off now. All the little guys and gals are counting on you, on us; if we settle or accept the status quo, then change never happens. It starts with you, after all.” He gave his partner a warm smile.

Judy looked stunned for a moment, then giggled. “That was incredibly deep Nick. How are you the same mammal that insisted on trying a ‘Sho-Ryu-Ken’ on Jacob last night?”

The two were broken from their reverie by an exclamation from the makeup area. “You look fabulous!” The polecat specialist, Percy Dovetail, was giddy with delight.

Jacob scowled into the mirror. “I feel like a clown, and I look like a Bunny!”

The androgynous mustelid cocked their head to the side. “But, you are a bunny.” It took both officers Lupinski and Winters to keep Jacob from throttling the mammal.

Judy stepped between the hare and his prey. “I think he meant Bonnie, and if it’s any consolation you’re not one of those either.”

Wolford looked at Judy in confusion. “What’s the difference?”

Oates ushered the terrified skunk out of Jacob’s kicking range. “A Bunny is a sex worker, while a Bonnie is an Alban or Caledonian rabbit of Pictish descent.”

Jacob paused in his efforts at murder and considered both Nathan Oates and Judy Hopps. He knew that, like his ancestors, the horses from Alba and Caledonia, especially those from County Clyde, were bred for war. The Clydesdales of the Gallowglass mercenary company were the stuff of legends. On the other paw, he should have seen that Hopps was a descendant of the Wode Warriors who stopped the Reman Army in its tracks. His estimation of both rose.

“Alright, I’m not going to kill them.” Once standing upright, Jacob turned to Oates. “You’ve got me all dolled up, what’s next?”

The Clydesdale turned to Jacob. “Now, we get you to look helpless.” The next hour was spent with
various officers trying to advise Jacob how to, ‘look helpless’.

The general din of so many officers laughing attracted the Chief’s attention. “What is going on here?!”

Everyone stopped in their tracks and looked sheepishly at Bogo. It was Nick who offered up an explanation. “We’re trying to get Raibert in touch with his helpless, feminine side, but I think it was shot off during the war.”

There was a rustle of chuckling at that, though the Chief seemed unimpressed. He turned to face Jacob. “What is there to understand? You get up on your toes, like this!” Putting words to action, the towering Cape Buffalo rose up onto the tips of his pedal hooves, causing his flank to suddenly stick out. “Then, you hold your arms to the side like this, for balance, and then walk, one toe directly in front of the other!” By holding his arms at his side and bending them at the elbows, the Chief did an admirable job of masking the shape of his hips. His method of walking also caused his hips to move in a hyper-exaggerated runway model sway. He reached the end of the room and pivoted around. “Now you…Winters?”

Everyone was torn from the spectacle of the Chief’s strut, when they looked to see Mitch Winters convulsing on the floor. Jacob thought the lynx had had a stroke, until…

“Bwa HA HA HA HA!”

Beside him, Moira Lupinski looked ready to pop as she desperately toe kicked her partner. “Shut up! -snerk- Shut up!”

In short order, the entire crowd was desperately trying not to laugh. Bogo shivered in place for a moment before bellowing, “Not, One, Word! Get back to work!” before storming off.

Once the Chief was out of earshot, Nick headed out. Judy noticed the direction he was heading. “Nick, the garage is the other way.”

“Yeah, but the CCTV monitoring and records section is this way, and I want to get there before the Chief orders that footage purged!”

There was a general rush of mammals as they went to, ‘Save the Strut!’. All that remained were Jacob, Ferdinand, and Oates. Standing in the doorway were Nadine Fangmeyer and a female badger Jacob wasn’t familiar with. “Jacob,” the tigress approached him, “…this is Dr. Pauline Dun. She’s the precinct’s chief psychiatrist and grief counselor.”

Jacob considered a humorous comment for a moment, but the serious expression on the doctor’s face made him hold his tongue.

“Officer Raibert,” there was both pain and determination in the voice of the mammal in front of him, “…I’m here to help you understand the mindset of a victim, which is what you’ll need to portray in order to catch this, creature.”

The guise Jacob was to assume was that of an up-and-coming business Jill. ‘She’ was to remain aloof, but visible; dismissive, but wary of predators. To add to the image, Jacob was chauffeured to and from locations by an undercover officer. To date, the attacks had all occurred along the border between Savannah Central, and the Meadowlands District. The operation focused on having Jacob visible in various bars which the previous victims had frequented. In order to ensure that their prey didn’t catch wise to the sting, Jacob went to multiple bars and restaurants, at different times and on
different days. Some days were more of a bust than others.

The Chevalier Town Car was sitting at a gas station after another unsuccessful evening. Luckily, their prey was an infrequent predator, and there had been no additional attacks since the start of the operation. That being said, Jacob was usually on edge by the end of every night. He just wanted to get off shift and head over to Nick’s place for Bad Movie Night and to plot how best to torture/tease Judy’s cinematic innocence, once she finished her current semester of night classes. That, and use the bathroom; the copious water he needed to drink to maintain the ruse of a tipsy business mammal meant frequent rest stops during the night.

Jacob signaled to his backup, Officer Cynthia Reynolds, where he needed to go. In short order, Jacob was finishing up and heading back to the car, when his worst fears were realized.

“OOF!”

Jacob and another mammal collided, both stumbling at the contact.

“I am so sorry miss, I didn’t see… Jacob?!?” There, standing in front of him, was ZHIP Officer Pearl Swineart in her duty motorcycle gatorskins.

Jacob tried to silently convey that she should say nothing. Luckily, six months at the Academy had instilled enough of a rapport between the two that she quickly gathered his meaning and simply headed to the bathroom. It did nothing to stifle her peals of laughter, once the door was closed.

…

Judy Hopps was unwinding with several of her classmates from Night School: Zabrina Alescu (silver fox), Catherine Montaigne (mountain lion) and Dolores Twitchle (grey squirrel). The four of them had formed an unusual friendship, as the only four career minded females in the Rhetoric, Persuasion and Culture course (WRA 230) at the University of Zootopia. They studied together and relaxed together. This night, they were at the Coyote Moon Bar and Grill. Catherine, who was recently divorced, was the driving force behind the evening’s festivities, much to Judy’s chagrin.

“Come on, Judy, you have to have a type? What about him?” Catherine gestured towards a dapper tan feline relaxing in a booth near the entrance.

“Nope.”

“What, you didn’t even look at him!”

Judy took a sip of her beer. “Sure, I did, when we came in. I looked at him, he looked at me, and it gave me the creeps. So, nope.”

“Is this about species? Cause let me tell you doefriend, there’s nothing wrong with playing in different fields.”

“Says woman who recently divorced murderous wolf.” Zabrina quipped over the rim of her Martini glass, alcohol making her Wallachian accent more pronounced.

“Hey,” Catherine pointed the celery stalk from her Bloody Mary at the vixen, “…I’ll have you know that charge made securing a ‘no-contest’ divorce a cake walk, though I can wish it hadn’t cost that poor ewe her life. Honestly, he didn’t get bad until he started associating with those out-of-towners.”

Judy huffed into her beer. “Cathy, it’s not about species; there are plenty of non-lagomorphs I find attractive."
“Like your partner, maybe?” Delores asked with a twinkle in her eye.

“Again, nope.”

Zabrina set her glass down. “I call B.S. I know you’ve mentioned how good he looks.”

Judy picked up a pretzel stick and pointed with it. “I’ve also mentioned how much of a kit he can be, sometimes. He’s okay at work, and when the situation gets serious, so does he; but I know him well enough and I know myself well enough, that while we’re good friends, we’d be a disastrous couple. Not as bad as Cat and her ex but…” The table laughed as Catherine threw a wadded-up napkin at the doe.

Once her friends calmed down, Judy continued. “But seriously, I’m not looking right now. I’ve only just started my career, and it’s hard enough climbing the ladder as a female; If I want to break through the glass ceiling, I’m going to need a running start, and I don’t see that happening with some guy’s delicate ego at dating a career minded doe weighing me down.”

“So, play for my team.” Dolores said while leaning back.

Catherine leaned forward. “I thought you and Lilly were doing good?”

“Oh, we are! Doesn’t stop me from recruiting.” The energetic squirrel looked around the restaurant for a moment. “How about her? The black Jill in the Two Piece?”

Judy looked to where her friend indicated and went dead still. A quick review of the restaurant showed her that the feline Catherine had pointed out earlier was paying an alarming amount of attention to the hare at the bar. Judy rapidly tapped on the table top and waited with her ears pointed erect. Within seconds, she heard a response from the ‘Jill’. “Girls,” Judy said in a low voice without taking her eyes off of the building entrance, “…when the Jill and the Caracal leave, we wait five minutes then head to Cathy’s place.”

The three with her balked slightly. Catherine furrowed her brow. “Now wait a minute, we just ordered…” She stopped cold when Judy looked at her. “O…okay, sleepover at my place.”

A quiet settled over the table for the next 12 minutes, until the hare at the bar stood to leave. At that moment, the feline in the booth signaled for his check. Precisely five minutes after their departure, Judy and her friends paid, and left. It was an hour later at Cathy’s up-town apartment when Judy felt her phone vibrate in her pocket with a text message. When she looked at it, she saw it was from Nick, its contents causing her to all but deflate in relief.

“Okay Judy, you’re scaring me here. What’s going on?” Dolores asked while perched on Catharine’s shoulder.

“I’ll tell you as much as I can over White Zinf and Rocky Road. Tomorrow’s going to be a long day.”

…

It was another two weeks before everyone’s schedules lined up for another Lady’ Night.

“I don’t buy it.” Zabrina shook her head. “I know the Jack you’re talking about, we grew up in the same neighborhood and that was not Emanuel I smelled.”

Judy chuckled as she could almost hear Jacob sigh in frustration, despite not being there. “And I’m telling you, that it was. We have an incredible makeup team for undercover work. They just tapped
him for this case. He’s been real busy since he started at the precinct about two and a half months
ago.” Judy pointed at Catherine while sipping her whiskey sour. “He’s the mammal who caught your
ex, after all.”

The catamount grinned. “Really? I might give him a kiss then; maybe more than a kiss if that two-
piece pants suit was any indication of his bod.”

Judy quirked an eyebrow. “God, do you ever turn off?”

Catherine assumed a wounded air that Nick would have been proud of. “Hey, I don’t judge; you do
you, and I’ll do me.”

Dolores threw a peanut at the feline. “And everyone between you and her while you’re at it.” While
everyone was cleaning up from the laughter induced spit-take, the squirrel looked around the
restaurant. “Hey Judy, this co-worker of yours: jet black, super tall for a hare?”

“Yeah, why?”

Dolores pointed to a booth in the back. “He’s right over there, with some Jill who looks familiar.”

Everyone turned to look, just in time to see the two hares staring back at them.

“Oh, sweet cheese and crack…Cathy! Stop waving at them!” Everyone but Judy started laughing
again.

Jacob waved jauntily and looked back at Valerie. “What?”

Valerie just smiled over her meal. “Subtlety, thy name is not Jacob.”

“I blame Lapinius the Lesser; he’s the hare that took off with all the subtle Efrafans in the first
century, BCE.”

“Are you calling me the child of thieves?”

Jacob waited until she took a drink. “Well, you did steal my heart.”

Valerie swallowed and mock scowled. “That was baaaaaaaaaad!”

“Well, like you said: I don’t do subtle.” He took one of her paws in his own. “I am, however, big on
honesty. Thanks for agreeing to come out tonight.” They smiled at one another for a moment. “So,
you said you had something for me?”

“Yes, but I’ll hold off on giving it to you.” Jacob looked quizzically at her, to which she rolled her
eyes. “Oh, come on! Rookie cop who was at the center of two high profile arrests in two months,
meets stunning, brilliant, talented…”

“Humble?”

“I’m Lapino so no, not even remotely; field reporter at a restaurant where they exchange notes and
other media, while his nosy co-worker and her very flirty friends…”

“Is the cougar still waving at you?”

“No, but the squirrel’s blowing kisses and making ‘call-me’ paw motions.”

“Should I be worried about my chances with you?”
“Absolutely, she’s gorgeous! You’re going to have to step up your game, mister. What about you: should I be worried about ‘the other woman’?”

“Not a chance in hell; you’d hurt me.”

Valerie snorted, then leaned over to kiss his nose. “Damn right I would. So anyway, I pulled what I could on what you gave me: the phrase, ‘We are Hunters’, and the crest are both from something called the ‘Thule Society’. They were a Volkish cult, and one of the driving forces behind the NAZI’s rise to power during the Weimar Republic civil war and the Austro-Hungarian/Baltic war in the 1930’s and 40’s. Turns out, they were the ones responsible for all those awful camps the History Channel is always doing specials about. They preached carnivore dominance and species purity as existential necessities for the survival of a healthy society; hit the Eweden community in Europa pretty hard.” She saw Jacob frown. “What is it?”

“Something I heard recently, I’ll need to double check.” Jacob’s thought went to the two recent arrests.

*Jacob wrestled the wolf to the ground as he read the mammal his rights: “You worthless grass eating pest, do you know who I am? I am a Hunter!”*

*Jacob kept his back to the unsuspecting serial rapist: “You don’t fight the natural law, little morsel: you are the prey, and I am the Hunter!”*

Chapter End Notes

With the global power initiative, and the orbital solar arrays which support it, there is a need for strong education throughout the globe to support the industry needed. To that end, member nations of the LoN are encouraged to support a central core education protocol collectively named, the International University.

The IU is not a single campus, nor one central institution, but rather a cooperative agreement between various colleges and universities worldwide, such as the Schiller Institute in Paris, or the University of Zootopia in Polis Zootopia. Certain educational standards must be met in order to participate in the IU collective. In turn, LoN funds help to subsidize the education of students, as well as granting preferential hiring for graduates in LoN supported institutions like Doctors Without Borders, or various national space agencies.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Paths converge and diverge, but always move towards their destination. Jacob is not the only officer to shine.

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Sweet cheese! The smells, the sounds of kits playing while parents chat nearby, it’s almost like being…

“Feeling nostalgic for your 10,000 kin back in the warren there, Fluff; except, ya know with 100% fewer rabbits?”

…back home; complete with obnoxious older siblings.

-sigh- “Yes, Nick, as a matter of fact this does feel a lot like home; pot-luck dinners, all the grownups trusting their kits with each other, though nobody ever used old mam Catmaul as a jungle gym. Who did you say that was, Jacob?”

“Huh? Gah! -pant- Make some noise when you move, Savage! When did you get here?”

“Situational awareness is the key to survival in the field, Nick; fail to know your surroundings when on patrol, and guess what? Take it away, Hopps.”

-Giggle- “You’ll be dead, Brushtail!”

“Thank you, officer. To answer your question, Nick; I live here, so this is where you’re likely to find me. As for your question, Judy, did you mean the African Lion, or the Mountain Lion doting on him?”

-um- “Both?”
“The elderly lion is Rabbi Dusan Loewe. The puma is Jean-Pierre DuPrey: he’s the cop who arrested me.”

“Not really a badge of honor there, Savage.”

“Dayne drayéveeron, Hombe-fa! Dayne drayéveeron!”

“Hwa?”

“And this is the neighborhood Hrair-roo. Hrair-roo, M’saïes Nicholas Wilde.”

“Frithaes, Nicholas Hombe-fa. Dayne drayéveeron!”

“They’re asking you to play with them.”

“But, Judy and I…”

“Oh, go on, Nick. We’re not supposed to speak until after the, Colchita, Lupadora? Is that right Jacob?”

“Um, okay?”

“Narn-nil!”

“Señoras Alvaredo and Cabrera: Mrs. Alvaredo is the maned wolf in the yellow dress She’s the Lupadora, as the Lapin root Lupa should tell you. Mrs. Cabrera is the Lama in the red dress. She’s the Colchita. Hola, señora Alvaredo, señora Cabrera!”

“Hola, señor Raibert.”

“They’re both from Bullivia; came here after one of the revolutions in that region 30 or so years ago. They were both internationally recognized professional fighters.”

-rumble-

“Iya, iya, kerfluffle fhtagn.”

“Oh, stop complaining Nick.”

Chapter 13

The night progressed well. The pair from Bullivia, with translation from Mrs. Alvaredo’s daughter-in-law, gave a demonstration on wrestling using your environment; while they themselves were quite showy in their presentation, they also showed much more sedate techniques based upon their movements. All of this was couched in terms of temporarily subduing one’s opponent, so as to ensure escape, though it was quite apparent that if either of them was in that situation, escape would be the last thing on their minds.

Next up were Nick and Judy, who were there to talk about an education outreach program being piloted by Northwestern Community College, with the assistance of the University of Zootopia. The program was aimed at providing GEDs, Anglican as a Second Language classes, Associate’s Degrees and Technical Certificates to inner-urban communities throughout the Pacific Northwest, such as Foxburough. Nick spoke about his own experiences, and how many of them might not have
come to pass had he had more education opportunities, as well as how an informed community is often more resistant to criminal influence and influx. Judy spoke about the work opportunities available for mammals with as little as a GED. She touched a cord in the audience when she spoke from the heart about how education and diversity go paw in paw.

“I grew up in Bonnieburgh, what most people call Bunnyburrow. As the name implies, we are mostly europian brown and cotton tail rabbits from the Edinburgh region of Caledonia. We had a UZ satellite campus that focused on agriculture, economics, and ethanol fuel industry. It was, also, mostly rabbits. Growing up, I knew two non-herbivores, Robert Catmaul and Gideon Grey; one was a school acquaintance, the other was the school bully. To me, that was how the world was, except in Zootopia.

“I didn’t know how little I knew about the world until I arrived here. I didn’t think foxes could be anything other than what I had been told or had seen from the only fox I had ever met. I didn’t believe a sheep could be so cruel as to actively destroy lives, just to push her political agenda. I didn’t think that I could be so parochial and ignorant, that my ill thought words could do so much harm.”

She paused for a moment to gather herself, while Nick rested a paw comfortingly on her back. After a moment she continued. “I certainly didn’t know a wonderful, diverse community lived right here on the edge of the city. I grew up with stories of Zootopia being a shining city where Predators and Prey could live side by side, but it’s not; it’s a city where mammals can live side by side, just like you do. I’ve never been anywhere else that a ewe would happily trust her lambs to the care of wolves,” she looked at Jacob, “…or where a hare’s word carries as much weight as a lion’s.

“Zootopia could be an incredible place, where mammals of all types don’t just live in proximity, but share a community, just like this one. These programs will allow your voices to be heard, your stories to be told. The opportunities offered aren’t just to get better paying jobs but to show Zootopia that it has been wrong; unity doesn’t come from rejecting what makes us different, but by embracing and sharing what makes us diverse and unique!”

She stood there for a moment, embarrassed that she had gone on like that in front of a crowd of strangers. The silence was broken when Rabbi Loewe stood and began clapping. Within moments, the entire hall was on its pedals, clapping and cheering. Jacob started rhythmically stamping his pedal paw, and soon every hare, as well as several other mammals were stamping and chanting with him. “M’saion fuléao! M’saion fuléao!”

Once the cacophony died down, the elder Lion spoke. “Pay heed, oh ye people, for God is speaking.” Saying this, he stepped aside as a young Jaguar in a Reman Catholic priests collar stepped forward and gave grace. After that, the assembly settled into a very lively dinner. Judy and Nick sat beside Jacob, and Judy suffered a great deal of thanks for her gracious words, as well as one poorly veiled attempt to set her up with a local hare.

When the well wishers had abated, Judy turned to Jacob. “I’m curious, what was that chant you started up?”

“The Hain are how Erafans and Lapinos celebrate or commemorate something. That one doesn’t translate well; literally, it means ‘We greet the dawn’. The best I could explain is it means hope for the future.”

After dinner, a statuesque Reindeer stepped onto the stage. “Good evening everyone. Most of you know me, but for our visitors from city center, I am Gladys Winterhorn, Chief of Police in the Seventh Precinct.” Judy sat ramrod straight in her chair, her ears pointed in rapt attention. “First, I would like to thank our guests from the First for their presentation, as well as their inspirational words.” Judy beamed at the praise, even as she blushed with embarrassment at being called out.
“Now, onto the FCDC police blotter: the racers who came into town last night were, with your help, sent back out; while there were no arrests, as there is no law prohibiting ‘spontaneous social gatherings’, there were also no injuries or altercations. Your filling the streets to prevent the racers from using Lower Canal Street as a drag strip quite possibly saved lives here in town; the race moved to the Wadi Pashto neighborhood of Sahara Square, where an accident destroyed a store front and landed three mammals in the hospital, one in critical condition. I bring this up to reinforce the point that it is through cooperation that this community remains safe; that accident could have been here, and that mammal could have ended up in the canal.”

Judy looked at Nick when she noticed him tune the rest of the Chief’s talk out. “What are you thinking partner?”

He glanced over to her, then looked back at his dinner. “Opportunities and outreach.” At her quizzical look, he continued. “You know Grizzoli and Snarlov coordinated with the Third on that accident, and the Fangmeyers have been working with Gangland trying to crack down on illegal street racing.”

“Of course; Bill and Wade ended up pulling a double trying to get something from the driver, while she was lucid. I still can’t believe Flash was involved in something like that.” Judy shook her head in dismay.

“Well, he was never involved for the same reasons as some. He’s a bit like Pearl; he races for the fun of it. A bunch of mammals do. Others are trying to be ‘edgy’ or are ‘sticking it to the mam!’ Not to sound like an old mammal, but I blame it on the media’s glorification of the underground racing culture.”

Jacob turned to Nick. “Hey Red, they have tapioca pudding. Do you want me to get you some?”

Nick’s ears perked up. “Yeah, that’d be gr…” His ears flagged when he noted the smirk on Jacob’s muzzle. When he turned to Judy, she was busy hiding a grin behind a black bean burrito. “I tell you, mammals today have no respect for their elders. Where was I?”

Judy swallowed. “You were railing against mass media for corrupting the youth of today with their Hot-Rods and Rock-and-Roll.”

Nick gave a good natured huff. “Thank you, young lady. Anyway, it goes way deeper than just obsession with the ‘Fast and Furriest’ series. Some are kids like I described, but there’s another use for the races: recruiting.” His friends looked at him strangely. “No seriously! When I worked for Big, one of my jobs was to go to those races and poach the best drivers. It’s how I met Flash in the first place. Anyway, there are a lot of kids who get into street racing for work; the pay can be incredible, it’s exciting and a hell of a lot more dignified than customer service work, especially for preds.” Nick held a paw up to Jacob before he could say anything. “I know, I know: Tannerman Propaganda language, but it’s our reality so accept it for now.”

Judy put a paw on Nick’s shoulder. “So, what is it you’re thinking?”

Nick looked thoughtful for a moment. “We need what happened here: outreach, cooperation and participation. It’s like a drug or Vice sting: so long as the market is there, mammals will come, and the ringleaders keep distance through mammals like me. Just rounding up the racers won’t stop the problem either; they just become ‘victims of the system’.”

A voice came from behind the three cops. “What would you suggest then, Officer Wilde?”

“Gah!” Nick turned to look at who startled him and came face to knee with Chief Winterhorn. When
he looked in her eyes, he saw genuine interest, so he took a chance. “We need outreach ma’am. A
good number of the mammals involved in street racing just want to race. The ZPA has a controlled
driving course; we could give them the competition they want, while demonstrating interest in their
interest. They stop being outcasts, have a safe venue to hone their chosen craft and are shown that
there are employment options available without resorting to vehicular felonies. We keep racers off
the streets, while providing outreach to disenfranchised citizens and, potentially, interesting recruits.”

Jacob started to grin. “I get it: a ‘Hearts and Minds’ campaign!”

Nick shook his head. “There will be no harvesting of organs, Jacob.”

Jacob looked aghast until he saw Nick’s smug look. “Smug rug. Well, I’m onboard, for what it’s
worth.”

Judy all but bounced in place with excitement. “I’m in too! OOH, Nick, this will be great!”

“This is all well and good, officer Wilde,” the Chief interjected, “…but it doesn’t address the core
issue you mentioned: that there are many involved who are involved specifically for criminal
activity, or other purposes, to say nothing about not knowing when a race will be.”

Nick spun completely around so he was fully facing the reindeer. “The mammals who are in it for
the counterculture thrill will lose interest once they aren’t ‘edgy rebels’. As for the hard-criminal
elements and the race times, I think I could swing an in.”

Judy looked pensive. “I don’t like the idea of getting Flash involved, Nick.”

“One, Judy, he’s already involved; we didn’t catch him that first day joy riding. He was practicing.
Two, it won’t be him that’s the mammal on the inside.”

“Who, then,” Winterhorn leaned down, “…will be this, Fox, on the inside?”

Nick grinned.

…

Nick swallowed nervously as Chief Bogo fixed him, Judy, and Jacob with a deadpan look.

“I want to understand this correctly: you, probationary officer Nicholas Wilde, want me, the Chief of
Police for Zootopia’s First Precinct, to authorize an extensive operation involving multiple precincts
and special departments, to say nothing of the countless mammal hours that will be involved, taking
away resources from ongoing operations by veteran officer teams, and which will, according to you,
result in zero arrests. Is this correct, officer?”

Nick took a calming breath. “No sir. I am requesting everything you mentioned, with the very real
potential of crippling the underground racing circuit, as well as securing vital intelligence on the key
actors involved: the organizers and recruiting officers, gang leaders, as well as the vice peddlers who
use these events as advertising venues. I am also asking, because a great many of the mammals who
participate are just kids; they feel forgotten or misunderstood and are trying to find a community that
gets them. If we can show them that they do have a place in the city, that we don’t view them as
deviants who will only ever find acceptance in the criminal element, then even if we don’t get
actionable intelligence to make any raids or arrests later, we’ll have stripped the scene of a huge
number of potential criminal recruits. Sir.”

The three rookies sat at attention while they awaited the Chief’s decision, the set of their ears the only
indication of their nervousness. After a minute of consideration, the Chief steepled his manual
hooves.

“I’ll give this my, tentative, approval. If Chief Winterhorn hadn’t called me and told me to hear your proposal out, and I am somewhat annoyed that another Chief knew about this before I did,” he held up a hoof to forestall any comment, “…I’d have laughed and put the three of you on Parking duty for a month. As it is, your idea has merit. However,” he lifted the sheet of paper Nick had written his proposal on, “…I can’t take this to the Commissioner’s meeting with the Chiefs tomorrow. If you are going to be this active an officer, Wilde, you’ll need to learn how proposals like this are drawn up. Also, this is somewhat sparse on details and resources required. I’m assigning you to Lt. Higgins for today Wilde: clean up and format this proposal for presentation. Higgins will work with you as far as resources you would require and have access to. Hopps, Raibert: you two are on foot patrol around Waterly Park; I still need officers on patrol, and Higgins doesn’t need the three of you under foot. Dismissed.”

After the meeting, but before heading off to their assignments, the three agreed to meet at Nick’s place for a bad movie night. “I’m using my veto; tonight, we will watch something with bad Seventies porn music and a crap load of fake blood.” Nick pointed his snout in the air with an affected air of disdain.

Judy shook her head as they passed Clawhauser’s station. “No can do, ‘Smug Rug’.” She giggled when Nick shot Jacob a glare. “I’m bringing one of my girlfriends tonight. She’s been wanting to join in for a while now, so she gets to decide what we do.”

Jacob faked a hurt look “Are we not enough for you?”

Judy snorted. “Nope. Plus, whenever we get together, you two just wear me out. Once one of you finishes, the other one starts in; I nearly passed out the last time.”

There was a yelp and a sputtering commotion behind them. When they turned, Benjamin was rushing to the bathroom. Jacob looked on with a worried expression.

“I really am starting to wonder about that mammal. Anyway, what are you complaining about? Laughter is supposed to be good for you.”

... 

The three rookies met at seven o’clock. Waiting by the door was Judy’s friend, who had a bag in her paws.

“Zib!” Nick and Judy started slightly when Jacob rushed forward and hugged the vixen, who broke out into a grin.

“*Umbra mica,* or should I call you *micuta doamna* now? You looked quite fetching in that pants suit.” Jacob began sputtering, while Nick tried to look his best in his off-duty casuals. Judy stared at the vixen questioningly. “I told you I knew Jacob. Anyway, I should probably introduce myself to my host.” She held out her unoccupied paw to Nick. “I’m Zabrina Alescu.”

“I’m awed by your radiance, glorious as the dawn, but you can just call me Nick.”

“Hey Zib, want to see a magic trick?” Every mammal was suddenly wary of whatever Jacob had in store. “Watch now as I transform one of my coworkers into a kit!” Jacob turned to Nick. “Hey Red, this is the niece of Mrs. Adame I told you about.”

“Ohmygodyourfamilymakesthoseawesomegrubbpuffsthosearesogoodpleasetellmeyoubroughtsomepleasemagicalpleasemagicalgasp-pleasemagicalplease…” The gathered mammals could only laugh at Wilde’s kit-like excitement.
“What have you been telling them, Umbra mica?”

Jacob managed to compose himself. “Only that you have access to your aunt’s grub puff recipe.”

“Yeah, no. I’m not risking Baba’s wrath by giving away one of her recipes.” She giggled at Nick’s suddenly crestfallen look. “But I might be persuaded to bring some when I visit.”

Judy snorted. “I’d become a dirty cop for you if it keeps him from pestering me for my family’s blueberries. What did you bring tonight?”

Zabrina lifted her bag. “Well, you said this was a bad-movie night, so I went for a theme,” She reached into the bag and began grabbing items and handing them out, “…Vanilla ice cream for Judy and myself, vanilla Aegean yogurt for the boys, and for tonight’s entertainment!” She pulled out a DVD. Upon seeing it, Nick’s eyes gleamed in delight as he and Zabrina said in a sing-song voice, “Can’t get enough of the STUFF™!”

…

Judy was the first to arrive at the precinct in the morning. She headed up to Clawhauser, coffee in paw.

“Good morning Ben!”

“Good morning Judy. I have a fresh dozen if you want one. How, how was your night?”

Clawhauser seemed slightly uncertain, but Judy was just hungry enough to not care.

“As long as it isn’t a Boston Crème or an Éclair. Last night was great, but I’ve had about as much of white, creamy gunk as I can stand. Thanks for the donut, Ben!” Judy didn’t see the stricken look on his face as she walked to the bullpen.

When Jacob and Nick arrived, a Zebra was at the reception desk. Nick waved at the mammal. “Hey, Cherise. Where’s Clawhauser?”

“Hi, Nick. He had another fainting episode, so the Chief took him to the clinic to get checked out. I hope he’s okay.” She nervously ran her hoof through her mane. “Higgins is running the precinct today, so you should head in now.”

As they walked into the briefing room, they noted the rather subdued environment, while Hopps and Trunkaby were in conversation.

“I’m not trying to ‘fat-shame’ him, I’m worried about his health! This is the third time in as many months.” Hopps was wringing her paws.

“Except he’s been that weight for years, and this has only been happening this last year.” Francine pointed with her trunk.

Judy’s and Jacob’s ears snapped up, and both moved to their seats before Lt. Higgins entered.

“Room, Aten-Hut!” He waited a moment, then continued. “At ease. First up: yes, Clawhauser has been sent to the clinic for a full evaluation. I am going to pass around a card for everyone to sign, as I know we all wish him well. Second, assignments: Hopps and Wilde, Ingram Heights; keep an ear on the radio in case the Chief needs to see Wilde once he’s done at the Chief Brief. Raibert, Lupinski is out on her roady thing, so you’re with Winters on speed-trap duty, Inter-District 25 off Grand.”

Jacob stood and headed over to Mitchel Winters. “Mitch, what did he mean, ‘roady thing’? It’s
Passover, the Holy Sabbath; she’s not doing *anything* until tomorrow night.”

They picked up the keys and radar gun. “Yeah, the L.T. is *super* atheist; he doesn’t get religious things, so he thinks she has special dispensation to work as a roadie for Black Sabbath.” The Lynx shrugged his shoulders. “I’ve tried to explain it to him, but he just doesn’t seem to get it.”

Jacob got into the passenger seat of the cruiser. “Are you sure he isn’t just an A-hole?”

“No, he really is just that dense when it comes to religions.”

“Huh, good to know.”

…

It was noon when the call came in. “Base to Adam 54; car 54, where are you?”

Nick picked up the radio while Judy wrapped up her hummus wrap. “Adam 54 to Base, we’re on the west side of Taylor Plaza.”

“Copy that Car 54, Chief needs to see you back here. How copy?”

Nick looked at Judy as she started the cruiser. “I guess the Chief-Brief is done.” He buckled in and re-keyed the radio. “Solid copy base, heading back now; ETA 30 minutes.”

“What are you talking about ‘30 minutes’, Nick? The station house is only five blocks from here.” Hopps pulled out into traffic.

“Yeah, but there’s construction on Pleasant St., and a Gala™ store on Peko Ave.”

“Aw, crap!” She scowled. “The new Me-Phone 9 comes out today doesn’t it?”

“Yes, please sit down. This is Commissioner Bagheera, and Sgt. Raine Daschle; she heads up the Street-Racer taskforce. They’re here to talk about your proposal.”

The Sgt. leaned in. “Specifically, the part where you have half the force putting on some kind of Broadway musical song-and-dance number, instead of making arrests.”

Nick took a deep, calming breath to center himself, and dove right in. “This op won’t be about making arrests, but rather a combination of preventing the need for some future arrests with kids who just want to be accepted, while securing intel to guarantee the arrests of mammals that use these events as criminal job fairs. The dance troop thing was actually Higgins’ idea; he and McHorn both have sisters in the Fourth who went to college with Officer Trunkaby. They were all apparently in the same sorority and were all on the Stomp team. There are a bunch of other officers with similar skills that we can use.”
The Commissioner rested his paws in his lap. “And why do we need this spectacle to begin with?”

“To prevent the racers from scattering when we arrive.” Nick hopped out of his seat and began pacing. “A lot of these mammals are just conditioned; ‘It’s the Five Oh, time to go!’ If we just pull up and start yelling and arresting people, we’ll accomplish nothing except what’s gone on before, and I hope I’m not overstepping any bounds, but that’s not good enough any more. We show up with a dance crew, and the novelty alone will entice some mammals to stick around.

“This is the social media age; everybody has a Tweeter account or a Muzzlebook Page. Everyone without the criminal savvy to not post their activities will be tagging and linking videos. Meanwhile, we will have several dozen hi-def, hi-resolution body cams and dash cams pointed at the crowd. We start comparing the two sets of information, and we’ll have eyes on nearly every player at the event.”

Sgt. Daschle had a thoughtful look on her face. “That’s all well and good, and I do mean that; it’s more dignified than some of the things me and my team have had to do in the past, but we’ll still need to know when and where. You said you would infiltrate, but you’re not a racer; this is about racing, and we don’t know that information until maybe an hour before.”

Nick paused and turned to the pony, arms behind his back. “That’s because you are a competitor, not a vendor.” At the combined curious looks, he continued. “Whether it’s a comic convention, a business seminar or an illegal street race, there is a certain amount of groundwork that has to be done. In our case, the route itself has to be mapped out, escape routes have to be scouted, and vendors, that is, chop-shop owners, drug dealers and pimps, have to know where and when to be, since they have valuable merchandise to move around.

“That’s also why I wanted to have access to the CI network. Whoever, and by whoever I mean me, goes in will need credibility; that means a name that can be dropped safely. I can’t just say I’m there for Big business, or that rejecting me might Destroy their future business opportunities; that’d get me killed or worse if someone tried to verify my story by calling Mr. Big or Victor ‘The Destroyer’ Destoyov. I also can’t just be a free agent or work for an unknown. I know there are just enough mid-level mob types doing time right now that one would be willing to cut a deal for a reduction in their sentence. If I ‘work’ for a known Capo or lieutenant, it affords me the protection to operate safely, and the legitimacy to get close to the key players, and that’s where the really good intel will come from.”

Bogo looked skeptical. “You expect these mammals to let you get close to them with recording gear?”

“The key to hiding something from someone,” Nick took on an almost pedantic air, “…is to conceal it in and as something they expect to see: Want to hide drugs? Disguise them as over the counter drugs or candy. Want to hide a fox cop in a criminal den? Plant him as a fox criminal. Want to conceal an AV recording rig? Bury it under a lot of other electronics. Only the most technically savvy mammals can tell the difference between the electronics associated with one of those Blackout Dance troop suits, and the guts of a modern cell phone.

“I’ve run a hustle before, where I posed as a party-drug dealer. It’s a lot of cash, very quickly, and the props make identifying me later almost impossible. I did it on a shoestring budget because I needed cash to pay off debts quick. Now, I have a city behind me, and I’m doing it to save lives.” Nick huffed and returned to his seat, seemingly spent. “Sirs, ma’am, I can do this because I have done it before, and I should be the one to do this because it needs to be done, and I can’t in good conscience ask anyone to do it in my stead.”

The three senior officers considered the fox in front of them, then looked at one another. After a moment, the Commissioner spoke. “Son, I am approving this operation. For the foreseeable future,
Nick perked up. “Yes sir, is this operation going to have a cool name I can put in my memoirs?”

Bogo snorted. “Yes, Wilde, we’re calling it ‘Operation: Mess-this-up-and-I’ll-tie-your-tail-to-a-rope-and-use-you-as-crocodile-fishing-bait’.”

Wilde sat still for a moment. “Maybe just ‘Operation: Shepard’s-Prayer’.” At the puzzled look, he saluted the senior officers. “Alan Shepard’s Prayer: Please, God, don’t let me screw up!”

With the operation now being organizational, rather than personal, Nick was freed up to establish the persona he would be assuming. He was still boggling at the idea that he was trusted to get this done. This was how he, Judy and Jacob found themselves back in Percy’s workshop.

“This will be Fabulous! My greatest creation to date!” The skunk was nearly beside itself in excitement.

Jacob relaxed against one of the walls. “As long as it’s not me in the chair, I don’t care.”

“I don’t know, I thought you looked quite fetching.” Judy smirked at him.

“The two-piece was okay, but an evening in those heels and I was ready to murder someone; they crushed my toes.” Jacob reflexively moved his pedal paws.

“And now you will know better what females go through to look ‘beautiful’.”

“Look, Hopps, at no point have I ever asked…JESUS-H-CHRIST, Wilde! What is that?! You look like the unholy lovechild of a Gypsy caravan and a Rave!”

Judy looked at her friend in horror. “I’d have said Liberace and an overdone Christmas tree, but, Yikes!”

Where once stood Nicholas P. Wilde, now stood ‘The Candymam’. He was perched on clear acrylic bottomed, white snakeskin platform boots which made him slightly taller than Jacob. His pants, shirt and tie were a riot of clashing primary colors and patterns, over which was a red-and-white candy striped Zoot-suit coat. Crowning the whole affair was a fuzzy, misshapen top hat and spangled Elton John glasses, as well as a walking stick fashioned to look like a candy cane. To add insult to visual injury, the whole outfit was covered in a variety of LEDs, blinking in a near hypnotic pattern. When he addressed them, it was with a falsetto so grating, it caused Judy’s ears to shoot up in alarm and Jacob’s to point straight back.

“The point of all of this is to make later identification nearly impossible: how tall am I? What’s my build? Even my scent is covered; if you two were canids, you’d be running for the hills right now.”

Jacob began massaging his temples. “And the Saturday morning villain voice?”

Nick approached them with a slow, exaggerated strut. “That’s all me. You’re going to have to get used to it, since you two will be taking turns in the A.V. van.”

Nick took a theatrical bow when Ferdinand started clapping.
“Fabulous, absolutely fabulous! Just some minor fitting issues, and to test the electronics!”

Judy squinted at the fox. “They seem to be working just terribly, I mean, fine.”

“Oh, not the lights dear: the A.V. rig!” With that, the flamboyant mustelid switched on a nearby T.V. monitor. What appeared was an image of Jacob and Judy at an angle, looking at a screen showing Jacob and Judy into infinity.

Jacob pinched is eyes closed. “Okay, turn and look at something else! This is just freaky.”

Nick walked over to the wall and turned out the lights, then turned back to his friends. What they saw, was a largely unchanged feed. While Jacob looked on in confusion, Judy sat up for a moment, then started laughing. “That’s brilliant!”

Nick smirked at her. “And that, young lady, was a terrible pun.”

Judy giggled and planted her paws on her hips. “Oh, shush you!” Jacob looked back and forth between the two, until Judy took pity on him. “It’s all those lights: I’ll bet the same number of red, green and blue LED’s are always on! The suit provides full spectrum illumination at all times.”

“That’s, pretty damn incredible.” Jacob turned to Ferdinand. “I bow, sir to your exemplary skills.”

As the skunk hurried into the back room for something, Jacob turned to Nick and Judy. “Now we just need your assigned criminal contact and we can get started.”

“I still don’t see why we don’t just ask Mr. Big: it’s not like he would say no to me if I asked Fru Fru.” Judy was busy fussing with Nick’s coat, and so didn’t see the alarmed look on his or Jacob’s face.

“First rule of the hustle, Fluff: never get in debt, if you can call one in. The precinct already has mobsters who owe us, might as well use them. I’m going to get out of this now; do you mind Hopps?”

She looked confused for a second, then blushed and stammered. “Oh, cheese and crackers Nick! I am so sorry! I’ll, uh, I’ll just, see how everyone else is doing.”

Once she was out of sight, Jacob turned to Nick. “She is aware of what the Bagnoli family is, right? That Francesca is the heir apparent to the Big empire on the West Coast?”

Nick pursed his lips in thought. “She has something of a blind spot when it comes to people who help her. I think she spent so long doing without support, moral or otherwise, that she won’t risk losing those who extend their paws to her.”

Jacob and Nick both looked the way she had gone. “We’re going to have to keep an eye on her and get her ready, aren’t we?” Jacob said with concern. “When the Bagnoli’s call in whatever debt they feel she owes, it will devastate her.”

Harold Papanopolis was not, despite his street name of ‘Happy’, a nice goat by any stretch of the imagination. He had been brought in on a number of charges ranging from drug distribution and racketeering, to less savory crimes such as allegations (unproven) that he had run a child pornography ring. He was serving back to back life sentences, and as such seemed a poor choice for the Candymam’s erstwhile employer, except for one detail: he hated the city’s criminal underworld. This might have seemed ironic on the surface, save for his adamant belief that his downfall was orchestrated by his own underlings, at the prompting of, ‘outside elements’. As such, the Gangland
Taskforce was able to secure his assistance simply because the end result would hurt those whom he felt had hurt him.

As with any other enterprise, Happy’s criminal organization was capable of functioning without his direct input, though when it was given, it was obeyed without question. More than one competitor or disloyal member had ended up in the same prison as Happy at one point or another, to gruesome results. As such, when Happy told one of his lieutenants, Dodger Wilson, that they were to assist a new employee called the Candymam to gain access to the racing circuit, there were no dissentions. This was helped by the fact that all the assistance that was required was a date, a time, a location, and a phone number to be called if there were any questions.

Nick stepped out of the panel van he had been loaned, at the location he had been given by Happy’s crew. He was immediately approached by a group of young toughs, probably part of the race crew that was scouting the location and meeting mammals like himself. “Hey you, circus mam, what you doin here.”

Nick put on his working smile: all teeth with his head tilted slightly down. “I’m the Candymam, I’m here to spread my own brand of Happy times.” So saying, he turned slowly, panning his hidden camera across all of the mammals. He then opened his coat. The inside was festooned with pockets, each one with a different baggy. Another advantage working with the ZPD, was access to Vice squad’s chemists. His own recipes had kept him out of trouble in the past. With the help of the precinct however, his two ‘best sellers’, a candy-coated mixture of ground up caffeine pills and an over the counter dietary and exercise supplement he called ‘Shock Rocks’, and gummy worms made with vodka and an over the counter sleep aid he’d dubbed ‘Wonder Worms’, were both much more convincing in effects, as well as much safer for the user. The final touch was a one-ounce vial of lab grown “Zootopian Ice”, just incase someone doubted that he had any actual drugs. That one was not for sale, only to be tested.

While some of the mammals looked impressed, the speaker, a rather stocky jackal, considered him with some skepticism. “You a Happy mam then? You ain’t trying to Skip out on nothin?”

Nick had no idea who Skip was, or if it was simply a test, so he stuck with the plan as established, and trusted his Brothers in Blue would have his back. “I wouldn’t dare to be called a Dodger. I’m just here to spread joy and Happy times.”

The jackal signaled three of his partners to stay with Nick: two watched the fox while the third looked over the van, as he moved back some feet. Wilde guessed he was confirming that Dodger knew Nick. Since there wasn’t anything to be gained by worrying about that conversation, he focused on the two animals in front of him. Particularly, he paid attention to the muskrat that kept licking his lips while looking at Nick’s coat; this mammal was the weak link in the team.

A minute later, the Jackal came back. “Yeah, ain’t no worryin about no Dodger here. You come back around seven tomorrow night, spread the Happy times.”

Nick nodded and lazily turned to his van, once again panning his camera across the area. Tomorrow was going to be very busy.

…

The next night, at seven sharp, the Candymam arrived on the scene. The van, while externally unchanged, had experienced a complete interior makeover, and was now the AV monitoring support station for Operation: Shepard’s Prayer. Jacob and Judy were seated at separate monitoring stations, while Winters and Lupinski were in riot gear, ready to extract Nick at a moments notice. The first racers had only just started to arrive, but the plaza was already filled with mammals, just as Nick had
said. He circulated the crowd, focusing on meeting the various players, as a networking mammal would do at one of these meets. He had mixed success, especially with a group of large wolves who looked at him with disdain and muttered to themselves.

By eight o’clock, all the racers were there. Just before the organizers could start the event, there was a rumble of engines from all directions, as police cruisers poured in from every road. There was a moment as the cops were arraying themselves around the nearly panicking mass of mammals. Nick used this to move over to a storm drain, but within view of the other ‘vendors’, and with a quick tug on an errant string, opened the bottoms of all the ‘drug’ pockets on his coat. Once he was clear of ‘contraband’, he kicked the piles down the drain. The few who had watched him, nodded in approval at his foresight.

There was the screech of a bullhorn, as Frank McHorn stepped forward. “This is the Police! You are being served!”

He lowered his bullhorn and stepped back, as every female megafauna in the assembled force stepped into line. The UZ geology department later reported a 1.2 Richter scale earthquake that lasted two and a half minutes, as the first Police Stomp team lived up to its name. This was followed by a more agile choreographed demonstration by several of the tiger, lion, zebra, and deer officers. The assembled cruisers had been modified so their sirens would act as speakers for the chosen Electronic Dance Music tracks, while the light bars provided the light show. As the dance wound down, there was a new roar when a tricked-out Chevalier Manta Ray pulled a perfect 180 slide park at the front of the formation, out of which stepped ZHIP’s own Pearl Swineart in a ZPD Nomex racing suit.

After a five second pause, McHorn stepped forward again. “This is the Police. You Have Been Served!” He let the bullhorn fall to the ground, and there was pandemonium.

…

The mood in the precinct that night was jubilant. Nick, upon his return to the station house sans Candymam costume, received a standing ovation from the assembled officers. Francine Trunkaby stepped forward. “All Hail the King of Candy! Your crown and scepter, your Majesty!” At that she bowed and placed an elephant-sized Lifesaver™ on Nick’s head, and an elephant candy-cane in his paw.

It took Nick a moment to collect himself, as this was the first time it truly occurred to him: he belonged, this was his pack. “Thank you, thank you. It wasn’t all me though: let’s hear it for the All City Dance Team! Yeah!” There was another round of cheering and back slapping. “They’ll be available for birthday parties, Leo Johnson will be available for Bachelorette parties…” A number of female officers started hooting and wolf whistling at that. Once the congratulations died down and officers started to return to their sections to begin interpreting the gathered intel, Nick looked around and saw Judy. “Hey Carrots, have you seen Emanuel?”

“Yeah, that’s what I came to tell you; he all but locked himself in the Cyber-crime offices, and he keeps reviewing the same section of transcript.”

“Huh, I’ll head down and check up on him.”

“Not alone you’re not! I want to know what’s going on, too.”

When they arrived, Jacob was seated in front of one of the large, hi-def screens with the same scene playing over and over: two large grey wolves talking in a foreign language, followed by them making a gesture with bared claws. Before either could say anything, Jacob spoke without turning
around. “I need someone who speaks Germanic.” In the background, the audio played in a synced loop.

“Warum wir mit diesem Essende arbeiten? Wir sind Jaegern!”

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“Warum wir mit diesem Essende arbeiten? Wir sind Jaegern!”

Chapter End Notes

While the Global Power initiative has revolutionized travel and the automotive industry, there are still applications which require more immediate and direct power. One of these, is the shipping industry. Whether it is a trans-continental rail-line, or an international freight ship, logistical transports need independent power, as their mobility makes beamed power impractical. The current best system is conventional internal combustion engines.

Unlike with the GPI, Petrochemical fuel production is a domestic trade product. It is so integral to the globe logistical infrastructure, that several nations banded together to form OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. The formation of this economic powerblock shocked world economies, as OPEC proceeded to enforce strict oil production quotas that caused crude oil price to quadruple over night. As this was a policy agreed to by all the OPEC members, and enforced on a local, rather than a global level, the trade independence clauses of the LoN charter prevented the League from censuring the organizations.

One of the nations first and hardest hit by the OPEC move was the Amerigon Confederation of States, whose large and heavily populated land area made them one of the chief importers of refined petroleum fuel. The solution was first enacted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. First generation automobiles had run on a blend of petroleum and ethanol; they simply put in an order with major domestic auto manufacturers to optimize their vehicles purchased for government work to run on an E85 blend. The commonwealth had both respectable domestic oil fields and substantial agricultural waste to be converted into ethanol. Many states soon followed. Within 10 years, over a quarter of domestically produced Amerigon cars were E85 or bio-diesel vehicles as well as dozens of biomass and ethanol refinement companies, such as the Burrows Petro-chemical Company based out of Tri-burrows County, Pacifica.

OPEC attempted to put pressure on the burgeoning industry, but this DID give the LoN the leverage needed to reign in the excesses of the oil barons, as they were, ‘infringing upon the domestic product of sovereign signatory nations’. While the League could not reverse OPEC’s control on the petroleum market, they did manage to halt the rampant market speculation that resulted from it. The sudden halt in wealth caused some severe social unrest in OPEC nations.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

The light of the past will illuminate all of the present, good or bad. Jacob learns a few new things, as do his friends.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

We’re at work: don’t laugh, don’t laugh, don’t laugh, don’t laugh, don’t laugh!

“Mh mh mh mhh, mh mh mhh, mh mh wub wub wub…”

-snark- Don’t laugh, don’t laugh, don’t laugh, don’t laugh, don’t laugh!

“Hm? Oh, yeah laugh it up ‘Candymam’! It’s just so …exciting! Not even six months on the force and you just spearheaded a city-wide operation! I told you that you’d make a pretty good cop.”

-snort- “Thanks, Judy. Really. It’s, just, -giggle- I’m sorry, Carrots, but I can’t take you seriously while you’re sitting there wriggling and humming EDM; it’s just…”

“Don’t say it.”

“…too…”

“I’m warning you!”

“…”

“That’s what I…”

“…cute.”

“Argh! Mark my words, fox: on this day, as you have sown, so shall you reap! Before the sun sets,
“Yeah, no more binge watching ‘Conan the Barbearian’ movies for you.”

“Oh no, Wilde! You seem to forget that I am, what was it you said? ‘Spawn of Shrub-Nigurtha, She-bun of the carrot patch of a thousand young’? This has been a long time coming!”

-chuckle- “Well before you go full-on Schwartzjenjaeger Schlockfest on me, we should figure out what we’re going to do about Benji; I’m really starting to worry. He’s just not himself since the last attack.”

“I know, and it’s not just the ‘cut back on the sweets thing’. Have you noticed how listless he is whenever we see him?” -sigh- “It’s like he’s, I don’t know, intimidated. I don’t like the thought that one of my coworkers is scared of me.”

“And yet you regularly terrorize and threaten me.”

“You’re my brother-by-another-mother, I am legally obligated to terrorize you; now be constructive! You just brought down a city-wide racing ring with a Clown suit and a Dubstep dance off: figuring out, how…”

“It’s all about motivation, Hopps; if Ben doesn’t want to change, he won’t. Now if Gazelle were to ask…”

“That’s it!”

-blink- “I know I told you I know everyone, but there are limits to my foxy powers.”

“Nick, I need you to find me something.”

-blink- “Okay, what?”

“A working ‘Prance-Prance-Evolution’ machine that we can take.”

“Again, okay. Now, why?”

“You said it yourself: Ben won’t change unless he wants to, but he would for Gazelle. He might just be intimidated by us, all of us, and the idea of working out next to you, me and Jacob could be really disheartening. You saw how he reacted when Emanuel suggested he join us for sparring. We need to Incentivize Exercise! If we can secure the Chief’s approval, I want to get a P-P-E machine down to the gym, and program it with all of Gazelle’s hits!”

“That’s, a damn good idea. The real trick is going to be keeping the chief off the thing; he’s as much a Gazelle fanatic as Clawhauser.”

“We just post a camera on it, largely so Ben can see his own improvement; but the threat of posting the videos should keep errant mammals away.”

“Very cunning. I’ll put some calls out; we should have a machine lined up by the end of shift, if not sooner.”

Chapter 14

Jacob stood at parade rest in front to the Chief.
“What was it you needed, officer?”

“I need access to a Germanic translator; this isn’t something I want to trust to a digital program, and chain-of-evidence means I can’t just take a copy of the transcript home and have one of the Eweden or Teutonic wolves have a listen.”

“Do you have the audio track isolated for what you need?”

“Yes sir. It’s roughly one-and-a-half minutes of conversation between three individuals, with thirty seconds of synced video. There may be some bleed over, but I had the tech kits clean it up so that it was clear to their hearing, not just mine.”

Bogo leaned back in his chair.

“Alright, have Cyber-crime send an A.V. rig and your file to interrogation room three; I’ll send Clawhauser in 30 minutes.”

“Clawhauser, sir?”

“Is there a problem, officer?”

“No sir just surprised that he knows Germanic.” Jacob saluted and headed out as ordered.

Exactly 30 minutes later, Clawhauser came in, snack in hand. Jacob wrinkled his nose. “Is that squid jerky?”

The cheetah looked forlornly at the bag in his paw. “I know, but it’s about the only thing the dietician will let me have until my cholesterol comes down.”

Jacob snorted “Being healthy shouldn’t involve being miserable. Throw that out, I’ve got some stuff for snacks. It won’t satisfy a sweet tooth, but hummus and veggies are a damn sight better than a bag full of fish-flavored rubber bands. Now, let’s get you settled in. I have about a minute and a half of audio, with thirty seconds of synced video that Wilde took the other night. I need to know what is being said, both…”

 “…literal and idiomatic. I know, I’ve done this before Emanuel.”

“You have?”

“Sure, I’m a polis certified Germanic translator.” Ben turned to the monitoring station, put on the provided headphones, and got to work.

A minute later, Clawhauser stopped typing, and Jacob heard a faint screeching sound. When he looked, Clawhauser had dug his claws into the table and was silently crying. Jacob hopped onto the table, pressed the ‘Stop’ button on the station and took Ben’s headphones off. The sudden change of stimuli startled the big cat into awareness. When he looked into Jacob’s eyes, he began to sob. “Wha…what is that?! That…that’s, who are they?! How could they just say…”

Jacob took the emotional cheetah’s face in his paws and said softly, “Ben.” Once he was sure Benjamin was focused on him, he continued. “There are two things I need from you: first, I need a full translation of what’s on this recording.”

Ben sniffled and nodded. “And the second?”

“At the end of the day, I need you to be the same goofy cat who has greeted me, Nick and Judy with
smiles and warm donuts for the past several months. The mammals on the tape will keep, but this precinct needs you. So, if it takes an hour to get through this tape, then it takes an hour, or a day or a week; I don’t care, but don’t burn yourself out on this like I did.”

Ben cocked his head in confusion. “What?”

Jacob sat back on the table. “I’ve been where you are now: raw intel in audio or video, or just standing in the room listening to some hate-mongering sociopath justifying the atrocities they had committed or intended to commit. I thought it needed to be done right now! Because the evil was right now, and someone had to do something. If I’d taken my time, if I’d allowed myself to process then I might still be with the LoNF, or with the Strategic Intelligence Directorate. Instead, I let my contract expire and came home, because the evil is always out there, and it can seem overwhelming.

“You just have to step back, for as long as it takes; and if that means this takes more than a few minutes then so be it. Now, you said you were a polis certified translator. How does that work, and does it come with extra pay?” Jacob relaxed when Clawhauser barked a laugh. He’d get Ben through this.

…

It hadn’t taken long for Wilde’s contacts to come through with three different machines, and so Nick and Judy decided to take their lunch break at a mid-town café to celebrate. They had just finished ordering, when Judy saw a familiar silhouette. “Cathy!”

“Judy! It’s great to see you! Is the semester break too much for you that you can’t stay away from me? And who is this? Mrow!” The catamount winked at Nick.

“Down girl, he’s Zib’s. This is my partner, friend and general ne'er-do-well Nicholas Wilde. Nick, this is my friend, classmate, and shameless flirt Catherine Montaigne. If either one of you does something to break Zabrina’s heart, I will end you both.”

The sultry puma waved at Judy. “Relax, kit; it’s harmless flirting.”

Nick placed a paw over his heart. “But, how could you toy with my emotions like that? You are a cruel, heartless… ooh they have Blueberry Strudels! I’m getting two!”

“Come on, Nick. We can’t enable Benjamin to cheat.”

Nick looked at Judy in mock confusion. “Who said anything about giving one to Clawhauser? Those are for me.”

Catherine started laughing and settled into a chair beside them. “Oh, you two are a pair! I needed that.”

Judy looked at her friend in sympathy. “Board negotiations?”

Catherine slightly bared her fangs and growled before getting her temper back under control. “Between the mammals trying to undermine me and snatch the company, those telling me I should step back and be a ‘silent partner’, and Simon Granger openly soliciting me like I’m some kind of call-cat, you may be arresting me for murder soon.”

Nick took her paw. “I promise, despite your breaking my heart, I’ll visit you in prison and send you care packages.”

She looked forlornly into Nicks eye. “Would you send me a Blueberry Strudel?”
He dropped her paw. “Not a chance in hell.”

Judy could only shake her head as her two friends broke out laughing.

Once they had calmed down again, and Nick and Judy’s lunch arrived, Catherine rested her paws on the table.

“So, on the subject of anything but greedy chauvinists, if I may ask, who’s this Ben you’re talking about?”

“A coworker of ours.” Judy said over the lip of her tea cup. “He needs to get back into shape.”

Catherine quirked an eyebrow. “There’s nothing wrong with a big male; soft sides and soft hearts tend to go paw-in-paw.”

Nick looked a little sad. “Yeah, but he’s been having fainting spells. Last time they sent him to the clinic, and we’re worried it’s something serious.” He then perked up. “But Carrots here, has a cunning plan worthy of a fox.”

Judy rolled her eyes when Catherine turned to her with her most obvious gossip-dishing face. “Ben’s a huge Gazelle fan, Shut it Wilde, so I thought of getting a custom P-P-E machine rigged up with all of Gazelle’s hits and dance moves, and having it installed at the Precinct house gym.”

The catamount leaned back, stroking her chin in thought. “It’s a good start, but I think we could do better. Let me call Gee, I’ll see if I can work something out.”

Nick and Judy looked at each other, then at Catherine. “Gee?”

“Oh, she’s all about supporting her fans, and a die-hard fan who is also a public servant and could use a little encouragement is just the sort of thing she lives for. Besides the music of course.”

Nick boggled. “You know Gazelle?”

“Oh, of course. Who do you think provides security for her concerts?”

…

Jacob looked at Benjamin over a vegetable and hummus platter.

“Dutch? Really?”

“Yup.” Clawhauser nodded as he chewed on some celery. “They adopted my ancestors while living in Zululand. When the Boar Wars tore through the region, they returned to Europa. My great, great grandmother came to Amerigo and settled here in Zootopia after the Great War. It was immigration that changed our name from Clausthaler to Clawhauser.”

“So, you still speak Germanic at home?”

Ben shrugged. “At my Oma’s house, and whenever we go back to the old country during Fasching.”

Jacob would have continued, but at that moment Chief Bogo came into the break room.

“Officer Raibert, could I see you in my office? Now.”

The cheetah seemed to sag into himself in resignation. “I… I should probably get back in there.”
Both Jacob and the Chief looked at Benjamin in concern. Jacob then patted Ben’s arm. “We’ve still got 20 minutes on break. Why don’t you head over to the Park, get some sun; you’ve been cooped up all day.”

Clawhauser looked hopefully at the Chief, who nodded his head. “I’ll be at least that long with Raibert. Wait by your desk when you get back.”

The portly cheetah was a blur of dopplerd ‘thank you’s as he made his way outside. Once he was gone, Jacob and Bogo made their way to the Chief’s office and closed the door.

“I’ve known Clawhauser for eight years, and even after the accident and rehabilitation, he was never this bad. What, the hell, is on those tapes, Raibert?”

Jacob gave the buffalo a haunted look. “Evil, sir. I hope I’m wrong about which particular one, but the more we hear, the clearer the picture gets that there’s a, a…”

“A hate group, officer?”

“No sir, nothing that banal. I think the Thule Society is coming to Zootopia, if it isn’t already here.” Jacob clenched and unclenched his manual paws. “It was one of the phrases I heard, ‘Wir sind Jaegern’, that clued me in. It was the motto, if you will, of the society during the Nazi party’s rise to power. The mammals in the file have used that phrase, as well as the Thule Claw salute, which was a variation on the Nazi paw salute. The comments that Clawhauser has translated so far are grotesque, barbaric, and entirely in keeping with the Thule philosophy of carnivore supremacy.”

“Bloody hell!” Bogo pinched the bridge of his muzzle. “Please tell me this is the limit of this.”

“I don’t think so, sir; Napier said something very similar just before he tried to jump me during the rape-sting. Howlton ranted that exact phrase at me when I arrested him, and his ex-wife said his change in behavior coincided with his starting to associate with, ‘out-of-towners’. That was just after the city announced Bellwether was responsible for the savage attacks. I’ll attach Hopps and Wilde’s deposition of Ms. Montaigne, as well as my body cam files from Howlton’s and Napier’s arrests with the report when it’s done. It’s a lot of circumstantial evidence, nothing actionable we could take to the DA…yet. That’s why I want to pursue this, Chief, or at the very least see that it is pursued. This can’t be allowed to stand, or it will just breathe new life into Bellwether’s ideology.”

Bogo snorted. “Damn. -sigh- How close do you think Clawhauser is to finishing?”

“We’re done with the initial listen-through and transcription; he’s going to listen to it again, front to back, no stops to try to catch some idiomatic oddities we’ve noted. After that, are the typed translation and transliteration for the report, so we should be done by end of shift; an hour over at most. I can have the completed report on your desk, first thing in the morning.”

“Excellent. You said, ‘we’ve noted’? I wasn’t aware you were a certified city translator?” Bogo looked at the hare with skepticism.

“I’m not, sir; certainly not with any Germanic language. I am, however, a certified translator for several languages with the LoNF, and have performed this particular duty, so I know what to listen to and for. I have to keep current until my Inactive Ready Reserve status expires.”

“Hm. Have you thought about applying for an official translator certification with the city?”

“Ben mentioned the program, but I just started online courses to get my BS in Criminal Justice through UZ, so if it’s going to take any real time…”
“If you’re half as good as I think you are, you should be able to test out; no classroom time whatsoever. Clawhauser has the application forms.”

...

The only way to describe how Judy felt, was ‘Jazzed’! She and Nick had pitched their idea to Bogo and much to their surprise, he was completely on board. In fact, he declared the matter one of Precinct moral, and assigned Nick and Judy to, ‘use whatever resources we have to make this happen!’ They did just that; Officer McHorn went to the warehouse and picked the machine up, while the IT department programmed it with the desired music and video files, as well as setting up the camera and speaker connections for what Judy considered the piece de resistance, courtesy of Catherine Montaigne: when ever Clawhauser hit certain benchmarks, such as -number of pounds lost, or so-many hours danced, then the machine would either play a personalized recording by, or open a live-streaming video chat with Gazelle. Now all that was needed was to wrangle the monstrosity into the gym and set it up.

It was 30 minutes after close of shift when Jacob and Benjamin were heading to the locker rooms past the gym, having just finished their report for the Chief.

“I’ll have you know that I am a third-generation cop! Between that and my family’s language, I’d say I have a collection of curses and swear words to rival even yours.” Clawhauser raised his chin in affected hauteur.

Jacob pointed at his comrade. “Oh, it’s on Bitty-Kitty; when you lose 25 lbs., you, me, Trunkaby and McHorn are going to McGruff’s to have a swear-off!”

Ben grabbed and shook the accusing paw. “Done. How are we going to judge a winner, and why Doris and Mike?”

Jacob thought for a moment, then nodded. “Winner is which ever mammal gets called into the Chiefs office the next morning, and I have no intention of being able to walk by the end of that night, so some one’s going to have to carry…”

“Come on Nick, just stick it in already.”

Both Jacob and Ben stopped and slowly turned to the gym door.

“You don’t just jam it in, Fluff; if you bend or break something it might get stuck, then we’d be screwed.”

Jacob was about to comment to Ben, when he noticed the cheetah’s heart-rate jump.

“How hard is, ‘put the male end into the female slot’? You know what, give it here I’ll…”

“Nick, Judy: freeze!” Jacob yelled while typing on his phone. Once he had the image he was looking for, he turned to Ben.

“Clawhauser:” once the big cat looked at him, he showed Ben the picture and announced, “…Boarat in a V-kini!”

Ben physically recoiled and started scrubbing his face. “Augh! What the hey, Jacob?! I can’t ever unsee that! I thought we were friends?”

“We are,” Jacob said as he removed the offending image from his phone, “…but I needed to shock you out of whatever attack you were having.”
By this point Nick and Judy had opened the door to the Gym to see what the commotion was. “What’s going on guys?” Asked Judy.

Ben looked back and forth between Nick and Judy. “Wha... but I thought... what were you two doing in there?”

Jacob clarified at his fellow rookies puzzled looks. “What we heard sounded somewhat risqué, what with all the threats of male parts breaking off in female slots.”

Nick and Judy looked at one another and broke out laughing. Judy got her breath back first. “Sorry Ben; not just no, but hell no.”

Nick gave a mock hurt look. “Hey now, I am a Catch! Just ask Zib.”

“She’s welcome to you, Red, but I’m not masochistic enough to risk injury from mating with someone that much larger than me.” She noted the smug look on his face. “Don’t let it go to your head, Nick, or I’ll tell Zib she needs to take you down a couple of notches. Anyway, if I had to live in the same house as you, I’d be calling Fru Fru to dispose of a body within a week.”

Ben boggled slightly at Judy. “But, but I thought you, Nick and Jacob…”

Jacob cocked his head to the side. “What?! Me too? What gave you that... is that why you’ve been having these fainting episodes?”

Clawhauser grinned sheepishly.

Chapter End Notes

Zootopia has always prided itself as a haven for the dispossessed. To support this, the Zootopian Emigration and Naturalization and Office, ZENO for short, has in all eras maintained a very fluid and liberal process. All one needs to enter Zootopia and secure citizenship is a citizen sponsor. In the years since the repeal of the Tannerman laws, the Office of Public Relations has done as much as possible to highlight this facet of Zootopia; hotlines are advertised and named 24/7 to coordinate foreign visitors being put in contact with sponsor families. Sponsors are in turn granted tax credits per family sponsored, though there are limits in place as to how many families may be sponsored, both in a given period and in total.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The light from the east means nothing if you are not turned westward. Jacob begins pursuing his prey.

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-Transcript Begins-

“Damn it, Dolph (*means wolf, assumed to be title, not proper name) didn’t your parents teach you not to play with your food?”

“Yeah, they also taught me not to be wasteful, and don’t tell me you wouldn’t like more than just a piece of that tail?”

“God in heaven, you’re disgusting! It’s food! You don’t mate with sandwich fixings.”

“Why not? They exist to serve us, why not service us while they’re at it?”

“Enough, both of you! We’re here on the Adolph’s (*means High wolf, male name but uses female modifier, another title?) orders, so let’s get to work.”

“Why are we working with Food? (*seems to collectively refer to any animal broadly classified as Prey) We are Hunters!”

“We are Hunters!” “We are Hunters!”

“This is beneath us. They are beneath us!”

“We are working with Food because the Adolph wants expendable drivers, and as Dolph said, Food exists to serve. We will recruit, we will entice, and when their usefulness is up, we will feast! But until that time, we will obey! Now focus on the task at paw and curb your appetites.”
“All right mammals, quiet down.” The bullpen was rife with tension as the Chief prepared to give the morning assignments. “Three weeks ago, our own officer Nick Wilde,” Bogo gave a moment for the praise to die down, “…orchestrated an elaborate information gathering sting. Aside from the increased positive press for the ZPD as a whole, as well as the diverting of large numbers of young mammals to our new Civilian Outreach Program, or COP; you can blame that one on Wilde as well,” there was a round of chuckling, “…we now have actionable intelligence on multiple criminal operations throughout the city. All 12 districts, every Precinct and special unit will be involved in the single largest combined raid in the history of Zootopia! This is going to be a clean sweep, so all hooves on deck.

“Wilde,” Nick stood up in his and Judy’s chair, “…we can’t afford to have you associated with this raid; there’s too much chance of recognition and/or reprisal. You’ll be in the Coordination Center with myself and the Commissioner.”

Judy’s swift elbow to his ribs prevented whatever Nick was about to say, so he simply saluted and headed upstairs.

“Hopps, Raibert, Lupinski, Winters; you’re with the Eighth. Report to Mayers, you’ll be hitting operations in the Canyonlands. Raibert, stick around after this for a moment.

“Grizzoli, Snarlov, Fangmeyers; you’re with…”

The brief continued with every officer heading to a different part of the city. Once the last Patrolmammal had left, the Chief lifted a sizeable manila folder and handed it to Jacob.

“Raibert, I’m greenlighting your investigation. It so happens that one of Winterhorn’s officers, Sgt. DuPrey, is pursuing a similar investigation. As you are technically Gladys’ officer, and are likely to be reporting to DuPrey once the new station house is finished, you will report to him on this. I would ask, as a professional courtesy, to be kept abreast of your findings.” He paused as he turned to leave. “You’re a damn fine officer, Jacob; Winterhorn is lucky to have you.”

…

The plaza in front of city hall was awash in reporters, including Valerie Coneja. This would be the first non ‘mammal-interest’ job she had been assigned since the O’Mauley Report incident, and she had no desire to mess it up. As she looked around, she noted several reporters from international news services who were hosted at and had offices in the Bullero Tower, a legacy of Hornblower the Second’s internal reforms.

She came armed with several questions that her editor wanted asked, if not answered: what had prompted yesterday’s city-wide raid, what was the unifying factor between the different targeted groups, and would there be further arrests? As a junior member of the ZNN field team, she had no expectations of being called, but it paid to be prepared. This would be a welcome reprieve; Jacob had recently become very sullen, though he did his best not to project whatever was bothering him.
Whether it was the buildup to the raid, or something else, she couldn’t say.

There was a rustle of activity as Commissioner Bagheera, as well as all 12 precinct Chiefs, seven special unit captains, and Lawrence Coulter, the Commissioner’s groundhog head of Media Relations, stepped out of City Hall and arrayed themselves behind the podium at the head of the stairs.

“Gentlemammals, thank you for attending this briefing.” The Commissioner’s soothing baritone calmed the crowd into silence. “At 10:15 yesterday morning, the ZPD carried out a coordinated series of raids across all 12 districts, which have resulted in 73 arrests, as well as the seizure of significant quantities of contraband, including three metric tons of illicit narcotics. There were also significant gains in the disruption of several mammal trafficking rings; the city will be working closely with Confederation and League of Nations agencies to facilitate the repatriation of those unfortunates who had been the victims.

“It is of special note that there were no casualties; not police, suspect, civilian or victim, during these raids. The outstanding professionalism of the mammals involved, both police and civil servant alike, contributed to the near flawless execution of this operation. The mammals of the Zootopian Police Department deserve the highest praise for their dedication to the citizens of this great city.”

There was a murmur from the crowd and a lot of writing, as well as applause. Valerie noted his obvious posturing for the cameras during that bit of grandstanding and guessed that the newsroom rumors were true: Kali Singh Bagheera would be throwing his hat in the ring for next year’s mayoral election.

The jaguar stepped back, and Lawrence stepped up.

“We will now take questions. Ms. Sandoval.” Coulter pointed to a goat in the middle of the press pool

“Louisa Mariana Sandoval, A Noite Globo; considering the large number of foreign mammals rescued in this operation, will the polis be changing its policies in regard to immigration and interstate transit procedures?”

Valerie almost kicked herself for not considering this question, however inflammatory it seemed. While Zootopia’s liberal immigration policies had allowed for unprecedented growth and prosperity for the municipality, it also allowed a great deal of illicit trade to flow through its ports. She prepared to write.

“I cannot speak to policy decisions of the Polis Senate, nor the office of Interim Mayor Canidae. I will say that the ZPD will be working very closely with the Confederation Law Enforcement Agency to combat this heinous crime against mammals, without disrupting interpolis, interstate, or international trade. Next question; Mr. Bryant.” A classic rhetorical dodge; that probably meant no changes were planned, especially going into an election cycle. Coulter motioned to a Senegal Tiger near the front of the crowd.

“Sanjay Bryant, Al Jazeera Amerigo; what precisely triggered this round of raids?” Valerie noted Bryant’s name next to her list of questions and was ready to record Laurence’s response.

“I can’t get into specifics of the operation, as they relate to multiple ongoing investigations, as well as considerations for the safety of the mammals involved. I can say that a recent information gathering operation netted a tremendous windfall of intelligence which was used to orchestrate this raid. Next question; Ms. Coneja.”
Valerie’s heart rate shot up at being called, but she dared not show it. She moved her notebook to her off paw and readied her recorder.

“Valerie Coneja, ZNN; given the diversity of criminal activities that were hit, what was the goal of the raid beyond mass arrests?”

Valerie’s question was answered when Coulter stepped back and one of the Camels in the line behind him stepped forward: Capt. Salim Abu Kamel ibn Kamel was the head of the cities Organized Crime Task Force, as well as Deputy Chief of the Third Precinct.

“The intent of this raid was to cripple the powerbase and support infrastructure of the various organized criminal elements that plague this city and fuel barbarous and savage practices, such as the mammal trafficking to which Ms. Sandoval alluded. It is our intent to put on notice the so-called ‘Crime Lords’ of Zootopia, that these heinous acts will not be tolerated. We will pursue every lead, every angle, and we will catch every crook who endangers the good citizens of Zootopia. Next question…”

Between his obvious rhetoric and the tone of his speech, it made sense to Valerie; Kali was going to need a running mate and for all Lionheart and Bellwether left a bad taste in the mouth, the combined carnivore/herbivore dynamic resonated with the ideal of the polis. Maybe she could pitch to Anders that she be on the interview pool when they announced their candidacy. First, though, she needed to get all this down.

…

The break room television was playing a recap of the previous days news conference.

“And that, my friends,” Jacob commented from his seat in the precinct break room, “…is how a press conference should go.”

Nick finished off his tea. “Yeah, but maybe we could do with a bit less political posturing.”

Judy looked at her partner. “What do you mean? They’re just taking a strong stance on crime. Is there anything wrong with that? Hm?”

“Careful there, Hopps, you’re dangerously close to an Ad Hominem attack.” Jacob wagged a digit at her. “You know that’s a two-shot penalty the next time we go out.”

“It’s okay, Emanuel, all her experience at informal and formal logic came when we started this game. I can argue my position.” Nick turned to Judy. “I do appreciate a strong position on crime but having the Commissioner and the Captain of the OCT stumping that hard at a public forum smacks of election campaigning.”

Jacob leaned back in his chair. “Val thinks the same way; she’s already petitioning her editor to let her into the interview pool when they go public. What I’m concerned with is the pushback from Capt. Kamel’s rhetoric. You know the Capo’s won’t take a challenge like that sitting down; we’re going to be busy enough cleaning up all the little puddles of nasty we missed in the raid.”

“Maybe,” Judy sat up, with a firm expression while thumping the table with a fist, “…but that’s what we are here for, right? To protect and serve!” Her ears fluttered dramatically for a second, before she saw that Nick had turned an oscillating desk fan towards her while chanting, ‘Judy for Mayor!’ Her attempts at retribution with wadded up napkins were thwarted by Nicks desk fan defense. Shaking her head, she turned her attention back to Jacob. “We were going to head down to the gym and cheer Ben on. You want to come?”
“Nah, you two go ahead. Benji needs real encouragement and while those hips may not lie, they exaggerate more than I’m comfortable with.” He stood from his seat. “Besides, DuPrey is coming down from the Seventh to officially start on our case together.”

Nick came over after turning off the fan, only to be beaned in the nose with a prepackaged toothpick.

“Real mature, Carrots. So, is this budding bromance what we owe the return of Howlton and Napier to our fine Precinct? And weren’t you having lunch with Jacob’s Once and Future boss, Fluff?”

“Yes, Nick, lunch: as in two hours from now. Ben will be done long before then. I just hope, Jacob, you two are done before I get back; those two give me the creeps.”

“You’ll get no arguments from me.” Jacob wrinkled his muzzle in disgust. “I really don’t want to spend any longer with either one of them than I have to. Napier in particular.”

“I’d have thought Howlton would be your ‘special friend’, being your first arrest and all.” Nick said as he chewed on Judy’s thrown toothpick.

“You just have a link to him because Judy is friends with his ex.” Jacob said as the three began making their way out of the break room. “You also keep forgetting I was a military cop before this, so he’s not my first arrest. Napier on the other hand, forced me to wear heels; I should have beat him like a bongo drum for that alone.”

…

Sgt. DuPrey looked over Jacob’s collection of evidence; from his and Clawhauser’s transcript, to the recordings and reports of Napier’s and Howlton’s arrests, as well as a compiled list of general knowledge regarding the Thule Society. There were accounts by survivors, recanters, witnesses and neighbors, as well as a list of all known instances of confirmed Society activity. All were referenced back and forth to one another.

“You did all this by yourself?”

“No sir, I had a lot of help; I’ve just been at it while. The Chief only just gave me the okay to use precinct resources, so it’s a little light on the Law Enforcement side; just a lot of general knowledge.”

The Sgt. sifted through the documents. “This is impressive for just a few days of work. What put you onto this?”

“Bellwether, sir.” When DuPrey looked up, Jacob continued. “I was called in to meet with her, after she came to power. Something seemed, off about her, so I started looking into her history.” Jacob was unwilling to share with his, now, superior that a vision had prompted him, though he could see skepticism in Jean-Pierre’s eyes. “Her grandmother and great-grandmother were the only members of her family to survive Dachau, and the experience drove them from the Flock. That got me onto the Thule Society; so, when I started to hear, ‘Wir sind Jaegern’ all over the place, I really started to dig.”

DuPrey leaned back in his chair. “And you think these two are with the Society?”

“No, I don’t think they’re,” Jacob glanced at on of the documents, “… Dolphen. I do think they have encountered them, and were seeking admission, especially Howlton. Ms. Montaigne’s deposition states that he was meeting with ‘out-of-towners’ right around the time their marriage went on the rocks. That was right after Nick and Officer Hopps exposed Bellwether’s plot. That boondoggle could easily have provided the Society the in they needed to get a foothold in the polis.”
"How do we know she isn’t? A member or aspirant, that is: she’s a puma, and a big one at that from what I’ve read. The society’s all about strength and purity, and an interspecies marriage where the male is physically subordinate to the female is neither of those."

Jacob paused for a moment. That was a weirdly specific detail to know; the interplay between organizational dogma and family dynamics. He filed that detail away for now. “I don’t; that’s why I have her coming in later today, about an hour before end of shift, to interview her myself. Nick seems to think she’s good people though, and I’m willing to hold judgement based on that. So,” Jacob crossed his manual paws on the table, “…how are we doing this?”

Jean-Pierre thought for a moment. “You question, I observe. If they are aspirants to the Thule Society, being made to submit to what they consider ‘Food’, should more than throw them off.”

…

Jacob would hesitate to say it out loud, but after Napier’s interview he had to agree with DuPrey’s opinion of him: that cat’s brain was a bag of cats. They both got the distinct impression that, had he not been restrained, Napier would have started masturbating as soon as Jacob entered the room.

Howlton’s interview was much more productive. Once the wolf was seated and Mirandized, Jacob settled in. “So, Essende,” the wolf bristled and barely refrained from growling, “…what prompted you to cheat on you wife with Ms. Scherer and then murder her? I mean, I understand that hunting is difficult, so you go after the easy prey, and it must be pretty emasculating being a powerless corporate figurehead married to an apex predator… you know what? Never mind; I just answered my own question.”

Byron snarled and lunged as far as his shackles would allow. “You, worthless little morsel! You’re nothing to us; just food waiting to happen.”

Jacob was as unimpressed as he was unsurprised by the display. “What ‘us’? Catherine’s got the company well in paw; pulling in double digit percentage profits for the first time in three years from what I’ve heard, while beating off propositions by the pawful, so you’re less than meaningless to her or the company.” Jacob leaned within inches of Byron’s snapping maw and went for broke. “Certainly not the ‘Wolves’; ‘the weak must be culled, for the good of the whole’ after all. And you? You were taken down by Hase, the epitome of Essende. I imagine that she would see that as the very definition of weakness.”

Sgt. DuPrey watched in morbid fascination, as Byron Howlton, a European Grey Wolf, flinched away from Jacob. Fascination became alarm as Jacob seemed to tense up, his ears pointing back and teeth chirring. Jean-Pierre had seen one other hare behave like this, and that was the manual combat instructor with the Foreign Legion, just before the hare hospitalized a hyena who was submitting. DuPrey placed his paw on Jacob’s shoulder. This brought Jacob back in time to see a flash of terror pass through Howlton’s eyes, before the wolf averted his gaze and turned to face Jean-Pierre.

The catamount continued from there. “I’m sure the Dritten told you that they have agents everywhere, that they would be watching you, to measure your worth. I can guarantee that you were found wanting. Die Adolph will want an example made, to ensure only those who are truly worthy even try approaching, so the only place left at the table for you is under the knife.”

Jacob felt, as much as heard, DuPrey’s sincerity. That was a detail, a clue, but he didn’t know of what. He and the Sgt. were going to need to have a conversation very soon. But first, he had an interview to conclude.

…
Howlton folded like a dishrag; he had previously maintained a policy of hiring ‘predators’, and that was what had attracted the attention of the wolves Jacob had taken to calling, ‘The Three’. Lionheart had hired ‘Knight-Howlton’ to protect Cliffside during the Missing Mammals case, and the blow to the company in the aftermath of Lionheart’s arrest had nearly driven him to corporate bankruptcy. The Three had offered to help fund him as silent partners, so long as they had a say in the hiring and training of company personnel. Catherine had blocked that action in lieu of diversifying their hiring practices and clientele. When it became apparent that Byron was losing control of his company, they threatened to pull their support unless he, ‘demonstrated a true hunter’s resolve’. They had apparently wanted, though never outright said, that he should kill Catherine. That had been when he decided to kill Candice; not out of rage or desire, but to work himself up to being able to kill his wife. His only interactions with The Three had been at work, in public places, and once at home, until his wife forbade him from bringing them back. It did give them a starting point to try to track their movements, as well as people to interview.

The meeting with Catherine was a qualified success. “These are Marcus and Martia Humboldt from the Law firm Ace, Skye and Wright. They have advised me not to simply hand information over to the police. I am willing to cooperate, so if you would give me a list of everything you need, then as soon as you file a formal subpoena I will have all relevant files sent over by bonded courier.” While any delay was irksome, the candor with which she treated the matter was a relief after two hours of her ex trying to blame his downfall on her. Once they had filed for a subpoena with Chief Bogo, they got ready to clock out.

“Emanuel, I really think you should see someone; a counselor, or a Chaplain. You nearly attacked Howlton back there. You need to be in control of your emotions, not the other way around.”

Jacob turned to the mountain lion with a pained expression. “I know, but there’s just so much! I’ve been fighting this my whole life, but with the prejudice and Timo and Anatolia, and now this Thule Society business…how do I lay all that on someone?”

“By accepting that you can’t carry it all alone, and having faith in those you confide in.” Jean-Pierre looked pensive for a moment. “Come by my place tonight after dinner. I have something I want to share with you; something you deserve to know, if we’re going to be working on this together.”

Jacob grimaced. “You live in the brownstones over on Pershing Ave., right? That’s a bit of a hike for me.”

DuPrey shook his head. “You need a car, Emanuel. All right let me get back to you; I’ll see if Rabbi Loewe will host us.” At Jacob’s startled look, he continued. “He already knows most of this and deserves to know the rest.”

Chapter End Notes

The wording of the Interstate Free Trade Clause of the Articles of confederation was made intentionally flexible, the better to allow each State and Polis in the Amerigon Confederation to manage its own internal trade and economy with as little oversight as possible. This has led to some tensions over the decades, as when in the 1920's, several States and Polis' banned all production, sale and transportation of alcohol. As the justification for this was largely religious, the Continental Congress was limited in what it could and could not do as far as enforcement of Federal Trade Statutes. With large blocks of States in the Midwest embargoing any and all alcohol transport, east to west
trade in liquor was disrupted.

While the Great Depression of the late 20's and early 30's prompted an easing of those trade restrictions, to better take advantage of lucrative tariffs and taxes, there was and still is a booming smuggling network plying the Interstate Highway system. Some families like the Swineart's of the Oregon Territory, have plied their rum-running notoriety into lucrative racing franchises. Others, however, have kept to the illicit trade runs, and the vast wealth they can provide.

There is some concern about such networks operating out of the west coast, as CLEAn has intelligence that these smugglers have since diversified into trafficking in drugs, weapons, and even mammals.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

No matter how dark the source, the light from the east always shines westward. Jacob is confronted with a dark truth.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Shalom, Mrs. De la Coure.”

“Shalom, Jacob! It’s good to see you. Come in. How is your mother?”

“Doing quite well. She and Kadir have really been getting along. I wouldn’t be surprised if he proposes to her soon, so that’s going to be rather exciting. How is your father doing?”

“As well as a 92-year-old lion can be expected. I don’t know what you, papa, and Mister DuPrey are going to be talking about, but I’ll respect your privacy. Just remember not to get him too agitated; he’s on a new battery of heart medication. You in particular: I know how much of a troublemaker you were.”

“Are those fresh mulberry pies I smell?”

“Yes?”

“Then I make no promises; your pies should be considered a controlled substance.”

Chapter 16

Dusan Loewe was comfortably reclined in a massive easy chair, sipping a cup of tea, while Jacob
was seated in a high-backed paisley chair that he assumed was meant for members of the Flock who came to visit. Across the relatively low coffee table in the middle of the sitting room, were Jean-Pierre DuPrey and Jeannette Deaux seated side by side in a near comically oversized loveseat. A quiet had settled over the group until Sasha De la Coure had left and locked the door behind her. After a moment, Jean-Pierre leaned forward and set down his tea cup. “Emanuel, how much do you know about me?”

That question gave him pause; after the attack on Matilda, when Rachel Daveed had asked that same question, he had considered calling some of his friends in the LoNF’s SID. Ultimately, he chose to honor his words to Rachel and simply trust Jean-Pierre. “Well, I know that Jean-Pierre DuPrey isn’t your birth name, though it is your legal one. I know you hold dual citizenship with Polis Zootopia and the Kingdom of Aragon by way of service in the Aragont Foreign Legion. I know you and Ms. Deaux know each other from before that time of service, so you probably attended Southeastern University’s Baton Rouge campus in the Louisiana Territory, and that you are likely from that area based on your accent, which is decidedly not Aragont.”

Jean-Pierre and Jeannette blinked at him and looked at one another. “That’s…actually a lot more than most people figure out.”

“I’m a brute, not a dunce.” Jacob sipped his own tea.

“Well, what I have to tell you deals mostly with my life before the Legion. For starters, as you said, my birth name isn’t Jean-Pierre DuPrey; it’s…”

…

“Isaac Mauser, you get in here this instant!”

I was an only child of two working parents. I didn’t know what a Hysterectomy was, or what an emergency C-section meant. I just knew that I was never going to have any siblings. That’s probably why I’m alive today.

“Mo-om, I wanted to play hide-and-stalk!”

My parents weren’t cruel to me, but I always got the sense that I was…less, than they wanted. So, they compensated; best school, best food, and high expectations to match.

“You can play with the Wallace boys, but you keep away from those weak little Pudleys! You don’t want to catch their weakness, do you?”

I didn’t know why they seemed to hate pigs, and deer; really anything smaller than them, but expected me to play with the children of their friends, who treated me the way my parents treated the Pudley family.

“But mom they just pick on me!”

“Then you get strong enough, so they can’t! What are we?”

“We are Hunters.”

“That’s right, we are hunters! And among Hunters, only the strong survive!”

…
Jacob could only stare in shock. “You were born into the Society?” He gaped at the mammals around him.

“Jacob,” Jacob looked at the elderly lion, “…you are fiercely proud of your heritage, and rightly so. It shines from within you like a beacon, but I fear it blinds you as well, for you cannot fathom why everyone does not revel in their great history.”

Jacob’s mind turned to all the times he had gotten into arguments in the last year, and realized that in most cases, it was with and/or about someone either dismissing or rejecting the importance of family history, his or theirs. He thought to the surprise he regularly felt when finding out people outside Foxburough had rich heritages they celebrated in private: Hopps’ Caledonian and Austrian roots, or Clawhauser’s Europan and South African family. He realized that he glorified his family’s history so much that he felt personally offended if others did not share his views on culture.

Jacob turned back to the couple on the loveseat. “My apologies Jean-Pierre, please continue.”

…

While I didn’t understand a lot, I did know that my parents were the least disappointed in me when I excelled, so I joined every sport that exemplified the individual: Track and Field, wrestling, boxing. I also studied as much as I could, to get the best grades, the most awards. It was never enough.

“But dad, the coach said if I continued to be, ‘unsportsmanlike’, I’d be disqualified to compete in the regionals!”

“Don’t give me that Essende drivel! If a mammal is in your way, you put them down, and if you have them down, you keep them there because that’s where they belong! If you’re not strong, then you’re weak, and a weak mammal is Essende!”

Things continued like that until I was 13. I was, well I was like you, Emanuel, when I first met you: resentful, hurting and confused. I poured all that out on one of the Wallace pups one day; Michael, their eldest, and his two brothers were picking on me again for standing up for Eustace, a goat kid the Bannerman wolves had adopted.

“Is the runt feeling lonely? Do you want the Essende for company!”

“Maybe he wants someone to love him; no one else would! Your parents should have just put you down!”

I could claim a lot of things as the cause for what happened next, but the truth was I came out that day looking for a fight. I’d seen the Wallaces fight before, and I knew how they worked; I came in with a plan, and it started, and ended with Michael on the ground at my feet. I did as my dad had insisted, and I poured all my anger and confusion into hurting him. It worked, too. He got maybe one hit in before I laid him out with a fractured muzzle.

“Stay down you stupid Essende mutt! That’s where you belong! What are you two looking at? You want to join him?!”

They ran, just like I expected them to; their strength was in their brother, and without him, they folded. I on the other paw, was dreading going home; mother and father always deferred to the Wallaces, so I expected that I was going to be in for it for breaking his jaw. Little did I know…
“Ohh, I am so proud of you, Isaac!”

“Well done, son. I never would have dreamed you could rise to the occasion, but here you are! You are a Hunter, my boy!”

I had been so starved for praise before then, that the backhanded compliments from my parents were easy enough to look past. As far as we were concerned, I had arrived. Little did I know what that entailed.

There was a gathering, called the Conclave, in a lodge deep in the Bayou; an old timber frame structure with no electricity, no running water, and no roads. It was decorated with red and black banners and lit with torches. There were sconces that just spewed a mild smoke, that made my head feel fuzzy.

We must have walked five miles. My parents insisted on doing so on all fours, and who was I to argue, now that they had accepted me. We started meeting other families, coming the same way, including the Bannermans with Eustace in tow. The Wallaces were also there, but they kept to the back, and Michael wasn’t with them. They ended up moving away by the end of the month, and I wouldn’t see Michael again for five years.

“Now Isaac, remember to sit up straight; We are Hunters! We bow to no one!”

“All pay heed! Der Adolph speaks to you!”

“Wir sind Jaegern!”

“My people, we gather in the shadow of a corrupt, and decadent world.”

“Wir sind Jaegern!”

“But even now, there are those who would keep the true ways!”

“Wir sind Jaegern”

“Let those who are to be recognized, come forward!”

There were two others besides myself who were brought up to the dais, to stand in front of a paw hewn stone altar and introduced to the assembly. There was a smell of death in the air, but I tried to put it out of my mind.

“Now, there is one among us, who is to be blooded. Let Hezekiah Bannerman come forward and present his offering!”

Hezekiah did come forward, pushing Eustace in front of him, all the while, the assembled mammals chanted, ‘Wir sind Jaegern!’

“The weak are culled, to protect the strong!”

“Wir sind Jaegern!”

“The Essende are sacrificed, to feed the Jaegern!”

“Wir sind Jaegern!”
Eustace was picked up and placed on the altar. Even though he was afraid, he didn’t struggle. His eyes though, his eyes pleaded, with his adopted brother, with me. Hezekiah, he...

Jean-Pierre was shaking in Jeannette’s arms; whether it was in fear or anger, Jacob couldn’t tell. Rabbi Loewe was equally shaken, tears flowing from his closed eyes.

Almost without willing to, Jacob spoke. “Cigdem smoke clouds the senses. There is a bronze blade, a single stroke. The sacrifice is silenced, but not stilled. A golden bowl catches the blood. The newly blooded drinks deeply, while the supplicants are anointed. The body is taken to be rendered for the feast to come.”

The others stared in shock at Jacob’s outburst. Jacob looked into his tea cup as if searching for something. “I didn’t just decide to investigate Bellwether because she gave me the willies.” After a moment, he continued. “Efrafans have a legend; that we became an independent people after Ephraim Stihrath-rah, of the line of Ephraim, had a vision that prompted him to rebel against the Purrsonian King Darius. Ever since that time, visions have guided us. We take great care to note signs and portents when they happen. When they do, we seek out those who can best help us to understand. When I was returning from my meeting with the now former mayor, I had a waking dream of a great granite hall lined with torches, incense censers and banners in red, black, and gold. There was a great host chanting, ‘Wir sind Jaegern’, as a wolf murdered a sheep in the manner I… well you know.”

Jeanette furrowed her brow. “You want us to believe that you had a magical vision guiding you on, what? A quest?”

Jacob could see the frustration in her eyes. He knew well what it felt like to be mocked for personal tragedy that others didn’t understand. He was prepared to try to explain, when the Rabbi spoke again. “That is the very nature of faith.” The old lion leaned back in his chair.

“We’re not talking about religion, we’re talking about seeing ghosts on the subway!” There was an almost frantic air to her voice; the sound of a rationalist being presented with claims of the impossible. That it was happening while discussing the unspeakable could not be helping the matter.

“Are not all who are now called ‘Saints’, supposed to have been guided by visions, and then were later seen after their deaths in conjunction with some miracle? Among the Eweden, there are many prophets, most of whom were of common stock. Do not discount God’s paw at work in your life. These are dark times, and his light is needed now, more than ever.”

Jacob shifted uncomfortably in his chair. “I’m not sure I like being compared to a prophet or a Saint any more than I liked Pater Tatapolis comparing me to an Apostle; their stories usually don’t end well, and life’s scary enough without God personally getting involved.” He turned to face the two on the love-seat. “Anyway, Jean-Pierre,” the catamount visibly sagged into Jeannette in relief at being called by his Aragont name, “…you didn’t turn into a baby-eating Brown-shirt, so I’m guessing there’s more to your story? You can skip the gruesome details.”

I had thought that the ‘festivities’ that followed were as horrible as it got, but the worst, for me that is, came the next day.

The TV showed the Bannerman family gathered behind a podium, with multiple police and news mammals surrounding them. Mrs. Bannerman spoke with a shuddering breath, as her husband gave...
her support. “Please, if you know anything about Eustace’s whereabouts, I beg you, call us!”

She turned into her husband’s shoulder, and everyone was looking at the distraught couple, save Isaac, who sat rigid next to his parents on the couch. He was looking at Hezekiah, who in turn was trying not to sneer in contempt. He dared not look left or right when he heard his parents chuckle at the display of false grief.

Isaac’s tail bristled when his father put a paw on his shoulder. “Don’t worry son, one day you’ll be blooded too!”

Isaac had the beginnings of a plan, but he needed time. “I thought you said we were hunters.”

Isaac’s parents recoiled. “Isaac, what are you talking about?”

The young catamount poured his derision for all his parents had taught him into his words. “Last night; that wasn’t a hunt! Zeke’s parents went to an orphanage and bought a goat to have slaughtered!” He hopped up from the couch. “They might as well buy a University of the Republic of Texas Diploma, then crow about how smart their boy is.” He turned to his parents. “If this is what it means to be a Hunter, then I want no part of it.”

There was a palpable fear in the two elder mountain lions. “Now son, let’s not do anything rash…”

“No!” Isaac lashed the air with his bared claws. “I will not have my future bought for me, or decided for me, or mapped out for me. I will be a hunter on my own terms, or not at all!”

Amazingly enough, it worked; from that day on, my parents let me choose my own path, though not for any moral reasons. They were still convinced I would become a great Thule Hochjaegern, the ruling elite of the Society from whom Der Adolph is chosen. I used my new latitude to spend as much time away from home as possible. I sailed on both the US Brig Champlain and the teaching Schooner Ocelot; I attended every camp that could be thought of during the summer, and during the school year I became a member of a Silver Gloves Boxing club in addition to school sports. Over the course of those three years, I learned that so much of what I had been taught was baseless. Herbivores and omnivores, what I had been taught to call Essende, were as strong and as dignified as any carnivore.

When I learned that colleges didn’t actually need me to graduate high school, just pass their entrance exams and have a high enough SAT score, I drilled the tests and got accepted to SEU by my 16th birthday. Before you ask, I do have a degree through the International University.

I spent that first year dodging fraternity recruiting efforts, while trying to figure out how I was going to escape what I saw as my destiny. That’s when I met Jeanette. At the time, I wanted to just prove my parents wrong, so I tried to get her to go out with me. It took a full semester before she agreed, but that year was one of the happiest in my life.

It couldn’t last though. The Grand Conclave, the ceremony where I would be expected to become a ‘Blooded’ member, to become Alf, was coming up. My parents knew I was spending time with Jeanette. They thought I was luring her in, to bring her as an offering. Jeanette on the other hand, wanted to move our relationship forward: she wanted to meet my parents, something I was absolutely opposed to, but I dared not tell her why. She thought I was hiding her, which I was but not for the reasons she assumed. We had a major fight the beginning of my Junior year. That was when Michael Wallace came back into my life.
Breaking up with Jeanette really messed me up, or I would have noticed him starting that year. He noticed me, though, and he noticed Jeanette. He, like my parents, thought I was luring her in, and decided to steal her for himself, to take what he felt was his rightful place in the Society. It was a month later when I saw them, sitting under a tree on the student mall.

Isaac looked on helplessly as Jeanette sat beside the Thule wolf while laughing at some joke he had told her, unsuspecting of the danger she was in. He waited until Michael left, presumably to go to his next class, then came over to Jeanette. “Jean, I need to talk to you!”

The doe didn’t bother looking up from her text book. “Maybe, but I don’t need to talk to you; please leave.”

“Dammit Jean, please! I know Michael, He’s dangerous!”

She turned so her back was to him. “Oh, really?! And I suppose I should run back to your arms for safety, right?”

“No, I want you to keep away from both of us because I’m dangerous too!”

Jeanette spun around, but whatever she was going to say died on her lips when she saw the fear in Isaac’s eyes. “We are, both of us, the children of monsters.” Isaac sagged to his knees in front of her. “I’ve spent the last five years trying to get away from my family, my history; but Michael revels in it. He needs you to reclaim his place with our, our people. I’m begging you, please keep away from both of us. I don’t even care if you hate me for the rest of your life, as long as that life isn’t measured in months.”

She looked into his eyes, trying to find answers. They were both startled when they heard Michael call for her. At that, Jeanette gathered her books and swiftly headed for her dorm building. Isaac left as soon as he was sure she wasn’t being followed.

I spent the next week trying to keep tabs on Michael; my attempts to do the same for Jeanette nearly got me arrested by campus police when one of her Sorority sisters called in, saying there was a stalker following them into the library. She spent a lot of time there after our meeting. I can’t say I blame them. I was scared, and that made me sloppy; sloppy enough to lose track of Michael one day, the day my parents called to let me know the date and time of the Grand Conclave, and to have my, ‘Offering’ ready. When I went to track him down, I was met by Edna, a slip of a brown bear and Jeanette’s roommate.

“I don’t know what she’s thinking, even having me talk to you after you broke her heart, but Jeanette wanted me to tell you she was meeting Michael at the LSU Rural Life Museum, so you can just, hey!”

Isaac was off like a shot, making his way to the 430-acre living history exhibit. When he arrived, he started searching around. Soon, he heard voices.

“Baby, I’m glad you saw reason and ditched that runt!” The catamount homed in on the voice of the grey wolf. “I promise you, my parents will love to have you, for dinner.”

“Aww, you sweet talker you!” There was something off in Jeanette’s voice; she was louder than normal, her diction more precise. “Can you tell me something about them before we meet?”

Isaac silently made his way to the roof of a nearby reproduction barn downwind of the pair.

“Anything babe.”
Isaac had to stifle the urge to growl at the disingenuous canid. Once he reached the peak, he looked down on the two mammals below him.

“Are y’all really part of the Thule Society?” Both Isaac and Michael were shocked by the question; that was when he saw Jeanette was wearing a Blue-Tusk™ ear piece. “I mean, like the real Thule Society: murdered 10 million mammals in the ‘30s and ‘40s, and not just some lame cult trying to pretend the last 12,000 years of social and cultural development didn’t happen.”

Michael snarled in rage. “You stupid Essende whore! We are Hunters! Killing you is what we are made to do, just like dying is what…”

Isaac leapt and tackled the wolf. It became very apparent, very quickly that Michael Wallace was outmatched. In the last five years, Michael had grown, but that was all. Isaac was faster, better in every way that mattered in a fight. His parents would have been proud of their son, had he not been fighting in defense of a deer. For all his skill, however, nothing could train Isaac to take a rock to the temple without falling.

I don’t know what he said while standing over me, and I didn’t much care. I only hoped Jeanette had gotten away. I was a fool to think that: the daughter of Philippe Deaux, Olympic silver medalist Savate Tireur doesn’t run from a fight. I just remember hearing him yelp mid rant, then Jeanette was pulling me onto the porch of one of the exhibit houses, to check my injury.

When the police came, she provided them with an audio recording she had made of the entire confrontation, while insisting I had come to her defense. When the EMT’s went to check on Michael, they found that he had died; internal hemorrhaging from a well-placed kick to the liver.

I knew there would be consequences; most of the local society would go into hiding, and with my admission to the police about my history, plus telling them where and when the Grand Conclave was to happen, I was a marked mammal.

…

Jean-Pierre settled into Jeanette’s comforting arm. “I don’t know if my decision was really for the best, but that was when I decided to join the Aragont Legion Etrangere; Jeanette was too high profile, but the Society might still come after her, if they thought they could get to me through her.”

Jeanette lightly tapped the puma on the back of the skull, then kissed his temple. “Stupidly gallant is what it was; I was heartbroken when you left with nothing but that stupid note.”

They looked lovingly at one another for a moment, then turned to Jacob. “So, there you have it.” Jean-Pierre huffed out. “I am the son of the Thule Society. Can you still work with me? I’ll understand if you can’t.”

Jacob set his cold tea cup down. “I’ll tell you, if you’ll answer one question for me.” When Jean nodded, Jacob leaned forward, and locked eyes with the big cat. “If it turns out that your parents are involved in this latest outbreak of Thule influence, would you be able to arrest them?”

Jean didn’t even flinch. “Without hesitation.”

Jacob hopped out of his chair. “Well then, there’s only one thing to do; let’s hunt some monsters!”
There was a gentle snore from the easy chair. Jacob chuckled while shaking his head. “Right after we get Rabbi Loewe to bed; old lions deserve their rest, after all.”

Chapter End Notes

The origin of the Thule Society can be traced to the Volkish Occult traditions of the early 19th century. As Europa was ravaged by Napomalin Bonaparte's failed attempt at a Grand Europan Empire, many Teutonic peoples, especially the wolves of the Black Forest region of Bavaria, sought new traditions and justifications to motivate their people. Such traditions rejected the broader Ewedeo/Christian ethics and embraced a Neo-Paganistic ideology in which the gods supported the strong and struck down the weak.

With the Germanic Empire's loss at the conclusion of The Great War, many members of the Volkist community formed the Thule Society as a way to try to reconcile the loss of status. Among those was a small but charismatic grey wolf named Adolf. He soon took control of the society and used it as a foundation for what he believed would be the third great empire of the modern age.

He was stymied early on when the Kingdom of Aragon pressured the Republic of Gaul into forgiving the Deutsches Reich's War debt. This took much of the wind from his revolutionary rhetoric's sails. He also tried to influence wider politics to support his ideology: he supported Gen Franco's failed attempt to unify Iberia, as well as backing a failed attempt at a fascist revolution in the Apennine Peninsula, which engulfed the western portion of the Kingdom of Aragon for three years before finally being put down. All emissaries he sent to the Joseon Empire to try and make contact with the Yamatonese Hakenden exiles were rejected by the mixed species courts which were heavily involved in the Yamato-Sinic War.

Ultimately, he relied heavily on the Anti-Semitic dogma of the Societies Volkish traditions. In 1938, in defiance of the Reichstag, military commanders loyal to the newly formed NAZI party invaded Poland.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

And now for something completely different; it's... Jacob and the gang shopping?

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Uh-oh, Big-guy’s eyeing Frank’s Elephant-ears; I wonder if Francine knows her partner likes pastries named after a part of her anatomy? Better keep Clawhauser on task.

“Hey, Benji, looking good! Shaking your tail to Gazelle seems to agree with you.”

“Oh! Uh, hey Nick! I was just, uh…”

-chuckle- “It’s okay, Ben. Just like in a relationship: you can look, just don’t drool, stare or touch.”

“Yeah, I miss the sweets, but I like seeing my toes again; I’m going to need a new uniform issue at this rate. Speaking of relationships, how’s yours with, Zeb?”

“Zabrina, but she prefers Zib. We’re going car shopping this weekend.”

“Ooh, serious! Swinging by any jewelry stores while you’re out?”

-Snort- “Nothing like that, Big-guy. She’s… Hey Emanuel.”

“Hey Red. What’s the gossip today?”

-giggle- “Nick’s helping his vixen-friend buy a car this weekend!”

“Huh? Oh, that’s right, she got that promotion!”

“Dammit, I only just found out last night, how do you know about it!!”
“FCDC meeting last night; she’s the talk of the town. Figured out which dealership you’re going to hit?”

“Probably Tully’s International Auto Dealership on Bramston Ave. Their staff have a few YELP hits for hard sales tactics, but their service history is spot on. What about you? Going to be a diehard of the public transit system?”

“Nah, I found a classic Caddy listed for 13K; gonna take a look at it this weekend, maybe make an…”

“Ow crazy doe. Let go of me!”

“You have the right to remain silent, I suggest you use it! Now, March!”

“Starting a little early there, Fluff?”

“I have had it with public transit! If I’m not nearly stepped on, or sat on, or vomited on, I’m getting groped and/or propositioned by random deviants…”

“Hey, how was I supposed to know you were a cop?”

-GLARE- “Perhaps the Uniform! And it shouldn’t matter anyway, because what you did was sexual assault, whether I’m a cop or not!”

“Easy there, Hopps. Clawhauser, think you could take care of our friend here before Judy tears his tail off and flogs him with his own spine?”

“Gah!”

“Sure, Nibbler could use some company to distract him while his cell is being cleaned.”

“Gah! No! Don’t take me to…”

“So, Carrots; if you want to come with, Zib and I are going car shopping this weekend, and…”

“Oh, yeah! She helped broker that deal with the Candletree Institute, didn’t she?”

“Wha? How does everyone know this stuff before me?”

“It’s the ears, Red; we hear everything.”

“Knock it off, Jacob. Thanks Nick, but I think I’ll just call Pearl and see if she can help me.”

Chapter 17

Judy was waiting in her apartment for Pearl. While she was happy for the help, as well as the company, she was a little confused as to why she needed to be in her ‘Sunday Drive’ clothes. She was passingly familiar with the habit of smaller families to take Sunday drives after church, but a farming family, especially one as large as hers, couldn’t afford such an endeavor. So, there she waited, wearing a sundress her aunt Mabel had gotten her and she had sworn to never let Nick see. At Nine O’clock on the dot there was a knock on the door.
“Judy bun, you ready?”

Judy grabbed her faux gator-skin purse, checking for her credentials and off-duty carry side arm, then opened the door. “Ready as I’ll ever be.”

She glanced at Pearl and wondered if they were going to a car museum. The athletic sow was dressed in an off white pleated linen skirt and jacket, with a white silk sleeveless blouse and a bleached ostrich-leather clutch. She beamed at Judy. “Oh, honey you are just pretty as a picture!”

Judy fussed with her dress self-consciously. “I feel ridiculous. Are we going car shopping or to the Opera?”

“Trust in my wisdom, darlin’. Most salesmammals are male and are likely to underestimate your intelligence and competence from the outset. You come in strong with a power suit, they’re likely to try to baffle you with B.S., pardon my language.” They headed downstairs to Pearl’s lovingly maintained silver 63’ Chevelle. “You give them what they expect, however, and they’ll try to impress you. That way, when they try to smarm you into buying some overpriced junker, you can shock them into reality; nine times out of ten they’ll fall all over themselves rather than risk the bad press of discrimination claims.”

Judy could only stare at her friend in awe. Today was going to be an interesting, and educational day.

…

Nick relaxed in the passenger seat of Zabrina’s 99’ Volvo as they drove to the dealership, both dressed in the casual attire of comfortable middle class.

“I really appreciate you doing this with me, Nick. The last time I went car buying was a nightmare of smooth-talkers and barely veiled insults that left me nearly in tears.”

Nick looked over and gave a comforting smile. “Anything to help. How did you want to do this: insufferable loving couple? Aloof heiress and her on-retainer negotiator?”

Zabrina snorted. “How about recently promoted, stunningly beautiful vixen and her loveable, if incorrigible cop tod-friend. I know it’s a stretch, but I believe in you!”

As they parked at the dealership, Nick assumed a theatrical air. “Though it pains me to portray so plebian a role, I shall endure.”

They entered the sales lobby, flanked on all sides by foreign cars and domestic consumers, some of which even managed to hide their disdain at the sight of two foxes at such an establishment. After five minutes of strolling the floor, they were approached by a small razorback boar in an off-the-shelf business suit that all but screamed ‘Salesmammal’. “Hi, Barry Goreman. Can I help you today?”

Barry seized Nick’s paw in a frenetic greeting that left him with the urge to check if he was missing his watch.

“Hey, Barry. My lovely vixen companion is here to see a mammal about a new car.”

The boar lit up in a tusky grin and gestured to the ground floor offices. “Excellent! Just come right over this way, and I’ll see what I can do for you.”

Fifteen minutes later, Nick was done. He wanted to give Barry credit for not once questioning his and Zib’s right to be there, that they could have the means to purchase a car at this establishment; he really did, if it weren’t for the fact that Barry hadn’t once even looked at Zib. Nick decided that this
would be epic.

…

Jacob walked into the used car dealership, with a manila folder in paw. He didn’t pause to look around, having already seen the 63’ Sedan Deville he had researched. The sales otter in a grey Polo shirt with a monogrammed tag declaring him to be ‘Walter’, looked up from his computer when Jacob sat down. “Can I help you, sir?”

Jacob removed the contents of the folder: a CarFox report on the Cadillac, a copy of his last city pay-stub, and a checkbook. “Has this Cadillac been sold yet?”

Walter perked up. “Not yet, sir.”

“Good.” Jacob put his paperwork back in the folder, and removed his drivers license and a credit card. “I’d like to take her out for a test drive.”

“Excellent! Just let me get this copied, and I’ll get us the keys.”

…

“I think you ladies would love this little beauty.” The koala who insisted on being called ‘Stevie’, gestured to a pastel blue two door station wagon in the center of the lot. Judy thought it wouldn’t at all be out of place back home, 40 years ago. “It’s got plenty of room for groceries or a growing family! And,” Judy and Pearl braced, “…power amenities, including an illuminated vanity mirror!”

Judy was torn between the urge to collapse in a laughing heap, scream in frustration while pulling her ears out, or tearing the offending vanity mirror off of the car and bludgeoning the salesmammal with it. She settled on a fake smile and turned to Pearl. “I just don’t know; what do you think?”

The prim sow considered for a moment, then nodded her head. “Could you do us a teensy favor?”

“Oh, absolutely!” Stevey all but gushed.

“Wonderful! I need a three-ton floor jack, a pair of jack stands, and an inspection dolly.” As she was saying this, she took off her jacket and handed it to Judy. Pearl just smiled and waved at the flummoxed look on the koala’s face. “Oh, it’s okay, just tell the maintenance floor manager; they’ll know what I mean.”

10 minutes later, Pearl wheeled herself out from under the car. She sat up and held out her manual trotters to Stevie. “Now, Stevie; I had one trotter on the universal joint, and one on the transmission case. Can you guess which I had where?”

“Uhhh…”

“That’s fine, I know you don’t know about automotive maintenance.” She wiggled her pristine left trotter. “This little piggy was on the universal joint. Can you tell me what you see?”

“It’s, uh clean?” There was trepidation in his voice.

Pearl smiled charmingly. “That’s right, and that’s the problem. There should be grease on the joint, and therefore there should be grease on my trotter. How about the other one?”

“It’s, wet?”

The sugar in her voice went up. “Very good! By which I mean very bad, as this little piggy in now
covered in transmission fluid,” Pearl’s smile evaporated along with Stevey’s hopes for a sale, “… which shouldn’t be on the outside of the case. This machine is a death trap waiting to happen. Had the transmission seized due to all the fluid leaking out, or the UV joint failed because of a sheared bolt, then this darling little bonnie behind me and her assumed family could very well have lost their lives; all for the sake of your desire for a fast sale. Come on, Judy. Let’s try someplace else.”

Zabrina remained motionless.

“This is an incredible deal!”

Her eyes were wide, jaw clenched shut lest she make a sound.

“I know, between the amenities package and the extended warranty, this car could easily retain its resale value for five or more years, given decent driving habits and no accidents.”

Her cell phone camera was pointed at the two haggling mammals before her.

“Well where do I sign?!”

It was a monumental effort to not collapse laughing as Nick passed Mr. Goarman a pen, while indicating a line on the lease agreement. “Just sign right here, and we can get this paperwork down to financing right away.” The easygoing smirk never leaving his muzzle.

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!” The tableau was broken when an armadillo in a fitted suit leapt onto the desk between the two mammals.

“Mr. Carson, wha…”

“What are you doing, Barry?!”

Barry looked down at the contract on his desk and the pen in his hand. “AHH!” The boar dropped the pen like it was a poisonous snake and leapt away.

The look of combined rage and fear on the sales manager’s face was the last straw for Zabrina, who began wheezing while frantically saying, “I have to pee! I have to Pee!”

Mr. Carson stood on the desk, glaring at Nick. “What is the meaning of this? And rest assured, FOX, if I don’t like the answer I will be calling the police!”

Nick never stopped smiling as he pulled his badge from his wallet. “Funny you should say that. As for what’s going on, consider this an object lesson: my vixen-friend brought me along while she came here to buy a car, yet your crack sales staff has yet to so much as make eye contact with her.”

Zabrina had managed to get her fit under control, while keeping the camera pointed at the exchange. The implications of that statement combined with the fear of the entire debacle being posted online motivated the shelled mammal into action. “Ma’am, I’m terribly sorry for your treatment by our establishment. What can I do to make this right?”

Zib put her phone away. “Well first, I really do need to use the bathroom. After that, we’ll talk models and option packages.”

…

Walter sat across from Jacob. “We’ll have our mechanics look into the stiff steering issue, but other
than that; how do you feel about the car?”

“As long as it falls under the warranty we’ve discussed, and isn’t going to take too long to fix, then I think we have a deal.”

The otter gave a sigh of relief. He’d be very glad once this sale was done; Jacob seemed to be a good sort, but when he was anywhere near the Caddy, it gave Walter the most unsettling feeling.

…

Pearl stood next to the car. “That’s right; the Wellington Street Northbound on ramp. You’re looking for a yellow Caprice Classic with the hood up and smoke coming out of the engine. Okay thanks.” She hung up and turned to Judy and Bill the salesweasel. “The tow truck should be here in about five minutes.”

“I’m so sorry, I don’t know what could have happened!” The small mustelid was nearly beside himself.

“I do.” Pearl pried something from the inside of the hood. “We blew a cylinder head.” She dropped the metal fragment into Bill’s paws and turned to Judy. “Come on, it’s only three blocks to the dealership. Let’s get our paperwork and get something to eat. I’ll make some calls and see if I can arrange something for tomorrow.”

…

Zabrina grinned at her jubilation while Nick relaxed in the passenger seat of her new Audi A3. “This is so great! Less than 10 miles on it, all the works, 10-year full service warranty…”

“All in a day’s work my dear.”

The vixen giggled. “I think they were terrified you’d start haggling again and end up owning the dealership. So, we have the rest of the day; what would my handsome hero like to do?” She gave him a playful wink.

He was about to answer when his ears perked, and he pointed to something on the opposite side of the street. “Actually, I think I’d like to go there.”

Zib’s giggles became full belly laughs as she headed for the nearest U-Turn.

…

Judy pulled into the precinct house parking lot with no small sense of pride, as her fellow officers stared at her new car. Nadine Fangmeyer was the first to speak. “Doe, that is gorgeous! Where did you get a Maserati?”

Judy grinned. “Not from any dealership in town, that’s for sure. It turns out, the pit crew chief for Pearl’s dad rebuilds classic Maserati’s. Gave me a great price, but I have to have him maintain it, though that will be at cost.”

Francine Trunkaby trumpeted in shock. “No sales hustle, and expert maintenance for the price of parts? How do you luck out like that?!” Several of the female officers nodded in understanding, while their male counterparts just looked on in confusion.

Judy puffed her chest out. “Well, I… what, is that?”
Everyone turned to see Officer Nicholas P. Wilde, gleefully perched on top of a brand new, baby-blue Vespa Primavera. They collectively stared as he pulled onto the curb, then shut the scooter off before chaining it to a post. He gave an almost challenging snort when he turned to his coworkers.

Judy rose to the occasion. “The hell, Nick? I thought you and Zib were going out to get a car?”

Nick took a pedantic pose. “Correction: we went out to buy her a car. I, on the other paw, am like all of you: a civil service wage-slave at the mercy of the city assessor. So, I got something more practical.”

Wolford boggled. “But, a Vespa?”

Nick turned to face the grey wolf while holding up a paw. “Four words, Ralph: Seventy, Miles, Per, Gallon.” Each word was accentuated with the raising of a digit.

All other commentary was cut off at the sound of a grumbling V-8 engine. All heads tracked the movement of the pearl-white classic Cadillac. Herd, pride, and pack mammals all huddled together, seeming to suddenly need reassurance that they were not alone, as the stately land yacht found its parking space.

When Jacob stepped out of the car he turned to his fellow officers. “Is there something wrong? Is this someone else’s spot?”

The Fangmeyers fidgeted and looked between each other. “Well, its…”/“You see, um…”

Nick dipped his muzzle down and spoke in a solemn voice. “I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, come and see.” The assembled mammals all started to look around in dread. “And I looked, and behold, a pale mount: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.”

Jacob ears all but vibrated in frustration. “Very funny, Wilde.”

As the black hare made his way into the Precinct house, Judy began to sing.

“My name is Death, I can excel.
“I’ll open the doors to, Heaven and Hell!
“O’ Death, O’ Death…”

“Real funny, guys!”

Chapter End Notes

While city-wide rectenna networks are a staple of the modern municipality, there is a limit to what can be powered using current distribution and control networks. As such, for most mid to large sized mammals, internal combustion engines are still a necessity. Significant use of bio-diesel and ethanol enhanced fuel makes such vehicles cost effective, as well as powerful enough to provide mobility to even the largest of mega-fauna, without requiring massive tax subsidies to offset differences in manufacturing costs.

Rodent scale vehicles run exclusively on beamed power, but a tax is levied and tracked.
Small to medium scale vehicles are either beamed power or Internal combustion. Large mammal vehicles are exclusively E-85 fuel vehicles with excellent weight to power ratios, while mega-fauna vehicles are powered by bio-diesel, which costs a quarter of what a similar quantity of E-85.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

The journey west can be treacherous if we don’t mind our own shadow. Judy learns a hard lesson.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Adam 54 to Base, suspect vehicle has moved into the container yard; we need eyes in the sky to track them! Have units at all exits to Pier 30, in case we lose track…Jesus, Hopps! …track of them.”

“You want to drive, Nick?”

“No thanks; I always sucked at Snake and that Light-Cycle game. WHOA! How the hell are you following them anyway?”

“They have a rock or something in the rear passenger wheel.”

“Wait, you can hear that over all this?”

“Just barely, now shut up!…Dammit! I think they stopped somewhere.”

“Right. Adam 54 to Base, what’s the status on eyes?”

“Stand by, 54… alright, I’m linking a feed to your MDT (Mobile Data Terminal).”

“Alright Base, what are… whoa! Where’s this feed coming from? I’m getting vertigo just looking at it.”

“It’s from a crane operator; he says you’re just left of the big block of yellow Hanese containers, two rows inland. He says our perps are at… Queen’s Knight to King’s Bishop Seven? What’s the…”

“I see’em, there Hopps. Go! Base, tell our friend ‘Kasparov, Check in three!’”
“Base… copies, 54?”

“Okay Nick, care to share? Ha, got ya!”

-Yipe- “Chess, Fluff. Not important now, just tune the super ears. Okay, I think I see where they’re gonna come out. Adam 54 to Base, perps are heading for Service Gate 2; have units waiting for them.”

“Roger, 54; Raibert and Snarlov are there, dropping a spike strip. Winters and Lupinski are in support.”

“Copy Base, flushing them out now. Next left is a straight away, Hopps; punch it!”

“RAARGGGHHH!”

Chapter 18

Once righted and the trio of Pronghorn sheep pulled out, the wrecked van was a treasure trove of stolen car parts. Interviews with several of the dock workers revealed that this particular group had been chased off of Pier 30 before, for trying to break into containers. Nick suspected they were leftovers from the ‘Rave Raid’, as the various precincts were calling it; he and Hopps would have to look into that more once they returned to the station house. Of greater immediate interest to Nick and Jacob, was the grey rabbit Judy was currently interviewing; he was the crane operator who had streamed video to Nick and Judy. His seemingly uptight bearing was easy for the fox and hare to recognize as a male desperate to impress a female with his cool poise. It was a monumental effort not to laugh, as Judy seemed to miss the entire thing, being so focused in her police mindset.

“Thank you, Mr. Davis, this was most helpful.” Judy handed the rabbit a business card. “If you can think of anything else, don’t hesitate to call me, or my partner.”

“Please, call me Dickie.” He smiled as winningly as possible. His ears drooped when Judy didn’t even look up from her note book.

“I’m afraid that would be wholly inappropriate, Mr. Davis, given you are a witness to this crime; any perceived impropriety could negatively impact the investigation.”

“I, ah, sorry. I’ll just, yeah.”

Judy looked up as Davis hung his head and shuffled back to the other longshore mammals, who greeted him with a mix of sympathetic back patting and chuckling. Her nose twitched, and ears swiveled in confusion at the rabbit’s sudden change in demeanor. Putting away her note book, she headed back over to Nick and Jacob, who could only shake their heads.

“There she is, ladies and gentlemammals, Judy Hopps,” Nick gave a slow clap, “…breaking hearts and shattering dreams the city over.”

Judy huffed in frustration. “What are you talking about, Nick?”

Jacob nodded to the retreating crowd of dock workers. “He liked you, and you destroyed him rather spectacularly. Did he give you a bad vibe or something?”

“No,” she looked for Mr. Davis in the crowd, “…it just felt like he was hiding something.”

“Only the painfully obvious crush, Fluff.” Nick turned and headed to their cruiser. “Come on; I’ll drive us back to the Station house, so we can get these mammals processed.”
“Yeah, let’s... wait,” Judy patted her pockets, then looked to see Nick jingling both sets of keys in his paws. “Hey!”

Hopps and Wilde were patrolling in the Banking district a few days later. When lunch came around, they decided to eat at an open-air café. Nick nursed his Black Bean soup while Judy was gesturing with her Hummus Wrap.

“Your mother on your case again, I take it?” Nick said with a bemused tone.

“Guh!” Judy let her head loll back. “Somehow she heard that I talked to a buck, and now she’s planning my inevitable departure from the force to raise his kits.”

Nick scrunched his muzzle in confusion. “Talked to a buck? What, the crane driver at the docks the other day?”

“Yup-pop-.” Judy looked mildly stricken when her vulpine friend chuckled. “I’m serious, I just don’t think I have time for a relationship, but I can’t get my parents to understand that. I go out with some random buck, and next thing you know, it’s marriage, then a couple of litters and, ‘whoopsie!’ , there goes my career down the drain.”

Nick snorted a laugh. “You only learned his name two days ago; worrying about ‘tying the knot’ seems a little premature. Besides, if he’s nice, what’s the harm? It would certainly keep the Clawhauser-esque rumors at bay if you hung out with another male besides me and Jacob.”

“But I like hanging out with you guys; we have so much fun together and I don’t want to give that up.” Judy looked genuinely distressed, her eyes down and her ears twitching erratically.

Nick set his soup aside and took one of her paws in his. “Judy.” She looked up at him. “You are your own person, and you have the right to live your life on your terms. Nobody, not me, not Jacob, not even you mother has the right to tell you how to live it; and if you want to hang out with other mammals, then you are the only one you are answerable to. So, go out, meet a buck! If they can’t deal with you being a career cop, then... are you okay there?”

Judy’s ears were now switching between pinching shut and trying to find something. “Sorry, Nick. Can you hear that?”

He let go of her paw. “I don’t know, Carrots; can you smell that?”

She tilted her head in confusion. “I don’t have your nose, Nick.”

“And I don’t have your ears, Fluff. Come on, let’s settle up and saddle up.” He paused when Judy snorted a laugh. “What?”

“Just picturing you in a Stetson, clinging to an Ostrich for dear life.”

Nick snorted. “Now I know where that ozone smell is coming from; it’s all that hot air coming out of you.”

Hopps was at her desk the next day when her phone rang. “Officer Judy Hopps, ZPD; if this is an emergency, please hang up and call 911. How may I help you?”
“Hi, Officer; it’s Dickie, from the docks?”

Judy hesitated for a moment. “Yes Mr. Davis. What can I do for you?”

“Um, I’ve talked with the other longshore mammals, and put together a list of dates and times that van has been seen, as well as descriptions of any mammals they have met with.”

Her ears shot up in excitement. “That’s great! If you can bring that down to the station house, we can get to work right away.”

“Yeah, well, my schedule is, well, it’s pretty nuts for the next two weeks. The only time I really have available is this Thursday around 6’ish. Could I, meet you somewhere? There’s a Diner on Rambler Ave. called Annie’s Port; the gang all swear by the place and I keep meaning to go. My treat!”

‘And there it is,’ she thought to herself, ‘…the come-on.’ “We’ll be there, Mr. Davis. Thank you again for this tip.”

“We’ll? Um, okay. I’ll see you then. Bye.”

Nick walked into their cubicle just after Dickie hung up. “What’s up, Fluff?”

“Got a call; someone wants to share some info with us about the dock job. Are you available Thursday night?”

Nick’s ‘Hustler-sense’ was tingling at her tone but chose to trust her. “I was going to take Zib to the Boardwalk; I got us tickets to see the Z-Pops perform, but I can rain-check; she’s understanding like that. Why?”

Judy felt a twinge of guilt at what she was about to do, but it was for a good cause; and really, nobody was going to be hurt by this. “No need for that, they want to meet at a Diner called Annie’s Port; it’s on…”

“…Rambler Avenue West. They have an incredible Lobster Wellington, and a Sushi Chef straight from Yamato who specializes in Vegan Rolls. A real hidden gem, that place. You’ve got a CI (Confidential Informant) with good taste; you’ll like it!” His unease increased when she scrunched her muzzle and sucked in a breath.

“Ohh, sorry. I’ve got a, thing that night. But don’t worry! I’m sure this won’t take more than a few minutes;” Judy swiveled back around to face her computer, “…just pick up the info, thank the mammal and enjoy your date.” She couldn’t see the look of concern on her partners face.

…

Friday morning at the Bullpen was as raucous as always when Judy walked in. Nadine Fangmeyer was patting her adopted brother Ralph’s back while the smaller timber wolf lamented another failed date. Francine arm wrestled both Leo Johnson and Wade Snarlov while discussing her and her husband’s impending anniversary vacation. Surprisingly, Nick was already in their chair. His back was straight, coffee cup and manual paws on the table. Judy came over and hopped up. “Good morning, partner!”

“Hopps.”

She felt some alarm at his brusk tone, and the fact that he didn’t even turn to face her. Shaking her concern off, she pressed on. “You’re here early for once. What’s the special occasion?”
Nick finally turned to her; the cold look in his eyes would have done Bogo proud. After a moment, he spoke. “Your, CI, came through; we’re going to be busy.”

Having said his peace, Nick turned to the front and waited in silence. Judy could only sit and wait for the Chief to come in and post assignments. The usual round of pumping up occurred, with the usual postings, until…

“Hopps, Wilde: you’re working up a report for the OCT on this information you secured last night. I would tell you good work with that, but as it’s literally your job, I’ll just leave you to it.” There was a round of laughter from the officers left, though Nick remained silent and simply nodded in acknowledgement. His silence caught the Chief’s attention. “Make sure you CC myself, Det. Oates and Sgt. Daschle when you file your report. Stick around after morning brief.”

With that, he moved on with assignments. Once the last officer had departed, he took off his reading glasses and leveled a stare at Nick. “Is there a problem, Officer Wilde.”

Nick remained at attention in his seat. “Yes-sir, but it’s personal; it won’t affect our duties.”

Judy knew the chief had caught Nick’s implication, when he glanced her way. She was beginning to seriously worry that whatever had happened last night had damaged her friendship with Nick.

Bogo snorted when there was no further explanation on the matter. “See that it doesn’t, you two. This is no place for schoolyard drama. Dismissed.” He gathered his notes up and left the two small officers alone in the bullpen.

Nick dropped to the floor and headed to their cubicle, while Judy rushed to catch up with him. Once she got ahead of him, she spun around and blocked his path. “Nick, please! Whatever it is, I’m sorry! Just tell me what I did wrong, so I can make it right.”

Nick stood in front of her for a moment, then closed his eyes while pinching the bridge of his muzzle. “Judy, not here, and not now; I’m angry, and will likely say something I’d regret. So, let’s get to work, and we’ll talk when lunch rolls around.”

Judy wondered if this was it: was she going to lose her friend? Then something occurred to her as they made their way to the office level; this was all the Chief had given them to do, and Nick fully expected to be busy until at least lunch. How much had Mr. Davis brought last night?

…

47 pages, not including the 17 date and time stamped full-page security camera stills which were cross-referenced throughout the packet; that was how much Mr. Davis had brought with him to give to her. Judy now understood a part of why Nick was upset with her: he couldn’t have simply left this in Zabrina’s car or his Vespa, and he couldn’t have discussed the details of what was inside with Zib present. She owed them both an apology. The three of them, really.

Mr. Davis had really put in the effort on this: there were timelines dating back at least a year, lists of ships and shipping firms that were handling the freight, even names of customs inspectors who were on duty. There was a clear pattern emerging, suggesting a very organized network of smugglers at work, and she’d nearly blown it. By the time lunch came around, she had decided that she owed Mr. Davis that date, at the very least.

She was about to ask Nick where he wanted to go for lunch, when he set a package down in front of her. Opening it, she saw a green seaweed wrap with rice, shredded carrots, and avocado. She looked up again when she heard the microwave in the break room ding, to see she was alone. Nick returned
a few moments later with a steaming pastry of some kind. Nick held up a paw to forestall comment.
“Eat, then we’ll talk.”

Once the last morsel was eaten, and the last crumb cleaned up, Nick turned to fully face Judy. “You
used me.” His tone was flat, as if describing the weather in another district. Judy would almost have
preferred if he had yelled. “You used me, and you used Zib. You lied by omission to me, and you
falsely presented yourself to Mr. Davis. You’re better than this Judy, so why?”

The words were on the tip of her tongue; the fears, the anxiety, the frustration at the crushing cultural
expectations of young, single does. “I don’t know.” Her voice was as small as she felt telling the lie;
it was made all the worse when she looked into Nick’s eyes and saw that he knew she had just lied
to him.

He didn’t yell. He didn’t tower over her and berate her. She could have dealt with that. Her heart
broke when he hung his head and turned to his work station. “Alright. Let’s get this finished.”

Judy lunged out of her chair in a near panic. “I was scared!” She spun his chair around to face her.
“He called, and said he wanted to meet at a restaurant, and it was every one of the blind dates my
mom and sisters tried to set me up on all over again.” She clung to his pant legs. “I didn’t want to risk
my career on some one-night-stand buck, so I, I used you, because you’re smart, and you can read
when mammals are trying to BS you, and you’re not like them, and…”

She stopped when he placed a manual paw on top of her head. When she looked up, his expression
was a mixture of frustration and determination. He got out of his chair and motioned for her to follow
him. They silently made their way to the atrium, where he had her stand facing the building interior.
He fussed and mumbled to himself before he headed to the reception desk. “Hey Benji, could I get
an application form from you?”

“Oh sure! Do you have a prospective applicant in the works?!” Clawhauser looked gleefully at Nick.

“Nah, I just need a prop for a moment.”

By now, there was a small crowd of officers gathering to see what Nick was up to. He looked over
at them for a moment. “Could you guys, I don’t know, mill around a little with your cell phones out?
Yeah, just like that, thanks!” Now everyone was looking on in curiosity. When he was standing in
front of Judy once again, he cleared his throat and ran through a couple of vocal exercises. “Okay,
you ready for this?” She nodded. “Alright. -ahem- ‘Oh, so there’s a them, now?’”

Judy flinched as if she was slapped in the face. Nick turned to the now very confused crowd.
“Thanks everybody, you did great.” He turned back to Judy and began guiding her to their office
area. Once back to their cubicle, Nick turned to face his irate friend.

“That was so far beyond mean, Nick! You know how I feel about that press conference. What the
hell?”

He was still calm and collected when he answered her. “Yes, I know what the conference did to you,
just like you know what it did to me. I needed you to know how you sounded to me a minute go: all
fear and prejudice, none of the empathetic ‘Try Everything’ attitude that got you through the
academy and, really everything leading up to it. Just a closed minded, ‘Me-versus-them’ stance that
let you justify using your friends to demean and belittle a nice guy.” Nick sat on his chair and rested
his forearms on his knees while looking Judy in the eyes. “I am tremendously disappointed right
now, Hopps. You’re better than this, so help me understand why: why did you use us to blow him
off.”
Judy took a deep breath to center herself, and dove in. “It’s, well it’s my family. They’ve been trying to pressure me out of being a cop since I was a kit. When I got the academy acceptance letter, they backed off on trying to get me to give up, but they haven’t stopped hoping I’ll quit. They don’t say it like that of course, but it’s implicit. I wasn’t kidding the other day when I said mom was planning my retirement from the force. She’s been sending me photos of the new warren extension dad has been excavating for me and my expected new family.” She hung her head and pinched her eyes closed.

“This isn’t even new for them; Junior year in college, they suddenly started being super excited. I thought they had finally accepted that I wanted something different than to be a farm-bonnie. Turns out, one of my classmates, Joseph Grieve, had ‘taken a fancy’ to me. We had some classes together, gone on study dates and one movie with some of my other friends. He thought that meant we were in love, so he told his parents, who told mine. Next thing I know, I come home for Thanksgiving, and Aunt Maddie is sizing me up for a wedding dress! I mean, my parents had Joey and his family over for dinner to, ‘meet the in-laws!’

By this point, Judy was pacing their cubicle, with tears of frustration pouring down her face. “I told them all; Joey, his parents, my parents, I told them I never asked for this, I didn’t want to get married; and besides that, Joey had never even asked me out! Do you know what my dad said? ‘Well, we’ve come this far, might as well go the distance!’ Mom was standing right there, smiling as if they hadn’t just sold me like a prize breeding turkey! And Joey? He was standing there looking at me as if I were a disobedient housewife! That’s what I meant by you not being like them; every buck I’ve ever known or dated, they just wanted me to be a house-bonnie; to be less than I’m capable of so they can feel like they’re more than they really are.

“Everyone spent the rest of the night trying to guilt me into giving in and marrying him. Obviously, that didn’t happen, and my family lost business because of it. When I went back to college, I didn’t hear from my parents until just before Christmas break. You don’t know what alone really is until you’ve spent Christmas in a warren of 300 family members who refuse to talk to you.”

Judy went to rub her eyes, only to find that at some point Nick had scooped her into a hug. “Judy, I need to ask you a question.” She faintly nodded. “Were you afraid that we were going to stop being friends over this?” Her breath hitched. She should have known he’d figure that out. She nodded again while sniffling.

Nick chuckled softly. “I love you, you silly little bun. It’s going to take a lot more than one mistake to get rid of me.”

Judy suddenly flushed “Nick, I like you as a friend, but I don’t (thok) OW!” She rubbed the top of her head where Nick had rapped her with his knuckles.

“You really can be a dumb bonnie sometimes, you know that? I said, ‘I love you’, not ‘I’m in love with you.’ I am dismayed that you have so little faith in me as a friend, that you think something like this could get between us.”

Judy stared for a moment, then cried and laughed in relief.

Nick relaxed. “There’s the smile I like to see.” Nick stood her up, so she was facing him. “I’m not going to lie to you: I am upset, but I’m also going to share some hard-earned foxy wisdom with you. Are you ready? We only hate things that we fear, and we only fear things we don’t understand. If you are afraid of Dickie’s intentions, then find out what they are: ask him. If he turns out to be like this Joey, creature, then you kick him to the curb where he belongs. But from what I saw last night, I think he really just wants to get to know you. Still, it’s your life, and only you have a say in how you live it. Just remember there are consequences for every decision. For instance, you might want to think up an, ‘I’m sorry’ gift for Zib; she was spitting mad last night. Also, you need to call Mr.
Davis. He deserves an explanation; you don’t have to bear your soul to him, just let him know the basics of what happened, and why. Here, I have his number; you can call him right now, I’ll be right here beside you.”

…

Judy was patrolling the banking district again; this time with Lupinski, as both Wilde and Winters were at the academy for certification on the new wireless TASER system the ZPD was going to be issuing soon. Lunch was, once again, at the outdoor café. “I’m really going to miss you, Moira. It’s nice having another female officer who’s not four times bigger than me.”

Lupinski chuckled and shook her head. “I’m going to the Seventh, Judy, not San Andreas or Liberty City. I’m always just a phone call away. Besides, you still have to have me over for one of these infamous ‘Bad-Movie’ nights.”

“Yeah, I know. We get anyone else in on this, and we’re going to need to rent a theater; Nick’s place is getting a little crowded.”

“Speaking of the King of Candy, how have things been between you two? Usually you’re thick as thieves.”

Judy’s ears drooped. “I messed up last week, and he had to read me the Riot Act. We’re good now, I think, but I’m still bummed about it.” She got a far away look. “It’s funny, I’m not used to…”

Moira quirked her head to the side when Judy hesitated. “What, being wrong?”

Judy smiled hesitantly. “Being able to count on friends when I goof.”

Moira reached over and gripped Judy’s shoulder and smiled reassuringly. When she leaned back, she took up her tea cup and looked at Judy over the rim. “So, what else is new? Clawhauser’s been chatting up that you have some date later this week?”

“Benji!” Judy ground out between her teeth before huffing. “It’s not a date; I’m going to Ricoh Plaza to apologize to someone.”

“That’s all corporate offices. Who did you piss off?”

“That crane driver from Pier 30; it’s part of why Nick’s been upset with me. It’s weird though; I called the number he gave me, but I got an office mammal named Mindy who scheduled an appointment.”

Moira raised her eyebrows. “That doesn’t sound like a crane driver to me.”

“I know. I’d look into it more, but Bogo has me and Nick working with Oates over in the OCT on all the info Mr. Davis provided. That’s something else I’m going to be talking to him about; a lot of the details he provided were well beyond the means of a crane operator to get. Some of them I couldn’t get without a warrant and subpoena. I need to know, how he… dammit, there it is again!”

Moira startled slightly at Judy’s outburst. “You okay there Hopps?”

“I don’t know.” Judy was looking around. “This is the second time I’ve eaten here, and I keep hearing this weird grinding noise. Can you hear anything?”

“The city’s full of unpleasant noises; you learn to tune them out.”
“What about smells?”

The wolf sniffed the air. “Other than lunch, the city and a thunderstorm, nope.”

“Thunderstorm…” Judy got a thoughtful look in her eyes, “…Nick mentioned smelling Ozone here before. I wonder…”

“Well, wonder as you wander.” Lupinski stood while dropping a handful of bills on the table. “We’ve a patrol to get back to.”

…

It had been a week since, ‘the Goof’, as Judy thought of her mistake. Now she was standing at the front of the Ricoh Plaza building. While not particularly tall by Zootopian city standards, it’s placement at the intersection of two major inter-district roads, as well as its one block footprint made the 42-story structure an economic hub, and an architectural force to be reckoned with. The edifice was made up of four art-deco gilt granite towers, connected from the third to the fortieth floors by glass and steel spans which themselves, contained substantial office space. On the ground flanked by the towers was an open-air garden and sculpture park. Judy might have been able to appreciate the elegance more, if she hadn’t been there to try to repair the police’s reputation with one of its occupants.

As with most modern Zootopian architecture, the ground floor of Hollander Tower, as the northwest corner of the plaza was called, was sized to accommodate megafauna, but equipped with assistive devices to help smaller mammals; such as the stepped podium attached to the front of the reception desk which put Judy at eye level with the maneless lion manning the desk. “Yes ma-am; how can I help you today?” There was no condescension in the lion’s tone, which caught Judy off guard.

“Um, I’m supposed to have an appointment with a Mr. Davis; he’s a…”

Judy was startled when the big cat held a paw in front of her and called someone on the desk phone. “Ming-Yee, it’s George at the front desk; Mr. Davis’ 2:10 is here. Alright.” George turned back to Judy. “Harold will be down to escort you up in a moment, Miss Hopps.” With that, George turned back to his duties, leaving Judy to wait and wonder.

A few minutes later, a wolverine in a business suit and business smile came up to the desk. “Miss Hopps, if you would follow me please?” With that, they set off towards the elevator column at the center of the tower. The elevator they arrived at didn’t have a call button, but rather an RFID card reader and biometric scanner. Once inside, Harold used a small key before pressing one of the three buttons on the control panel. What Judy knew about the businesses located in Hollander Tower from her limited research told her that it was used as the corporate headquarters for several shipping companies, but only Hollander International was likely to have such dominance as to warrant a private elevator. She didn’t have long to ponder, as the elevator arrived at its destination in less than a minute. The doors opened onto a tasteful, if eclectic ante room. Hanging on the walls or tucked into alcoves, were various pieces of art from around the world, as well as photographs of multiple oceanic and dirigible freighters. At the far end of the room were two desks, one occupied and one not. Judy assumed the empty desk belonged to her escort, while a slim female Red panda in business attire sat at the other.

Hanging over the two desks were a pair of paintings. One was of a five masted sailing ship, with a placard declaring it to be “The Flying Hollander”. The other was a family portrait of three rabbits; a stately buck in a dark suit, a doe in what looked like an outfit out of Laura Jones or Indiana Croft, and a very familiar young buck in private school attire. The door between the two pictures had a sign saying, “A. R. Davis, CEO”. The idea that she would have to explain her conduct to Dickie’s father
was so discomforting that she nearly turned around and left; but she had promised Nick that she would do her best to make amends. If that meant getting lectured like a kit, then so be it.

As they approached, the red panda looked up. “Is she Mr. Davis’ 2:10?” The voice was identical to the mammal who Judy had spoken to on the phone.

“Sure is, Ming. Is he ready?”

“He should just be finishing up; I’ll buzz her through.”

Judy wanted to feel slighted at being handed off so impersonally, but then, she imagined that was how Dickie had felt. With a buzz and click, the office doors unlocked, and Judy stepped through to face...

“Yeah, Frank? My 2:10 is here. I’ll talk to you later. -click- Officer Hopps. Please, have a seat. What can Hollander International do for the ZPD?” The voice was the same, but the rabbit standing before her was worlds again more confident than the crane operator she had met and brushed off two weeks ago.

“Um, Mr. Davis?” She looked at Dickie, then back at the door.

“I never had the heart to change the placard after dad died. Archibald Richard Davis, Jr., at your service. Now, not to rush you, Officer Hopps, but as I said the last time we spoke, my time is limited; I have a meeting I need to leave for in 10 minutes.”

Judy was stunned into silence as she realized that Dickie Davis, the crane operator, was the CEO of one of the largest shipping firms in the Pacific! Pier 30 was his property, so of course he would have access to the extensive information he had provided! Suddenly, the idea that he ever saw anything in her other than a simple beat cop seemed absurd; the gall to think of her mistake as ‘The Goof’, just to spare her own pride was staggering. All he would need to do is snap his fingers and he could have a dozen does more beautiful than her hanging off his arms at a moments notice. Every apology she had thought up, every excuse she had considered sounded completely egotistical now. The idea of ‘Pride’ as a deadly sin made a lot more sense now, as her hubris, her prideful assumption that Dickie Davis had just been coming on to her, so he could claim her was laughable. She had to make this right, somehow. She had to…

“Five minutes, Officer Hopps.”

Judy started when she realized she had been staring into empty space for five minutes. “I’m sorry.”

“Take your time, just not more than four minutes of it.”

“No, sir. I'm sorry. I made assumptions based on my own fears, rather than on any real facts, and in so doing I did you a great disservice. I’m sorry.” Judy looked down at her paws. “I say that a lot. You’d think I would figure out how to not act in a way that needs apologizing for, but I keep making the same mistakes, over and over again.” She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them again and looked at Mr. Davis, his entire focus was on her, though she couldn’t tell what he may or may not be thinking. Judy really missed Nick’s mammal insight right about now. She’d just have to go for it.

“The information you have given us has been more than we could have hoped for and has allowed us to begin investigations we didn’t even know needed to happen. I realize, now, how my pride may have poisoned you to the ZPD, but please don’t doubt the value of what you shared with us, or the value we place upon your efforts.”
She stood up from the chair and faced him at parade rest. “Rest assured sir, the best detectives on the force are already pouring over what you gave us, and if you ever care to share more with the ZPD, you won’t need to talk to me. Thank you for your time, Mr. Davis.”

Dickie looked thoughtful for a moment, then a chime sounded from his desk. He also stood from his seat. “Well, that’s time. Thank you for coming by in person, Miss Hopps. Harold will escort you out.”

She turned and made her way to the office door with as much dignity as she could muster.

…

That Friday was the ‘Going Away’ bash for Lupinski, Winters and Raibert. Most of the medium sized mammals on the shift were there, including Nick, Judy, the Fangmeyers and Clawhauser. All the males had headed over to the pool tables to watch Mitch Winters and Benjamin Clawhauser play a round or two; Clawhauser had apparently made quite a name for himself in the competitive circuit before joining the force, while Mitch had paid his way through college by Sharking in pool-halls near the campus. This left the females, to include Zabrina and Valerie, to relax; much to the relief of Lillian Winters, who was five months pregnant.

“Oh, don’t get me wrong; I love Mitch to death, but he’s been nigh on impossible when it comes to anything dealing with the babies. You’d think I was the first mother in history.” There was a round of good natured laughter.

Nadine sipped her beer while absent mindedly grooming Lillian’s head fur. “Don’t worry too much about it. He should be calmer the next litter you two have.”

“Oooh no! There will be no next litter. Mitch and I talked about it, and we agreed: one litter and one litter only. Once I get my feet and ankles back, I’m getting tied off. I’ve got my own career to think about, for our future. A cop’s pension will only go so far.”

“Yeah, how’s that supposed to work for you?” Moira gestured with a fried cashew-mozzarella stick. “We’re going to Foxburough, not New Amsterdam; you’re an Ad and Marketing specialist, and VT Commons isn’t exactly the fashion capital of the New World.”

“Reynard.” Everyone turned to look at Zib.

Judy scrunched her face in thought. "Isn’t that the new design firm Gazelle started using after that ‘Foreign Sweatshop’ scandal with Preyda six months ago?"

The silver vixen nodded. “It is, but Reynard isn’t a company, he’s a Corsacan todd, and an excellent clothing designer. My uncle is leasing him one of the old textile mills on Lower Canal. All the machinery has been brought up to modern standard, so there’s going to be zero logistical train, since we already have people and resources on hand for nearly all of it: Yamatonese silk, Angora and Alpaca wool, Anatolian linen, all of it is either locally grown, made or donated. So, between no transport except for the finished product, a ready made and skilled work force, and the Gazelle brand name, Foxburough might just become the next New Amsterdam.”

Lillian tapped a claw on the table. “That’s right, and an up-and-coming mammal like Reynard needs good advertising; word of muzzle isn’t enough, even in this digital age. You don’t just need good press, you need BIG press!”

Val raised an eyebrow and ear. “You mean like the charity auction and exhibition fight in a couple of months to support the Iberians who were hurt by Preyda’s business; that was your idea?”
Lillian grinned smugly. “Gazelle’s people were still in full damage control mode, trying to distance themselves from Preyda’s operations in Madrid. They were desperate for any idea, and Reynard, bless his little Mediterranean heart, hasn’t the faintest idea about marketing. I just planted the seed of the idea. Gazelle donated one of the dresses Reynard made for her Europa tour, then Reynard brought me on full time. That’s when these little seeds were planted.” She looked down and fondly rubbed her growing belly. “So, when Reynard moved his operations to Foxburough, we started looking into moving. Mitch had already accepted the transfer orders, since there would be better promotion opportunities in the Seventh, so it works out beautifully for us.”

Lily looked over at Val. “Are you going to be covering the event?”

“Are you kidding?” There was a child like gleam in the jill’s eyes. “I grew up watching Roger Bove fight! He’s a legend in the Bullfighting circuit; one of only five mammals in the last two centuries to hold the title of ‘Minotaur’ undefeated for Ten, Years! He’s a Catalan National treasure!”

A voice rose from over by the pool table. “Breath, honey.”

“Shut it, Petita Ombra! Don’t even pretend you’re not excited too! Don’t you have a pool match to watch?” The table chuckled at the by-play between the two hares.

“I have learned that playing pool is like being a sniper or an artillery officer: it’s all geometry, and I hate math. Plus, Nick got all squeamish about giving me a handicap.”

“You were going to dislocate my shoulder. That’s not the type of ‘Handicap’ we were talking about.”

At that, the ladies table devolved into full on belly laughter.

“-Ha-ha-he-he- Oh boy; make way for the pregnant lady!” Lilly started heading towards the restrooms.

“Lilly, do you need any help honey?” Mitch started making his way around the pool table.

“I’m going to the bathroom, Mitch, not crossing the Rockies.”

As everyone was settling back into their respective areas, Judy’s phone went off. Glancing at it, she saw it was her parents trying to Muzzle-time her. “They don’t ever call at this hour. I’ve gotta take this.” The assembled friends quieted down. “Mom, dad, what’s wrong? Is everyone okay?”

“Way to go, Jude-the-Dude! Why didn’t you tell us?!”

Judy was perplexed by the excitement in her father’s voice. “Tell you? What are you talking about? Why are you calling, mom?”

“Oh, you don’t have to play coy with us, dear. Archibald Richard Davis!”

Judy leaned her muzzle into her palm and groaned. “Mom, is this call about something important or not? I’m at a party with friends.”

Stuart all but bounced in place. “Oh my god, is he there with you? Oh Bon-Bon, we’re going to meet him!”

Judy boggled at her parents. “Is he…? NO! This is a going away party for some of my friends from work.”
Bonnie crossed her arms. “Well, what are you doing there instead of with Archibald? Honestly, your little friends can wait, this is more important.”

Zib and Val resting their paws on her shoulders was the only thing that kept Judy from leaping out of her chair, but it didn’t stop her from growling out at her parents. “This isn’t a garden party at the Lopperson’s! These are my friends and peers! If you can’t respect me, at least try not to disrespect them!”

Bonnie tried to placate her irate daughter. “But hon, this is your future we’re talking about here.”

“That’s right, Jude.” Her father chimed in. “I mean, you don’t want to be a cop for the rest of your life, do you?”

“Yes, I DO!” Tears streamed down Judy’s face as she screamed at the phone. “And if you can’t accept that then you can GO TO HELL!” With that, Judy threw her phone across the restaurant and collapsed sobbing onto the table. There was a sudden commotion as the pool group abandoned the game to find out what was wrong. They arrived to find Judy curled into a ball against Zabrina. “They’re never going to accept me!” She openly wept while her friends did their best to console her.

Lillian made her way back to the table just behind her husband. “What’s going on? What did I miss?”

Nadine Fangmeyer was petting Judy’s ears. “Jude’s parents called, basically said we, and her career, weren’t important, and that she should ditch us to chase after someone called Archie.”

Most of the guys were milling around, though it didn’t take long for Clawhauser to work his way into the consoling cuddle with the distraught doe. Jacob all but vibrated in frustration for his friend. Soon, his ears picked up the tinny sound of two animals calling Judy’s name from the other side of the room. When he got there, he found several mammals looking at a Me-Phone 6 in a grey Beaver Box™. Picking it up and flipping it over, he came muzzle to muzzle with two upset cottontail rabbits. The pair went stock still as the black hare stared emotionlessly at them. Jacob turned the phone’s screen to show Judy’s table, then turned the phone back to his face. Her parents looked ready to say something when he silently shook his head and hit the ‘end-call’ icon, then headed back over to the group.

When he got to the table, Jacob set Judy’s phone down in front of her. “Hey, Judy?” She looked up at Jacob while sniffling. “Are you going to be okay? Do you want me to punch them in the Junk?” The offer was met with strangely hopeful looks from the males in the group, since that was something real, if illegal, they could do.

Valerie’s eyes snapped wide at that. “Jacob Emanuel Raibert! You cannot just go to Bunnyburrow and punch Judy’s parents in the Junk!”

“Yes, I can.” Jacob’s tone was conversational. “There would just be consequences.” Everybody startled a little, then relaxed as Judy started laughing.

Zib huffed. “You all want something to do? Go refill our drinks. All of you! Shoo!” With the males ‘banished’ to a useful task, the ladies set about building their friend back up. That task, though it would be difficult, was made easier for Judy with the realization that she was with true friends.

Chapter End Notes
For most mammals, trying to pinpoint the moment in history when animals gained sapience is nearly impossible to identify. Most, however, will agree the the most important event afterwards were 'The Accords'. This was not, however, a single event. Nearly every continent experienced something similar at roughly the same (archaeological) time: a struggle between carnivores and their prey is resolved not by subjugation, but by cooperation. In nearly every incident, this event is said to have been brokered by one or more foxes, often as a fait accompli after 'betraying' one side or the other. This has lead foxes to be considered cunning tricksters in every culture in the world.

The only exception is from Africanis Australis, where verbal tradition tells of a tribe of lions making peace with their neighbors after a brutal war nearly destroyed both. This single story has spawned both pop-culture icons such as 'The Lion Prince', as well as ongoing academic scrutiny. Renowned archaeologists such as Dr. Robert John Braywood and Dr. Laverne Carter-Davis to dedicate their lives to tracing the so called, 'First Accord': that place where mammals first agreed to live together in harmony.
Chapter Summary

The light from the east shines on many paths. Judy finds a link to Jacob's case.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Judy?”

“Yeah, Nick.”

“Your phone’s ringing again.”

“Yeah, Nick.”

…

“You going to answer it? It’s getting kind of annoying.”

“No, Nick.”

“Oh, come on Fluff! How long is this feud going to go on? They’re your parents! It’s not like you can trade them in if you don’t like how they drive. Just pick up the phone, that’s it, and … (beepop) You just turned it off, didn’t you?”

“Nope, just muted it. -sigh- I have tried, Nick. Really, I have; three different times since last Friday. Do you know the first words out of my dad’s muzzle every time? -ahem- ‘Now see here young lady!’ Like I’m a disobedient child, not a grown mammal with the right to live her own life. And for the record: No-one feuds like country folk.”

“So I see; well, at least it’ll be quiet. Speaking of, you’ve been bottled up over there for a while now. Care to share, Partner?”
“It’s, um, -grunt- it’s dumb, don’t worry about it.”

“Hopps.”

“Hm?”

“You need to stop second guessing yourself. You misjudged a situation, and it backfired. So, what? I thought it was a good idea to sell a rug of suspect quality and make to crime lord, and I thought it was fine to hustle a cop on her first day. I managed to survive both of those situations and have come out a better mammal because of it. You can learn too, but like your favorite song says, ‘Try again’. You have incredible intuition when it comes to situations, so if there’s something you think warrants our attention, it’s not dumb.”

“It’s ‘Try Everything’, Nick.” -huff- “Okay. You know that café we ate at after the Pier 30 bust? You remember how I was twitchy and hearing things? You said you smelled ozone. Well I was there a little over a week later with Moira, and I heard it again, but it sounded, different, and she said she smelled a thunderstorm, but I checked the city weather center and there were no storms, scheduled or otherwise. There’s something going on there, I can feel it! I just, can’t prove it.”

“Well, sounds like we’ve got lunch plans. Let’s draw up a preliminary report I can file in the call-log with Lt. Higgins, and we’ll see where this leads.”

Chapter 19

Nick and Judy were given the go ahead to stake out the restaurant, though Bogo did advise them not to claim desert on their taxes. It took a little convincing, but Judy eventually agreed to go in plain clothes to not raise suspicion at having a pair of cops sitting at a café all day. Lunch was both as pleasant and as irritating as ever; the food and service were both excellent, but the noise was still there. Also, Judy’s parents were still calling. The only change came when the lunch rush ended, so did the noise and ozone smell. After an hour of nothing, Nick suggested they head back to the station for a bit, then come back out around 3:30.

“What’s up Nick?” Judy was curious, as her partner wasn’t one to give up on something.

“Just a hunch; chances are, whatever is going on, if it’s illegal, they will be doing it when people are least likely to notice it, like the lunch rush, or …”

Judy grinned. “Commuter rush hour, Nick that’s brilliant! I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again; you make an excellent cop.”

“It’s the glasses,” Nick put his Aviator’s on, “… they fill me with confidence and a righteous fervor for justice !”

Judy snorted a laugh. “As long as you don’t start acting like that tool from ‘CSI: Vice City’, we’ll be fine.”

Nick dropped a few bills on the table and followed Judy to her car. “Hey now don’t go dissing my favorite TV cop; his stuff is comedy gold.”

“CSI isn’t a sitcom Nick.”

Nick chuckled for a moment before getting a confused look on his muzzle. “Wait, really?”
…

When they arrived back at the precinct house, Nick immediately started asking the other officers if the CSI series was intentional or unintentional comedy; the resulting debate nearly crippled the precinct. When 3:30 rolled around, Nick and Judy were back at their table at the café.

“Chief’s gonna kill you when we get back, Nick.”

“Only if we come back empty pawed. Anything?”

Judy’s ears flagged. “Not yet.”

Nick settled in with his Cappuccino. “Good. That means this isn’t just regular construction you’re hearing. Now begins the waiting game.”

Four O’clock arrived with a rush of mammals leaving Lemming Brothers, and Judy’s ears shooting up. Nick smirked. “I love being right. Come on, Fluff. Let’s… what is it?”

Judy’s head was tilted slightly. “It’s moved. Not much, but it’s definitely moved from where it started this morning.”

Nick was suddenly all business. “By about how much?”

“Hard to say; maybe, five degrees from this morning at the beginning of lunch. Come on, let’s head across the street!” She got ready to leap to her feet when Nick lay a restraining paw on her shoulder.

“Not so fast, Carrots. If this is as illegal as we suspect, then they’re going to have spotters. Use your ears to point to where you think they were, and where they should be.” Watching his partner, Nick did some calculations in his head. “At most, we’re looking at five feet an hour, and they are likely still under North Broad Street. Sound about right?”

Judy relaxed into her seat. “Yeah, you’re right, so unless this is some ‘Boarn Identity’ crap and they intend to hit something on the road itself, they’ll be heading, to… Lemming Brothers!”

Nick became alarmed at the gleeful look in Judy’s eyes. “Judy, what are you thinking.” By now she had covered her muzzle and was bouncing in her seat. “Alright, let’s get out of here before you wet yourself.”

Once seated in the Maserati, Judy let out a Clawhauser level ‘Squee!’ “It’s a bank heist Nick!”

“You’re a cop, Fluff. You shouldn’t be this excited about something like that.”

Judy gripped the steering wheel in excitement. “Are you kidding?! This is literally something I’ve dreamed about since I was a kit! Bank robberies are…”

“Usually either white collar computer jobs, or demand notes given to a teller.”

Judy looked sidelong at Nick. “To quote a friend of mine, ‘Don’t tell me what I know.’ Just let me have my dream, until we find this is an extreme case of trying to steal cable. Any way, what’s our next step.”

“What you were going to do earlier, triangulation; we go somewhere else to see how far they move, then pinpoint them.”

“Sounds like a plan. So why the sour face, Slick?”
Nick grimaced. “The only other good spot on this street is the Golden Panda over there.”

Judy looked at the restaurant in question with concern. “What, do they have a history?” She had images of Triad drug dens and illegal gambling parlors flashing through her head.

Nick stuck his tongue out in distaste. “Yeah, they think MSG is a food group; every time I eat something from there I get the runs and a screaming headache.”

…

When Nick and Judy made it back to the precinct house, they found the debate from earlier still going. Bogo called them to his office as they entered building. “Wilde give me one good reason I shouldn’t transfer you to the Fifth right now.”

“Sir!” Nick stood at attention. “We have tentatively confirmed that there is an unidentified activity occurring at or near the 700 block of North Broad Street, and that said activity is moving towards the Lemming Brothers main branch building on the corner of 2nd Ave. and N. Broad St. Our next step will be to confirm that there is no utility work in that area, scheduled or otherwise. That means going to Callie.” Nick hid his smirk at the grimace on the Chief’s muzzle, as the porcupine who worked at the City records office was as personally prickly as her species was physically; to date, Nick was the only mammal on the force who seemed impervious to her acerbic nature.

The water buffalo leveled a no-nonsense glare at his vulpine subordinate. “You’re lucky you manage to get results, otherwise I’d have already bounced you out of here like a tennis ball. I keep you on because your partner would be inconsolable were I to remove her pet project. Hopps!” Judy snapped to attention. “Your evaluation?”

“Sir! I don’t think it would be possible to cure Wilde’s smugness without invasive surgery that isn’t covered on our insurance.” The Chief snorted while Nick gave a feigned gasp of pain. “We’ll go to city records to see if there are any work orders on file first thing in the morning. If there are any irregularities, we’d like one more afternoon of observation to confirm our suspicions; with your permission, sir.”

Bogo considered the pair before him. “Another ‘working lunch’ at La Bohemia?”

Judy shook her head. “No sir; we need to triangulate, so we’ll be staking out at, what was it Nick?”

“Golden Panda.”

Bogo grimaced at the two. “If you’re willing to suffer that place, it must be serious. I’m assigning you two patrol there tomorrow. You’re exempt from morning brief; sign in then hit city records first thing. After that, come back here and do up your preliminary findings so I can justify this to the Commissioner and the Finance office. Dismissed.”

As the two small officers opened the office door, the day’s argument could still be heard from the lobby. They were half way to their cubicle when the P.A. system kicked on.

“Attention First Precinct; this is Chief Bogo. CSI: Vice city is hack, pandering writing, and laughably bad police work. That is all. Now, GET BACK TO WORK!”

They were packing up to leave when Judy’s phone went off again. Glancing at it, she saw the call was from one of her littermates. Judy indicated to Nick that he could stay, when he pantomimed his leaving to give her privacy for the call. “Hey, Jen! You usually call on weekends; what’s up?”

“Hey, Jude …” Judy threw a wad of paper at her partner as he started singing The Beatles, sotto-
voce. “...just checking in for the family; you haven’t answered mom or dad in like a week.”

Judy huffed. “So they had you call for them?”

“Not even! I was here for last week’s call; mom and dad were way out of line. But they’ve been freaking out since you stopped answering their calls.”

“Well, if they ever considered treating me like an adult instead of a piece of property, I might consider talking to them.” Nick winced at the bitterness in his friend’s voice and slid his chair over to rest a manual paw on her shoulder. She gave him a thankful look and gripped his paw for a second. “You can tell them that I’m fine, just very mad right now. When I’m ready, I’ll call them.

“Now onto more important things: how’s the residency going?”

The voice on the other end perked up. “Finished; what’s more, I’m being considered for a position with Doctors Without Borders!”

The sisters spent the next five minutes catching up, with a promise from Jen to visit Judy later that week. Once she hung up, Judy finished getting ready, with Nick waiting nearby.

“Ready to go Fluff? It’s a Schlocky double header tonight: ‘Bog Thing’ and ‘Attack of the Killer Potatoes’! Zib said she’d make something called, ‘Poutine’, to go with the theme of the night.”

Judy settled into an easy walk next to her partner. “If we’re going to be dealing with ‘Prickly Pierce’ first thing tomorrow, I should ask her to make us Jaeger Bombs.”

“Don’t push your luck too much, Carrots. She may have forgiven, but she sure as hell hasn’t forgotten.”

…

Everyone stood in Nick’s kitchen while Zib cursed in three different languages.

“It’s okay, honey,” Nick soothed while rubbing her back, “…you didn’t know. Hell, Judy didn’t know until we cut into one.”

Judy was throwing out the offending batch of potatoes. “I’d check with your green grocer to see where they got these; there’s no way for a farmer to not have noticed this.” As she washed her paws in the sink, an unusual amount of brown came off her paws. “Then again, they could have known and just wet-dyed them brown and rolled them in the dirt.”

Jacob screwed his muzzle in distaste. “That can’t be legal.”

Judy sighed while drying her paws. “It isn’t, but farm subsidies only carry you so far; if a farm had a bad couple of years, drought or blight or something, they might have pushed whatever crop they could just to stay solvent. That’s one of the problems with co-op farm communities; you are sharing the profits while trusting your neighbors to do right.”

Zib nodded her head, then quirked when Judy went to the door with her car keys. “What, that’s it? The potatoes are bad, so you’re going home?”

Judy shook her head while putting her coat on. “Not at all; Jacob and I will go to one of the convenience stores and pick up a bag of frozen fries. I know they won’t be as good as fresh home-made, but you can work on the rest of the recipe, and we can bake the fries when we get back, so we shouldn’t be too delayed.”

“Why am I going along with you?” Jacob asked as they were leaving the apartment.

Judy batted her eyes at him. “You wouldn’t allow some poor, helpless doe to wander these streets alone at night, would you?”

“What, are you expecting us to run into one out there or something? OWOWOWOW! Let go of my ear!” Zib and Nick’s laughter was cut off by the closing door.

Judy and Jacob didn’t say anything until she was pulling out of the parking spot.

“Why am I really coming along? I know you and Zib are a little strained right now, but this seems excessive.”

Judy turned onto a main street and headed downtown.

“I’m making the run as a down payment on my apology to Zib and Nick, and you’re coming along so they can have some privacy. Besides, why should I carry the produce when I can have you do it.”

They had just arrived at a gas station with attached mini-mart, when Jacob noticed a silver and black Pierce-Arrow Model 2017 Touring at one of the pumps, with a large mammal standing near it.

“Jude, hold on a second!” Jacob said as he rolled down and leaned out of the passenger side window. “Hey Turret! Look left!”

“Screw you too, Larue!” Judy was aghast as a bull moose in a tailored suit headed towards them, while Jacob laughed and got out of the car.

Judy scrambled to follow him out. “Oh my God, sir! I am so sorry! My friend here is…” Judy petered off when she saw the grin on the muzzle of the approaching mammal.

“That’s quite all right, miss. I’m more than familiar with this fuzzy little terror. How are you, Jacob? And more importantly, am I going to need to help Val hide your body?” The ungulate glanced questioningly between Jacob and Judy.

Before she could take offense at the innuendo, Jacob waved Judy off. “Nah, we’re just here on a snack run; besides, they’ve met. Speaking of, Turret? This is the ZPD’s own Judy Hopps. Judy, this is Horace Oswald Hornblower, the Third; Turret, for short. I’m gonna run in and get the potatoes.” At that, Jacob headed inside.

Horace gave an easy smile while extending a manual hoof to Judy. “I’d say don’t pay attention to him, but that’s a recipe for disaster. Just call me Horace. Between Cat and Dickie, I feel like I already know you.”

It took Judy a moment to make the connection between the mammal before her, and the Bull-Horn media empire as she shook his hoof. Then Judy’s eyes widened in surprise. “Wait; Cat and Dickie? As in Catherine Montaigne and Alexander Davis?”

“Yes, but no one who’s a friend calls them that outside of business.”

Judy hung her head slightly. “I can’t really be called Mr. Davis’ friend, not after what I did.”

“Yeah, Dickie mentioned that.” Horace scratched the underside of his chin. “He also said you really stepped up; came in person to apologize, then left without trying to, ’sweeten the pot’, as it were.
You probably don’t know, but Dickie’s always on guard for gold diggers trying to bed him for a part of his fortune. When you left as you did, without trying to make a play, it really made an impression.”

Judy was stunned into silence; she had been convinced that she had alienated one of Zootopia’s wealthiest citizens. She was torn as to what to do with her new-found knowledge: should she ask Mr. Davis for a do-over, and risk coming across as desperate? Should she take the chance to at least get to know the mammal? Did she risk her family finding out she had, in fact, asked a buck out on a date? The idea of letting her fear of her family’s reaction guide her decision galvanized her. Like Nick said, it was her life to live. “Mr. Hornblower?”

“Please, Horace. Saying ‘Mr. Hornblower’ has me looking over my shoulder for my father.” Judy was intrigued at the stress in Horace’s voice at that statement but chose not to pry.

“Horace, then. Do you think Mr. Davis, Richard, would be willing to meet? Somewhere inoffensive; coffee or something. No gold-diggers or family obligations. Just, two adults talking over coffee?”

The bull moose looked thoughtful for a moment. “I can’t really say. His business has been in a bit of an uproar recently, between this gala next month and some contracts he’s been renegotiating. I can say that he really appreciated you coming in person, so I would think you should just call him. The worst that happens, is he says no.”

Judy looked both determined and hopeful. “Thank you, Horace.” She paused for a moment. “If I may ask, why does Jacob call you ‘Turret’?”

Horace hesitated for a moment. “Ask me again in a couple of years.”

“Um, okay. Why?”

“Because that’s when the NDA expires. Good evening, Miss Hopps.”

Judy looked thoughtful as Horace walked back to his car. “What does he mean, ‘when the NDA expires’? Jacob’s always saying that.” She looked up as the hare in question came out of the store. “What the hell did you do?”

Jacob was taken aback. “Spuds and Suds! I decided to get a 12-pack as well. I am a grown mammal after all.”

Judy just stared for a moment, then shook her head. “No not that; what’s an NDA?”

“Oh.” Jacob paused in loading the car. “Non-Disclosure Agreement; it’ LoNF legal speak for ‘Gag order’. Has Turret been not telling stories?” Jacob chuckled at Judy’s confused expression. “Come on, let’s head back; I’ll not tell you along the way.”

“Alright…what?”

…

Judy stared at Nick as they descended into the bowels of City Records. “I know you say you know everybody, but that was just weird.”

Nick glanced at his partner. “If you must know, during my non-cop years with Mr. Big, one of the things I did was, acquire items people wanted. No B&E shenanigans, if that’s what that look is for. I traded in favors, and a few cash deals but mostly quid pro quo kind of things. Callie, hers was a cash deal; she had a grandfather who was a Merchant Marine. He lived in Kyoto for a time just after the
Yamato-Sinic war, before things in the Pacific heated up, and appeared in a few movies from that time. I managed to get 8mm reel-to-reel copies of all of them, as well as the projector set up.”

They entered the primary records hall and headed to a workstation to look up ‘City Work Orders’.

“So, what? She just asked some random fox if they could track down a copy of their grandfather’s movies?”

“Not at all.” They settled into the workstation, and Nick started typing in their request. “She heard through ‘the grapevine’, that I could track things down, and went to a very specific fox. What do you think? Look for underground utility work orders forward and back one month?”

“Hm, two months, just to be sure.” Judy hopped up just as Nick started typing. “Oh! Also look for work orders on buildings along the southbound lane.”

“Sure thing, Fluff. May I ask why?”

Judy smirked. “Just thinking like a hustler.” Nick mock glared at that. “Whatever is being done requires heavy machinery; if they have a legitimate work order on one of the other buildings, it justifies bringing in heavy equipment.”

“Well, look at you, junior con-mammal! You’d actually make a really good hustler.”

Judy snorted. “Oh, how dare you.” She noted the predatory grin on his face. “I already am a really good hustler! What have you got.”

“713 N. Broad, the Glassman Building, has two work orders: one to drill a new utility conduit, and the other through Board of Health for ‘Black Mold Remediation’.”

“I see a couple of others here with work orders. What makes you think it’s this one?”

“First, the Glassman is a turn of the century brick/steel/concrete hotel, and Black Mold is a problem with damp organics, like wooden supports in or behind walls.” He shrugged at her skeptical look. “Hey, trust the mammal who squatted in abandoned buildings to survive his late twenties. Second,” Nick pointed to a note on the building file, “…the Glassman was bought last year by Ronald Silver-Foxe; he’s the sort of mammal people are thinking of when they talk about ‘shifty, no-good foxes’.” Nick grimaced in distaste until Judy started to scratch him behind one of his ears.

-sigh- “Thanks. Anyway, Ron here has a reputation of buying up wide swaths of real-estate, then bulldozing whatever’s there, building some generic office structure, and selling them to the highest bidder. You don’t remediate a building you’re going to tear down.”

“Do you think he’s involved?”

Nick snorted. “No, he’s a shyster and a crook, but he’s also a coward, not a criminal; it would endanger his business, but I wouldn’t put it past him to look the other way. Whoever ‘Schwartzalfen Contracting’ is, they’ve probably greased his palms enough to fry fish.”

Judy stood up. “Well, it’s not the 70’s anymore; we’re not going to be able to investigate based on ‘Ron’s a shady fox’. Are the approving official’s names on file for the work orders?”

“Yeah…no wait; BoH is a tracking number of some kind.”

Judy looked at her watch. “Let’s head on up to the BoH’s office and see what that number means.”
“I am so, so sorry!” Judy said while Nick sat beside her in their squad car, clutching his tail. “That was just... do you want me to act as a witness? God, if someone treated me like that...”

“We’d be cleaning them up with a squeegee and pressure washer if I didn’t get to you in time.” Nick pinched his eyes and shivered. “You know what?” He took a deep calming breath. “Let’s just move on with the day. Prioritize; first, we get what we’ve got to Bogo, then we head out to Golden Panda for Hanese flavored MSG. (snort) I should have called in dead this morning.”

When they pulled into the precinct car park, Judy sat staring at the console for a moment. Nick looked at her in concern. “You okay there, Carrots?”

“Nick, does it bother you when I touch you?”

“Judy.” She looked at him as he gave her an easy smile. “You are a trusted friend who cares enough to try and comfort me when I’m down and respects me enough to stop when I ask. Pamela Duff,” Nick flicked his tail towards the City Hall, “...is apparently a fur covered lamprey that escaped from the Three Mile Island quarantine zone and is now masquerading as a coyote. Now come on; we’ve got bad guys to foil!”

The Chief wasn’t very accommodating until he saw the information they had uncovered, including the digital confirmation code from the Department of Public Health: they had found that this particular code was meant as a read-receipt for intradepartmental memos, not as a signature for official documents. They had a promise the tracking number was going to be traced. The two were sent out with a grunt and a pair of Buffalo-sized antacids. From there, they were off to the Golden Panda.

They were the first mammals in the restaurant, and so could pick the ideal place to sit and observe. They were served by a bubbly feline with purple dyed ears that looked like a leopard but was only a head taller than Judy. "Ni Hao! Welcome to Cat Café! I Xian Pu! How may I serve you?"

“Uhh...” Nick and Judy looked at one another in confusion.

“Oh! You wonder about name, yes?” They nodded. “Great grandmother take from stupid panda mam to pay for debt yesterday, no have time to change sign. Now we make too too delicious traditional food from Qing Hai. I bring tea while you look, yes?” With that, she disappeared into the kitchen.

Nick looked at Judy and shrugged. “Maybe we won’t need the Chief’s gifts.” He patted the pocket where the antacids were.

After half an hour of tea and soup, Nick put his pedal paw on top of Judy’s, which had been thumping like a Jack hammer for the last 10 minutes. “Carrots, relax.”

“I can’t!” Judy started to fidget. “It’s all starting to come together and, well, I’m worried I’ll miss something.”

“Of course, you’ll miss something.” Nick smirked at her shocked expression. “That’s why you have a partner; to cover you and make sure things go smoothly. We’ve still got twenty minutes until the lunch rush hits full swing. Why don’t you, I don’t know, call Dickie like you were talking about last night. If you do, I promise to stop.”

“What are you talk... Oh that is gross! Knock it off, Nick!”
Judy physically recoiled from her partner as he began noisily chewing on a freshly delivered spring roll with his mouth open. “Mwah mwah, theeshe are sho tashtee, Cawots!”

"-Blech- Fine, I’ll call him; just stop already!” She shook her head as she pulled her phone out. “Seriously, how are you older than me, again?” Nick just grinned as he returned to a more civilized manner of eating. Her call was answered after two rings.

“Hollander International, Mr. Davis’ office; how may I direct your call?”

“Miss Ming Ye, it’s Judy; um Judy Hopps. I was wondering…”

“Just hold on the line Miss Hopps; I’ll connect you to Mr. Davis’ office.” Before Judy could balk, there were a few seconds of classical music in the back ground, then the phone rang again.

“Richard Davis speaking.”

“Mr. Davis, it’s Judy Hopps.”

“Oh, Judy! I’m sorry, Officer Hopps, or would you prefer Miss?”

“Judy’s fine, this isn’t an official call.” She looked at her partner, who was smirking over another spring roll. “-hm- In all honesty, I’m calling because my partner threatened to eat like a three-year-old in front of me if I didn’t.” She stuck her tongue out at Nick, who returned the gesture after swallowing. She was surprised to hear laughter on the other end of the line.

“I remember doing something like that to my mom and dad one year when I wanted an ‘Action Savage’ play set. They responded by giving me peanut butter sandwiches or peanut butter toast with every meal.”

Judy giggled at the mental image of a little Dickie Davis with his cheeks puffed out, filled with peanut butter. “I take it you never got the playset?”

“Oh no, come Christmas, it was waiting under the tree. I was just doing that around Memorial Day.”

Judy started laughing in earnest until Nick lightly kicked her shin. When she looked at him, his nostrils were flared, and he was motioning with his ears to a pair of mammals who had just entered. She didn’t immediately recognize the muskrat, but the small mountain goat looked and sounded familiar. When the smaller mammal started scratching himself in the manner of someone suffering the DT’s, she recalled them: the muskrat was one of the mammals Nick had met as the ‘Candymam’ the day before ‘Race Day’, while the goat had been one of the racers who showed up early. She started to mess with her phone.

“Oh, that sounds lovely dear! Here, let me put you on Muzzle Time.” With that, she turned on the camera on her phone and began recording even as Dickie started to ask questions. “There you are, darling! I’m here with Red. You remember introducing us?” She worried that she was going to ruin any chance of even a cordial relationship with Mr. Davis, until…

“Ju…did this suddenly become, work related? Should I be calling backup for you two?”

Judy’s relief was palpable. She leered at her phone while pointing it and her ears at the two mammals at the counter. “You know it girlfriend, but don’t you worry; I’ve got this in the bag.” Both Nick and Dickie snorted at her over-the-top performance.

Judy caught a part of what the two visitors were saying, and even for a junkie they were ordering a lot of food. Judy continued the bizarre conversation, while Dickie read the Horoscopes, just to ensure
there was sound coming from his end of the call. 10 minutes later, the two race-escapees left with multiple large bags of food. They turned at the door and walked down the street, directly towards the Glassman Building.

Once she was sure the coast was clear, Judy stopped recording. “Mr. Davis I am so sorry! That came completely out of the blue.”

The rabbit on the other end of the line chuckled. “That’s quite all right, Judy. This is the most interesting working-lunch I’ve had in months. Though perhaps you should call back when you are less likely to have to do improv. And please, call me Dickie.”

“Alright, Dickie. I’ll talk to you later. Bye.”

“I look forward to it, Judy. Good day.”

Judy slumped in her chair once the call was hung up. “Well, that could have sucked more. Now what?”

“Now,” Nick readied his chopsticks, “…we have our lunch and see if the machinery sound kicks on in 20 minutes or so; then we head back to the House and check the Jam Cams to see where Tweedledee Dee and Tweedledum came from, and where they went. If, as we think, everything lines up time-wise and they head to the Glassman, we work with Bogo to plan our next move.” Nick savored his lunch of Imperial Fire Roasted Chestnuts and vegetables over Glass Noodles. “Mmhh, this is so much better than the Golden Panda. The muskrat, Lenny I think, he’s our avenue of attack: compulsive addict, not really focused. I think he’ll break under questioning like a ‘Happy-Meal’ toy.”

Judy looked thoughtful. “We should probably call Jacob as well.” At Nick’s questioning look, she pointed at her partner. “You remember that recording he was listening to? The one with the three Germanic wolves? Same event we encountered these two. Then, there’s the contractor; what was it, Schwartz Alf?”

“Schwartzalfen Contracting, and yeah, that sounds very Germanic. That’s a lot of coincidence to ignore.”

“This just keeps getting bigger. We can’t go after them now, can we Nick?” Her voice was filled with resignation.

“Not yet Fluff; all we’d have them for would be some building code violations. We need to wait, let them get into position to do, whatever they’re going to do…”

“And then we’ll be waiting for them, catch phrase at the ready: ‘It’s called a hustle, sweetheart!’”

“Oh please, Carrots; get with the times!” Nick took his Aviators out of his pocket. “We’re the police; It’s called a Sting, Punk!” He just put his glasses on in time to stop the thrown chopstick wrapper.

…

After confirming the startup of ‘work’, enjoying a light yet very filling lunch, and calling Jacob to tell him their suspicions, Nick and Judy headed back to the station house. As they were striding through the atrium towards Cyber-crimes and records, Benjamin waved them over.

“Judy, I should warn you; your parents called again.”

“Was it a family emergency?”
“Um, no but…” Ben looked slightly concerned.

“Was it a police matter?”

“No. But Judy…”

Judy archly crossed her arms. “Then it can wait. I’ve told them I’ll call them when I’m ready. I’ve got work to do. You’re going down to the gym tonight? 25 hours on the PPE machine, right?”

“Yeah… why does everybody care about that? I mean I enjoy it and all, but I’ve only lost like, 10 pounds.”

Nick smiled at the cheetah. “That may be true, buddy, but you’ve dropped four inches off your waist. What was it your friend said, Carrots? Soft bodies and soft hearts go paw in paw? Well hard bodies and soft hearts are the stuff dreams are made of, and we all just enjoy seeing a dream come to life. So, stick with it Ben; you won’t regret it! You coming, Fluff?”

“Not right away; I’m going to let the Chief know we called Jacob in on this. Last thing we need is for him to think we’re trying to go around him.”

“Alright, I’ll see you in records Hopps.” As she headed off, Nick turned to Ben, only to see a concerned look on the reception officer’s muzzle. “Alright, Ben; what’s going on.”

Clawhauser turned to face the front of the atrium again and started fidgeting with his papers. He then bit his lip and looked at Nick. “When I said Judy’s parents called, I didn’t mean they called me.”

“Ooohhh, -hiss- that’s not going to go well.”

He and Ben turned to face the front doors just as Officer Raibert and Sgt. DuPrey entered. Nick was struck by the casual military precision of their movements. “Welcome back, Jack! You look good.”

Jacob settled into an easy stance by the reception desk. “I feel good; the First isn’t as bad as I thought it was going to be, but the Seventh feels right. You said you and Judy had something for us? Where is she anyway?”

Every mammal in the precinct turned when a high-pitched scream of frustration erupted from the Chief’s office. “THEY DID WHAT?!”

“Possibly deciding whether or not to orphan herself; apparently, her parents called the Chief when she didn’t answer their calls.”

The door to Bogo’s office slammed open, and Judy’s rapid footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs. Jacob stood straighter when she came into view at the bottom of the stairwell. “My junk-punching offer still stands, Hopps.”

She stopped for a moment. “I’ll get back to you on that. For now, focus on work; we have criminals to deal with.”

Judy and Nick managed to pull together all the little details they had been considering: Lenny and the goat that Sgt. Daschle identified as a professional wheel mammal that went by ‘Zing’, did head to the Glassman building. Cyber crime was assigned to data mining Jam-Cam footage to track the movements of all mammals that were seen in association.

Jean-Pierre had an alarming bit of intel on the possible goings on. “If this is Thule, then Schwartzalfen Contracting is likely made up of Der Schwartzalfen.”
Bogo looked across the conference table at the black panther. “And the difference is?”

“Der Schwartzalfen is the instrument of policy for the Thule Society: you want something stolen, send Der Schwartzalfen. You want leverage on a politician? Send Der Schwartzalfen. You want someone killed?”

Oates waved a hoof. “We get the picture.”

“No, sir, I don’t think you do.” DuPrey shook his head. “These aren’t thugs for hire: they are true believers who choose from an early age to become the weapons of the Society. They enlist in police forces, the military, wherever they can get training to become better operatives. If this is what we have here, then we are effectively dealing with foreign military agents operating in Zootopia, and it’s not going to be for recruitment. Zootopia is everything they stand against: unity and inclusivity. If Bellwether wanted to control the city through fear, these mammals are looking to use fear to tear the city down. We need to confirm whether or not this is Der Schwartzalfen, or just a bunch of criminals borrowing the name.”

Nick pushed several stills from both his ‘Candymam’ cam, as well as CCTV images of the front of the Glassman building that morning; they showed one wolf who bore a striking resemblance in both sets of images. “I’d say there’s enough for securing a warrant, if that’s what we wanted.”

Raine shook her head. “Which as you said earlier, we don’t. We want to bust the leadership, not pick up the foot soldiers. We need to know what they are going after, but getting information out of Lemming Brothers about what their clients may or may not have in their vaults is a nightmare.”

Bogo sat back in his chair. “I’ll deal with that at the Commissioners level. Until then, business as usual. Hopps, Wilde; you two are back on patrol starting tomorrow. I’ll assign you to areas of interest on this case. Oates, Daschle; you’re now the heads of this investigation. I want OCT, Vice and Gangland all coordinating; any officers you can spare that aren’t on anything else, get assigned to this. I will NOT have terrorists loose in my city. DuPrey, Raibert; I have no authority to order you, but I will ask you keep all of us appraised of anything you find, and we’ll do the same. I’ll keep Gladys up to speed at my level. Thank you all. Hopps, can you stick around?”

Once the room cleared, the Chief took off his reading glasses. “I understand that nobody gets under one’s fur quite like family. Bondye knows my mother and mother-in-law could drive any mammal to drink; but I need you here on task. If you need a day or two to get this sorted out, let me know. You certainly have enough leave saved up.”

Judy took a few moments to center herself. “I’ll have this resolved by Monday sir, one way or another.”

…

That night, Judy was sitting across from Gladys Winterhorn at a Hindi restaurant.

Judy waved emphatically with a piece of naan. “The look on Benjamin’s face when the recorded message from Gazelle came on was priceless! I can’t wait to see his reaction when she live-streams for his 50-hour mark.” Winterhorn chuckled at Judy’s exuberance.

The smile fled Judy’s features. “I know you said you’d talk with me about anything regarding career development, so I really appreciate you taking time out for this.”

“Not at all Judy; I’m glad to help. I assume this doesn’t have to do with your coworker’s fitness. Is this an issue with another co-worker?”
Judy huffed into her potato curry. “More an issue with family. A little over two weeks ago, my mom and dad found out I had met a buck, and I mean that in the most literal sense. I’d had maybe two conversations with him, both work related, one of which I’m really not proud of. Anyway, they immediately started planning my coming home, permanently. It got worse when they found out who I’d met. They called the night we were having Moira, Mitch and Jacob’s going away party and basically told me that I was being stupid for spending time with my friends and peers instead of trying to entice Richard Davis, and then implied I should give up being a police officer! I haven’t spoken to them since except to tell them I’ll talk to them when I calm down, but now they’re calling Chief Bogo right as we’re, well, you know.” Judy looked sheepishly at her dining partner.

The reindeer sipped her tea. “That I do. Your family are farmers, yes? Tri-Burrows County, Palouse River region?” When Judy nodded, she set her cup down. “You need to talk to them, but as equals. You have a car? Good. Call ahead and tell them you want to talk, then drive down; don’t take the train. Let them know that you can and will leave at any time if they aren’t willing to treat you as an adult. You need to be ready for that. Also, go in the morning, that way you still have the day to yourself if you do leave, rather than trying to navigate back in the dark while upset.”

Judy took a deep breath. “I’m, I’m scared that I’ll alienate my family. I know I have friends, real friends, but still…”

“Judy; they are alienating you, not the other way around. Your parents are just scared, and you know that scared people don’t make the best decisions. Once they calm down, they’ll realize what they risk losing but it could take you walking away for that to happen. You need to be ready for that. Know your fear, understand where it comes from, but also know theirs; ours is a dangerous job, so every day your parents wake up knowing that today might be the day they answer the door to see a black sedan and two officers in Dress Blues.” Gladys closed her eyes. “I’ve had to be that mammal in Blues before, and there is no more heartbreaking thing to see, than a parent having to bury their child.”

Winterhorn rested her manual hooves on the table between them. “Be patient with them, Judy, but also firm. You are your own person, and they need to respect that.”

Saturday morning at 10 O’clock, Judy was sitting stone-faced across from her mother. “Dad had to suddenly go out into the fields? Just before I arrived, even though I was explicit with both of you; 10 O’clock, we sit down and talk, and yet he decides to wander out to the asparagus fields to, ‘look over the irrigation system?’”

Bonnie fussed with a pitcher and glasses without looking at her daughter. “Oh, you know your father; he’s a paw-on kind of mammal. He’ll be back by around lunch time. Won’t you have some sun-tea?”

“Dad is many things mom, but a plumber is not one of them; uncle Reece put that system in, and I just saw him out front putting up the badminton set, yet My Dad has to disrespect the wishes of one of his daughters, to insult me and my intelligence and blow me off to wander the back 40?!?” Judy was standing and shaking with barely contained fury.

“Now see here, young lady…”

Judy slammed her paws on the table. “No! You will see here! I asked in no uncertain terms for you and father to be here, so we could talk. You chose to ignore my request. Now you will hear my demand. I know how long it takes to get to the south fields from here. I will be waiting in my car: if father isn’t here in 15 minutes, I. Will. Leave.” At that Judy turned and headed for the front door.
Her mother gaped as Judy climbed into her car.

15 minutes came and went, and Judy drove away. She was only five miles down the road when her phone rang; when she pulled over, she saw it was her father’s number. Judy went into her settings and blocked both of her parents. Then, she wept. It was twenty miles later that Judy had to pull over again or have an accident from her anger and distraction.

‘I have to talk to someone!’ She thought to herself. Not Nick, he and Zib were on a makeup date. Not Jacob, he had already volunteered to commit violence against her family, and she wasn’t willing to risk his being serious about that. Besides, a Black hare in a pale Cadillac? Half the family would drop dead from cardiac arrest. Twitchle? No, Judy was in an emotionally vulnerable state, and they both deserved better than the aftermath that would occur.

Cathy; she’d call Cathy.

It was three rings before the phone was answered.

“Judy! How’ve you been? I was going to head to Club Cache tonight. Do you want to come with?”

“Actually, Cathy, I just need someone to talk to.”

There was a moment of silence on the phone. “Where are you right now?”

“About 10 miles from the Bunnyburrow municipal line.”

“That’s about, what, three hours out from my place?”

“Yeah.”

“Good, that gives me time to get everything set up. You just let Aunty Cathy take care of you. Do you have Blue-Fang with your phone?”

“Yeah?” Judy didn’t know whether to be scared or intrigued.

“Great, we’ll talk as you drive. Now I need to know three things; what type of wine you prefer, what’s your favorite ice cream, and what size you wear.”

Judy was certain as she started her car and began driving back to Zootopia with a smile; she should be scared.

…

Judy ran through a mental checklist as she woke up Sunday morning: mild wine hangover? Check. Flannel Pajamas that belong to Catherine’s granddaughter? Check. Tummy overly full of Rocky Road ice cream? Check. Catherine curled around her on the couch after binge-watching ‘Silver Gals’ all night? Check. Life was good.

Then Cathy stretched as she woke up, knocking Judy onto the floor. They blinked owlishly at each other for a moment, then collapsed in laughter.

“Cathy? Thanks. You don’t know how much I needed this.”

“Anything for you, Judy, you know that.” Catherine got a pensive look.

“What? If I can help let me know, Cathy.”
“Actually, I think I can help you. I seem to remember you saying this was all happening around an investigation near the Lemming Brothers branch on N. Broad?”

Judy’s eyes bugged out. “Oh my god, was I talking about that last night?! No, no, no!”

Before Judy could scramble anywhere, Catherine scooped her up into a hug. “Shshshshsh. It’s okay. How about a little reciprocity, hm? There’s a charity event, the tail end of next month. My company’s being contracted to move several items that are being auctioned there from the N. Broad St. branch of Lemming Brothers, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When my ex started heavily associating with those wolves, that seemed to be one of the things they took unusual interest in. I wouldn’t have thought of it, if it weren’t for that yummy little hare friend of yours and his gorgeous panther friend asking about those very wolves the other day. Too bad they’re both taken.” Catherine theatrically sulked.

Judy huffed in good natured frustration at her friend’s antics. “So, what do you think; were they trying to get into your company to get onto the security detail?”

“If you were a member of a predator dominance group, a charity event put on by one of the most famous prey celebrities would be just the ticket for your manifesto.”

Judy’s eyes bugged out. “Oh, god! How much did I say last night?!!”

“Huh? Oh no, honey. I’ve had ages to look into these mammals; anyone who ruins my marriage and tries to have my ex kill me? You’d be surprised at how that can motivate a mammal. Plus, as a security company, Knight Howlton has extensive resources for performing background checks.”

Judy breathed a sigh of relief. At least she hadn’t blabbed everything out last night. Noting Judy’s rising stress, Catherine decided it was time for a change of themes. “At the risk of sounding like a meddling matchmaker…”

Judy snorted at her friend. “Way too late for that.”

The cat-a-mount snorted. “Oh shush. You said last night that you were going to try and work things out with a buck you’d met earlier?”

Judy crossed her arms and looked directly into Catherine’s eyes. “Don’t try playing coy; you know damn well I was talking about Richard Davis. I… oh god!” Judy groaned and pulled her ears over her face.

“Judy?”

“I promised him on Thursday that I’d call him when I had time, but this case just blew up! And then my parents happened, and I just… he must think I brushed him off again.”

“Oh, honey; that’s easy to fix!”

Judy’s interest was piqued when her friend set her down on the couch and headed into her bedroom. There was silence for a moment and then…

“Dickie, Darling! It’s Cat.” Judy suddenly scrambled off the couch. “Listen, I have a friend over and I was going to make omelets and waffles; you’re coming over for breakfast.” Judy frantically tried to wave her friend off. “No, you don’t have a choice; and as your security is, in fact, my security, don’t think I won’t come over there in slinky sleepwear to pick you up and carry you back. Yes, very casual is fine. Okay, see you in fifteen; Kisses!” Cat hung up and turned a smug look on her friend. “There; problem solved. Now, time to make the Waffles.”
Judy all but screamed in frustration as her hostess sauntered into the kitchen. “No, Cat! Problem not solved!” She frantically scurried around the bedroom while Catherine chuckled in the kitchen. “Dammit! Cat, where are my clothes?”

“If they’re not in the bedroom with you, then Roberto probably took them to be laundered. Don’t worry; they should be ready by Noon.”

Judy screeched. “Noon?! You invited the city’s most eligible bachelor buck for breakfast, and I’m going to meet him in a ‘My Little Primate’ flannel onesie!”

“Oh, so you have noticed the opposite sex after all!” Catherine giggled over her preparations. “Our little kit is all grown up.”

Judy growled at her friend. “Of course, I noticed him; I’m driven, not dead. Now where is something I can wear?”

“I still have one of my grand-cub Mabelle’s Easter dresses. Ooh! And a witch’s costume from her first Walpurgisnacht Trick-or-Treat!” Catherine paused in her work to turn and face her diminutive friend. “But in all seriousness Judy, just meet him as you are; no pretense, no false assurance. Simply Judy Hopps, flawed mammal, just like the rest of us. If he can respect you and treat you with the dignity you deserve as a mammal while in your borrowed sleepwear, then you have yourself one of the good ones.”

Chapter End Notes

The mid 19th century brought an end to centuries of self-imposed isolation by the Yamatonese government. Multiple attempts by Amerigon shipping companies to port in Yokohama Harbor while on their way to Hana and Manchuria, finally enticed the reclusive islanders to begin interacting with the wider world. They found themselves at a technological disadvantage, but were well placed to benefit from Amerigon trade. By the time of the Boxer Rebellions, the Empire of Yamato was a fully modern industrial powerhouse.

The next half century saw a steady expansion of Yamatonese influence, culminating in the Yamato-Sinic War which saw the annexation of a portion of Manchuria; the Manchu Prefecture remains a satellite of the Yamatonese Nation to this day, though there has been some efforts, both locally and internationally, to return Manchu Prefecture to independent governance.

Ties with the Amerigon Confederation of States (ACS) remained fairly stable until the Imperial Yamatonese Navy invaded the Kingdom of Hawaii in December of 1941. Amerigon Merchant Marine vessels fled to their home ports carrying word of the attack, as well as an emissary of the kingdom who made a formal appeal to Philadelphia, under the statutes of treaty as established following the failed 1895 Rebellion. With most of Europa embroiled in several wars, Amerigo was in serious need of stable trade partners such as Yamato. However, the young Princess Mowana’s impassioned plea, combined with the Treaty of Maui, spurred the Continental Congress to declare war on the Empire of Yamato, New Years Day of 1942.
None may hide from one who searches with the light from the east. The true foe is revealed.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Grrr. Stupid, smug fox. “How did you get those pictures?!”

-snerk- “Ms. Montaigne sent them to Zib; she really liked this one with you and Dickie trying to eat cougar sized waffles and whipped cream with cougar sized flatware.”

“Argh! Delete that right now!”

“Okey dokey.”

Huh? “Wait, that’s it?”

“Sure; I mean, Zib sent them to me, so I can just have her resend them. By the way, she says you’re forgiven.”

-groan- “Oh joy, and all it took was my mortal shaming.”

“Relax, Carrots. These are for personal use only; in the dark times to come, I can always look at a picture of you in a baby onesie covered in raspberry sauce and all will be right with the world.”

“I’m surprised you aren’t planning to share those with Finnick.”

“I’m a jerk, Fluff, not a monster. For all his tough talk, Fin’s a lightweight when it comes to booze; and once he’s drunk, he couldn’t keep a secret to save his life. That’s how I know he’s the one who swapped the rug I was selling to Mr. Big.”
“I thought you said you knew it was suspect?”

“I did; I just didn’t know how or when the swap happened, and I was committed to the deal by that point. I figured I could play it off. Funny that one decision, the worst I ever made, was one of the best things to ever happen to me. If I hadn’t left Mr. Big’s employ when I did, I’d be a much different mammal right now, and not for the better.”

“I’m surprised you two were still working together after that.”

“Oh, he owed me, there’s no denying that. He saw where that life was going and wanted me out of the family, but instead he nearly got me killed. That’s why I could leverage him into humiliating himself for our hustles. Anyway, you said something that Dickie said got you thinking?”

“Hm? Oh, yeah. He mentioned he was having some issues with trying to get some work done on the pier; some new fire suppression system is supposed to be installed, but he’s waiting on one of the licensed drilling companies to get a small-bore tunneler freed up; there’s like only, three in the entire northwest region, and one is tied up in court with the unions.”

-snores- “You were talking about work, with a multi-millionaire, over omelets and waffles, in borrowed jammies?”

-hmph- “He appreciates that I am a career minded doe. It just took Cat a little while to stop trying to steer the conversation. Anyway, didn’t you say once Mr. Big had an in with most of the labor unions in the city?”

“Yeah? What are you thinking?”

“Well, Fru has been going on about… oh don’t give me that look; I’m still Little Judy’s godmother. I’m not going to stop being nice just because…”

“Because there might be a horrible conflict of interest? I know for a fact that IA is, and likely always will be, looking at the both of us because of our connections to the Bagnoli family.”

“I know that Nick, but in this case I think it gives us an in for information; information, like Fru Fru says her dad donated some art pieces worth a few hundred grand a piece for the charity event next month. Also, Big is named in the Union dispute between ‘Dirty-Ratt Diggers’ and the Pipe-fitters Union. I did a little digging myself, and all of D-R-D’s contracts are on hold until the litigation is cleared up. If anyone was motivated to help a bunch of crazed mammals drill into the vault at Lemming Brothers, it would be them.”

-Huffs- “Okay, we’ll forward this theory to Oates and DuPrey. Let the OCT handle the Union connection. The last thing I want right now is to be facing off against the Mob on top of everything else.”

“Room; Aten-Hut!”

Ch. 20

It had taken a couple of weeks, but Lilly and Mitch’s new place was ready for a proper housewarming party. The building was one of the renovated turn of the century textile mills on Lower Canal St. This put it less than a mile from the Seventh Precinct’s Foxborough station house,
while Lilly was employed at Reynard’s building right next door. The apartment itself was on the third floor, at the corner of the building looking out over the river towards Haresburg.

Moira Lupinski looked around the apartment and whistled. “Very nice, Mitch! I might have to look into taking my detectives test if it affords me a place like this.”

“You’d get less than you do as a Sgt. now; we just lucked out in getting in on the ground floor with this place.”

Lilly came out of the kitchen, waving a wooden spoon. “Ahahahah! There will be no shop talk tonight. Talk about the neighborhood, the building, the economy, politics or religion, I don’t care; but I don’t want to hear a single word about police work for the rest of the night.”

Moira shrugged. “Fair enough. Here, Lilly; I brought you ice-cream.”

The lynx’s eyes lit up. “chocolate-chip cookie dough?”

“You know it! Now if it was for Mitch, I’d have gotten a five-gallon tub of Pralines and Di…” There was a sudden knocking at the door.

“I’ll get it!” Lilly made her way to the front room, while Mitch gave his former partner a faux-hurt look.

“She gets manna from heaven, but I get ‘Wayne’s World’ punishment food? What did I do to you?”

Moira simply crossed her arms while smirking. “Pine, Street, Station.”

“That was like, three years ago!”

“And Gerard in Precinct One’s supply center still hasn’t gotten the smell out of my old anti-stab vest.”

Lilly’s voice came from the front foyer. “Mitch! Arms and paws!”

“Coming, dear!” Mitch made his way while grumbling, as Moira followed, chuckling at his antics. When they arrived, they found Nick and Jacob with their heads bowed, holding packages as if they were church offerings. Zib and Val stood behind them rolling their eyes.

“Praise be unto the life-bringer; may our offerings find favor in your sight!” Jacob took a knee. “I bring chicken mole, from Mr. Alvaredo’s new place on Clairemont Ave.”

Nick then took a knee next to him. “And I bring red wine from Hatches package store.”

Lilly looked haughtily at the two for a second. “I find your offerings acceptable. You may enter.”

As they were entering, Zabrina turned to the two males. “Life-bringer?”

Nick pointed to Lilly’s swollen belly. “Yeah, she’s bringing life.”

“And what about me?”

Nick stopped and looked at Zib. “It hadn’t come up in conversation. Is… is that a conversation we want to have?” There was hesitancy and hope in his voice.

Zib was about to answer, when the import of the subject hit her full force and she snapped her jaw shut. Glancing around, she saw all eyes were on her and Nicholas. She looked her tod in the eyes.
“Yes, but not here, and not now.”

He visibly relaxed, but there was a new, almost imperceptible tension in his posture. “Alright. Let’s go inside then.” In an effort to deflect some of the attention, Nick sidled up to Jacob. “So, how about you two; you’ve been getting pretty serious. When’s the wedding?”

Jacob huffed as he made his way to the couch. “Fishing with dynamite, are we? If it happens, it won’t be for a while yet; at the least, not until after my mother’s own wedding. Besides, it can’t happen until we get mine and Val’s mother’s together first.”

Valerie shivered as she sat down. “I am not looking forward to that conversation.”

Zib looked on in concern. “Better you than me, but still; are you not sure, about each other I mean?”

“It’s not that.” Val leaned on Jacob. “My family’s old blood; like, Rautha old blood. My ancestor, Elrei Avellaner, helped establish the Lapino people within the Reman Empire after Lapinius Australis’ failed rebellion.”

Jacob rubbed her back comfortingly. “Yeah, there’s still bad blood between Efrafans and Lapinos over that. Avellaner’s title in Efrafan is Ela Rah, though he’s usually called Elil Rah: ‘the Prince of Enemies’.”

Everyone was settling into the Winter’s living room, while Mitch brought out hors d’oeuvres. “When was that?”

Moira nibbled on a cracker. “Around 2000 years ago. Lapinius was the first Senator of and for the Efrafan people within Rome. He was counting on Reman military support to help oust the ruling Owslafla, but the senator he backed, Julius Caesar I think it was, all but bankrupted the republic in a failed war against Vulpingerix in Gaul. Caesar had to return to Rome in disgrace just to keep Pompeii from having his holdings seized to pay his debts.” She looked at the mammals staring at her. “What? I’m interested in history.”

Everyone chuckled at that. Nick turned to his friend. “So, what you’re saying is that, because of a hare that died some time before Christ, your parents aren’t likely to approve of you two? This isn’t going to turn into a Romeo and Juliet situation, is it?”

Val shook her head. “Nothing that drastic, but there’s a lot of family pride tied up here, plus my mother is a complete control freak. Thank god Esmeralda’s the first-born or I wouldn’t even be here to have this conversation. Can we talk about something other than my impending trans-continental screaming match, please? Like, where’s Judy?”

Mitch took a sip of his beer. “She said she was bringing someone new and had to go get them. She should be here.” There was a knock at the door. “Speak of the devil. Stay there, honey, I’ll get them.”

Everyone looked over when Judy walked in beside Richard Davis. Nick put his paws to his muzzle. “To quote our ever-shrinking friend, Oh, Em, Goodness! Judy, you brought a date! Look, Jacob, Zabrina, our little Carrots is growing up.”

Zib gave Nick a patronizing look, while Jacob lay a manual paw over his heart. “I know, it touches you right here.”

Judy’s embarrassed blush could be seen through her fur. “I’ll touch you right upside the head if you don’t knock it off!”
“Not too hard, Judy,” Valerie flicked one of Jacob’s ears, “…I need him as a meat-shield for when my ma-ma starts spitting fire.”

Dickie chuckled as he looked around the room and saw not the stunned fascination of people awed by his money, nor the false adoration of those who sought to use him. Here, it seemed he was just ‘Judy’s date’, and that was a very nice change of pace. He strode over to the pregnant lynx. “Mrs. Winters, I presume? I’m Dickie. I brought you something as a house warming present.” He handed over a moderately sized cooler.

When she opened it, she saw and smelled fresh tuna steaks. “Mitch, you’re fired. I’m trading up. Judy are you willing to share?” Mitch affected a wounded air.

Judy planted her paws on her hips. “Are you willing to share the chocolate-chip cookie dough Moira said she was bringing?”

Lilly closed the cooler lid. “Mitch, you’re off the hook.”

As everyone laughed at Mitch’s fake relieved expression, Dickie couldn’t help but think this was a great group of mammals. He couldn’t wait to see what trouble they got into.

…

Jacob never got tired of the new station house; or perhaps more appropriately, the old station house. The building had been the municipal police station at the turn of the century, when Foxburough was still considered a separate municipality from neighboring Zootopia. Back then, the Adame textile mills, as well as the Castorman paper mills were boom industry, and that wealth showed in the architecture. The cathedral ceiling was adorned with a genuine Thomas Benton Hart mural depicting the mutual respect and unity between Burgess County and Polis Zootopia. Jacob thought it a delicious irony that Polis Zootopia was picking up the bill to have the San Andreas Institute of Art and Northwestern College of Fine Arts restore the unity mural that the Polis had neglected.

He paused for a moment to take in the aesthetic. The interior was a blend of Gothic Revival and Art-Deco, with marble floors and polished granite walls. The vaulted ceiling was supported by brass gilt steel arches. The LED lights attached to the supporting marble columns were aimed at the ceiling. They allowed for indirect lighting of the entire space, while natural light shining through a restored Tiffany opalescent glass window above the main entrance gave a warm glow to the atrium. Jacob felt the First Precinct’s Post Modernist austerity lacked this warmth.

As he was heading towards morning brief, he was called over by his shift Sargent. “Raibert, hold up.”

“Yes, Sgt. Lupinski?”

She came over to him with a file in hand. “Got something special, just for you. First precinct’s night shift pulled over a driver last night for a broken tail light, a jackal: Kostebek Genc Kova.” Jacob wondered at this; a Jackal named ‘Infiltrator Young Buck’ was odd, but it might just be Zootopia’s immigration service hard at work butchering names again. Lupinski didn’t notice. “His ID flagged him as a Mammal of Interest (MOI) in this Lemming Brothers business, so they brought him in, but he’s gone full on ‘No-Speaky-Speaky’, except to say, ‘Anatolian Consulate’. So, guess what?”

Jacob took the proffered file. “I get to give my new official city interpreter status a workout?”

Moira smiled at him. “You get to give your new official city interpreter status a workout.”

“All right. We have the buggies up and running yet?”
The Sgt. gave a sour look. “The rectenna in Williston Park is getting worked on, so no power to the Buggies within a kilometer of County Line Rd.”

Jacob snorted. “Well, I guess it’s the Pale Mount.”

“Not a chance.” Moira shook her head. “The bean counters won’t spring for gas during work hours, not while there are alternatives; especially not for that gas guzzler. Everyone’s getting issued these instead.” She then handed him a commuter pass card.

Jacob stared at the credit card sized implement for a moment. “Finance won’t cough up the funds for the one gallon of gas I’d burn, but they’ll shell out $150 for a renewable ZTA pass I’ll likely only ever use today?”

Moira snorted. “Bureaucratic finances at their best, plus they will have a record of your movements to make sure you aren’t, ‘wasting city resources’.”

Jacob huffed in disgust. “I’ll bet they created a whole new office to manage this fantastic, ‘cost-saving program’.”

“And got some award for thinking up the whole thing to boot. Call in when you’re heading back.”

“Got it, Sgt.” Jacob said as he headed back out, towards the J-St. rail station.

…

Jacob spent the ride to City Center reviewing the file he had been given; as the mammal in question had only been brought in for questioning, and not arrested, there was no good picture of him. There were, however, a few CCTV footage stills showing him in proximity to one of the Alf’s, as well as a goat who was also flagged as, ‘of-interest’. The Jackal seemed familiar, and the odd name piqued Jacob’s interest, but he would hold comment until he was certain of his suspicions. Then, he would have to decide how to act.

Jacob walked into the now familiar Precinct One atrium and headed directly to reception.

“Good morning Clawhauser. I’m here for the Mr. Kova interview?”

“Oh, hi Jacob! He’s in Interview Three with Snarlov and Eilerson. I’ll call and let them know you’re coming; just head on down to Gerard in the Armory.”

Once Jacob’s new wireless service stunner was in the Armorer’s hooves, Jacob headed to the interview room. He stopped in the observation room to check in before heading in. “Nick, Judy. Someone said you guys needed a Terp?” They gave him a puzzled look. “In-Terp-reter, a translator.”

“Oh.” Judy nodded. “Yeah, this guy’s been talking nonstop since last night; just none of it in anglican, except to say, ‘Anatolian Consulate’. He’s twitchy as hell, though; his ears are going nuts.”

Nick shook his head. “It’s like this guy doesn’t know that only diplomats get immunity. Think you can educate our friend here?”

Jacob turned to the observation window and listened for a second. He was sure of it: this was one of the LoNF Intelligence mammals he had worked with during Operation: Nobel Garden, an Egyptian named Amon El Masry. He needed to figure out if this was an Intel Op, or if he was dealing with a rogue agent. The simplest way to do that, was to just walk in: if the mammal acknowledged knowing him, he was a rogue. If he held the façade of ignorance, this was an Op, since they both knew Jacob could out him with a phone call.
“Well, time to justify that extra five cents an hour on my paycheck.” With that, Jacob headed into the interview room.

Wade Snarlov opened the door when Jacob knocked. He was the only mammal in the room that was armed and was an intentionally ominous presence at the door. Seated across from Mr. ‘Kova’, was Phillip Eilerson. The normally dour Prong Horn was in fine form that day; his disinterested gaze, contrasted by his pristine uniform gave the impression of detached authority. Jacob knew, however, that all of this was wasted on the Jackal in front of him.

Jacob nodded to Eilerson before sitting down. “Morning Phillip.” He turned his attention to ‘Kostebek’. Jacob waited for a response and was rewarded a moment later when the Jackals ears began twitching in what Jacob recognized as a fixed pattern. It took him a moment to translate it; it was a silent code he had learned for one of the Ops they had worked together. After a few moments of observation, he had the message: Bilgi Almak Lazım, Need Debrief. Jacob sat tall in his chair and flicked his own ears in response: Anladım, understood. The entire exchange took 10 seconds.

Once the jackal’s ear twitches became random, Jacob addressed the mammal before him. “Mr. Kova, my name is Jacob Emanuel Raibert. I will be serving as translator on behalf of the ZPD today. Before we begin, I understand you have requested to speak to your Consulate. Did you wish for me to ask for anyone in particular, and do you wish me to give them a message?”

Mr. Kova snorted. “Yes, I have a message, for Ceren Sadik; a strong name for a strong wolf. You tell him that I, Kostebek Kova, say it is time we say what must be said!” At that, he turned his head and sneered at Wade.

Jacob nodded and turned to Phillip. “He says he wants to contact someone in the consulate named Ceren Sadik, and tell them, ‘I, Kostebek Kova, say it is time to say what must be said.’ I’m going to make that call. You might give him a glass of water; among Anatolians, doing that is a sign of hospitality and might get him to be a little less hostile.” Eilerson gave a diffident nod, and waved to the mammals in the observation room.

When Jacob stood, Snarlov opened the door and let him out. The closest phone was in the observation room, so he would go there. Jacob maintained an outward calm, but inside he was seething; he was dealing with an intelligence operation, and now he may have to falsify information to his superiors in order to preserve the integrity of that operation. He needed to get out from under this, and now.

Jacob stepped into the sound-proofed room and held a paw up to forestall comment by his friends as he made the call. “Clawhauser? Yeah, it’s Jacob. I need you to connect me to the Teller-Ulam Building switchboard office. Okay, thanks.”

It was only a few seconds before he was connected. “League of Nations International Offices, Zootopia branch; how may I direct your call?”

“Yes, this is Officer Raibert with the ZPD, Badge number 4328 Tango; could you connect me with the Anatolian Consulate, please.”

“Certainly sir, one moment.”

As Jacob was waiting and listening to the muzak, he distinctly heard a -pop/klick-. Whether it was his lapine hearing, or just a sloppy splice, he knew this was now a party line.

A moment later, the line was active again. “Anatolian Consulate, unsecure line; how may I direct your call?”
“My name is Officer Jacob Emanuel Raibert with the ZPD; badge number 4328 Tango. I was asked by a Mr. Kostebek Gene Kova to direct a message to a Mr. Ceren Sadik. Message is as follows,” There was another, softer -pop/klick-. Jacob had to resist the urge to suggest they wait for any other intelligence services who wanted to listen in. “… ‘I, Kostebek Kova, say it is time we say what must be said.’”

“Very good sir, I’ll pass the message along. Is Mr. Kova under arrest?”

“Not at this time, we simply have some questions for him.”

There was a pause, and Jacob could hear hushed conversation in the background. After a few moments of discussion, the Consulate was back on. “In compliance with LoN treaty, we are exercising our right to provide legal counsel to our citizen. Mr. Sadik will be by your Precinct One in half an hour.”

Jacob heaved a sigh of relief; this was nearly out of his paws. “Very good; I’ll inform Mr. Kova and the interviewing officers. Good day, ma’am.”

Once Jacob hung up, he sagged in the chair. Nick kept an eye on the interview room, while Judy wheeled over beside him. “Are you alright, Jacob?” She asked while laying a paw on his shoulder.

“Yeah, I just despise international politics.”

Nick glanced over to his friends “Can’t say I blame you. This Kova character seems like a real piece of work; my ‘Hustler-sense’ is tingling just looking at him. His ears are still going a mile minute. Yours did too, for a bit there.”

“Just trying to see if I could hear whatever was setting him off.” Jacob massaged the base of his ears, then stood up. “I’m going to let Bogo know we’re about to have company, then head back in to give the good news to Mr. Kova.” Jacob could see some skepticism in Nick’s eyes, but there was nothing for it until Mr. Kova’s handler arrived. Jacob thought to himself as he headed to the Chief’s office, ‘Yet another reason I hated all this cloak-and-dagger crap.’

When Ceren Sadik arrived, he was exactly what Jacob expected: a middle aged athletic wolf with an easy smile and a faintly Britannian accent. “Good afternoon, all. I’m Mr. Sadik.” He proffered a manual paw to Chief Bogo. “I understand you have detained an Anatolian citizen; a Mr. Kostebek Kova. I’m here to act as Mr. Kova’s legal counsel. I would greatly appreciate a private meeting room where I may consult with him.”

“Of course, sir. We have rooms set up for privileged conversations right this way. Once you are situated, I’ll have Mr. Kova brought to you.”

Once the wolf was out of earshot, he turned to Jacob. “Well?”

The hare stood in a relaxed parade rest. “You had Mr. Kova for three hours before I got here, so I haven’t been able to do a full listen through, much less translation but, Heathcliff Notes of what I have heard? Wade Snarlov, Ralph Fangmeyer and Daniel Wolford are all species traitors for working for a bull, while Eilerson and Rammington have hourglass shaped eyes from fixating on the past; pretty bog-standard species supremacy rhetoric. I’ll need a copy of the full log, and probably wouldn’t be able to get you a translation until Monday at the earliest.”

Bogo simply huffed in understanding. “I’ll need you to stick around for the meeting with Mr. Sadik and Mr. Kova, but I don’t expect that to take very long; all we have is a minor traffic violation, since
free association applies to citizens and visitors alike.”

“Not entirely, sir.” Jacob turned and followed the Cape Buffalo. “We have the plate number off his car; traffic can plug that into their tracking programs, and we can map out his movements and build a better model of what this group is up to.”

This time his snort was contemptuous. “Any other advice, officer? Finer points on chewing cud, or best practices for tying my shoelaces?”

Jacob never looked over. “Not at all, sir. Just reminding you that we are still gaining ground. I need your blood pressure down; my money on your inevitable stress induced stroke is still on something Wilde-related six months from now.”

The meeting was, as Bogo predicted, only five minutes long. First, Bogo and Jacob were handed a small stack of legal documents to sign; Anatolian script at the top, Anglican at the bottom. Jacob was given one additional, ‘As the assigned translator’. This turned out to be an NDA, and signing it absolved him of his obligations, beyond those of a police officer. Mr. Sadik pointed out that detention over a moving violation was borderline harassment, and free association meant Mr. Kova was allowed to mingle with who he liked. Chief Bogo assured Mr. Sadik that there had been no violations of Mr. Kova’s rights. Mr. Sadik then requested a copy of the full interview tape. Bogo had a copy made, and that was that. Mr. Kova was released on his own recognizance, Mr. Sadik walked out with what Jacob assumed was the full debrief in ear twitch Morse Code, and Jacob was handed what he now knew to be encrypted, Code Word Top Secret information. It was only noon and he felt bone tired.

As he was getting ready to head back to Precinct Seven, Nick and Judy waved him over. “Jack, got time for a bite? Our treat.” Nick was better at concealing his feelings, but Jacob could see the tension in his eyes. Judy on the other paw, looked genuinely hurt.

Jacob thought he might as well get this over with. He doubted he had much of an appetite anyway. “Sure. Where to?”

“Our favorite café, of course.”

Once seated, Jacob couldn’t help but comment while rubbing one of his ears. “You know, I’ve read your reports Judy, but… God that’s annoying!”

She looked ready to blow when Nick lay a restraining paw on her shoulder. “So, while you were with the Chief, we did a little research on our two visitors. Not much to say except that for a, how was it put? ‘A strong name for a strong wolf’? That name, Sadik, sent me on a Wiki-walk of pictures…of Fallow Deer. Care to comment, buddy?”

Jacob took a sip of his iced tea. “Ask me again, later.”

Judy’s foot was going a mile a minute. “How much later?!?” she gritted out.

Jacob took out the USB with the recording on it and rolled it in his manual paw. “About five years.” Jacob knew they understood when both Nick and Judy’s jaws snapped shut. When he looked up at them, they were both staring at the memory stick with alarm. ‘Yeah,’ Jacob thought, ‘…it’s going to be light lunches all around.’

Jacob returned to the Seventh in heavy spirits. This did not deter him from getting straight to work. Once he confirmed that he wasn’t needed for any patrol work, what with the day half spent already,
he settled in to begin the official translation of Mr. ‘Kova’s’ interview. Thankfully he had access to various programs to speed the process up, so if he had no other duties to attend to, he might have had the translation completed by close of business the next day. He did, however, have other duties.

“Raibert!” Sgt. Lupinski stuck her head in his cubicle.

“Yes, Sgt.?”

“Rap up whatever you’re doing and head up to Sgt. DuPrey.”

“Got it.” He set a ‘voice-to-text’ bot to create his baseline translation from his recording; he could clean it up later. Once the program was running, he locked his workstation and headed up the stairs to the detective’s offices. Jacob waved at Winters as they were both heading towards the Duty Sgt.’s office.

“Hey Mitch. They tap you for, whatever this is?”

“I’m a detective now, Jacob; I’m the one who taps!”

“Please, get him out of the offices!” Whined detective Grimes from her desk. The coyote was the station house’s only other detective besides Det. Winters and Sgt. DuPrey. “He’s been binge watching ‘Breaking Baaad’ on his lunch breaks, and now he won’t stop quoting it!”

“Silence, Philistine! You know nothing of great theater!” Mitch’s statement was an inside joke within the precinct, as Det. Madeline Grimes had a BFA from Columbia College, in addition to her BS in Criminal Psychology.

DuPrey stepped out of his office and arched an eyebrow at his subordinates. “Most people knock to enter a room, not irritate the occupant out.” Jacob was beginning to learn the subtleties of the puma’s expressions, and so could make out the faintest hint of a smile. “I just got word from the first; a former Knight-Howlton employee, a red wolf named Lewis Bayer was recently hired as security at the Lemming Brothers branch on Broad St. Ms. Montaigne says he was let go during the first round of purges, right after you arrested her husband, Jacob. He’s been observed on multiple occasions with several MOI’s in this investigation.

“Winters, I need you and Jacob to head up to his address in Abernathy Heights. Lemming Brothers are dragging their paws on telling us which vault is likely to be hit. Bayer has recently changed to night shift, so he should be home right now. First says this means the drilling team is within two days of breaching. We’re shaking the tree on this, see what falls out. By the book, mammals, but get me intel.”

Winters and Raibert saluted, then headed out. Jacob turned to Mitch as they made their way downstairs. “Has the Williston Park Rectenna been fixed yet?”

The lynx shook his head. “Nope. From what I’d heard, they’ve offered overtime for megas to act as flag mammals and direct traffic.”

Jacob snorted. “Well, no power means no buggies still, and I refuse to roll into The Heights in your Astro…”

“Hey! Don’t dis the baby-mobile!”

“…So were taking my Caddie; end of discussion.”

“No arguments here; the missus would skin me alive if anything happened to the mini-van. Just let
me get in first.”

Jacob rolled his eyes. “What is this, some kind of superstition? Nothing’s going to happen to you if you see me standing next to my car!”

“Hey now,” Mitch pointed at Jacob over the roof of Jacob’s white Cadillac, “…there’s already a web site of, ‘Black Mammal’ sightings, and all of the clearer pictures are of you next to this car. You’re almost as popular as Slender-Mammal, or reports of furless primates living in the deep forests.”

Jacob started the car. “Five will get you ten that Nick set the site up. Let’s get to work, then I can figure out the best way to troll that smug rug.”

…

When most mammals talked about ‘Happytown’, they were thinking of either the Williston Park or Abernathy Heights neighborhoods. Once upon a time, Williston Parks had been a suburb of Vulpington Commons, housing factory managers and supporting business mammals. Abernathy Heights had been the workers neighborhood; low income apartments and boarding houses that had once supported the vibrant industrial community. Now, it played host to the metro area’s disaffected, ‘predator’ population. Jacob’s heart broke a little, every time he drove through there.

Mitch pointed at a dilapidated tenement building. “There, 42 Young’s Way. He’s on the ground floor, unit 3. Go ahead and pull up in front of the building.”

As Det. Winters was getting out, a red wolf in exercise clothes was leaving the building while texting.

“Mr. Bayer?” Mitch called out.

When the canid looked up, he saw a lynx in a turtleneck, slacks and a sport coat, and a… Jacob groaned internally when Lewis froze up upon laying eyes on the hare next to the white car. Jacob yelled over the roof of his car. “For God’s sake; Wir sind Jaegern! Act like it.”

The wolf shook his head for a moment and chuckled. “Yeah, Wier sint Yaeger; sorry. I don’t know what…” He stopped when he realized what had been said, and by whom. He looked up to find that Winters was now standing next to him, while Jacob had his newly issued electro-laser trained on the lupine security guard.

“Mr. Bayer, I’m Detective Winters of the ZPD’s Seventh Precinct. This is Officer Raibert. We’d like to ask you a few questions about some recent friends you’ve made. May we come up?”

…

“He’ll fold like a dish towel, Sgt.” Winters was grinning whisker to whisker. “He’s asking for immunity, though technically I don’t think he’s done anything he can be prosecuted for; just fired.”

Jacob sat in one of the chairs in DuPrey’s office. “He’s not a true believer, just angry. Didn’t have anything nice to say about Ms. Montaigne, despises working for Lemming Brothers, though that might have more to do with losing the seniority he’d built up when Cat purged her company,”

Jean-Pierre arched an eyebrow at Jacob. “Cat?”

“Sorry, sir, Ms Montaigne. I’ve met her outside of work; she’s a friend of Zib and Judy. She’s Ms. Montaigne when it’s business, but the rest of the time, she’s Cat.”

Winters shrugged. “That’s it. He knows which vault will be hit and when but won’t talk without a plea deal.”

DuPrey blinked for a second, then chuckled and shook his head. “Freakin television lawyers. Alright, I’ll contact Chief Winterhorn and let her know what’s going on, then call the DA’s office. You can tell our friend that he’ll get his deal, as long as he plays ball.”

It was a delicious irony that ADA Deaux was the one to come down for the deposition. Jacob, however, wasn’t sure how to feel about his sister being assigned as an assisting Attorney. On one paw, this was a potential criminal with ties to one of the most odious international hate groups in the world. On the other paw, he saw the fire in her eyes as she set up for Miss Deaux. This was what she wanted, this was her battlefield; who was he to stand between an Efrafan and their foe? He relaxed some when they glanced at one another, she gave a confident little smirk. He felt mollified that he would be the inside sentinel for the interview.

“Mr. Bayer, I’m Assistant District Attorney Jeannette Deaux. I understand you have some information to share with us?”

The lupine shifted uncomfortably in his seat. “Um, yeah. But I want a deal, or I don’t talk!” He seemed to take strength from his perceived position. That perception died with Jeannette’s next words.

“That’s quite understandable, considering if you didn’t share this information, you would be charged as accessory to all the associated crimes; and since some of the animals involved,” the doe passed a group of photos over to Lewis, “…are on an international watch list in connection to terror activities in three different countries, you would also be charged with domestic terrorism. So really, a plea deal is your only option.”

Jacob well remembered the last time he was sitting across from Jeannette in an official capacity, and he almost, almost, felt a twinge of sympathy for the wolf in front of them.

…

Jacob was more than a little upset when, three days later, he was placed on night shift; he and Valerie had planned an evening together, just the two of them. That was now shot, and the surly hare was well prepared to express that displeasure to which ever criminal required his response.

Lt. Waters marched in front of the assembled officers of the Seventh and stood at attention. “Room; Aten-Hut!” There was no banging, chanting, hooting or hollering; just the sound of 58 mammals snapping to their pedal paws, hooves and trotters.

Chief Winterhorn strode into the room and turned to face her officers. “At ease; take your seats. Approximately five weeks ago, officers at the First Precinct noticed unusual activity within the vicinity of the Broad St. branch of Lemming Brothers Savings and Trust. It has since been confirmed by multiple sources, that a team has been boring a hole, from 713 North Broad St., to the Sotheby’s High-Volume Vault that Lemming Brothers maintains there and that the vault contains some 15 million dollars worth of valuables intended for auction at a charity event next Friday. Between ourselves and the First Precinct, we now know that there is a seven-rat tunneling team in possession of a 1.5-meter diameter industrial tunneler, as well as an ultra-high-pressure water-saw.” An image appeared on the screen behind her of a large wormlike machine.

“There are an additional dozen mammals involved, not including our informant;” Several new
pictures flashed up on the screen. “…Jean-Coq and Jean-Baptiste DuMont, two wolverine Acadian nationals who are wanted in relation with several mass casualty attacks throughout the North Amerigon Continent; one foreign wolf, no name as of yet, who may also be involved in several such attacks worldwide; a mountain goat named Eustace Palance, a.k.a. ‘Zing’ from East Meadowlands; a muskrat named Leonard Holloway, AKA ‘Tweek’; and a local boy, Duke Weaselton, out of Williston Park. There are also half a dozen homeless mammals who have apparently been paid to act as porters. Our information is that they intend to breach the vault tomorrow night, carry off as much real property as possible in one trip, then destroy the rest.” There was a round of murmuring.

“Intelligence secured by this precinct has tied this plot to an international terrorist group called the Thule Society.” There was a tense hush among the officers. “Make no mistake mammals, this is not just some crime; this is a terror attack against everything Zootopia is supposed to stand for.”

The Chief began pacing. “Now, we have contacted the Confederation Law Enforcement Agency (CLEAn) regarding this matter. They have in turn, requested, that we not act on this, as it may negatively impact their own ongoing investigations. I am here to give you our Interim mayor’s official response. Attention to Orders!” Everyone slammed to their pedals. “Assignments: all SWAT and TUSK certified officers will report to Lt. Waters for coordination with city wide units; you will be the cordon to contain this.” The murmur from the gathered officers took on a tense air of anticipation. “All non-certified officers will report to Lt. Sandoval; you’ll be pulling double coverage to maintain the illusion we aren’t deploying half our officers. Sgt. DuPrey, you’re our resident Thule expert; you’ll be with me at the Tac-Ops center. Raibert, Hays,” Jacob and a scarred Honey Badger stood up, “…head to the armory and get kitted out for assault, then report to Waters for special duty. Dismissed!”

The room exploded in activity as mammals rushed to their assignments. Jacob and Oliver Hays both went to the basement to get their gear: steel reinforced Fibermax™ armor, helmets with respirators, radio links, flash-visors and sound suppressors. They also received twenty-gauge pump guns with a variety of low-flash, low-impulse cargo rounds, flash and CS grenades, and electro-laser pistols with belt power packs. Last to go on were reinforced gloves and boots. Once kitted out, they headed upstairs to meet up with the Hippo commander of Seventh Precinct’s SWAT and TUSK units.

Oliver and Jacob stood at attention. “Lt.,” The mega fauna looked at the armored mustelid, “…Hays and Raibert reporting as ordered.”

“Good.” He set a lock box in front of them. “All smart-tech in the box; you’re coms black for this.”

Once the box was locked and put away, Waters handed Hays and Raibert each an overstuffed backpack. “Your camping gear; you two are being assigned inside the vault, along with P1’s dream team. The brass isn’t as concerned with damage to the goods, as they are with the fact that the wolf in this fold is known to be fond of using arson to make his statements. The vault has a Nitrogen fire suppression system, so you’re also getting a five-minute supply of canned air.” He held up a pair of small compressed gas cylinders. “I assume you both know how to use these? Good; if it comes down to it, prioritize getting yours hooked up. You can’t help anyone if you’re unconscious.

“Now, orders are to contain and detain; our informant will set off the silent alarm the moment the vault is breached. Multiple assault teams are going to hit 713 N. Broad from every angle one minute after that alarm goes off. We need to keep these mammals from scattering, so your job is to keep them in the tunnel and vault as much as possible.”

Oliver was putting the last of the gear in the pack, when he looked at the Lt. “What’s keeping our informant from turning turn-coat on us?”

Jacob settled the mini-rucksack on his back with practiced familiarity. “He was deposed by ADA
Oliver started at that. “What, DuPrey’s doe? Jesus, I almost feel sorry for the mutt.”

The meet and greet at First Precinct was short, as they were introduced to their method of being snuck into Lemming Brothers; they were loaded into Brinks™ canvas money bags. It was five hours later when they were finally allowed out of their, ‘disguises’.

“You know what the greatest crime here is?” Nick was stretching and popping his back. “The city gave up the single greatest pun moment in history by not having a feline on this team.”

Jacob had his back turned to the vulpine while setting his equipment up. “Hopps, if you would please?” There was the sound of something hitting something else, and Nick’s theatrical ‘Ow!’

“Thank you.”

Jacob was very thankful for the sound suppression gear in his helmet, because the sound of drilling from just outside the vault could be felt through the walls and floor. It took them until the end of the lunch drilling cycle to get fully situated. Once the drilling stopped with a screech, the team knew the diggers had hit the vault walls. They went silent from that point, not wanting to risk the diggers having a listener at the wall. It was 11 o’clock at night when a new noise started up, which had to be the water saw at work.

As everyone was securing their gear, Oliver started to grumble and grit his teeth. “I was supposed to have my daughter for the weekend; I was going to take her to see Swan Lake at the Glacial Opera Amphitheater.”

“One of my sisters was supposed to come down today; I was going to work out how to get back on speaking terms with my parents.” Judy’s comment was punctuated by slamming the closures of her boots.

Jacob was checking the charge on his side arm. “I was supposed to be on a date with Val last night, so your fuzzy muggs were certainly not what I wanted to wake up to this morning.”

Nick was fully kitted when he settled in amongst the various stands of goods destined for auction. “Sounds like everybody’s weekend plans were ruined by these insensitive louts.” He pumped a round into his shotgun. “Let’s explain it to them.”

The team settled in, hidden amongst the auctions items, and waited. Within a minute, there were periodic bursts of water spraying in from a circle in the vault wall. It was only 15 seconds later that a circular plug of steel fell into the room. The four cops’ computerized sound filters deadened the worst of the cacophony, and soon picked up the sound of receding machinery. At that moment, an indicator blinked on their MUD’s (Muzzle Up Display) to tell them the silent alarm was active, and a one-minute timer began. The first mammal into the room was Duke Weaselton. The scrawny weasel looked around for a moment, head twitching to and fro, before he called down the tunnel.

“Looks clear, boss mam.”

The next animals through were the Acadian brothers, followed by Tweek, who was carrying a leaking canister. The four cops guessed this was their mystery wolf’s firebomb; its presence meant no flash bangs or E-Lasers in the vault except in extreme close quarters, though low-impulse pump-gun rounds should be okay at a distance. The one-minute countdown on their MUD’s reached zero as the porters started coming in.
Once all but the wolf and rats were in the Vault, Oliver bellowed out through the vox-mitter in his mask. “Police! On the ground, Now!”

The two Acadian wolverines snarled in rage and moved to grab the weasel. “Weaselton, you lying little bastard! You’re dead!”

That was when Nick and Judy opened fire, sweeping the room with 20-gauge gel rounds. The Acadians were quick to use the nearest porters as living shields, while Duke simple contorted in a fantastic dance as he tried to avoid fire. Tweek took at least one round to the chest, though in his drug addled state, this only seemed to attract his attention. Once the two police officers had emptied their magazines they ducked behind their cover to reload, while Oliver and Jacob began firing.

It was at this point that the two wolverines threw their shields at the police and charged, followed closely by Tweek. The crazed muskrat took two more gel rounds to the chest before he crashed into Oliver.

Jean-Coq arrived right on top of Hopps, whom he snatched up and hurled towards the vault door, then turned on Nick.

Jean-Baptiste lunged for Jacob with jaws wide open. Raibert just barely got the pump-gun up in time to prevent the enraged mustelid from clamping down on his neck, though the momentum carried them both backwards in a pile of thrashing limbs deeper into the vault.

Judy easily corrected herself to land against the door with her feet, though not quite soon enough to turn it into one of her infamous Hop-Kido rebound kicks. As she was preparing to head back in, something caught the corner of her eye; a line of flame was rushing down the tunnel towards them.

When Jean-Coq tried to swipe at Nick, the slippery fox pounced completely over him, tucking and rolling into the middle of the mass of downed mammals. As he was turning to face his opponent, he saw Judy throw something into the tunnel before yelling out over their radio frequency, “Bang Out!”. Nick finished his turn, as the Acadian terrorist leapt towards him. Putting six months of hard training at the academy, and an additional year of sparring with Judy and Jacob to use, he turned Jean-Coq’s attack into a throw, and used him to plug the end of the tunnel.

Oliver had just managed to get Tweek into an armbar and was securing him with pawcuffs, when the muskrat dislocated his own shoulder, wrenched himself out of Hays’ grasp and took a swipe at the badger officer. Buried under armor as he was, Oliver didn’t care. He slammed the rodent’s back against the vault wall as he heard Judy yell, and pinned him there with his left arm. Hays then drew his side arm, pressed it into Tweek’s diaphragm, and pulled the trigger.

Jacob was on his back, with Jean-Baptiste chomping down on the middle of the pump-gun while trying to wrench it away from the hare. Jacob delivered as hard an uppercut as he could to the wolverine’s jaw. Combined with the gun acting as a fulcrum, it was enough to crack the wolverine’s jaw and stun him long enough for Jacob to plant his feet in Jean’s gut and push him off. Jacob used that momentum to jump to his feet as he heard Judy yell. He rushed towards the stunned assailant, and butt stroked him in the head.

Both Oliver and Jacob looked at their weapons in alarm for a moment as the vault was hit with a thunderous noise. Realizing that they were not the cause, they looked towards the tunnel entrance. There they saw Nick and Judy staring, as Jean-Coq’s limp form poured out of the breach like molasses from a cold jar, while faint wisps of smoke drifted out of the tunnel mouth.

Judy was the first to gather herself. “Command, Vault.”
“Go ahead, Vault.”

“Command, we’re going to need EOD and EMS in here, in that order; possible incendiary device, and 10 injured mammals.”

“Nine injured mammals.” Nick said, as without looking, his manual paw lashed out and snatched the writhing form of Duke.

“Ah! Lemme go! I didn’t do it! It wasn’t me, I was framed!”

Nick used his free paw to remove his respirator and raise his visor. He then simply stared at the weasel.

“Nick! Oh mam, am I glad to see you! They’re crazy mammals, I tell you. Threatened me! But I didn’t tell em’ you was here, so… Look, I got a meet up with my parole officer in like, a couple of hours, so if you could do me a solid and just…”

Nick continued to hold Duke off the ground and turned him to face Judy. The Rabbit had just removed her own mask and visor. She rolled her shoulders once, then cracked her neck and grinned.

Duke started thrashing again. “Ahhhhh! I’ll Talk! I’ll Talk! Just keep her away from me!”

Nick turned Weaselton back towards him. “Very good Duke; first though, a bit of formality. Duke Weaselton, you have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will…”

Chapter End Notes

For centuries, the wealth and influence of rodent kind among mammals has vexed their larger brethren. While not possessing the size and/or ferocity of other mammals, they do possess a vast network of contacts. Their collective ability to acquire knowledge, to get into places other mammals wanted to keep hidden, has allowed them to amass vast influence, and accrue great wealth at the expense of their enemies.

Institutions such as Lemming Brothers Savings and Trust based out of Zootopia are prime examples of this philosophy. Leveraging insider knowledge on economies from Mongolia to Scandinavia, the rodents of Lemming Brothers were able to build sizable market shares in a number of industrial firms and create what has become a cornerstone of the North Amerigon banking industry. Despite the history of spying which has driven them to the forefront of economic institutions, Lemming Brothers has a well deserved reputation for circumspection when it comes to their clientele.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

The journey west is difficult; take moments to rest. Jacob takes a break from the case.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hraka!”

We’ve been working on this investigation for months, and those vairlil tharnalt from CLEAn swoop in and seize all our work?

“Hraka!”

‘Leave the matter to the subject experts,’ “Hah!” Those vairlil would have had us sitting on our thumbs while a terrorist firebombed a bank!

“Hraka!”

I’ll bet that was the intent; ‘How terrible, Zootopia should have come to us! We’d have prevented such devastation to a critical economic institution.’ Yeah now you vairflay pricks have to use treaty clauses, and our investigation gets tied up in Supreme Court hearings, while Thule Society fanatics dig in.

“Hraka!”

“You should probably tone your language down before heading inside, Jacob.”

“Gah! Oh Mrs. Daveed. Sorry, I was stuck in my own head there.”

“That’s quite all right, but the Yenta’s are in a bit of a fuss; there’s been some, vandalism near the Synagogue. You should probably avoid swearing in front of the little ones. The FCDC meetings are all about teaching the community, best to set a good example.”
“Has it been reported? The vandalism I mean.”

“We called it in, but everyone’s been so busy recently. I suppose you’ll get to it soon.”

“Not me; I’m on administrative leave, pending this business with CLEAn being finalized, which by the way, DuPrey’s fighting tooth and claw.”

“Well, if you have time off, why not use it? Take that lovely jill of yours out for a few days. Get your head out of work. I’m confident everything will get resolved in the end. You’ll see.”

-Huff- “You’re right, of course. I need to leave work back with work; not bring it home with me.”

“Care to talk about it?”

“I wish! It’s all inter-state pissing matches and hush-hush politics. You know, a year and a half ago, I’d have been cheering CLEAn coming in and ruffling Zootopian fur. Now, well, you just saw now. Anyway, it’s police work and officially under a Continental Congressional issued gag order; I just have to take a deep breath, and hope the Agency knows what it’s doing.”

Chapter 21

Jacob was sitting down with a plate of pierogies, while Kitsuko and her husband Yana demonstrated open pawed disarms, when his phone went off with a text alert. He was glancing down at it, when Valerie and her cousin Estelle entered the hall. He absently waved at the two of them and indicated the open seats at his table, then opened his phone. The message was from Horace:

-Larue! -

Jacob chuckled at his friend’s insistence on using that nickname.

-Turret? -

-Get Val out of the city for a couple of days.

She’ll know where to go.

3=-(

Jacob outright laughed at Horace’s use of the ‘Grumpy Moose’ emoji. Val and Estelle sat down with their own plates just as Horace sent another message; this time, it was a video file.

Val settled in next to him, kissing him on the cheek. “What are you looking at there, umbra-amore?” There was a tension in her posture and voice.

“Chatting with Horace; he seems to think you need time away.”

Kitsuko was asking the assembled mammals if they had any questions, when Jacob opened the file. All attention was suddenly on his table, when the sound of Valerie screaming Lapin obscenities and threats of legal, and possibly illegal action, against a flustered looking elk in black pantsuit; all while standing on a table. Jacob had been on the receiving end of one such tirade, though not by Valerie, and not in some years, so he could understand the ungulates shocked expression. He was startled out of his reverie when Val snatched the phone out of his paw and turned the video off.

Jacob looked at Val and saw embarrassment and frustration in her eyes. Looking around, he noted
other reactions; Estelle was trying not to laugh and choke on her dinner, while a small flock of Eweden looked on disapprovingly. Kitsuko and Yana stood primly on the stage, before the Yamatonese Hare nodded towards Valerie. “Alternatively, you could try that; I imagine whomever you were upset with was quite disarmed.”

The tension in the hall broke with a bout of good natured laughter, while Val lay her head on the table and groaned. Jacob started rubbing circles on her back. “Val? Want to talk about why you were threatening to sue and/or bludgeon the suit senseless?”

Valerie leaned against him. -grrr- “We got a visit from some goose-stepping Jack-booted Gen. Franco wannabe Pendéjos from Philadelphia, trying to censor us about the bank job the other day! Catalonia wasn’t putting up with it 80 years ago during the failed unification war, I certainly won’t stand for it now!” She thumped the floor in emphasis, causing every hare in the hall to sit up in alarm.

Jacob redoubled his efforts to calm her down. “Okay, so that’s why you threatened to tear, whatever-her-name’s arm off and pummel her with her own hoof. I guess I can see why Horace wants you out of the city; getting 5-10 for assaulting a G-mammal wouldn’t really help your career. It so happens, I’ve got a bit of admin leave myself. Turret mentioned you’d know where to go?”

She nodded and a pulled a moose sized business card from her purse. “Sí. He has a friend with a fishing cabin on the eastern side of the Willamette Valley.” She grinned maliciously for a moment. “He gave me the card just before Señor Hornblower Sr. came storming in with half the legal team in tow, and murder in his eyes. The two may not see eye-to-eye on much where the company is concerned, but censorship is absolutely not something either of them will tolerate.”

“Well then,” Jacob smiled for Val “…if we both have the time, and Horace is recommending, I think some time off together would be very nice.”

Val was about to comment, when Jacob’s text alert went off. As he was looking at it, Valerie started grumbling. “If he’s sending you more embarrassing pictures…”

Jacob turned the screen to her. On it was a ‘grumpy rabbit’ emoji, and two words.

=>:{
-CLEAN SUCKS!-

“Rest easy, émartha olma (my love); it’s Judy. Go ahead and call Turret’s friend and let them know we’re coming.”

The next day, Jacob and Valerie headed off on the four-hour trip to the fishing lodge, after confirming with the Grisleigh family that they could stay there. It turned out that Horace had called ahead to inform Adam Grisleigh, the owner, that Val and Jacob would be coming. They were greeted at the steps of a rough-hewn bear-sized log cabin, by a family of four grizzly bears. Jacob grumbled when all but the youngest froze upon his getting out of the Cadillac. “I’m starting to think I should sell this car.”

Val smiled indulgently at him. “Not a chance, umbra; I like this car. Just walk over there and introduce yourself; I’ll get our bags.”
He was about to comment when she gave him a mock stern look and pointed one claw at him. He just chuckled and walked towards the family. “Hello! I’m Jacob, and that’s Valerie. I understand you’re friends with Horace?”

The large male that Jacob assumed was Adam shook his fugue off and smiled. “Yeah, that’s right; we met at the Veterans Association of Amerigo (VAA) hall in Beaverton. I’m Adam, this is my wife Hannah, our daughter Barbara, and this little guy here is Benjamin. Now be gentle, Ben, and say ‘hi’.”

The cub, who couldn’t be more than two but still stood as tall as the hare, toddled over to Jacob. The cub considered him for a moment while sucking a thumb, then scooped Jacob into a hug. “Klahowya!”

“Ben!” Barbara rushed over to her brother while their parents and Valerie all laughed. Jacob suffered the mini-bear hug with as much dignity as the circumstance allowed. Once he was extracted from Ben’s grasp, he looked at Barbara quizzically. “Claw how ya?”

Barbara giggled. “Kla-howya: It means hello.”

“Ah!” Jacob then looked Ben in the eyes. “Vaobyt M’saion, Ben-roo.”

Hannah came up and took her son in paw. “That’s not Algonquin, Salish or Navajo. What language is that?” She smiled at Jacob’s surprised look. “I teach linguistics, and cultural anthropology at UZ.”

Jacob nodded. “Ah. It’s Efrafan. My mother and grandfather are from Edirne in western Anatolia.”

Adam went over to the car and took the bags from Val. “Before the two of you lose yourselves in discussing linguistic diaspora, perhaps we could get some fly-fishing in before sundown. Do you two eat fish, or are you strict vegans?”

Valerie relinquished her bags and smiled. “We both eat fish, but not a lot, and not raw.”

…

Jacob could claim a number of skills and titles as his own; he was a soldier and a police officer, a swordsmam and an investigator. One thing he was not, however, was a fishermam.

Valerie stood on the shore, with her paws on her hips. “Stop flailing at the water Jacob! You’re trying to trick the fish into thinking the lure is a fly, not flog them into submission.”

He got a contemplative look on his face and began working with the reel. Once she was certain he wasn’t going to continue as before, she turned back to Adam. “So, what did you do in the LoNF?”

“I was a combat engineer; did a rotation in the Acadia/Vinland DMZ clearing minefields. After I lost this,” he knocked his paw on his left knee-cap, “…to an Arrow Anti-personnel mine, I was rotated home for recovery; worked at a bar for a little while. That was, fifteen years ago? Anyway, I met Hannah at one of the annual Chinook/Salish council meetings. She helped turn my life around. Now, I’m a city safety inspector, specializing in commercial demolition. We… what in the world is he doing?”

Everyone looked over as Jacob stood still, left pedal paw forward, with the fishing rod held high over his right shoulder. Valerie’s eyes widened, and she was about to say something, when the rod flashed down, striking the water with a -whip-crack-! He immediately reached down into the water and came up clutching a fish. He turned and brandished the catch towards Val with a triumphant
smirk. “HA!”

Valerie’s ears shot straight up for a moment, and then pointed straight back as she stormed over to Jacob. “Give me that!” She took the rod from Jacob and pointed to the shore and the now laughing bear family. “Go over there and clean your bludgeoned fish.”

When Jacob came to Adam and Hannah, the matron was marginally in control, and handed him a filleting knife.

“Our legends say that every person has their own spirit guide that manifests in their actions, but I’ve never met anyone who showed it so quickly, Ten-Iqesqes. Where did you learn to fish?”

“Right here, today; my idea of fishing is to go down to Fleischer Dock with a ten and a newspaper. What is Ten-Iqesqes, exactly?” Jacob asked as he set about dressing his catch, while Val began to properly fly-fish.

“It means ‘Child of Blue-Jay’, which would make Valerie Ioi-as.” At Jacob’s curious look, she smiled. “We can talk while you work. Let me tell you some of my people’s stories from before the arrival of animals from the east.”

…

Val was resting in an oversized easy chair with Jacob, while the Grisleigh’s relaxed on a couch next to the cabin’s fireplace. “…so, by the time Caesar Augustus reorganized the republic into the Reman Empire, Lapino’s were an entrenched institution; we were the diplomats for the senate, and the engineers for the legions.”

Hannah smiled while Adam tried not to nod off. “And where ever Lapino’s went, they took the Reman Language with them.”

“Well, our dialect of it anyway. You know one of the main linguistic barriers between mammals is the inability to reproduce certain sounds.”

Hannah nodded. “Yes, some cultures have even used it as an excuse to show how ‘un-evolved’ other species are, in order to justify oppressing them. Hares don’t have any specialized vocal or sinus structures, so any sound you can make, another mammal can reproduce. That’s why the Algonquin language of the Snowfoot tribes of the Northern Appalachians, and the Navajo language of the Blacktail tribes of the Great Plains are two of the three major language groups native to this continent.” Hannah looked over to her husband, who had begun to snore softly. “Isn’t that right, dear?” She asked as she gently poked him in the ribs.

He startled awake. “Yes, honey! Of course.” Everyone chuckled as he looked around.

Hannah smiled at him. “It’s getting late; why don’t you get the cubs tucked in?”

Barbara pouted. “But mom, It’s vacation! Can’t we stay up a little longer?”

Val looked slyly at Jacob. “Maybe we can cut a deal? You two get ready for bed, and when you come back, Jacob will dance for you.” The jack looked oddly at her, while the two cubs perked up.

“Perhaps the song of Elil-hrair-Rah?”

At that, Jacob rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. “I don’t know; it’s a long Methrah Hain. You two would have to be done and ready pretty quickly if you want to see it.”

There was a rush of air and a brown blur as the two youngest darted for the bathroom, their father
ambling afterwards.

Hannah laughed at her children’s excitement. “I may have to borrow you more often once we get back to the city; getting those two ready for bed can be quite the adventure.”

Jacob shook his head. “It’s no problem, Mrs. Grisleigh. I imagine I’ll be seeing more of you and your family, now that I know about the Veterans group.”

“Please, it’s Hannah.”

Jacob shook his head again and got out of the chair. “If I didn’t show you all due deference as matron of this house, my Marli-fa would swoop down here like the wrath of Keharr and box my ears.”

Hannah leaned forward. “Keyhar?”

“Um-hm; after the sound made by hunting raptors.” Val settled into her seat. “Legend has it that Keharr is an evil spirit; it claims the souls of those lost in battle that Inle-Rah rejects due to cowardice.”

Jacob took up a slightly curved stick from the kindling bucket next to the fire place. “It was a bit of a sticking point, culturally, when the Lapino’s first returned to Efrafa, marching under the Reman Nidel banner.” He gave it a few test swings, nodded, and stood waiting. “It sounds like the little ones are about ready. I know this may sound presumptuous, Mrs. Grisleigh, but if you want, you could set up some recording equipment. The Methrah Hain are performed in the old tongue.” There was a commotion as the cubs returned. Jacob squared his shoulders, ready to sing his people’s history.

…

The hares and bears were all standing next to a set of stepped falls the next morning, where fish were leaping up the river. Hannah and Adam were moving into the river at the head of the falls, while Barbara and Ben made their way to the shallows at the base of the falls.

Adam smiled at Jacob. “After yesterday, I think this might be more your speed, Ten-Iqesqes.”

It was only a few minutes before a fish leapt in front of Adam, who swatted it onto the bank.

Jacob’s eyes lit up in excitement, and he made his way towards the head of the falls. Val, who had been warned ahead of time by Hannah, was setting up a camera. “Don’t start until I get this ready; I need to immortalize your humiliation, after all.”

Jacob waded into the water. “Hah! I defeated the cunning fish yesterday, and my triumph shall be double today! It is a story that shall last through the ages!”

Val gave a thumbs up. “Oh, no doubts there; once I show Horace the footage, he’ll never let you live it down.”

The first few fish that morning to jump near Jacob were just far enough away that all he could do was brush them away.

Val and Barbara were laughing and cheering him on. “You’re supposed to catch them, not block them!” Val teased.

Jacob harrumphed. “They are merely weak, and unworthy to…”
He was interrupted when a Brown Trout as long as he was tall came sailing up the falls and landed on him. The tangle of limbs and fins caused the fish to go back down the falls, just as Jacob came sputtering upright.

Hannah nearly fell down the falls when she doubled over laughing. Her husband managed to stay upright.

“It would seem the spirit of the river has accepted your challenge, Ten-Iqesqes!”

Jacob glared at the offending fish before wading nearer to the shore.

Valerie was about to try to convince him to try again, then her expression hardened as he turned and tensed. “Oh, no no no, neci Conejo, don’t you do it!”

He did it. As soon as the fish jumped up the falls, Jacob leapt and tackle it with a war cry. Both fell back down the falls with a splash. Everyone stared dumbfounded for a moment, until the two splashed up out of the water again, and again, and again.

-Splash- “I Got Him!” -splash-

-Splash- “I’m wearing him down!” -splash-

-Splash- “I need an old priest and a…” -splash-

-Splash- “The power of Christ compels…” -splash-

-Splash- “The power of Christ compels…” -splash-

The Grisleighs broke down laughing again as Barbara waded out and retrieved Jacob and his fish. Once ashore, they saw Jacob had his legs wrapped around the trout, while biting it on top of the head and punching it in the gills. Once the fish stopped fighting, Jacob let go. Standing up, he looked at his foe and raised his arms in triumph, flinging water everywhere. “Victory is mine!”

His ears shot up when he heard Valerie’s pedal paw drumming on the stone. He turned around, slowly lowering his arms, and saw she was standing with her arms crossed over her chest, her eyes wide and her ears pointing straight back. Jacob sheepishly smiled at her. “I love you!?”

That evening, Val, Jacob and the Grisleigh’s enjoyed a feast of local wild greens salad, and smoked trout that had been caught the day before. The, ‘Spirit of the River’, as Jacob had taken to calling the fish he had fought earlier that day, was being smoked for transport back to the city. Jacob and Valerie had already eaten the fish he had ‘caught’ the day before. Once everyone had eaten their fill, Barbara and Ben put on an impromptu show; the (brand new) story of Ten-Iqesqes and the River Beast. Their traditional dance and singing gave gravitas to what everyone present knew to be a ridiculous incident. The two cubs bowed to the laughter and applause of everyone present.

Jacob grinned ear to ear. “I will be very disappointed if that doesn’t become a part of your people’s folk-lore.”

“Not to worry,” Adam chortled, “…I’ll sing that story at the next Inter-Tribal Council meeting myself; you will live on in Chinook and Salish legend for generations to come.”

Val smirked at Jacob. “Satisfied? Your legend will live on; maybe now you can stop acting like a leverette and taking Loco risks and scaring me like that!” Her comment was punctuated with a flick
to his ear. “Now, if you’ll excuse me. I need to do a little editing.” She held a digit in front of Jacob’s muzzle to forestall any comment. “Ahahahah! Not one word, Neci Umbra; I may love you, but you’re not off the hook that easily. Just take it like an Owsla.” She kissed him on the nose, then headed upstairs.

Jacob watched her leave, with a happy grin on his face. “I will gladly make a fool of myself every day for the rest of my life, if it keeps her smiling like that.”

When he turned back to his hosts, they were looking at him with their own smiles, as Hannah hugged her husband. “Maybe you could find ways that don’t scare her out of her fur? Speaking as a wife and a mother, that is a hard-enough fear to live with, without the one you love putting themselves needlessly in danger.”

Jacob was about to say something, when he paused. “I’ve lived so much of my life in a state of threat; gang life as a teenager, the military, and then the police, I guess I just don’t see it as abnormal any more. I just, brush it off as ‘the way of things’. I suppose, if God can send someone as wonderful as her into my life, he’s more than able to send a Blue-Jay to show me my own folly and set me back on track.”

Everyone relaxed for a moment, then Jacob’s phone went off with a text alert. Looking down, he saw it was from Pearl. There were two more alerts in rapid succession, and that was when he saw it was sent to several people at once; all cops. He was a little concerned when he opened it, but he was soon laughing. When Adam got up to see what Jacob found so funny, the hare turned the screen, so the two larger animals could see it. There were three parts: one was a dash-cam still image of the back of a black SUV with government plates, the second was a phone picture of a ticket for ‘Failing to signal’, and ‘five MPH over the speed limit’. The final part was three words:

-Sweet, petty vengeance!-

Once Jacob had gotten himself back under control, he waved off his hosts.

“I’ll explain some other time; confidentiality clauses and all that. Right now, I’ve got to show this to Val.”

…

Jacob, Nick, and Judy were all at McGruff’s, a restaurant they frequented whenever Jacob was near Precinct One. All of them had taken advantage of their enforced time off. Jacob told his friends some stories of his and Val’s trip. Nick had spent the time looking at apartments in the same building as Lilly and Mitch; he wanted to have his mother move out of her current place, and into a better neighborhood. The irony of ‘Happytown’ being a step or several up from her current place in Savannah Central was not lost on anyone. As for Judy…”

“…so, there was my dad, literally cap in hand, apologizing for how they had acted. I know what they did was wrong, and so do they, but I never wanted to humble them like that.”

Nick rested a paw on her shoulder. “It’s hard to think of your parents as flawed mammals, just like it’s hard for them to see you as an independent adult. Just remember that if they weren’t your parents, how they’ve treated you would be unacceptable.”

“I know, and I told them both as much; treating me with less respect than they give strangers isn’t going to cut it.” -huff- “Anyway, we sat down to talk. Turns out, part of the problem is the new Pacifican State regulations on the use of Midnicampum since Bellwether. Dad’s had to pretty much scrap his entire pest control scheme. Since the Tri-Burrows is all watershed land, there’s no
pesticides or nitrates allowed. Three farms have already had to apply for subsidies, and the Tuathanac family had to sell their farm off when a blight hit their entire crop. I'll grant, Clarence was probably most to blame; he’s been mono-cropping Silage Corn for the Tri-Burrows BPC ethanol plant for the past 10 years. Their land is pretty much just clay now; but the timing has all the surrounding farms running scared.”

Judy took a pull from her beer. “Well, mom and dad had this, ‘perfect solution’; start divvying up the farm to their daughters as dowries. Burrow law precludes taxing dowry land for ten years, to give the new family a chance to get their farm up and running.”

Jacob cocked his ears in confusion. “How was that supposed to fix the whole, ‘new pest control strategy’ issue?”

“That’s just it, it doesn’t! It keeps the farm in the family, but it does nothing to ensure the farm prospers! And it’s not like there aren’t ways to keep the farm solvent and up with the times. My little brother Peter, who’s from my aunt Eugenia’s second litter with her third husband Walter Proudfoot…”

Nick made a shushing motion with his paws. “We don’t need a reading from the Book of Neuteronomy, Carrots; we just OW!” He immediately started rubbing his shin where Judy kicked him. The frown on her face was only somewhat playful.

Jacob gestured with the celery stalk from his Bloody-Mary. “First, Smug Rug, you deserved that. Second, you’re thinking of the Begats in Genesis, not Deuteronomy.”

“Thank you, Jacob.” Judy nodded to the hare. “Now, where was I?”

Jacob set his celery stick down. “And Walter lived thirty years, and begat Peter-Ow!” He started rubbing his shin where Judy kicked him, while Nick laughed.

“Hate, you, both.” She growled and took another swig. “So, Peter, who graduated with a Masters in Agricultural Sciences at, like, 18; the kit’s scary smart; he had an idea to introduce free-range poultry onto the farm. Guinea Hens will devour produce pests, fertilize the soil, and are a second and third revenue stream, what with eggs and poultry meat, as well as the potential to rent the birds to other farms. But dad was all set in his ways: ‘We’ve farmed for generations using *Midnicampum* for pest control, this is a phase, it’ll pass…’ blah, blah, blah.”

Nick looked at her in concern. “Little bitter there, Fluff?”

She threw her arms up in frustration. “He blew off another one of the kits, just like he did with me; I mean, they pretty much ignore Jen because they think she’s gonna come back to the Burrow to practice medicine. Joke’s on them; but Peter *wants* to be a part of the farm’s future! It’s just, painful seeing how self-involved my parents have become when it comes to the farm; they want it to thrive, but they’re afraid of change.” Judy blew out a breath. “I think they get it now. I got a message from Peter’s doefriend, Clover, thanking me for getting my parents to listen to his proposal. All I did was let them know they needed to respect their kits as mammals, not just as their property.”

Both hers and Nick’s eye lit up when an alarm went off on Nicks phone. The tod turned to one of the wait-mammals at the bar. “Hey, buddy, could you turn the TV to ZNN?”

Jacob looked at Judy, who smiled and shrugged. “We got a message from Val to watch the news at this hour, tonight.”

They all turned to face the screen, as Peter Moosebridge and Fabian Growley came on to give their
closing remarks.

“Thanks, Benet. And now, on the lighter side of news; a new form of extreme sport fishing?” Peter looked to his co-anchor.

Jacob’s ears shot straight up in alarm, as Fabian turned to face the camera, a smile tugging at the corners of her muzzle. “So it would seem, Peter. Our own Valerie Coneja managed to capture footage of ZPD’s Jacob Raibert practicing this new method. Let’s take a look.”

... 

The night of the auction Gala was here, and Valerie was front row with all the movers and shakers of Zootopia. Horace had brought her on as his +1. However, she was there to cover the event, so she was in a smart grey two-piece pants suit. She still had some latitude as to how she proceeded, so she was currently wandering the grand hall of the Fine Arts Museum, where the event was being held. There were tables near the main auction podium, on which the various items were displayed, while finely dressed mammals circulated the crowd doing their best to draw interest in those items.

One such mammal who had caught Val’s eye, though she didn’t know why at first, was a svelte Belgian Hare in a one-piece black evening gown. Her own experiences with Belgians were less than pleasant, so she was initially going to ignore the doe, until she noticed who she was aiming towards. A flustered Judy Hopps stood in a very tasteful and stylish black pencil skirt and jacket over a cream blouse. Beside her was Richard Davis, in a charcoal-grey Tuxedo; though instead of a formal bow tie, he wore a black string tie secured with an obsidian arrowhead. The understated pair were actually quite striking next to the ostentatious plumage of high society. Though she could claim she was going over to interview the two, she noticed the predatory gleam in the Belgian doe’s eyes. That galvanized Val to act; no gold-digging bunny was going to ruin her friend’s evening.

She was making her way over to the pair, when Dickie noticed the doe. His posture changed from relaxed, to formal with a business smile, and he looped his arm through Hopps’. Val wanted to laugh at the idea of using the small grey doe as a living shield, though to hear Jacob tell it, she more than lived up to her Pictish heritage. Judy immediately noticed her partner’s change in demeanor and began subtly looking around for the threat. It was clear she had slipped into police mode, as her eyes slid over the oncoming mammal without taking notice. Val was still a few paces away when Judy finally noticed the real threat.

“Mr. Davis!” The sales doe slipped her paw through Dickie’s free arm while smiling suggestively. “Do you see anything you like?”

Judy’s ears shot straight up and began to flag at the presence of the floor mammal, obviously not accustomed to this type of social combat. Luckily, her partner for the evening was an accomplished verbal combatant, as he deftly moved the arm that had been co-opted and gesture to one of the items while walking towards it, still holding Judy’s arm.

“Actually, I have a friend who has recently taken up fishing; this is a Cat Pagle signature, isn’t it?” Val almost laughed at the frustrated look on the Belgian doe’s face, though she soon recovered. She was about to go into her sales pitch, when Valerie arrived.

She put on her best reporter’s smile and strode up to the trio. “Mr. Davis; good evening! And Officer Judy Hopps, what a pleasure. Valerie Coneja, ZNN.” She turned to face the display item, putting herself between Dickie and the floor mammal. “Fishing seems to be all the craze lately; are you considering taking it up yourself?”

His shoulders visibly relaxed, and Judy smiled in thanks. “Actually, I was thinking of getting it for
our mutual friend. How is he, by the way?"

“Pulling an overtime shift out front so he has tomorrow off. Honestly, though the sentiment would be appreciated, it would likely be wasted on him. He’s been talking to some mammals about deep sea fishing.”

Judy snickered. “Sounds like he’s read Lemmingway’s, ‘Old mam and the sea’, and started getting ideas.” All three joined in for a laugh, at which point the Belgian stalked away.

Judy hesitated for a moment, then looked sidelong at Dickie. “She was pretty.”

The buck snorted. “So are Coral Snakes; I don’t want one of those hanging off my arm either. In all seriousness, how are you two doing? It’s been a month and a half, and all that’s been on the news was that sanitized speech the Commissioner gave last week. He looked like he’d swallowed a live scorpion while giving it.”

Val and Judy both huffed, then looked at each other and gave pained smiles. “I couldn’t say, officially or otherwise.”

Judy hugged Dickie’s arm a little tighter when he got a crestfallen look, then whispered, “She threatened to scalp one of the mammals from Philly, then engrave the First Amendment onto their forehead, so I think her boss is trying to keep her ‘safe’.” Val blushed a little, but otherwise looked unrepentant.

Any other comments were delayed as a trio of nearly identical arctic vixens in black pant suits walked up to the group.

“Oh, my gawd, Judy, you look fantastic!” The tinny voice of a shrew came from the arms of one of the vixens.

Judy smiled brightly. “Fru Fru! Anthony! Oh, it’s so good to see you. And little Judy!” she detached from Dickie’s arm and began fussing with her namesake. “Where are Kevin and the boys?”

“They’re all down in VT Commons at Temple; Boris’ little one, Morris, is having his Bar Mitzvah today, so daddy gave them all the day off.”

Mr. Big grunted in approval. “Yes, well I make it a point to *reward* the mammals under my care, commensurate to their actions. Mr. Davis, a pleasure as always. I would never dream of pressing business on such a festive occasion, but would it be possible to arrange a date to sit down and talk? I have some associates who would like to discuss arrangements for shipment and transport.”

The tension was back in Dickie’s posture. “Of course, I’ll have my office review my schedule for when you can come down to the tower.”

Val sensed the tension in the air and felt the need to act. “Well, as much as I would like to stand around and reminisce, I am here in an official capacity. To that end, Mr. Davis, Mr. Bagnoli, do you have any comments for the general public on the event tonight?”

There was a thankful look in the buck’s eyes when he turned towards Valerie.

“Actually, yes. While it’s always heartening to see Zootopia come together in support and solidarity with the brotherhood of mammalkind, none of this would have been possible, were it not for the valiant efforts of the ZPD, Officers Hopps and Wilde in particular. They are partly responsible for saving everything here from loss, including several donations from mine and Mr. Bagnoli’s estates. I’m sure Anthony would agree, that we all *owe her* and her colleagues a debt, of gratitude.”
There was a moment of hesitation as both Fru Fru and Anthony looked pointedly at Dickie, before the elder shrew spoke. “Truer words could not be said about Miss Hopps, and her colleagues. If you will excuse me, I see the city Surgeon General waving me over. Good day, Miss Hopps, Miss Coneja.” He pointedly did not address Dickie before he and his entourage left.

A moment later, dual calls of, “Judy!” came from either side of the group of lagomorphs. Catherine Montaigne was in a fur-hugging red silk ankle length gown, and Pearl Swineheart was in a flattering off white two-piece dress, surrounded by a sounder of hogs that all bore striking resemblance to her. All started heading over to Judy and company.

Val chuckled. “I need to bring you along with me to more events like this, Judy; everyone who’s anyone seems to come to you.”

Val felt as if the only thing keeping her from binkying was the weight of Jacob on her arm as they were leaving the Zootennial Stadium. During the previous night’s Gala, Catherine Montaigne had introduced Val to Gazelle, who had in turn introduced everyone to Roger Bove. Both the Iberian Bull and Zootopia’s darling had been delighted when, in her excitement, Val had slipped into their native tongue. It was then that Gazelle suggested they should continue their discussion the next night, after the exhibition match. This is how Valerie found herself and Jacob leaving the arena with Señor Bove, Gazelle and their collective entourages through the VIP side entrance.

Jacob chuckled and smiled at Val. “Relax, émartha olma .”

She tightened her grip on his arm. “Are you kidding?! My papa used to take us to Barcelona to the Iberian league Bullfights when I was little; I still remember that first match against Emilio LaPlancha!”

Roger laughed. “Ah, that seems a lifetime ago! I never thought I’d meet such an avid or loyal fan this far from Andalusia.” He noticed the uncomfortable look in the eyes of one of Gazelle’s dancers. “I take it, Señor, that you are not a fan?” The young Bengal looked away for a moment. “Now, there is no need for that. The fights may be a part of my heritage, but I am not so self indulgent as to be offended that someone doesn’t approve. I fight, because it is a tradition within my family, within my people since the time of the kingdom of Minoa, when King Midas granted the first Golden Hoof and the title, Minotaur, to the one who would serve as his champion. I fight to remember my people, and those times when we were not allowed to be Minoan. Last, I fight to test my skill, not to visit pain on another.”

Jacob thought back to his own troubles accepting that there were those who could not understand why he, ‘…clung to the brutal traditions…’ of his ancestors. There was a purity in the Minotaur’s desire and reason for fighting that Jacob had lacked in his youth.

He was about to voice this thought as they exited the building, when a crashing noise near the end of the alleyway caused them to look up. A black panel van had backed into the end of the alley, blocking the exit. When the rear doors opened, a pack of wolves in balaclavas came pouring out towards Roger and the group. The bull’s entourage closed ranks around him, just as Gazelle’s dancers did the same for her. The pack crashed into the bull fighter’s group with a snarl and immediately started trying to batter their way towards Roger, while a small number headed towards the singer.

Before either Jacob or Valerie could react, a pair of wolves were thrown bodily over Bove’s group and landed in front of them. They rolled easily with the landing and turned on the two hares. One reached for Jacob, who promptly grasped the canid’s outstretched paw and yanked. The wolf
lurched forward, off balanced, and braced himself on all fours. He turned to deal with Jacob, only to be stamp kicked in the temple. The attacker collapsed to the ground, stunned. As he had no way to secure his assailant, Jacob opted for a less subtle method of ensuring the wolf was no longer a threat, and dislocated both of his shoulders. The wolf’s pained howl was echoed by his partner. When Jacob looked over, he saw that Valerie had pulled a *Nevaja* out of her purse and used it to pin her attacker’s left manual paw to his own left thigh. That wolf’s cries were soon silenced when the jill delivered a machinegun fast series of punches to the lupine’s slack jaw.

Trying not to be mesmerized by Val’s fighting spirit, Jacob assessed the battlefield. He noticed a familiar muzzle looking out the back of the van; it was the LoN spy Amon. Jacob quickly turned to Valerie. “*Marli-rah, call it in!*” Turning back to the conflict at paw, he pointed at the Jackal. “YOU!” Jacob dropped to all fours and bolted towards the van. At the same time there was another pained yelp, and the sound of a body colliding with a wall. Without hesitating, the Jackal turned to the driver and said something, at which point the vehicle took off, leaving the pack to its fate.

Jacob was about to leap into the fray, when the alley was filled with tiger’s roar, stunning nearly every mammal there. Not a moment later, a massive Bengal tiger in police service blues slammed into the back of the wolf pack. What had started out as a baker’s dozen assailants, had been reduced to three lone wolves who immediately bolted for the alley entrance. Two were dropped with the distinctive -sizzle/crack- of a new police-issued wireless Taser. The third wolf jumped at the shooter, a statuesque white-tail doe officer. She simply braced her legs and lowered her head and caught the attacker in her rack. Whatever fight the canid might have had, ended when she head-butted the wolf against the side of the building. All was silence for a moment.

“Samir, Eveline; good to see you both.” Jacob nodded to his academy mates.

“Savage.” The young tiger nodded back. “I’m surprised you left anything for us.”

Officer Whitall calmly walked towards the group. “Sammy, could I get a paw, please?” At her partner’s confused look, she gestured to the unconscious wolf, tangled in her rack. With a chagrined smile, he started dislodging the mammal from her headgear.

EMT’s and additional officers were soon filling the alley. At one point, Eveline had to bodily lift Jacob by his coat collar and set him next to Valerie; he figured that she needed him out from under hoof as the investigation started, but her stern look and head nodding towards Val finally clued him in to where he needed to be right then, as the jill was shivering and silently crying from stress. So, there he sat, doing the only thing he could, and held Valerie.

Out of the confrontation, there were several injuries, nearly all suffered by the pack or Roger’s security detail. There had been one fatality, among the group that tried to attack Gazelle; one of the dancers had swiped at the oncoming wolf, sending the mammal flying. The young tiger’s sniffles turned into full blown hysterics when the coroner’s technicians carried the body away in two trips. Gazelle and the other dancers tried to console their friend as best they could.

Val stood shakily, with Jacob hovering close by, and walked over to the distraught mammal. “Sanje, was it?” She lay a paw gently on the tiger’s thigh. “Don’t try to deal with this alone. You have friends; let them share your burden.” When the weeping mammal looked up, she handed him a card from her purse. “Talk to someone. This is my therapist. If she doesn’t have any availability, she’ll contact someone who does. You’re not alone.” The crying feline nodded, then gently scooped her into a hug, which she returned as best she could for the larger mammal.

Once Sanje’s panic attack had passed, and their statements had been taken, Gazelle and her troupe headed home. Jacob sat back down on the curb next to the stadium wall with Val and rubbed her
back. “I didn’t know.” Jacob nodded to her purse, where the card had come from.

“You couldn’t have; I didn’t tell you.” She leaned into him.

“I feel like I should have known; like I’ve somehow failed you by not being aware of something that important.”

She gave a watery snort. “Now I feel bad for not trusting you with this.” She nuzzled into the hollow of his neck. “I want my knife back. There’s a mammal dead, and all I can think of is my knife.”

He resisted the urge to laugh. “You’ll get it back, once they confirm it wasn’t used in the commission of a crime; I’ll see that you get it back.”

As he rested his chin on top of her head, he noticed something sticking out of a sewer grate next to her pedal paw. He searched around for a moment for something to grab it with, when he saw Nick helping with the deposition of one of Roger’s security detail. He gave a short whistle and a flick of his ear to draw the vulpine’s attention. When Nick could break loose, he tiredly walked over.

“Hey buddy, Valerie. How’re you holding up?”

Jacob shrugged noncommittally. “As well as can be expected. Oh, mind your step.”

When Wilde looked down and saw the cylinder sticking out of the drain, he glanced at Jacob, who subtly nodded. He knelt down and used a latex glove to extract the object. It was an insulated handle with a switch on the side. From one end of the cylinder, projected a loosely wound heavy metal coil, surrounding a heavily insulated post with a small engraved plate at the end. When Wilde activated the switch, the coil began to glow, and heated the plate. This caused the engraving to come into stark contrast: it was a bared clawed paw, surrounded by a shield. Wilde shivered for a moment, then turned the brand off. Once he was sure it was cool to the touch, he placed it in an evidence bag and handed it to the lead officer on site. “You two should head home; I’ll walk you to your car.”

... 

Jacob tried to take Valerie to her cousin’s house, but she was having none of it, so he called home. Amelia was more than happy to host Val in her room for the night. Once they came in, Jacob’s mother was instantly by their side. “Are you two alright? They said there was some kind of attack, but not who was involved!”

Jacob hesitated for a moment, then growled; procedure be damned, he wasn’t going to leave his family in the dark on this one. “It’s the Thule Society.” His mother and grandfather both gasped. “We’re alright, but it’s not, it’s not safe in the city. We need the FCDC to step up watches. No one travels alone.”

His mother took a calming breath and nodded. “Methi laythe, Owsla-fa.” (It will be as you say, Owsla-fa.) She then turned to the living room and started to make phone calls. Jacob didn’t think he would ever get used to his mother calling him that.

She paused in her calling and looked over her shoulder. “Oh, a certified letter came for you while you were out today; it’s on the coffee table.”

Jacob left Val with Amelia and went into the living room to get the letter. It was from the LoNF’s regional office of recruiting and retention. The whole house stopped when Jacob shouted.

“Hraka!”
His mother turned immediately to reprimand his language, when she saw the set of his ears, and the fire in his eyes. Val and Amelia both came in and saw his state. “Umbra amore?”

Jacob could only brandish the letter before throwing it on the table.

“Attention to orders: this is to certify that Sgt. Raibert, Jacob E., has been recalled to active duty effective immediately. You are to report to Military Enlistment Processing Center, Zootopia, no later than…”

Chapter End Notes

As more and more mammals began emigrating to the New World, the need to expand became more an more necessary. This inevitably brought Confederation Pioneers into conflict with Native Amerigon tribes. The Confederation, not possessing the unified resources of one of the Old World nations, and having just concluded a bloody seven year civil war, was neither prepared nor inclined to protracted conflict in the expanding west.

There was one attempt at military support by Federal forces, but after the disastrous defeats at Little Big Horn and Wounded Knee, the remnants of the Amerigon 7th Cavalry were recalled to Philadelphia and treaties were brokered with Chiefs Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. Once the Tribal leaders understood how the Confederation was organized, they proposed their entry into the Amerigon Confederation as sovereign states.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

When the enemy is sighted, do not hesitate, but do not act rashly. Jacob and Zootopia make ready to face their enemy.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Jacob, good; come in, I need to talk to you.”

“I need to talk to you too, Chief. What’s up?”

“This incident with Bove seems to have shaken the bureaucratic tree; CLEAn is forming a Joint Task Force with the Polis on this Thule situation. I need DuPrey here, so I’m appointing you as the Seventh Precinct Liaison.”

_Hraka_, this is gonna go over like a lead zeppelin. “I’m, afraid I have to decline ma’am.”

“This isn’t a suggestion, officer; I’ve already appointed you.”

“I understand ma’am, but I still have to decline. Here.”

“What is this?” -rustle- “You’ve been recalled to active duty?!”

Chapter 22

Chief Winterhorn’s blood pressure could almost be heard rising as she read the Notice of Activation. Jacob steeled himself when she turned an arched look at him.
“I’ve already called MEP-C this morning, ma’am; the orders are legitimate.”

“Time frame?”

“No less than six months, but as long as two and a half years, ma’am.”

-grrr- “Get down to Mammal Resources and put in for three months Administrative leave.”

Jacob hesitated. “Ma’am, my orders stipulate…”

“I know, officer; no less than six months.” The Chief sounded more tired than angry. “I can only authorize Admin Leave in three-month blocks, before MR has to perform a Retention Justification Review. The city has so few military veterans, that issues of activation and retention haven’t come up before now. Chrisakes, now I’m down a patrol officer, and two detectives.”

Jacob took his orders back. “Two detectives?”

“Lilly went into labor last night.”

“Ah. Is the Task Force some kind of permanent transfer?”

The reindeer huffed. “The key to administrative planning, is the assumption of worst case scenarios. I just wanted to avoid putting DuPrey in with Capt. Kamel and Interim-Mayor Canidae; Between those two egos, CLEAn’s posturing, and how close Jean-Pierre is to this whole Thule Society issue, I had very poor hopes that anything productive would happen.”

“But I could be voluntold to suffer this debacle?” Jacob hinted a smile.

The Chief snorted and nodded. “You’re lowest on the totem pole, so you’re where all the crap settles. Keep safe and get back here in one piece; I’m not giving you up without a fight.”

Jacob snapped to attention and saluted before heading out.

…

Jacob showed up at the MEP-C at 8:00 sharp in his blue Class-B service kilt and tunic, with his grandfather’s sword at his side. There was about two hours of in-processing to accomplish, including being sworn in and re-entered into the computer system and having his chip re-activated. He was then directed to a briefing room to receive his assignment. He arrived to find Lt. Redmane, the red deer head of LoNF security for the International Offices, as well as a rail-thin raccoon with an almost comically pronounced mask, and one very familiar, if unexpected face. “Mrs. Daveed?”

“Capt. Daveed, if you please Jacob.” She was completely at ease in the Medei Aleph uniform of the Judean Armed Forces.

The raccoon stood and extended a paw. “Sgt. Raibert! Thanks for coming in on such short notice.” The procyon’s smile was worthy of Nick at his smarmiest.

Jacob took the proffered paw. “Sgt. Raibert, reporting as ordered, so it’s not as if I had much choice. I’ve met the Lt., and I thought I knew Mrs., Capt. Daveed, but I don’t know you.”

The Lieutenant looked ready to jump over the table at Jacob’s seeming disrespect when the raccoon waved him off as Rachel chuckled. “Relax, Mike; the circumstances certainly warrant skepticism.” He stood erect before Jacob and was instantly the picture of professionalism. “Special Investigator-in-charge Sylvester Cooper-Montoya, Interpol. You’ve met Lt. Mike Redmane, LoNF Special
Intelligence Directorate; and of course, Capt. Rachel Daveed, Mossad.”

Several odd encounters with the Eweden female suddenly made more sense. “You’ve been keeping tabs on the Society? That explains your interest in DuPrey.”

She nodded in agreement. “The State of Judea is understandably interested in the activities and movements of the Thule Society. The Society has been trying to make inroads into Zootopia for years, since the close of the Tannerman Era. Bellwether’s little coup attempt opened the door for them.”

“Sgt.” The Lt. stood from his seat. “At the request of Mossad, and with the shining recommendations from several of your former superiors, you are hereby reactivated for the ostensible purpose of participating as the official representative of the League of Nations, and its affiliate bodies, on the newly formed ‘Zootopian Anti-Terrorism Commission’ (ZATC).” He then handed Jacob a signed and notarized document. When he looked it over, he saw that the LoN was pulling a CLEAn on CLEAn.

He looked at the cervine officer, who waited patiently. “There’s a lot of political capital invested in this sir, and whatever my orders might say, several of the mammals involved are my superiors. They’re not going to like me telling them what to do, even if it is just ‘play nice and share your toys’.”

“And we don’t expect you to.” Sylvester had slipped back into his easy-going demeanor; Jacob almost wondered if he shared more in common with Nick than just a smug grin. “You’re there as the LoN representative on the task force due to your extensive knowledge and experience in counter-terrorism operations, as well as your knowledge of the Thule Society. Your recommendations are our recommendations; if they try to shut you out, we sweep in on grounds of international security. Other than that, everything stays the same. Canidae chairs the commission, Kamel ibn Kamel heads field operations, and you work with ZPD under the Joint Law-Enforcement agreement, just like back in Anatolia.” Jacob sincerely hoped not; those ended up being a bloody three years. “Now then, Sgt., let’s get down to your security brief.”

...

Jacob walked into First Precinct the next morning in full Class-B’s: heavy service kilt, beret and tunic, sword and sidearm; though where once the feel of the FN FiveSeven was a comfort, now it was a reminder of how bad things were becoming. There were more than a few odd stares from his colleagues which turned to alarm at the sight of a live firearm, rather than the police issue non-lethal systems.

Jacob nodded greetings to those he made eye contact with, but otherwise headed directly for reception. “Officer Clawhauser, good morning. Looking good, the dance machine must agree with you.”

The cheetah looked up from his terminal with a smile to answer, when he noticed Jacob’s attire. “Oh. Em. Gee. Jacob?!”

“In the flesh. I’m here for the ZATC.”

There was a flash of puckish glee in his eyes. “So, it’s true?! CLEAn got cleaned out of the operation?”

Jacob smirked slightly. “Not entirely; this is an international venture, due to the international nature of the threat, but it’s still a domestic issue, so domestic agencies have jurisdiction. I’m just here to co-
ordinate international interests and assets into this commission, and to ensure everyone contributes to
the fullest extent. I’m also here as the Seventh Precinct rep, since I’ll be working there when I’m not
here.”

“And the, uhh…” Ben glanced at Jacob’s armaments.

Jacob’s demeanor became very formal. “I’m here in an official capacity as a military police officer
and counter-terrorism specialist. They’re a part of the uniform.”

“Very good. Give me a moment to get you assigned a visitor’s badge and an officer escort.” He
typed for a minute, then while the visitors badge was being coded in, he paged the Chief’s office.
“Chief, The LoN rep is here.”

“Fine, have Hopps escort them up.” The Cape Buffalo’s gruff voice carried an additional edge that
Jacob assumed was due to the increased bureaucracy the commission involved.

“Yessir!” The building PA cut in. “Sgt. Hopps to reception, please.”

“Sgt., Hopps? When did this happen, Ben?” Jacob quirked his ears.

Clawhauser leaned back into his seat. “Just this morning; Chief stipulated he would get
representation since the commission is meeting here, and they said it needed to be a minimum of a
Sgt., so he brevet promoted her six months early.”

Jacob paused in his musings; Winterhorn had intended to post him to the commission, and he wasn’t
an NCO outside of the military, so how was that supposed to work?

It only took a minute for Judy to come down to the atrium. She was just as surprised as everyone else
at the sight of Jacob. It took her a moment to gather herself, before addressing her fellow lagomorph.
“Good morning, Sgt.? Raibert.”

“Good morning Sgt. Hopps. Congratulations, by the way. I need an escort to the SLECC.”

Judy smiled nervously as she glanced at her new rank insignia. “Thank you, Sgt. If you’ll follow me,
please.” The two made their way to the second floor and back to the command center. She glanced at
Jacob from the corner of her eye. “How’s Valerie doing?”

“Better.” Jacob’s shoulders relaxed slightly. “She’s stopped asking about her knife, at least.” He
paused at the head of the stairs. “I know it’s just an irrational male thing, but what upsets me the most
right now is that I can’t fix this; I can’t find something to take a knife or a hammer to, and make it
better for her.”

Judy gripped his forearm for a second. “She doesn’t need you to fix this, just be there for her.”

“But I’m not!” Jacob gritted out. “I’m here playing at international politics, instead of at her side; but
this is where I can do something, maybe put an end to this group, at least here in Zootopia.” He
looked at her with chagrin. “I had a long talk with her, my Marli-fa and my sister, and that’s what
they all said; I’ll also be talking with Father Tatapolis, if only to have someone who isn’t family tell
me the same thing. Speaking of, how are yours reacting to the attacks?”

Judy huffed in frustration. “That, as you would say, is a two-drink ante conversation. But we’re
talking, at least.”

“And Nick?”
Judy barked a laugh. “He’s too busy with the Detective exams. The real drama is watching Oates and Daschle trying to get him to commit to one or the other as an intradepartmental transfer. I swear, every time they’re in a room together, you can hear fight music from that old ‘Stellar Voyage’ show.”

Jacob shook his head in mock dismay. “It’s the end of an era; the breaking up of the ‘Dream Team’.”

“We’re changing departments, not continents.” Judy mused with a smile. “Besides, only one of us can become Chief some day, and I think he enjoys the mental exercise of detective work too much to give it up for the promotion ladder. He says he’ll be surprised if he makes Lt. before he retires. I’ll be surprised if he doesn’t.”

Judy knocked on the entrance and announced that the LoN representative had arrived. When the door opened, it was onto a scene out of a Tinsel-town action cop movie. In the background, a wolverine whom Jacob assumed was Special Agent Jed Swayze, looked on with a barely contained grin. Next to him was the city’s Deputy Fire Chief, Capt. Kurt McCaffrey, an African clawless otter known for his loyalty to his peers in the fire service.

Capt. Kamel was standing in front of his chair glaring down at Interim Mayor Canidae. “You can’t expect me to provide security for the city if we keep having new faces pouring in through the borders, not with mamming at our current numbers! Either close the borders or authorize the activation of the Police Reserve.”

The dowdy wolf looked singularly unimpressed. “Salim, you know damn well we don’t have the budget for that, and we certainly won’t have it if we lose any more Polis revenue from port tariffs. We need the trade to secure funds, and we need confidence in our Polis’ security to entice trade. As it is, we’re dealing with nuisance attacks; high profile, but nuisance attacks nonetheless. I am not going to take any action that will compromise the city’s economy or international standing over a bank robbery gone wrong and a failed mugging.”

Judy looked aghast at the Mayor. “My god! You’re arguing about budgets and reputations? Mammals’ lives are on the line!”

When Agent Swayze’s eyes lit up like a kit in a toy store, Jacob knew he needed to act, no matter how much he might agree with Hopps’ sentiment. “Of course, they’re talking politics.” Jacob hesitated for a moment until he saw the wolverine’s grin grow ever so slightly. “They have a city to run; it’s not as simple as just saying, ‘throw more mammals and money at it.’ Without trade, the city has no funds, without funds, the city can’t pay the police, without police there’s no confidence in the security of the city, and without confidence there is no trade.”

Jacob almost laughed at the scowl on the Agent’s muzzle. “Who the hell are you?”

Jacob and Judy strode towards the conference table. “I’m Sgt. Jacob Raibert, 237th MP Battalion Det. 3. I’m here as the LoN liaison and Precinct 7 representative; you may call me Sgt. Raibert.”

Judy cast a sidelong glance at Jacob’s subtle rebuke of the agent, then turned her attention back to the commission. “I’m Sgt. Judy Hopps. It’s a pleasure to be here Madam Mayor, Capt. Kamel, Capt. McCaffrey, Agent, who are you again?”

“Special Agent-in-Charge Jed Swayze.” The mustelid drew himself up as much as possible, but both Raibert and Hopps could see he was restraining himself from further comment. “Couldn’t LoN send someone better suited than a couple of cute little bunnies?” Okay, not restraining himself, just trying to find the most offensive string of words possible.
“No, Agent Swayze, the LoN couldn’t find another mammal with extensive counter-terrorism experience who was also intimately familiar with both the threat subject and the municipality in question. My colleague Sgt. Hopps,” Jacob nodded to Judy, “…has been involved in nearly every instance of Thule activity in the Polis in the last year, as well as having a proven track record of novel thinking which resulted in breaking two citywide conspiracies.”

Jacob noted the sudden attention the three senior mammals were directing his way, as well as the CLEAn agent’s worsening mien. “On that note, Madam Mayor, I do have to correct you on the matter of the attacks; there has been a clear trend of escalation, from one murder, to serial rape, to the attempted firebombing of Lemming Brothers, to the organized assault at the charity fight last weekend. The Thule Society’s ideology of rule through strength means they can’t ignore their repeated failures in Zootopia, and they have a history of mass casualty attacks.”

As the agent scoffed, Capt. McCaffrey spoke up. “How bad are we talking? Worst case scenario.”

Jacob crossed his manual paws on the table. “Wankdorf Stadium, Bearne Switzerland in 1954. The Thule detonated the Graf Hindenburg II directly over the semi-finals of the World Cup; 8,000 dead, another 20,000 injured, to say nothing of the economic cost. Switzerland managed to stay out of the Great War, the Coup and attempted Iberian unification war by General Franco, and the Weimar Republic Civil War and Austro-Hungarian War. Intel seems to indicate their refusal to lend the NAZI party financial aid was one of the reasons they were targeted.”

The Agent’s scowl changed slightly. “They’re not just about big foreign attacks. They hit the L in Chi-town in 1983; when they blew the tracks, a full commuter train went off the rails and plowed into a mixed species apartment. 183 dead, ten times that many injured; millions in damages and millions more in lost revenue when the L shut down for repairs and inspection.”

Jacob nodded to the agent, hoping this was a sign that he was, at the least, going to meaningfully contribute. “There was also an attack in Tel Aviv in 1996. They rigged an X-Ray emitter to a pressure plate at a bus stop in the business district. Mossad thinks the device was operational for at least two weeks before they realized why people were getting sick; no direct fatalities, but the fear and disruption in municipal infrastructure triggered a recession. In every case, once the damage was done the Society claimed responsibility as an attack against the corruptors of the natural order. They seem to favor, ‘combating the Zionists’, though any herbivore dominant society, and especially any group preaching co-operation and inclusiveness is a target to them.”

Judy looked thoughtful. “So why haven’t we been hit before now?”

Canidae leaned forward. “International scrutiny would be my guess; after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the repeal of the Tannerman laws, Zootopia was required to have both a Confederation and a League of Nations representative on the Polis Senate for 50 years, to keep those kinds of breaches of civil liberty from being passed into law again. Any attack on the Polis would have garnered an immediate response by both the Continental Congress and the LoN.” She sighed and looked between all the sitting members. “So, we are dealing with a sophisticated, dedicated enemy that’s only now getting started?”

“That’s correct ma-am.” Jacob nodded his head. “Though I should emphasize, while their attacks may target the citizens, their true aim is the end of interspecies cooperation, and by extension, the idea of Zootopia. Any decisions this body makes, should be weighed against that goal.”

... Whatever hopes Jacob had of Special Agent Swayze being non-obstructionist were dashed as the morning went on. Both he and Hopps saw a clear trend developing; if an idea was floated which the
CLEAn agent had not himself put forward, it was ferociously challenged, most often by subtly attacking whoever made the proposal. The same happened if there was any discussion on changing ideas he put forward. It was apparent that Canidae could see through him, and McCaffrey was unaffected by Jed’s less than subtle attacks. Kamel however, despite his political aspirations, was too hot blooded to know when he was being played. By lunchtime, Jacob had decided he needed to make a call to some of his old LoN SID contacts. He had contemplated just seeing what Daveed might be able to do but felt that was the nuclear option.

Agent Jed ran his claws through the fur on top of his head. “Cripes, we’re getting nowhere with this. Hey, Miss Hopps; I want a sandwich and a coffee.”

Jacob, as well as the rest of the commission, could see murder pass through Hopps’ eyes for a moment before an almost serene expression settled on her features.

“Personally, I’m in the mood for pizza. What about you, Jacob?”

It took Jacob a moment to gather himself up. “I could go for Pie-Zano’s.”

Capt. McCaffrey snorted. “You want good pizza, you go to Delaney’s on Westchester Ave.”

Judy just shook her head. “Chicago Deep-dish isn’t pizza, it’s quiche without eggs.”

Agent Swayze looked on in growing frustration as the three smaller commission members debated the merits of various types of pizza and where to get them.

“Can you believe this?!” He asked Capt. Kamel.

The camel shook his head in dismay. “Disgraceful, absolutely disgraceful.” He paused for a moment when the CLEAn agent got a smug look on his muzzle. “Everyone knows the best pizza in the city comes from Ristorante Castellano.” The agent was shocked into immobility.

Jacob looked pointedly at the police Capt. “That’s easy to say on Capt. pay, but we’re wage slaves.”

Aurelia cleared her throat. “I think, as the Agent suggested, that we should break for lunch; hopefully full stomachs will facilitate fresh perspectives. We’ll reconvene at,” She glanced at one of the wall clocks. “…1400.”

With that, everyone except the agent got up and headed out, while the Wolverine sputtered in indignation.

…

A night out with friends had helped to calm frayed nerves from the day before, though Jacob was still a little tired the next morning; he had stayed up later than everyone else to make a very long-distance call. He had high hopes that, one way or another, the CLEAn issue would be resolved by the next evening.

The various commission members were pleasantly surprised Tuesday morning when Agent Swayze was not there to meet with everyone. Judy actively perked up. “Maybe he’s getting everyone donuts by way of apology?”

“Unlikely.” Kurt settled into his chair. “Let’s just see how much we can get done before he finally gets in.”

After an hour of debate, the various mammals had a better grasp on the extent of the resources they
would have, and need; Aurelia, as the Chairwoman of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), needed at least an afternoon to coordinate with the city’s Surgeon General and directors of the Housing Commission and the Department of Public Works (DPW) on possible refugee, supply, and triage camps if a mass casualty event did take place. Both Capts. Kamel and McCaffrey felt that the Police Reserve and Volunteer Fire Services needed discretionary funds set aside but agreed not to use them until and/or unless they became necessary. Jacob would be checking on the availability of Corps of Engineers and MASH units that could be called up from neighboring states.

Hopps surprised everyone with one of her suggestions. “We could ask Pacifica and the Britannian Northwest Territories to step up their Maritime patrols. That could alleviate some of the burden from our own police and maritime services, while adding a second layer of security for the interim.” When everyone looked at her, she blushed but pushed on. “Well, they have as much at stake as we do; if Zootopia falls to these mammals, or even if we just take a hit, it’s going to affect trade up and down the coast as well as across the Trans-Pacific Partnership. If we can get the other stakeholders involved, not just in potential cleanup, it could relieve a lot of the financial and mammal power burden from us; then we could focus on tracking these, monsters down.”

Canidae smiled at Judy in appreciation. “That idea has significant merit. I’ll get in touch with the Pacifican Governor about…”

The Mayor was cut off when the conference room doors were slammed open, and Agent Swayze swaggered in.

“Alright, I’m here; we can get started.”

Canidae waited until he was seated to address him. “In point of fact, Special Agent, we started over an hour ago, at the time we all agreed to reconvene.” She affixed the government agent with a pointed look. “Since we have been working for an hour, I am calling a 15-minute recess to refresh ourselves.” With that, she and the other senior members stood up and headed towards the door.

He finally stopped sputtering when Judy and Jacob stood to leave. “-Grr- Hopps, I want a coffee.”

She didn’t even pause on her way to the door. “Break room is on the first floor, first door on the left past the elevator.” She walked out next to Jacob, tail flashing in agitation. As soon as they were down stairs and out of sight, she turned around, buried her face in Jacob’s tunic and screamed.

Jacob gently scratched the base of her ears until her breathing returned to normal. “It’ll be okay, Judy.”

“The hell you say, ‘it’ll be okay’! He’s not treating you like a personal assistant!” Jacob could hear the edge in her voice, and knew she was on the verge of tears. “I am so sick of being treated as less than I am. What do I have to do to be treated like I’m worthy, get a sex change?!”

Jacob stood her up and looked her in the eyes. “I’m not going to lie to you; in his eyes, you’ll never be worthy.” She balked at that statement, but Jacob kept her focus. “I have it on the highest authority that Special Needs Agent Swayze…” Judy barked a laugh at that, and Jacob shared in the moment, “…thank you Nick for another fine zinger. Anyway, he’s par for the course as far as CLEAn is concerned. It’s top down, institutional narcissism; has been that way for about three years now since the new director came on.”

Judy stepped back and leaned against the wall and crossed her arms. “Great, we’re at the mercy of an agency approved toddler. So, what do we do.”

Jacob pulled his phone out. “You are going to ignore him as the meaningless government middle
mammal he is; and I do mean ignore him. If he doesn’t address you as Sgt. Hopps, don’t answer him, don’t look at him, don’t acknowledge him. You saw the look on the muzzles of the rest of the commission in there; they’ve noticed you, and not just as a flash in the pan lucky rook. They’re the ones whose opinions matter.”

“Thanks. And what about you?”

Jacob held his paw up to forestall further comment and made a call.

“Kim? It’s Jacob.

“Yep.

“About five minutes ago.

“Say, fifteen minutes?

“You can? Perfect, thanks.”

Jacob noted Judy confused look as he hung up. “Nick’s not the only mammal who ‘knows a mammal’. Come on, let’s head back upstairs; I guarantee, you don’t want to miss this.”

Once everyone was back in the meeting room, Swayze looked at Hopps expectantly. “Where’s my coffee?”

Judy settled into her seat. “Ma’am, was there anything you might specifically need from first precinct? I don’t mean to step on Capt. Kamel’s hooves, but Chief Bogo can be…”

The wolf waved her off. “Chief Bogo is as prickly as a porcupine when it comes to city politics, so having an intermediary is a nice change. We’ll probably need a few work stations in the SLECC set aside for inter-state…”

“Hey, I asked you a question rabbit.” Jed’s voice was stern and paternalistic.

There was dead silence in the room after the outburst. It was Capt. Kamel who spoke up. “No, Special Agent, you didn’t.” Swayze looked almost shocked at being contradicted. “You stated you wanted a coffee, then interrupted the meeting to demand why you aren’t being served. Sgt. Hopps doesn’t work for you; she works for the Polis. You would do well to remember that in the future.”

Jed seemed to draw himself up to argue, when his cellphone rang. There was a pause as everyone looked at the agent, who flushed in anger and embarrassment. Embarrassment turned to alarm when he looked to see who it was. He was about to try to say something to the commission, when Jacob spoke. “Answer that. We’ll wait, he won’t.” The rest of the commission looked at Jacob in shock at that declaration. Jed’s alarm started to morph into genuine fear as he answered the call.

“Special Agent Swayze.

“Yes, sir I…”

“No sir. It’s just…”

“No sir.

“Absolutely not, sir. I…”

“Yes sir.”
His paw shook as he put the phone away. Everyone was either looking at the agent or looking at Jacob. “You wanted to know yesterday.” The agent looked up when Jacob spoke. “That is who I am. We will not have this conversation again.” Jacob turned and faced the rest of the commission. “My apologies, Madame Mayor, Captains, Sargent. We were discussing the possibility of coordinating with neighboring state agencies to expand our capabilities in searching for more Thule infiltrators?”

…

The rest of the day went quite smoothly, if awkwardly; Agent Swayze only had to be reminded once that Judy was to be addressed as Sgt. Hopps, not Miss Hopps. The other commission members insisted on referring to Jacob as Sgt. Raibert, which was good on the face of it, but carried a tension Jacob wasn’t entirely comfortable with. This was especially noticeable with Judy, who seemed to shy away from eye contact. Jacob resolved to give her the space she seemed to need.

As far as commission work was concerned, the day was a success. The basics of available resources were presented, from RAT assets stationed at the Teller-Ulam building, to forensic specialists in Philadelphia. It was agreed to adjourn for one full day, to give everybody a chance to coordinate with their various entities on when and what could be rapidly put into place. They would reconvene on Thursday to begin laying out a framework for an Emergency Action Plan.

As they were leaving, McCaffrey pulled Jacob aside for a moment. After a minute of conversation, Jacob headed over to Judy. “Sgt. Hopps, a moment.”

Judy froze in place without turning around, though her ears did track to him. “Yes, Sgt. Raibert?”

“Capt. McCaffrey just challenged me to put up or shut up on the pizza issue from yesterday. You in?”

Judy hesitated for a moment while looking at Jacob from the corner of her eye. “No, thank you though. I’ve got a… a thing with Nick.” She walked away, internally wincing and hoping she wasn’t ruining another of Zib and Nick’s date nights. She really needed to talk to someone, and Nick was the best person she knew for evaluating people.

Luckily, Nick and Zib weren’t on a date that night, though he did insist on inviting Zib. The more she thought about it, the more she liked the idea of having another female along; she loved Nick better than some of her own kin, but he still didn’t have a female’s perspective. They decided to meet at the ‘Cat café’.

Judy was nursing her hot and sour soup while the two foxes shared a plate of Crab Rangoon. “Thank you, for letting me vent. It’s just frustrating, feeling afraid like this; I feel like the stereotypical bunny, jumping at shadows, or like I’m about to have another Press Conference moment. It doesn’t help that ‘Capt. Hammer, Government Tool’ can’t go five minutes without saying something belittling to someone.

“Then, there’s Jacob; I thought I’d feel relieved at having a peer in there with me, but he’s not. It may seem stupid, but I was scared! Here’s this government Special Agent sent from the Capitol, and he nearly wet himself after Jacob made a 30 second phone call! I just… I feel like I don’t know him. It’s one thing to joke about, ‘ask in five years’, but what did he really do that he has that kind of political clout? I just feel so, small.” Judy sagged against the table.

Zib held out one of her paws for Judy. The doe was grateful for the contact. “Judy are you scared of Jacob, or what you now know he can do?”
Judy hung her head. “A little of both. I’ve never met anyone with that kind of power before; what happens if, I don’t know, I offend him or something?”

Zib and Nick looked at each other in concern, before Zib spoke up. “Judy, it’s all right. You’re allowed to feel fear, just don’t let it control you.”

Nick lightly rubbed the top of Judy’s paw. “You remember that bit of ‘hard earned foxy wisdom’ I shared with you a few months ago?”

“‘We fear what we don’t understand and hate what we fear.’”

“Close, we only fear what we don’t understand. It’s a choice, not a state of being. For perspective, could you do me a favor?” When she looked up, he had a nervous grin on his face. “Go into your phone’s contact list and bring up the letter ‘F’. Who’s the first name that comes up?”

Judy sat up straight. “I don’t need to look; it’s Fru-Fru.”

Zib’s paw tightened in surprise, and Judy was alarmed by the look on the vixen’s muzzle. She was about to reassure her friend when Nick continued. “That’s right Judy; you have the heir apparent of the Bagnoli crime syndicate on speed dial, and that’s scary to people.”

“But that’s different; I saved her life, and she’s my friend! I’m her first-born’s godmother. I’d never use that to…”

Nick tapped her on the nose. “But you did, and I was there. Yes, mammals lives were on the line and you didn’t have any other resources to draw on, but you still made the call. Jacob made the call he had to, and you can’t say that making sure the ZATC runs smoothly when we’re under threat of attack isn’t as important as trying to find the true mastermind of the Nighthowler plot.”

Judy let her head sag down and tried to pull her paw back, but Zib kept a firm but gentle grip. “Judy, I know it’s scary to find out someone you know has scary secrets.” The vixen rubbed her thumb across the back of the doe’s paw. “God knows I’ve been shocked by some of the things Nick has shared with me. I know it’s hard being a female in a position of authority; hell, Cat’s a big cougar and she still gets treated like that. It’s okay to feel frustrated at your treatment, or startled by the power you’re seeing, but the heart of the matter is that Jacob doesn’t abuse that power, just like you don’t abuse yours. You need to have faith in your friends, because we have faith in you.”

Judy groaned and lay her head on the table. “Now I feel like a terrible person.”

Nick started scratching her behind her ears. “No, just a normal one. At least you know it takes a solar powered flashlight like Swayze to get Jacob to break out the big guns.”

Judy looked up in confusion. “Solar powered what?”

Zib squeezed her paw and smirked. “A special kind of worthless tool.”

...  

Jacob sat in front of the flight officers of the Teller-Ulam buildings RAT security detachment, while nursing his oatmeal and coffee with honey; he boggled that Kurt could power through an entire Chicago deep-dish pizza, as the one slice he’d eaten had left him blocked up like a beaver dam. The mammals in front of him were very understanding of his short explanation and were ready to get down to work. “So, F.O. Hacket, W.O. Jack...”

“Please, Gadget and Monterey.” The hefty brown rat cut in with an Anzac drawl. The diminutive
field mouse with a shock of blond head fur nodded in agreement.

Jacob arched an eyebrow at the two pilots of the RQ-19/O observation ornicopters, calls signs Rescue One and Rescue Two. “Maybe off duty, but not with the Lt. lurking around.”

There was a chuckle from Lt. Charles Damner and F.O. Dale Edwards, the two chipmunk pilots for the MQ-12 flight, call signs Ranger One and Ranger Two. “Redmane’s a pussycat, figuratively speaking.” The chipmunk in a bomber jacket opined.

“Be that as it may, I’m not taking chances on this. Anyway, I need to know what you’d need for secure comms from inside a building? In a pinch, we could erect an ATC (Air Traffic Control) rig on Precinct One’s roof, but I’d rather have a direct link in the Command Center, if we need to call you guys up.”

“Dale’s sweetheart’s in charge of forward control so she’s the one you’d ask, mate.” Monterey flinched when a pine nut bounced off his head, courtesy of the aforementioned brown bat.

“Watch the sexist crap Monty, or I’ll put you up on report, again!”

The aging Warrant Officer looked around, but got no support, especially not from his female wing-mate.

“On task, mammals.” Jacob chided lightly. Once everyone was focused again, he turned to the aforementioned brown bat. “So how about it Cpl. Foxglove; can you tie in through Zootopia’s communications gear, or are we going to need special Crypto lines installed?”

She squared her shoulders and looked at Jacob. “All the Cryptography is handled by the vehicle radios and the base-station, and we do have one mobile base station for forward deployments at un-improved locations. We’ll just need security for the gear and an adapter for the power, since it’s meant to run off a generator.”

Jacob nodded. “Alright, I’ll talk to Redmane about a detail, or see if he’s willing to vet ZPD officers if all they need to do is make sure nobody tampers with the gear.”

Dale gnawed on a pine nut. “What’s the ROE going to be, if we are called up?”

“Urban riot, minimally lethal.” Jacob leaned forward. “There’s nothing in the city, police or otherwise, that’ll stand up to steel-core 7.62mm, so we’ll leave the chin guns alone. Ordinance pods will be millimeter wave Active Denial Systems, and C.S. canister launchers. Unless directed otherwise, or you are directly engaged with weapons fire, stick to the pods. Any other questions? No? All right, thanks for your time.” Jacob stood and saluted the W.O. and Lt., then started working on his proposal to Bogo and Redmane.

He was interrupted by a knock on the conference room’s door frame. Special Inspector Cooper-Montoya stuck his head around the corner. “A moment of your time, Emanuel?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Oh, none of that formality crap; call me Sly.”

Jacob rolled his eyes and waved the raccoon in. “What did you need?”

“An in with the Hornblowers: our media relations office wants to, screen any propaganda that comes out of the Thule, and CLEAn managed to bollocks up the initial meet and greet.”
“Was that the one where Val was threatening the deer in a suit?”

“If Val was the Lapina, then yes. You know her?”

Jacob got a wistful look on his face. “We’re dating, hopefully more soon.”

Sly whistled and smiled while worrying his unadorned ring finger. “Gotta watch those Iberian ladies.”

Jacob pushed his paperwork to the side. “Want to talk about it?”

The inspector looked at his paws. “No, but maybe take some hard-won advice: don’t ever, ever stop communicating. I did, and I got fixated on old problems, old feuds. By the time I got my head out from under my tail, our marriage was tanked, and my career nearly with it. She took a posting as Deputy Director of the Kantō office under Zenigata, and I was busted down to special investigator and assigned to Zootopia.” He looked up at Jacob. “There’s not a day goes by I don’t wish that crazy bastard really had built a time machine, so I could go back and slap some sense into myself.”

He levered himself up and headed back out. “Anyway, if you could arrange a meet and greet for me, I’d really appreciate it.”

Jacob stood up. “I’ll see what I can do; just to warn you, censorship of any kind is a real hot button issue with both Horace and his dad.”

Sly nodded and smiled. “I’ll keep that in mind. I don’t need a second Iberian angry at me; Carm would get jealous of anyone else kicking my backside, and her not being involved. Then again, it might be worth it if that brings her home, even for a day.”

…

Thursday’s meeting had started much smoother than Tuesday’s, with Agent Swayze keeping sullen and quiet unless directly addressed. The first hiccup came when Jacob was explaining the requirements for integration of LoNF Ornicopter operations. Interim Mayor Canidae leaned forward with a puzzled look. “I think I understand most of the first part of that, though it will be the responsibility of First Precinct to provide adequate security; you and Sgt. Hopps should have no difficulty coordinating that.”

Jacob looked over at Judy and noticed her pensive demeanor. Thinking about his conversation with Special Investigator Cooper-Montoya, he decided that he would need to talk to her and clear the air between them; though that would have to wait for lunch, as Canidae was continuing. “It is the rest of the technical terms I don’t understand; and as they seem to relate to the readiness and capabilities of these aircraft, could you elaborate for the rest of the commission?”

“Certainly, ma’am.” He used the terminal at his seat to operate the 90” monitor at the unoccupied side of the room, to show a pair of machines, with rodent crews for scale and technical data printed next to them. “These are the RQ-19 Dragonfly, and MQ-12 Hornet. They are both electric ornicopters, with microwave rectennas for main power, and fuel cell backup power. The Dragonfly is the quad rotor, has a crew of four, and specializes in ELint and EWars.” Jacob looked abashed at the pointed look Canidae gave him. “Apologies ma’am; electronic intelligence gathering, and electronic warfare.”

Capt. Kamel tapped the table with a hoof. “How is that helpful to us?”

“The 19’s have rather powerful monitoring and jamming gear, so we can use them to track intercept, or even jam any communications within a three-kilometer radius; and with a speed of around 250
Kph, they can keep pace with any vehicles we might want to track.”

Capt. McCaffrey perked his ears. “Search and rescue capabilities?”

“Minimal, sir; they’re meant to track electronics, not people. For that, we would use the Hornets. They include a FLIR, or Forward Looking Infrared sensor system, coupled to the chin turret.” Jacob noted the alarm in both Hopps and Canidae. “This is the same system used by fire jumper teams in the Sierra’s, for tracking wildfire teams, and locating mammals caught in a blaze.”

The mustelid captain raised an eyebrow. “They can spot a mammal’s heat through a fire?”

“So a friend of mine says. He’s with the Pike’s Peak fire station as an ornicopter pilot.”

Frank gave Aurelia a look that promised discussion at the next budget meeting.

Jed piped up. “If the FLIR is coupled to the turret, what’s to keep the crew from, say, accidentally mowing down pedestrians they’re looking at?” While the commission might not like the tone he used, it was apparent that this was one of the concerns that they all had. “I mean, that thing’s a .30 caliber machinegun; that’ll open up a rhino like it had a zipper.”

Jacob was annoyed more with the smug look on the agent’s face, than he was with the concern being brought up. “The same thing that keeps cops and soldiers from doing that: good trigger control. The gunner operates the weapons, but only after the pilot arms them.” Jacob wanted to chuckle at the agent's pout. “Standing orders are not to arm the gun unless fired upon or ordered to do so. That’s one of the reasons I wanted the forward air controllers here; any orders for the flight would have to be cleared by this commission. As for the pods, Capt. Kamel and Sgt. Hopps are both familiar with these systems, if not the carrier itself.”

The desert beast nodded his head. “TUSK team vehicles have a similar device in a remote turret on the roof; an automatic tear gas-grenade launcher, next to a directional microwave emitter for breaking up riots.”

Jacob turned is head back to Aurelia. “Ultimately, it’s your choice whether not to use these assets.”

She leaned back in thought for a moment. “I’ll approve, but only for search and rescue purposes at this time; I have no desire for Zootopia to turn into a police state patrolled by military gunships.” She glanced at the clock on the wall. “Let’s break here for lunch.”

Jacob headed over to where Judy was packing up her reports. “Hey, Sgt. Hopps; the Falafel Cart should be at Unity Park. Care to Join me for some al-fresco fried food?”

She hesitated for a moment. He was about to press, when she turned to him. “Sure; Nick’s taking his exam today, and I hate eating alone.”

Jacob and Judy headed across the street to the large park that dominated the space between City Hall and Precinct One. Once they secured their lunches, they found a bench that faced the central spring-fed fountain. Jacob had just taken a bite when Judy spoke without looking up. “You scare me Jacob.” Jacob nearly choked and was about to speak when she continued. “You scare me, and I hate feeling like a stereotypical scared little bunny. I was looking forward to having at least one mammal in there who wasn’t some big-shot political player, and then you made that call and I was once again the smallest mammal in the room. I hate feeling like I need a, ‘big strong male’ to save meek little me, but there it was; Swayze can’t, or won’t respect anyone smaller than him, or who doesn’t have testicles.”

“That’s not an unreasonable concern, Hopps.” Jacob looked down at his lunch. “You get the short
end of the cultural stick on this one; small, female, and classed as prey. You’re a triple threat of stereotype fodder.” He looked over at his friend. “It’s okay to be afraid of things you don’t understand at first. It’s just, I had hoped you knew me well enough to trust me.”

Judy growled and scratched the top of her head. “I know, and I feel terrible because of that. That’s the scared bunny thing to do; react to the threat by running and hiding. But I am not, and I refuse to be a scared little bunny.” She turned to face Jacob. “And you’re right, what you said about fear and all; Nick and Zib said the same thing to me the other night. So, help me understand. You always go on about your NDA, and ‘ask me in five years’. Help me not be afraid.”

Jacob nodded and leaned forward to rest on his elbows. “Among other things, I was involved in several interrogations that led to the creation of double agents in several terrorist groups. Those inside mammals, and their SID handlers are still in play in Anatolia, as well as the Levant, Assyria and Purrasia. I’m known to the Directorate and have met the current regional head of operations. That’s who I called; mammals who scare me as much as I scare you.”

Judy scrunched her muzzle up. “You’re not going to get called to do any ‘Jack Savage’ shenanigans because of that call, are you?”

Jacob chuckled at that. “No, this isn’t a Quid Pro Quo kind of setup; that call, is precisely why I was activated and put on the commission. Now, if I had done something like that while inactive, then I might have gotten a visit by the ‘Smoking Mammal’; though more than likely, I’d just get told no, and found my phone was blocked.”

Judy deflated slightly. “Is it bad that I’m relieved by that fact?”

“No at all; there need to be checks on mammals with that kind of power, and ultimately, I think that’s why you’re on the commission.”

Judy smiled, and raised her fork in salute.

…

When Jacob came back from the days meeting, he had a list of officers who were assigned security of the SLECC. Out of all twelve names, only one was rejected due to a drunk-and-disorderly charge from Oakland PD. Jacob had always thought McHorn was a rock-solid officer, but apparently it really is always the quiet ones. This still left eleven officers who could provide the necessary security, and the next day saw the beginnings of the integration of the LoN’s RAT detachment. Friday was also the day the commission finalized and formalized their emergency action plan. It was six that night before the meetings were adjourned, with the plan to meet once a week for departmental updates and reviews. Judy headed out to celebrate Nick’s passing his detectives exam, while Jacob stayed behind to ensure the ATC was up and running. Once that was done, he fully intended to join them.

They were doing final radio checks with Rescue 1 over the Climate Wall between Sahara Square and Tundra Town when a tech from cyber-crime rushed in. “Sgt.?” The out of breath Sun Bear handed Jacob a printout while leaning on a workstation.

Jacob’s ears shot up in alarm as he read the sheet. “When was this?”

“Only about ten minutes ago; conversation’s still going, as far as I know, but it sounds like…”

“Neues Kristallnacht; New Night of Broken Glass. Is this a Tweeter™ feed?”

“Yes sir, but it’s a new account; set up in the last couple of days. CLEAN data-miners spotted it
earlier today.”

Jacob handed the sheet back. “Looks like we got all this set up just in time. Keep on this; we’ve got two large Eweden populations in the metro area, we need to know which one is the target, and when they plan to hit.” The specialist nodded and headed back to her work center. Jacob then turned to the dispatch officers assigned to the ZATC. “Officer Nolan, get on the phone tree; we’re going live. Officer Wiggins, get a hold of Precinct Seven and Precinct Nine, tell them to stand up for a possible attack against the Eweden community. Cpl. Foxglove reroute Rescue One to the border of the Meadowlands and launch Rescue Two to hold at the border of Foxborough Parish; once there, start listening for cell phone chatter. We’ll get them specific numbers as they come in. Also, put Ranger One and Ranger Two on Ready-Five status.”

There was a rush of activity as the Command Center spun up. During the lull, Jacob started to compose a text message for the FCDC. While he was typing, he received a text from Mrs. Horowitz. When he read it, he smiled in relief; this was a general text alert being sent out across the FCDC, advising that the police were conducting operations, and to be on the lookout for suspicious activity. There were directions on who to notify if anything was spotted, as well as rally points where people could bunker down until the all clear was given. Jacob erased the message he had been composing, and simply acknowledged receiving the text. With the network up and running, he could focus on his job with confidence that the neighborhood was in good paws.

Officer Nolan was still going through the phone tree, when Officer Wiggins put the Precinct Seven and Precinct Nine dispatchers on dedicated terminals.

“This is Officer Hartnell, Precinct Nine.”

“This is Officer Santusky, Precinct Seven.”

Cpl. Foxglove turned around from her terminal. “Rescue One and Two are on station, Ranger One and Two are on the hot pad.”

Just then, Nolan hung up his phone. “Everyone but Capt. McCaffrey is on their way; he’s dealing with a restaurant fire on Tujunga Dr. in the RFD (Rain Forrest District).”

“Alright.” Jacob stood at military parade rest, and everyone look at him. “Nolan, you coordinate with Hartnell and Rescue one. Wiggins, you’ve got Santusky and Rescue Two. Foxglove, ZPD isn’t used to having this kind of aerial recon; ease them into it, and let Monterey know if he gives the cops too much crap, I’ll wrap him in duct tape and donate him to the UZ Jai Alai team.”

There was a short round of chuckles, and then everyone swept into action. The first of the commission members started to show up five minutes later. “Good evening, Sgt. Raibert. I’m assuming this isn’t just a drill?” Mayor Canidae was in a much more casual slacks and blouse than she had been wearing earlier.

“No ma’am. CLEAn and Cyber-Crime got a hit; it looks like the Thule intend to hit the Eweden community, either in Foxborough or the Meadowlands, maybe both. McCaffrey’s tied up with a fire in the RFD; other than that, everyone is on their way. I’ll have Cyber-crime patch in through monitor two.” Jacob nodded to the tech at the appropriate terminal, and soon a flustered sun bear appeared on the screen. There were a few seconds of the ursine gawping at the camera, before she got up and walked away.

Jacob looked around in alarm for a second before Officer Nolan spoke up. “Naomi hates cameras.”

Before either Jacob or Aurelia could say anything, a ferret in a turtleneck was placed in front of the
“Um, hello? Mrs. Mayor, ma’am? I’m specialist Nielson; I guess, I’m your mammal.”

“Good, as long as we have one. Once the rest of the commission arrives, I want you to brief them as to what you’ve found.”

There was a squeak from off screen which caused Nielson to look over in sympathy before responding. “Yes ma’am.”

It took another twenty minutes for everyone else to arrive. The last to come in was Agent Swayze.

“I got pulled over!” There was some cheese sauce on his tie, indicating he had been eating when the call came in. He glanced around. “Where’s the fuzzy noodle? If we’re here, so should he!”

Jacob spared a moment to give the agent a disdainful look. “Capt. McCaffrey is fighting a fire in the RFD. He’ll join us when he can.”

Capt. Kamel waved the obnoxious wolverine off without looking at him. “We’ll have any ticket cleared up, and work on a priority signal for Traffic to know to let you through. Now, Sgt. Raibert, what do we have.”

“Sirs, at approximately 1900 hours, a social media channel CLEAn had flagged had this posted on it; Specialist Nielson?” At that, the ferret was replaced with a Tweeter™ post calling on, ‘all true Alfen to strike a blow against the Zionist lie! #NeuesKristallnacht!’ ‘That was when I activated the call roster and notified the two Precincts with the largest Eweden populations in the city: Precinct Nine in the Meadowlands, and Precinct Seven in Foxburgh Parish.”

The Capt. looked around the command center. “We’re online, then?”

Jacob nodded. “Yes sir, Chief Stiles and Chief Winterhorn are on and waiting; ZATC is all yours.”

Aurelia settled into one of the chairs. “Good. Hopefully, this is just angry hate speech, and nothing else comes of it.”

Specialist Nielson’s voice came from the screen. “Sorry ma’am but it doesn’t look that way; chatter shot up in the last ten minutes from 50+ mammals, and we have a possible time frame, though it looks to be in code, unless someone knows what, ‘the hour of claws’ means.”

Canidae’s shoulders slumped. “It means 11:11 at night.” She mimicked dragging her claws down in front of her.

Judy nodded her head and squared her shoulders. “Well, that gives us three hours to get in place. Your orders, Capt.?” Judy stood at parade rest in front of Kamel.

The Capt. stepped forward, his head held high; now was the time for Zootopia to shine.

Chapter End Notes

The modern Rodent Air Trooper, or RAT Corps is a relatively new intitution. With the invention of computerized control systems and beamed power, the weight to power ratio that once made Air Power to purview of Zeppelins and their crews has shifted somewat, but not wholly, in favor of small, rodent operated aircraft. Most Zeppelins are still controlled and operated by medium sized mamals; the size of the machines, as well as
existing fabrication systems and some cultural resistance, means there will likely never be a full transition towards exclusively rodent crewed aircraft.

The current benchmark for these technologies is the Mitsubishi/Hyundai Type 93 Ornicopter. These aircraft are more commonly known by their LoN designation, the MQ-12 Hornet. At two meters wide, one and a half meters long and one meter tall, the MQ-12 is often considered comically over large compared to its crew. These twin seat gunships are driven by a pair of electrically powered lifting fans on the end of articulated booms on either side of the fuselage. These are capable of lifting and driving the aircraft at more than 200 kph while fully laden. When unloaded and under backup fuelcell power, they are only capable of 180kph for 20 minutes. The majority of their 150 kg mass is in the rectenna assembly and control computer systems. The aircraft frame and skin are both carbon fiber composite. Between the high output electric drive and the carbon structural frame, the Type 93 is capable of carrying twice its own mass in ordinance, be it 100kg Small Diameter Bombs, Stinger Anti-Air missiles, or even AGM-184 Anti-Tank Missiles.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Once committed to the fight, do not hesitate. The ZPD directly faces their foe.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

This chapter deals with extremely violent themes: reader discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Praise be to Allah, this is going better than I thought.

“Sir, Ma-am; 911 switchboard says they’re backlogged on calls”

Not perfect, but better.

“I’ll deal with this, Salim.”

“Thank you, Madam Mayor.”

“Is that backlog across the board?”

“No ma’am, just Precinct 9. Precinct 7 only had two calls in the last two hours: a small apartment fire in Abernathy Heights, and that Medevac from VT Commons.”

“Alright, have James assign half his operators to take up the call load from the Ninth. That should help clear up the board.”

Sharp lady; gotta watch it or she’ll steal the show. “Officer, what’s the nature of the call load in the Ninth?”

“Umm…”

“Well, out with-it son.”
-sigh- “It’s, a lot of false alarms sir; every time something moves in in the Meadowlands, there’s a call about a sighting of wolves. In one case, a call was made on a patrol car driving towards another call, that turned out to be a neighborhood kid rushing home to his parents.”

“Well, we can't afford to ignore anyone ‘crying wolf’; not tonight, anyway. All right, have Fifth and Sixth Precincts send five units each; they answer to Chief Stiles until I say otherwise. Seriously, nothing from the Seventh?”

“No sir, it’s all going through this text-chain set up the Foxburough mammals have going.”

“Well I’ll be damned, Sgt. Raibert; I’m going to have to see about getting your little AC/DC network set up in other districts.”

“Um… FCDC, yes sir.”

Nothing? Not even a twitch? Damn; that old lion having a heart attack really hit him bad. Nothing we can do about it now; just focus on the task at hoof, and trust in Allah to have a reason.

Chapter 23

Jacob stood still as a statue. He needed to stay focused on the mission at paw. Sasha DeLacour would keep everyone up to date on Rabbi Lowe’s status; his fate was in the paws of God, and the Zootopia University Teaching Hospital (ZUTH). He idly wondered if Judy’s sister would be working on him. What was her name again; Jan, Joan? He was jolted out of his reverie when Officer Wiggins piped up.

“Santusky’s reporting a group of vehicles sighted on Beaker St. and County Line Rd.”

Cpl. Foxglove turned to the commission. “Rescue Two has eyes on; putting it on the monitor now.”

An aerial picture on the display showed three open-bed pickup trucks with medium sized mammals climbing into and onto them. A moment later, a flag was attached to each one: a gold bordered black field, with a red shield and paw.

Officer Nolan spoke up. “Hartnell is reporting the same at Brampton Pasture: multiple vehicles and wolves.”

“Thirty seconds until Rescue One can confirm.”

Capt. Kamel rolled his shoulders. “Alright, contact Stiles and Winterhorn: tell them it’s beginning.”

There were a few moments of silence, then the Cyber-Crime feed showed several back-and-forth messages. Foxglove sounded off again.

“Rescue Two is on station, Monty and Gadget both confirm: cell traffic is coming from these groups.”

Officer Wiggins had a trotter held to his ear. “Sirs, there’s a huge uptick in FCDC text chatter.”

Jacob looked at the municipal maps of the two districts, then turned to Cpl. Foxglove. “Have Ranger
flight launch and move to support Rescue One.”

Aurelia looked at Jacob in concern. “Shouldn’t you send those units to the Seventh? The Meadowlands is fairly open, but Foxborough is an inner-city maze.” Salim nodded in agreement while Jed sneered at Jacob.

Judy spoke while looking at the feeds from the Ornicopters. “Those look like Edsel utility trucks, sir; a mix of 78’ to 92’ models. They’re built for off-road work, and the Thule have every reason to stay off the roads. They can do that in the Ninth, but not in Foxborough.”

Jacob smiled at Judy, then turned back to Capt. Kamel. “That uptick in FCDC chatter is spotters notifying the community and whoever is monitoring at the Seventh. The plan is to create roadblocks and detours to run mammals through the worst parts of that ‘inner-city maze’ until Waters and the TUSK and SWAT teams are in position, then trap them on Upper Canal St.”

Agent Swayze looked skeptical. “Your saying your town had a plan in place for this invasion?”

Jacob shrugged his shoulders. “For any scenario like this. We did something similar a few months back when street racers tried to use our downtown as a drag strip.” There was no need to elaborate that these plans dated back to the middle of the Tannerman Era, and were meant to fend off the police, not support them.

“Blimey! Hoons are scattering!” W.O. Jack’s Anzac drawl cut over the speakers.

“Ranger One and Ranger Two are on station, Rescue one.” Chip calmly reported.

“Cheers! Designating Alpha’s One, Two and Three; break and track.”

“Copy Rescue, Rangers are on it!” Dale excitedly declared.

Gadget piped up. “Command, Rescue Two. Targets are splitting up. Moving to… what the…”

The video feed from Rescue Two showed the Thule trucks periodically driving down a road, only to find a broken-down car or pile of detritus blocking the way. Jacob walked over to Foxglove’s terminal. The brown bat passed him the mic.

“Rescue two, this is Sgt. Raibert. Use the FCDC text feed to track our guests.”

“Copy Control.” There was a pause. “We’re into the Thule’s comms; do you want Maskirovka?” She asked.

Jacob’s eyes lit up. “Coordinate with Santusky, then execute.”

Both Kamel and Canidae looked alarmed at Jacob’s declaration.

“Sgt., I refuse to authorize combat within city limits!” Aurelia pointed accusingly at the screens.

Jacob turned to face the rest of the commission. “Maskirovka is LoN speak for a misinformation campaign. Flight Officer Hacket simply means she and her crew intend to infiltrate the Thule communications and feed them misinformation. Actually,” Jacob turned to face the corporal again, “…have Rescue One do the same; see if he can herd them into a police trap.”

“On it!/Roger!” All the flight crews responded. The rest of the commission looked on in shock as the various targets soon began heading towards the designated SWAT and TUSK interception teams.
Joseph was almost frantic with how bad this night seemed to be going. Alfrich Taylor had been desperate for something, anything to show Die Adolf after the string of losses in Zootopia; costly losses. That psychotic bean-counting wolverine Madeline had been all but foaming at the mouth when the Lemming Brothers job went south. The Society in Zootopia had put a huge investment into that one; bribes to that gutter parasite Silver-Foxe, the cost of the services from Dirty Rat Diggers, even Alf/Bill wining-and-dining that bitch from the Department of Public Health, so he could get on their server. Between all that and purchasing the land for the new Große Halle, the Zootopia chapter had desperately needed the revenue from the bank job. Now, they were nearly bankrupt.

Joseph Doltz, the Ulfberdt for the Zootopia chapter of the Thule Society, growled in frustration. Well, he’d become the Ulfberdt after Ramos got pasted in that stadium job. God damned Rassenverräter tigers! Now, he had an ultimatum by Die Adolf: bring a victory in Zootopia, or she would send someone who could! He knew what that meant, but he needed the Society’s support! Jenny needed that surgery after what those mindless Essende did to her! Of course, she went ‘savage’, their son had to go to the hospital after being attacked on the soccer field! All it took was one hate-filled, ignorant deer to yell ‘Savage Predator’!, and the whole herd turned on her for protecting her pup! Not one of those self-entitled animals even apologized, and he was left with an injured son, a crippled wife and in crippling debt!

It was the perfect plan: go after the Eweden where they lived! No elaborate ‘Oceans 11’ Rube-Goldberg plot, no going after an internationally recognized prize fighter! Stupid, smug Schwartzalfen got what they deserved for talking down to them. They were now coordinating through a brand-new Tweeter™ account, so nobody but the Society knew what they had planned. Besides, they were going after sheep, and nobody in Zootopia was going to stand up for sheep after what Bellwether did! Between him and Alf/Bill Laugherty, they had about half of the blooded and Aspirant Alfen with them; more than enough to put the fear of claws into those simpering, herd-minded thugs.

It should have been the perfect plan, but now they had been driving in circles for an hour and had only just made it to Tenno Ave. They were 45 minutes behind schedule, and really needed to get this done and get out of this blasted neighborhood. His son had a soccer match in the morning, and since Jenny certainly couldn’t be there, he had no intention of missing it! Plus, he’d owe that cackling windbag of a hyena an emu steak dinner if Bill got back to the Halle before him.

All three trucks had turned onto Upper Canal St. and were halfway down before he noticed the road block. This time, however, it wasn’t just some broken down car, or a pile of cast-off household appliances; it looked like a small locomotive engine, complete with steam coming out of the stack, parked across the road! He signaled the rest of the trucks to stop and stared incredulously; it was an antique, museum-quality fire engine. When he turned to speak to the mammal in the seat next to him, he saw that the alleyway next to them was blocked by a dumpster! This wasn’t a town in decay, it was a god-damned trap!

“Everyone turn around! It’s a trap!” He leaned out of the cab and bellowed to the rest of the convoy.

Just as the other two trucks started to turn, a line of mega fauna carrier vehicles in ZPD markings blocked the Tenno Ave. ends of Upper and Lower Canal St. Some of the un-blooded aspirants jumped out of their trucks and rushed into one of the shops on the street, while others jumped into the canal. Joseph was about to go into one of the shops himself, when he was knocked over by one of his followers flying backwards into him. What came out after him was quite possibly the single largest wolf he had ever seen, wearing a stained apron; in one of his paws was a massive rolling pin, while gripping the neck of a desperate aspirant in the other. Joseph thought it was Deacon Giles. The Worg, as he thought of the brute in front of him, was growling and bellowing in some language, while gesturing with Deacon like he weighed less than a hand-bag!
Just as the Police heavy line was forming up, Joseph heard a series of yelps coming from the canals. When he looked over, he saw a wave of rats leaping out of the guardrail next to him, each with some kind of rope or line. As they swam across the canal to Lower Canal St., more than a dozen mammals of every type: goats, wolves, hares, and foxes came from the factories on that side. They grabbed lines laying under their guardrail, and when the rodents pawed off their lines began hauling and singing a work song! Within seconds, the Alfen who had jumped in the water were hauled up like so many fish.

This was insane! How could they be this ready? How could these Essende be the hunters here? “Wir sind Jaegern!” He could only repeat to himself over and over. Jim Bayleman must have heard him, and thought it was to psyche himself up, because Jim took up the chant. That was when the giant deer in riot gear stepped forward with a handset attached to one of the trucks.

-scree- “This is the Police! You are hereby placed under arrest for attempted terrorist activities, attempted assault, and violations of municipal anti-defamation statutes pertaining to speciest hate crimes.”

Jim stood up from the bed of his truck.

“Screw you, Bambi! Wir sind Jaegern!” There was a cheer from the remaining Alfen.

The ungulate raised the mic again.

“Ausgezeichnet! Wir sind Soldaten! (Excellent! We are Soldiers!)” She let the mic go and turned to her forces. “On the ready line!” She bellowed as she slammed the muzzleplate on her helmet closed. The mega-fauna formed up on either side of her and locked their shields together in a wall and began to advance. With every thunderous step, the trucks bounced an inch off the ground. The crowd on Lower Canal St. began chanting in time with the steps. “M’saion tharn elil! M’saion tharn elil!”

Joseph finally panicked; he had to get away! He was being hunted and he had to get away! He leapt into the canal and swam as hard as he could towards one of the culverts under Lower Canal. The current was incredibly strong, and he found himself sucked through a propeller-like device. He was spat out the other side into the river, where he swam away from his friends, his comrades, his failure, and his shame.

…

There was a jubilant atmosphere in the SLECC. Both groups of Thule Society members had been intercepted without a single civilian casualty. The only two incidents were when one of the Meadowlands Thule trucks rolled while trying to evade the police, with the passengers in the bed being thrown clear rather than rolled over, and the two wolves who had tried to hide out in Mikhail Podanski’s Deli. Winterhorn had to threaten to call his wife to get him to let one of the young wolves go; she was visiting her mother in Des Moines, and neither one was likely to be pleased at having the trip ended abruptly.

Once McCaffrey arrived, he had been slightly upset with the FCDC for ‘raiding’ the Vulpington Commons Fire-fighting Museum for their final roadblock, though he was still impressed that they managed to get the old steam-powered fire engine running. He had to concede that, since the museum was not Polis owned or funded, the proprietors had the right to use the artifacts how they saw fit. Jacob knew the old goat who ran the museum, Peter Aldrich, would be annoyed with the attention to come. However, Canidae and the Polis’ growing interest in Foxburough’s place in the larger community could only mean good things in the future.

There was only one animal unaccounted for: the as yet unnamed ring leader who had gone through
one of the generator culverts under the Adame Textile Mill. Thanks to Canidae coordinating with the surrounding municipal authorities, River Patrol teams from Haresburg, Warrenton and Zootopia were all searching, but the general consensus was the mammal had likely drowned; the new hydro-turbines were designed to allow fish and smaller mammals safely through; they weren’t tested or certified for anything larger than a beaver.

Judy beamed around for a moment, until she noticed how tense Jacob seemed. There were only two things she could think of that might leave him so distressed, and the Thule were well in paw. She gripped his forearm and shook lightly. “He’ll be okay, Jacob; ZUTH is one of the best surgical hospitals on the West Coast.”

Jacob pinched his eyes closed and lay a paw over hers. “I know, but his health has been in decline for a while. If it’s his time, then we must all meet it with the dignity his life deserves; but he’s... he’s just been through so much, and I hate to think his life is bookended by this evil. He’s an old lion; he deserves his rest, undisturbed by monsters of a bygone era.”

“Well then,” She squared her shoulders, “...let’s -yawn- slay us some monsters.”

Jacob snorted a laugh. “After some shut-eye, Judy. You need a ride home?”

“Nah; Dickie gave me a ride in and said to text him when I needed another. He just let me know he was on his way.” She noted Jacob’s silent grin. “Yeah, yeah, I like the guy. He doesn’t need me to be anything but me and turns out he’s a really nice buck. Though I did have to warn him off trying to tinker with the Maserati. I don’t want to know what the Sweinart’s mechanic would do if I let anyone else work on it.”

They both chuckled as they headed towards the garage. Jacob was getting into his car when Officer Wade Snarlov came running up to him. Jacob lay his forehead on the steering wheel and sighed.

“Wade, I’m two hours from a twenty-four-hour work day; can it wait?”

“No can do, Army Mam. Highway picked up Mr. Kova again; 20 over the limit on the ID-7. Since we now have evidence that he was at the attack on Bove, Bogo wants this mammal nailed down. Hell, even Special-sauce Agent Swayze wants a crack at him.”

Jacob blinked owlishly for a moment, the very picture of a decaffeinated burnout, while inside his mind was going a mile a minute. Jacob could now confirm that Amon El-Masry, under his alias of Mr. Kova, was a deep cover SID plant within the Thule Society. The absolute last thing he needed right now, was to have CLEAn run off with a LoN intelligence officer.

“There had better be an entire Emu-egg omelet waiting for me when we’re done.” Jacob started climbing out of his car.

Snarlov glanced away as Jacob stood up. “Not a problem, we can go halfsies.”

Jacob snorted. “Nothing doing, Wade. You touch my omelet, and I’ll take you off at the elbow.”

“Oh, come on mam! You couldn’t possibly eat the entire thing!”

Jacob stuck his snout in the air. “Call it a nuisance tax…or maybe graft; the cost of doing business with the government. Now then wage slave, bring me to my sacrifice and have my tribute waiting for me and I may yet be merciful.”

“How about I bring you a cruller and coffee, and I spring for breakfast at McGruff’s?”
Jacob thought for a second as they walked. “Make it a Boston Crème and Decaf; I don’t need my ears ringing while translating.”

...

Jacob sat down across from ‘Mr. Kova’ with two cups of water. “Mr. Kova, welcome back. As a reminder you are being recorded while in this room, so anything you say from this point onward can be used as admissible evidence, should you be required to come before a judge. If at any point you wish to exercise your right to silence, you may state so, and we will pause until your council arrives. Please sign this if you understand your rights as stated.” Jacob was doing his level best not to shake; the moment he had entered the room, El-Masry’s ear signals started with just one word: Extraction. Assets didn’t extract unless there was a problem.

The jackal signed the document with a flourish, then leaned back. “Council.”

Jacob nodded, took the form, and headed out to call El-Masry’s handler.

Once through the switchboard process, as well as the inevitable wiretapping, Jacob was connected to Mr. ‘Sadik’ again. “Mr. Sadik, this is Sgt. Raibert of the LoN Military Police Forces; we’ve spoken previously. I am calling to inform you that Mr. Kova is in custody at the First Precinct again. At this time, he is wanted for questioning due to his being linked to a recent violent assault. He has again requested consulate representation.”

Ceren huffed into the phone. “Did he have any specific message for me?”

“Just one word sir: Council.” Jacob in his exhausted state had nearly said ‘extraction’, then he heard at least one of the wire taps disconnect. He knew he had to make one more call before leaving the room.

“I shall be down, personally, to resolve this matter. It is not right that one of my citizens should be treated so. I expect you, Sgt., to see to Mr. Kova’s comfort until I arrive.” Apparently, Ceren had heard the sudden disconnection as well.

Jacob nodded reflexively. “I understand sir. We have great interest in determining Mr. Kova’s role, if any, in recent events. As such, we will take great care to ensure he is treated properly.”

“Very good. I will see you in an hour.” With that, Mr. Sadik hung up.

Now Jacob had to figure out how to keep El-Masry out of everybody’s paws until his extraction arrived. First, he needed to get the authority to lock a foreign dignitary down; that started with the Home Office at the Teller-Ulam Building. He called the security desk.

“LoN offices, how may I direct your call?” Jacob recognized the nasal tone of Cpl. Mandy Pumba.

“Cpl. Pumba, this is Sgt. Raibert. Is Lt. Redmane in?”

“Not yet; do you want me to leave him a… oh wait, there he is. Let me put him on for you.”

There was a short pause, then the cervine’s tired voice came on. “Sgt., I’m still working on my first cup of coffee; this had better be good.”

“Lt., I’m working on more than twenty-four hours without sleep, so no pity here.” Redmane snorted. “Well, you grew into a traditional Sergeant quick. What did you need?”
Jacob was relieved he wouldn’t get too much resistance from his superior. He still didn’t know if Redmane had a ‘Need-to-Know’ as far as Agent Amon was concerned, so he didn’t want to have to try and explain-without-explaining what he was going to do.

“I need to be able to vet authorities quickly, like secure line quickly; we have a MOI in the Thule case in custody, and I think there’s a little too much interest from various parties. Swayze, for one, has all but ruined his tie drooling over the chance to interrogate him. I don’t want our mammal walked out from under our noses by someone posing as legitimate.”

“You still have that ATC rig setup?”

“Yessir.”

The Lt. grunted. “Good. Give me ten minutes, and I’ll have it tied into our database here; you give it a scanned document, it’ll tell you in thirty seconds if it’s legit or not.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll let you get back to your coffee.”

Redmane snorted again. “How magnanimous of you.” He then hung up.

Jacob immediately went in search of a small document scanner. He had just hooked one up to the ATC unit, when Wade came in.

“Hey Raibert, Kova’s Lawyer is here.”

Jacob looked down at his watch and noted it had only been 35 minutes. Ceren had been specific about the time. “Mr. Sadik’s here already?”

“Nah, some golden jackal named Erdogan”

Jacob was certain this jackal was from whoever had been listening in.

Jacob sat down at the terminal. “Alright, send em up here, but take your time.”

Snarlov nodded. “Right.” He turned to leave, then paused and turned back around. “Wait, you mean, here here? Not the interrogation room?”

“Yep.” Jacob leaned back in the seat. “Got my orders from Higher-HQ: vet everyone who wants contact with Kova. If he is who we think he is, everybody’s going to want him, and not everybody’s going to want us to keep him.”

“Got it. I’ll bring Erdogan up. Hope you don’t mind if I stay, but I’ve got security detail this morning.”

Jacob smirked. “I insist.”

Jacob had just finished tying in one of the video-conference cameras when Snarlov and Erdogan came in. Jacob stood up and smiled.

“Ah, Mr. Erdogan; welcome! If you could stand right there, please?” The hare indicated a seemingly random spot on the floor. The well-dressed jackal stepped over with a perturbed look on his muzzle.

“I’m a busy mammal, Sgt., and I do not have time for…” He startled when one of the wall monitors suddenly showed a still frame of him.

Jacob continued smiling. “I understand, sir. However, there are no small number of security concerns
regarding this case. I’ve been directed by my superiors to screen all individuals desiring contact with Mr. Kova.” Jacob opened the document scanner and gestured to the lawyer. “If you would please, place your credentials on the scanner.”

Mr. Erdogan stood ramrod straight. “I will absolutely do no such thing!”

Jacob cut off whatever else he was going to say. “Then I will absolutely not allow you access to Mr. Kova.” Jacob never stopped smiling.

“This is an outrage! Do you know who I am?” Snarlov began positioning himself for a takedown, even though they both could see that the jackal’s actions were more theatrical then genuine.

Jacob shook his head. “No sir I don’t, but we could clear that up right away if you could place your credentials on the scanner.”

Mr. Erdogan was about to continue when he received a text alert. He screwed his muzzle up. “Your superiors will hear about this!” With that, he stormed out to an escort officer waiting outside the door.

Wade relaxed and turned to Jacob. “Well, that was interesting.”

Jacob started securing the terminal. “Your take?”

The timber wolf hesitated for a moment. “We had a hit-and-run about five years back. Witness was an arctic hare, James Frost. He was in the Savvy (Savannah Central) after seeing off relatives at the Aerodrome. We were deposing him when an arctic fox claiming to be Mr. Frost’s lawyer tried to horn in and, ‘advise’ his client. Kept very loudly going on about the legal repercussions of induced testimony. Turned out, he was a partner at Calhoun and Wynn; he was the brother of the driver and had come to intimidate the witness into silence. That’s what this felt like.”

Jacob smirked and nodded. “Good instincts.”

“Do you think Erdogan was Thule?”

Jacob looked over to where the jackal had departed from. “Him? No. He’s foreign intelligence; probably from somewhere in the Levant or Northern Africanis.” The hare tapped his ears at Wade’s incredulous look.

Snarlov nodded. “You could hear something in his voice.”

Jacob chuckled and shook his head. “No, I heard whoever he works for hacking into the consulate’s phone line.”

Wade stood still for a moment. “That’s right, ‘NDA, ask in five years’. You’ve played these kinds of Reindeer Games before. Where does that phrase even come from?”

Jacob futzed with the scanner. “Russo-Slav/Finnish war in 1943. The Soviets tried to annex the Kingdom of Scandinavia, so they could use their Baltic Sea ports to attack the Austro-Hungarians. There aren’t a lot of polar bears in Finlandia, so they needed to infiltrate using reindeer. The Finn’s caught on almost instantly and returned the favor. It was hot ‘spy-vs-spy’ action for about a year before the Red’s got fed up and sent their Third Armored Corps to try to invade. An entire regiment of Finnish Fifth Column troops devastated their supply lines. Moscow finally pulled back when the Scandinavian Royal Navy and Zeppelin Corps intercepted and sank a support and resupply fleet out of Murmansk in the Norwegian Sea.”

Snarlov blinked for a second. “Oh. How do you know that?”
Jacob was about to answer when the phone next to him rang. “Two beer ante conversation, buddy. Sgt. Raibert, unsecure line... Okay, Clawhauser; send him up.” He hung up the phone and got the terminal ready. “Mr. Sadik just arrived. Let’s not mention to him that there was a possible spy trying to get to his mam; we need him calm and willing to leave Mr. Kova in our custody if we ever expect to get anything out of him.”

After Sadik had grudgingly submitted his credentials for inspection, Jacob escorted him to El-Masry’s interview room. No sooner had they both sat down when there was a knock at the door. When Officer Daniel Wolford opened it, they found Lt. Redmane and an MP escort, along with a scowling Chief Bogo.

The deer stepped forward and presented a sheaf of papers to Mr. Sadik. “Council Sadik, under General Order 93, SS 7/B of the League of Nations Charter, I am hereby taking custody of Mr. Kostebek Genc Kova.”

Ceran’s hackles rose as he read the orders, which he finally slammed onto the interview table. “This is an outrage! My government will hear about this.” He then stormed out of the room, shouldering the white-tail deer aside.

Once the wolf was clear of the room, Bogo nodded to Officer Wolford, who handed ‘Mr. Kova’ over to the LoN MP’s. There was another delay as the Jackal was led down the hall, after which Bogo turned to Jacob. “Sgt. Raibert, I would dearly like to know why I was just made to hand over an MOI in our ongoing Thule investigation?” Though phrased as a question, there was no doubt in anyone’s mind that this was an order.

Jacob tried to remain upright in his chair, as the stress of the day caught up with him. “We had a Mr. Erdogan try to gain access to Mr. Kova. He became downright belligerent when I tried to have his credentials inspected. He also received some kind of message that caused him to depart very suddenly just before Mr. Sadik arrived. I feel more than confident that this was a foreign intelligence operative trying to gain access to our mam.”

“Are you sure Erdogan wasn’t a LoN spy?” Dan looked towards where the group had departed. “I mean, like to create a stir to justify taking him into custody?”

Jacob hadn’t considered that possibility, but in the end, it didn’t matter to him; El-Masry was back in LoN protection, and if he had any actionable intelligence, Jacob was likely to find out about it soon enough. “If this is some kind of ‘False-Flag’ op, it’s so far above my pay grade you could see my house from there. Now if you’ll excuse me,” Jacob levered himself up to leave, “… I need to visit a very sick old friend.” Jacob stumbled slightly as he headed towards the door.

Wolford caught Jacob, so he didn’t fall over. “You try driving in your condition, and you’ll be joining your friend alright, in the trauma ward.” The wolf turned to the Chief. “I’m gonna take him on down to the duty billets, Chief.”

The scowl on the buffalo’s muzzle softened slightly as he nodded, hearing Jacob’s soft snoring.

…

Jacob jolted awake in the unfamiliar bed. It took him a moment to recognize the shift billet next to the Precinct One gym. He looked towards the door when there was a knock and a call from outside.

“Sgt. Raibert.”

He stood up, shivering slightly in his exhaustion, the movement turning the lights up.
The door opened, and two mammals walked in: a medium sized cat whose species couldn’t be identified through their tactical gear, including what Jacob recognized as a Thermite grenade, and a seven-banded armadillo in an off the shelf suit who was chained to a briefcase.

The un-assuming armored mammal nodded to the hare. “Sgt., under the authority of the Special Intelligence Directorate I am hereby authorized to update your security brief. We will require a secure location.”

Jacob looked at the briefcase, then at his own watch. He had only been asleep for three and a half hours. For this kind of turnaround on El-Masry’s debrief, the intel must be dire indeed. “I’ll coordinate with dispatch to use the station’s ‘Privileged Information Council’ room. If you’ll follow me?”

Five minutes later, Jacob was sitting at the table in the only room in the precinct house without some kind of recording device, reading over his new brief. The armadillo sat across from him, the briefcase resting on the table, while his escort watched the door with his rifle at the ready. There was an unsettling familiarity about Jacob’s circumstances; yet another classified brief about yet another ideological hate group. This time however, it was his home that was imperiled. Shaking his sleep clouded head, he focused on the pages in front of him. El-Masry had secured evidence that made it highly likely that high-profile officers in the Thule Society, Der Autor and Der Schauspieler, were already inside Zootopia. Jacob recognized the titles but couldn’t put them in context in his current state. He’d have to call Jean-Pierre in to get the full scoop.

There was a section that detailed a Britannian Company, the 15th Para. staged out of Vancouver that could be in the city in 45 minutes, should an assault against a Thule stronghold be necessary, though he felt slightly insulted that the addendum stated this information was not to be shared outside the LoN, and then only to Command officers. Jacob sincerely hoped it wouldn’t come to that; Canidae would have puppies if a British Columbian combat dirigible started raining armed elk on the city.

Once he finished reading, he handed the sheaf back to the suited animal and stood up. The agent wordlessly put the brief back in the case and stood as well. All three left together, the intelligence pair heading downstairs, while Jacob went over to the SLECC.

As he was heading in, Nick jogged up. “Hey buddy, you missed a hell of a party and threw one of your own from what I hear. Is everything okay? And who were the gruesome twosome I passed on the way up here?” Nick nodded to where the SID agents had just left.

Jacob keyed into the door. “They were the LoN Official Bearers of Bad News, and no; everything is not okay. First and foremost, I have to call in and put up with Secret Agent Super Douchebag Jed Swayze on no coffee and an empty stomach. Snarlov,” Jacob nodded to the wolf still on security detail, “…I’m calling in that Boston Creme and Coffee you owe me.”

Luckily, Sgt. Rambrant was coming on duty, and was an authorized security mammal, allowing Snarlov to head out to pick up the requested foodstuffs. Jacob, meanwhile, got onto the phone tree and called up the ZATC, as well as Sgt. DuPrey. They were understandably annoyed at the rude wake-up, so soon after their late night. There must have been something in Jacob’s demeanor that managed to keep the group from pressing the matter too much. Once Sgt. DuPrey arrived and was seated, Jacob began his report.

“Last night, a MOI in the Thule case was arrested and brought in. Through political shenanigans, LoN secured our mammal and got him talking. We now know that the Grand High Bitch of the Thule Society sent the… The Producers…”
DuPrey looked at Jacob with concern. “The Who?”

“You know, the Mel Brooks film; two mammals write a play about Hitler as a tax write off and fail upward spectacularly.”

Jean clicked his jaw closed for a moment. “Der Autor and Der Schauspieler?”

Jacob nodded frantically. “Yeah, Mutt and Jeff. Ooh! That’s their code names from now on!” Jacob giggled to himself. “I have photos of the two, but considering they’ve been evading capture for the last decade and a half, I wouldn’t bid Jed’s family jewels on this bet paying off.” He then proceeded to pass a pair of pictures to the ZATC members as if dealing cards for a game of Blackjack.

Aurelia furrowed her brows slightly. “That seems rather trite, considering the gravity of the situation.”

Jacob waved her off while still treating the pictures as a Blackjack hand. “Omnicidal Neo-Nazis who’ve come to sow terror in my hometown get called by my lame-ass code names: Mutt and Jeff.” He then turned to Jean-Pierre. “Take it away, Sgt.!”

Judy stood up and took Jacob by the paw. “With respect, councilors, I’m going to get Jacob down to the billets.”

Capt. Kamel looked at Jacob with some concern. “That might be for the best. We’ll brief you on the highlights when you get back up.”

Swayze turned to say something as Jacob and Judy passed, but the almost feral look of anticipation in the hare’s eyes made him hold his peace. Once back in the shift billet, Judy spent five minutes humming a soft tune while petting Jacob’s forehead, until he fell back to sleep. As she was closing the door, she caught sight of Nick who had a paper sign in his paw. At her raised eyebrow, he held it up for her.

Beware of Attack Hare
(I’d turn back, if I was you!)

She chuckled slightly and taped the sign to the door.

…

Jacob awoke without a start, feeling entirely rested and almost completely refreshed except for one detail: he was beyond famished. He was also in clothes he had been wearing for… he glanced at his phone, only to see it was nearly dead. He saw he had slept about 10 hours, so he had been in uniform for more than 35 hours. He didn’t have an assigned locker at the First anymore, so a change of clothes and shower would have to wait; food wouldn’t. He stood and stretched, re-secured his duty belt, and headed out.

Jacob, Nick, and Judy noticed each other at the same time. Nick approached with his normal, if subdued swagger, while Judy all but stormed over to him. Jacob held up a paw before the other two could speak.

“Whatever disaster is in the works can wait. I haven’t eaten in more than 24 hours, and I am in desperate need of a shower.”

Nick laid a paw on Judy’s shoulder to calm her.
“No problem, buddy. We were going to head over to McGruff’s to welcome all the new blood.”

Clawhauser was just coming out of the precinct locker rooms.

“Oh, hey Jacob! Are you feeling better?”

“Yeah, big guy; hungry, but better.”

The cheetah’s eyes lit up. “Oh, that reminds me! Snarlov left you a pastry for when you woke up, but…” he looked sheepishly at the floor, “…I eated it.”

Everyone looked aghast at Benjamin until he started laughing. “Just kidding! I’ve got it here behind the desk. You’re coming to McGruff’s, right?”

Jacob immediately set upon the pastry while nodding. “Snarlov promised me breakfast, and McGruff’s serves every meal at every hour.”

The mammals all convoyed to the restaurant, quite ready to head elsewhere afterwards. Jacob managed a call to Redmane’s office on the way and was informed that he would not be needed until the next scheduled meeting in three days, and that he should report for police support duties at the Seventh. A second call to the Seventh Precinct watch officer confirmed he would be on the morning roster, and so would not be needed until 7:00 the next morning. Once he arrived at McGruff’s, he sent a text to Val letting her know he was up, but shutting his phone off to save power, and that he would have someone text her when he was getting ready to head to the hospital. Her text reply of, ‘MFN, political aftershocks’, left him wondering what fresh hell had erupted while he was asleep; the old Efrafan phrase for things happening in their own time, M’saion Frithrah Narn, implied she might be awhile.

Jacob, Judy, Nick, and Benjamin all headed into the restaurant and walked into complete bedlam. There were almost three times as many people inside as normal, most in uniform. There were more than a dozen reserve officers, based on their badges, as well as the current ZPA class in their Police Auxiliary Polos and Khakis. One such Plebe, a female dhole whose nametag read ‘L. Darling’ was sitting across from a pair of identical female Eurasian Jungle cats in reserve uniforms.

“Soo… I’ve never really traveled much. What’s Burma like?”

“We’re not from Burma!” The two cats sniffed haughtily and replied in unison, “We are Siamese, if you please!”

Ben led their group to a series of half-moon booths where several First Precinct officers were waiting, most in street clothes, though some were in uniform with service caps on to show they were on duty. Jacob hopped into a seat and left his beret on.

Ralph Fangmeyer looked up at the new arrivals. “Oh, come on! You can’t still be on duty?”

Jacob tapped his hip where his duty carry weapon was resting. “Cover stays on until this little prick gets put to bed.” The assembled officers all nodded in understanding. Jacob looked around and noted a few new faces. “So, care to let Rip van Winkle here know where all the fresh blood came from?”

Ralph’s sister Nadine talked while watching a lioness reserve Sgt. walk by. “Whatever you told the ZATC before passing out lit a fire under their collective tails; the entire police reserve has been activated, plus the graduating class of cadets. I hear their taking the field duty as their finals for everything except weapons quals… huh?”

She looked at her brother who nodded meaningfully at the retreating Sgt. “Sis, either you go ask her
out or I will Jim Kirk her out from under you out of spite!” There was good natured chuckling at the retreating tigress’ hurried departure.

Jacob speared a short stack of hotcakes from the center of the table, as well as two strips of what appeared to be Ostrich or Emu bacon. One of the Plebes at their table looked on with alarm.

“Um, Sgt.? That’s meat you really shouldn’t, eat…” The young red wolf almost passed out when Jacob finished off one strip before he had even set his plate down. This earned another round of laughter from the table.

Grizzoli’s massive paw descended over the divider between the two booths. “This little guy needs all the protein he can get to keep up with the Lapina fireball he’s dating.”

Jacob batted the bear’s paw away while guarding his plate. Once the table calmed down again, he glanced around as he drowned his hot cakes in syrup. “I get the activation of the reserves, but what’s got Judy’s ears in a knot?”

Nick had just finished ordering and turned to the hare, while resting a paw on Judy’s shoulder; her teeth could be heard grinding from across the table as she let out an exasperated, “Ugh!”.

“Patience, Fluff.” Nick patted her shoulder. “About two hours after you crashed, the ZATC held a presser, which Canidae and Kamel proceeded to mercilessly politicize. I’m pretty sure that if someone had dropped a knife between them, we’d need another new mayor. I’m starting to think that job is cursed.”

Judy snatched a chicken nugget from the communal plate, much to the Plebe’s continuing horror. “All the Ugh! I wanted to believe in them soo bad!” She slumped in her seat while gnawing on the nugget. “I mean, Swayze was better behaved, and he had a good idea.”

Nick nodded. “Word is, all active duty officers are to report in street clothes for the foreseeable future; the activation of the reserves allows the same number of in-uniform patrol officers…”

Jacob nodded and finished, “…while the active force patrols incognito, doubling our effective patrols. Makes sense; Jed cut his teeth as an undercover officer in the Vice City PD, La Florida.”

“And how do you know that?” Phillip Eilerson gave Jacob a squint with hour-glass eyes.

Judy rolled her eyes as Jacob began gesturing with his fork as he worked on a hot-cake. “Yeah, yeah, we get it; NDA, five years, blah-blah-blah.”

Jacob finally finished his cake and gave Judy a pointed look. “I was actually trying to say, let me finish chewing and I’ll tell you.” This triggered a new round of laughter, during which Jacob started nibbling on his second bacon strip. “As for the rest of it, Swayze’s service history is now public record: seven under-cover cases, six successful convictions. That last one ended with the target, one of the Lt’s. for the Medellin Cartel, to turn State’s Evidence in return for asylum. He’s made a career out of worming into and breaking up organizations. Combine that with the positively toxic political environment at the J. Edgar Hoofer building, and I’m genuinely surprised he’s as well adjusted as he is.”

The combined officers, less the new blood, all looked slightly ill at the possibility of a less civil Agent Swayze. There was a slight commotion at the bar as one of the second-shift officers had the T.V. volume turned up. Growley and Moosebridge were apparently mid report about something.

“…expecting an upset in the stock market, as in a surprising turn Horace Oswald Hornblower the Third has apparently sold his stake in the Bull-Horn Telecommunications group.” He looked to his
“That’s right Peter. The young Mr. Hornblower has shocked both his family, and this organization with his declared intent to pursue the Mayoral post. In a prepared statement, he cited this morning’s hotly debated press conference by Mayoral hopefuls, Councilmammal Canidae and ZPD Capt. Kamel ibn Kamel, which critics of both candidates claim the opposing candidate of grandstanding, at the expense of the victims of the recent string of attacks. Hornblower the Third has stated that his relinquishing his stock in this station’s parent company, is to ensure that he avoids any conflicts of interest. He is the youngest Mayoral candidate in Zootopia’s history.”

Jacob whistled quietly. “Val wasn’t kidding about political aftershocks.”

Once fed, Jacob asked Judy to text Val and let her know he was headed for the ZUTH to see Rabbi Loewe. From the earlier texts from the FCDC, he knew the old lion was in the Hospice Care Ward of the hospital; at 93 years old, there was precious little the medical community could actually do for him, save keep him comfortable. Jacob parked a block away, not wanting to deal with people’s absurd reactions when he was near his car; especially not outside a hospital. When he arrived at Dusan’s room, he found most of the family filing out, while Jean-Pierre and Jeannette sat on a bench just outside. He feared he had arrived too late.

When DuPrey glanced over and saw Jacob’s stricken look, he waved the hare over. “Relax, Sgt. Raibert. He’s just very weak, and the hospital is minimizing visits to reduce stress induced cardiac incidents.”

Jacob sagged against the wall in relief. “Thanks, Sgt. I needed to hear that. The last 48 hours have been a veritable vair-flay banquet, and not getting to say goodbye would be an absolute steamer of a cherry on top. Sorry, by the way, for ditching you at the commission, but I was completely out of it. How have you two been dealing so far?” Jacob looked back and forth at the two seated mammals.

Jeannette gently rested a hoof on Jean’s shoulder and looked at Jacob. “Our office has been almost non-stop since last night. Out of those mammal that were caught, I’d say a quarter of them have been tripping over themselves to plea down, though there are a couple of true believers. I’d say you wouldn’t believe the things they’re saying, but I think you probably already have a good idea. One of them tried to intimidate your sister.” The doe giggled lightly. “Thirty seconds in, she jammed a ruler in his maw to keep it open, then hopped up on the table and used her pencil to dislodge something between the wolf’s teeth, then began lecturing him on proper oral hygiene.” Everyone started chuckling at that. “Once he started his whole, ’Wir sind Jaeger!’ shtick, she went off on him in Turkic for about five minutes. He actually started whimpering at one point.” Jeannette smiled proudly. “She’s gonna make a crack DA, one day.”

Jacob smiled fondly, then looked at the puma. Jean-Pierre’s smile faded. “We nabbed 23 mammals in the Seventh, and roughly the same number in the Ninth. With the interrogations so far, we think this represents about half the active membership, with maybe a quarter of those taken being blooded. Raids on associated homes and workplaces have netted confirmed Thule paraphernalia; trophies, and about a dozen Goldene Schusseln. It’s a ritual bowl, made from…” Jean waved a paw over the top of his head, while Jeannette rubbed his back. “All of them were in the homes of lifelong Zootopians. That probably means between 30 to 50 mammals have been murdered by these monsters, at least in the last two years.” Jean took a shuddering breath. “We’re starting to dig into the associations of those we captured, but it’ll take time, and with Mutt and Jeff in the city…” Jeannette snorted. “Don’t look at me; Jacob’s the one who called them that.”

Jacob shrugged at the doe’s arched look. “I was punch-drunk tired and famished at that point, so I
make no apologies. Anyway, give the data-mining to the CLEAn; they’ve got the mammal power for that kind of task. Like you said, with *them* in the city we need to be focused on stopping whatever they come up with.” Jacob levered himself off the wall. “Take care, Jeannette. Sgt.” Jacob nodded to Jean-Pierre, “…I’ll see you at morning brief.”

Chapter End Notes

Zootopia has prided itself for decades on its strict non-militant status. While there has always been a component of society who have sought military service (either in the League of Nations Forces, the Arrogant Foreign Legion, or in one of the various commercial security firms which take advantage of Zootopia's tax exemptions for companies) the Polis as a whole has eschewed any hint of military adventurism. This does not mean the Polis is not without defense, as the ZPD is one of the best trained, funded, and largest per citizen police forces in the Confederation.

As with most State Militias, the ZPD has an active and reserve force, each of which is trained up to equal standards. The ZPDR has a standard reserve cycle of one weekend per month and 15 days per year of service to maintain certification, has its own Officer and NCO cadre, even its own Deputy-Chiefs who answer to the respective Precinct Chiefs.

What the ZPDR lacks, are the specialized paramilitary teams: SWAT and TUSK Teams. Special Weapons and Tactics Teams are the special forces of the ZPD: they are the officers who perform hostage negotiations and rescues, as well as being the leads on any police raids which are expected to turn violent. The Tactical Urban StriKe Teams are the shock troops of the ZPD. The mega fauna only unit is mostly called upon for riot control duties, as well as urban tactical operations, as the name suggests. In the event that Zootopia were to face an invasion or other military incursion, it is the mammals of the TUSK teams which would form the first line of defense. TUSK teams are the only unit whose mandate makes them exempt from the MII as far as equal opportunity recruiting
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

A determined enemy will always strike back. Der Autor and Der Schauspeiler demonstrate their resolve.

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Chapter Notes

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This chapter deals with extreme violence. Reader discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jesus Christ! Is that, that’s Alfrich Taylor’s blood on her claws! How the hell am I going to explain Happytown to that psycho?!

“Brothers and sisters, I come before you tonight in dire times.”

Ohohoh, Madeline Lewis you have no idea!

“Wir sind Jaegern!”

“Are we? For decades, the lie that is Zootopia has stood, an affront to the Truth of the natural order! The lion, subservient to the lamb, and look where that led!”

“Wir sind…”

“Silence!”

“…”

“It has been nearly two years since that impotent pretender king Lionheart, and his grotesque usurper paw-maiden Bellwether opened the gates of this Polis to us, and what do we have to show for it? You say nothing? That’s right! Ulfberdt! What say you? You departed with 50 of the Blooded and Recognized; what say you!”
What say I? What the hell would a badger like you know about group dynamics? “Alfrich Lewis, they were prepared for us; waiting for us; I barely got away…”

“Really Joseph? You ran from Essende! Essende, do not hunt; Essende, do not stalk; Essende, do not rout a host of Jaegern! Now, the eyes of the Polis are upon us; the eyes of the world are upon us; the very eyes, ears, and claws of Die Adolf are here with us now, and what do they behold? A mockery! Jaegern, cowering before Essende! We are laughed to scorn by the rest of the Society, while Rassenverräter and their Essende overlords, hunt us in our own homes! We are now but a pale shadow of our former glory.

“But there is still hope for us, for the Truth! Die Adolf, in her benevolence, has granted us this one chance to prove ourselves. She has sent to us her Righteous Claws. Pay ye heed, brothers and sisters; the will of Die Adolf, mouthpiece of the Truth speaks to you!”

Who… oh god! It’s… they’re here already! How did they get here so soon?

“Wir sind Jaegern!”

“Jaegern, it is now known to us that among the Rassenverräter of the ZPD, there is one, Isaac, who is called Geblutverräter, for he had slain his brother Michael, for an Essende! This is how they have been prepared for us; and for this treachery we shall visit one-hundred-fold suffering upon him and this lie, this Zootopia! Ulfberdt Doltz, step forward that I may impart to you your part in avenging our fallen brothers and sisters.”

-shiver- For Jen, for Phillip! “Ich bin Jaeger!”

Chapter 24

The last two days had been a blur of served search warrants and devastated families. The CLEAn data-mining teams and financial forensic technicians had compiled 13 potential Thule Society members based on correlated spending habits, associations and social-media posting habits. A definite positive discovery was that the Zootopian Thule Society members seemed to be directly funding their chapter as of a week after the failed bank heist. A subsequent issuance of several Mareva Orders was in the works by and through Interpol. It was expected that within two weeks, not only would the asset freeze cripple the Thule in Zootopia, but the financial ripples could lead to the discovery of additional cells throughout Amerigo, maybe even world-wide.

In addition, Jean-Pierre had begun an in-depth search of Administration for Children and Families records after learning one of the Meadowlands Thule team was an inspector for CPS. This added another 17 addresses to be searched. Jacob rode along with Jean-Pierre from address to address, along with two reserve patrol teams and one van of medium sized SWAT Officers. In a departure for the remainder of Precinct Seven’s active officers, Sgt. DuPrey was in his service blues. The contrast with Jacob’s OD green LoN uniform was often enough to disrupt any would-be confrontations.

Of the 30 locations their team had searched, there were 12 households with either NAZI or Thule iconography in at least one room, while four more Goldene Schusseln were found on full display in common areas. Two of those homes were under the CPS officer’s purview. Another five homes still had their adoptive charges, though it was clear they were not being treated even remotely well. Three had simply vanished, only bothering to pack essentials. Thankfully, the remaining six homes appeared to be well adjusted, loving environments. It was decided that these locations would remain under observation for the time being.
They were heading to lunch when the radio went off. “Golf 22 to Base, come in please.”

Jacob keyed the handset. “This is Golf 22, go ahead base.”

“Golf 22, please proceed to Alpha for field brief.”

Jacob and Jean-Pierre looked at one another in concern; the use of code to tell them to head to Precinct One spoke volumes about the severity of whatever situation they were heading into. Jacob spoke again as DuPrey wheeled the buggy around and hit the lights and sirens. “Copy Base, Golf 22 proceeding as requested. Golf Romeo 13, Golf Romeo 14, Golf Sierra 3; return to Base for further tasking. How copy?”

All units acknowledged, and the vehicles split up to their designated locations. With the rectenna at Williston Heights finally fixed, Raibert and DuPrey’s remote powered police buggy was able to make the 12-mile inner-city trip in 20 minutes. It was another five minutes before they were in the SLECC. Capt. Kamel, Chief Bogo, and Mayor Canidae were all looking at various monitors. Swayze leaned against a wall near the door. “Nice of you to join us, Sgt.” The last was said with a sneer.

Capt. Kamel didn’t bother looking away from the CCTV feeds on the wall. “Can it, Agent.”

Jacob never bothered acknowledging the obnoxious badger. “What’s the situation, Capt.?”

The dromedary gestured to the various monitors. “Half an hour ago, Officer Clawhauser and Reserve Officer Catano reported suspicious behavior from a young lion just outside Little Rodentia. When they identified themselves, he threw a duffle bag over the wall. R.O. Catano pursued and apprehended the lion, while Officer Clawhauser went for the duffle; it was filled with snakes. Clawhauser was able to secure the bag with most of the little chokers and report the breach to the Herpetological Response teams. Rodentia’s in lockdown until they’re sure they have them all contained or dealt with.”

He gestured to one of the terminals. “Our would-be Apophis is named Theodore Hoary, from Longdale in Savannah Central. He’s been Mirandized, but he just keeps going on about the ‘Coming of the Truth’, and calling every predator officer he comes across ‘Rassafrasser’,”

“Rassenverräter,” Jean-Pierre corrected, “… it means ‘race-traitor’.”

Aurelia snorted. “Charming. And this impending ‘Truth’?”

DuPrey nodded to the dowdy wolf. “Heathcliff Notes version ma’am: predators eat meat, and prey are made of meat, so stop pretending we’re equals and get in our bellies.” Disgust was plain to see in everything about the puma.

Chief Bogo gave an explosive snort that could be either a laugh, or just a contemptuous noise. “To continue,” the cape buffalo gestured to another set of screens, “… 15 minutes ago Hopps and Wilde were in the Fallstaff neighborhood near the First Unitarian Universalist Church on the border of the RFD when Wilde noted a wolf acting suspiciously. Like with Hoary, the mammal ran when challenged, though he seemed to forget to ditch his pack. EOD and Fire were called in and the neighborhood was evacuated when they reported the pack he was still carrying was a fire bomb.”

Bogo gestured to an image of a strikingly familiar canister device, nearly identical to the one meant to be used at the Lemming Brothers job.

“Then, five minutes ago there was a call from Officer Capran in the Ninth.” Kamel gestured to the wall monitors showing a mix of CCTV and Ornicopter camera footage near a seedy bar called the
‘Cloven Hoof’, outside of which was parked a plain sedan. A familiar goat could be seen in the driver’s seat, while the profile of a wolf could barely be made out in the back seat. A mountain goat in plain clothes was walking towards the car. Jacob tensed for a second before looking at the Capt. with alarm.

“Tell Capran to get out of there now and mobilize all SWAT and Tusk units to that location, along with EOD!” Jacob turned to McCaffrey. “Have fire and EMS on standby but wait until the TUSK heavies are in position.”

McCaffrey was already calling in when Kamel came over. “One moment, Sgt. You don’t just order units around without…”

Swayze cut the Capt off. “You think it’s a car-bomb?” There was none of his usual condescension, a glimpse of the agent he had the potential to be.

All other discussion was halted when all the feeds around the Cloven Hoof cut out. Jacob grabbed the Base-station mic from the ATC terminal. “Base to Rescue One; come in!”

There was a moment of silence, then the radio piped up and the Ornicopter feed restarted. “Rescue One to Base, we’re here. Local EMP disrupted power for a moment when the car blew. All local comms are down, and we’re on fuel-cell reserve.”

“How long can you remain on station?” Jacob looked at the ornicopter feed on the monitor. There was nothing left of the sedan, the front of the bar, or the unfortunate officer except a 10-foot-wide crater and a thirty-foot ring of smoldering wreckage.

“Twenty minutes, then I have to get back; I can’t guarantee my receiver isn’t damaged.”

Jacob sighed. “Copy Rescue One. We’re deploying Rescue Two and Ranger flight; Once they’re on station, head on home.”

There was frustration in the rat’s voice when he replied. “Copy Base.”

Canidae stumbled for a second. “How, but…” She was close to being in shock. DuPrey headed over to help her sit down.

McCaffrey was calling his units to respond when Swayze spoke up. “You heard the mini-Sgt.; tactical units, then emergency responders.”

Jacob cut Capt. Kamel off from attacking the Agent. “Terror Tactics 101: cause a mess, wait for Emergency response, then attack again. Pretty soon, EMS is slow to respond to events out of fear, and the city loses faith in the government’s ability or desire to protect its citizens.” The Captains looked at each other, the the two former military members and Swayze. Seeing the grim determination in their eyes; they acted as advised.

It took 10 minutes for the TUSK and SWAT teams to get into position, at which point they immediately came under small arms fire from a nearby building. One SWAT officer was downed as she left the transport truck. The SWAT teams hunkered while the TUSK Heavies formed a shield line. Ranger flight and Rescue Two arrived just as the TUSK and SWAT vehicles fired CS canisters into the building. The Ornicopters tracked the mammals in the building and used their own CS launchers to herd the assailants towards a side entrance where the SWAT officers had stacked once they could move freely. Two mammals were seized at the door with little to no fight, while another two were apprehended during the sweep of the building. A fifth mammal tried to fight his way out, injuring one of the SWAT Officers. His death was later reported as due to a malfunction of the new
Wireless Taser Carbines the SWAT team was using. The Officer with the defective carbine was soon after taken off active SWAT detail for ‘emotional recuperation’, while an inquiry board was formed to review the new technology the ZPD had implemented.

…

“This is Allison Hornsby of ZNN reporting live from the remains of The Cloven Hoof, a neighborhood institution in the Shearebourne neighborhood for 35 years. Earlier today, several attacks were attempted here and in Savannah Central’s Little Rodentia district: a biological terror attack involving rodent carnivorous snakes, and a car bombing and subsequent gun fight here in the Meadowlands.

“As soon as the area was secured by a Multi-District TUSK and SWAT taskforce, Fire and EMS swarmed the site. Among those killed in the attack is Master Patrol Mammal Jonathan Capran, Ninth Precinct. Thankfully, it appears that Officer Capran’s last heroic act was to get everyone out of the bar by a back entrance. As such, the death toll in this attack was five: Officer Capran, the driver and passenger of the sedan who are awaiting DNA identification, a nineteen-year-old coyote gunmammal by the name of William Cavil Yote, and Sgt. Olive Hanady, a roe deer of the Ninth Precinct SWAT Team who was pronounced dead on arrival at Beth Hamel Ewedish Hospital. There are five additional confirmed fatalities in the Little Rodentia Attack. These names are being withheld, pending identification and notification of their families.

“The Thule Society, a world-wide terrorist organization, has claimed responsibility. Our hearts and prayers go out to the families affected by this tragedy. Back to you Peter.”

The ZATC members, less Judy Hopps who was still out in the field, all looked around before settling their gaze on Jacob. The hare quirked an eyebrow at the group.

“What are you all looking at me for? The last time I was in front of a camera, I nearly killed the interviewer.”

“Well,” Canidae slumped into an office chair, “…at least it’s over.”

“No.” Jacob stared intently at a municipal map. “We stopped this attack, and we rounded up a few soldiers, but their leadership is still out there.”

Swayze leaned his head over the back of his chair. “Come on! Let us have this victory lap before the real suck begins.”

DuPrey sat on one of the terminal desks. “History has taught militaries time after time; the best moment to hit your opponent, is while they are recuperating, and the Thule just hit us hard. We need to be ready for the other shoe to drop.

…”

Jeanine Hopps, MD., detested the cramped environs of the ZTA’s Red Line, but despite it’s circuitous route it was the shortest trip from Beth Hamel to her flat in Acorn Heights. She bit down the resentment at being called to the Meadowlands for trauma support, when there was only one traumatic injury, and the surgical team there had the officer on and off the table in less than three hours. Still, it was nice to know that she was on the short list of trauma specialists who would be called upon. It bode well for her chances to be accepted by Doctors without Borders.

She was walking past one of the more infamous Downtown establishments that her sister had mentioned, called ‘The Mystic Springs Oasis’. The remnants of a street party could still be seen,
smelled, and “Blech!” occasionally stepped in. She was trying to find an unsoiled patch of grass to wipe her pedal paws on, when she heard a faint cry coming from the building behind her.

“Hello?” She slowly approached the Al-Hambra facade. “Is anyone there? My name is Jen Hopps. I’m a doctor.” She strained her hearing and heard the faint cry once more.

“Help us! We’re dying!”

When she looked inside the atrium, she knew she had to make several calls; first to her sister, then to the ZUTH to get a Mobile Trauma unit here on the double.

“Office…Sgt. Judy Hopps speaking. If this is an emergency…”

“Jude, it’s Jen and yes this is an emergency! I’m outside Mystic Springs, and I think… I think an attack may have happened here. I can’t stay on the phone; I have to notify the Emergency Room at ZUTH.”

Her sister was as blindingly fast on the uptake as ever. “Nick and I are five blocks away; stay put and don’t go inside.” Jen hung up and called in the trauma unit.

True to form, Judy and her partner Nick were the first mammals on the scene. The pair looked tired, but ready. Judy stood tall in front of her littermate. “Dr. Hopps.”

Jen squared her shoulders. “Sgt. Hopps.” The sisters grinned at one another for a moment.

Nick wanted to let the siblings enjoy the moment but having called the ZATC on the way, he knew they needed to have an initial report of some kind. “If this gets any more ‘Howlmark channel’, I will cuddle the two of you until your own mother doesn’t recognize your scent.”

Judy sent a mock glare Nick’s way; Jen’s glare was less mocking. As the wind shifted, Nicks nostrils flared, and his fur bristled in alarm. Judy turned to face the naturalist club. “Alright Jen, what have you got for us.”

“I was walking home, when I heard faint voices coming from inside. I identified myself, and the response I got was, ‘We’re dying!’ When I…” Jen noticed Judy and Nick were both intently staring at the entrance with weapons drawn.

“ZATC Control, this is Adam 54 on site.” Nick called on his radio while covering Judy’s approach. “I smell cordite and effluent; requesting aerial support and additional units.”

An unfamiliar tenor voice came back over the radio. “Copy Adam 54; linking your body cams to the network. Support one minute thirty, proceed with extreme caution.”

“Copy control.” Nick followed Judy in.

Nick came to a stop just behind his partner, who stood motionless in the entrance way. Yax, the normally mellow manager and proprietor of the club, was slumped backwards against the stained glass Islamic window. The flies which usually swarmed around him in a halo were now crawling in a line of blood down his muzzle. Light from outside glinted off of a single small brass cylinder on the floor. The massive wooden double doors leading to the club proper had heavy gauge chain and a crowbar attached, preventing them from being opened. The damage to the surrounding frame and lintel demonstrated the force which those inside had used to try and break them open. A dark, rancid fluid seeped from under the door. He thought he could faintly hear voices from the other side of the doorway, and movement at the base of the door showed a small paw desperately clutching at them. The voices grew louder and louder until…
“Wilde, do, you, copy?!”

Nick was jolted out of his fugue by Jacob’s voice. “I… I copy control. Go ahead.” He couldn’t break his gaze from the feeble movements of the desperate, trapped mammal.

“Get Hopps out of there, now! Aerial shows a nightmare on the other side; if that door breaks, you two will be crushed.”

“I…”

“Move it, Brushtail!”

Almost by instinct, the favorite nickname given him by the STI at the Academy jolted him to action. He scooped up an unresisting Hopps in his arms and ran. He burst onto the street to find several reserve patrol units, as well as what looked like a portable canvas picnic pavilion with the beginnings of a triage station. Jen ran over and guided Nick to a spot under the pavilion where she had him lay Judy down.

“Officer Wilde?” Nick slowly looked at the rabbit doctor. “I need you to stay here with Judy. I want you to stroke her forehead, like this.” She took his paw and had him pet Judy’s head. When she took her own paws away, he automatically continued stroking Judy’s forehead. “That’s great, Officer Wilde. You just keep doing that until I tell you otherwise.”

Once she had ensured Judy was as well treated for shock as she could, she turned around for a moment until she heard a vaguely familiar but tinny voice behind her. “Doctor Hopps?”

Jen turned and noted the belt radio and shoulder mic attached to Nicks uniform.

“Pardon me for a moment, Officer.” She unhooked the radio and attached it to her scrubs as if she were a head nurse. “This is Dr. Hopps, go ahead.”

“This is Director Canidae of the Zootopian OEM; tell me what you need, doctor.”

Chapter End Notes

Within the Polis of Zootopia, is a near independent Polis all its own: Little Rodentia. Due to fundamental infrastructure requirements which are not available anywhere else in the city, namely the persistence of non-mammalian rodent aggressive predators such as King Snakes and Red Tailed Hawks, the Polis’ sizable rodent population needed a place dedicated to their special needs. One major facet of Little Rodentia’s infrastructure are the Predator Attack Bunkers that can be found in every building. Due to the very real threat of snakes, there are strict building codes regarding materials used in Rodentian construction. This does mean that buildings in Little Rodentia are disproportionately expensive when compared to buildings of comparable relative size elsewhere in the city.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Storm clouds can dim the light, but they can not destroy it. Zootopia recovers from the attacks.

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The following chapter deals with Traumatic Stress Disorder and similar psychological reactions after a terrorist event. Reader discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Just remember Aurelia, it could have been so much worse.

“…was on patrol there?! Thirty-two people killing each other in a Night Howler gas-bomb induced panic doesn’t just get ignored!”

The pups are camping with their father in the Olympic Mountains, and they can stay there, safe for the time being.

“…Wallander, but it looks like he and his partner called in sick during their last hour on the beat.”

It could have… for me. Just for me. For everyone else…

“…lander’s a malingerer and a blame-thrower of the worst sort. I finally managed to get him suspended for his lazy work ethic and shoddy police work, and he shows up with some lawyer to overturn that decision as, ‘Bellwether-esque species profiling’.”

For Little Rodentia, the Fallstaff community, the Meadowlands twice now, and the 103 families of the mammals trapped in the Oasis, it was as bad as it could get, or worse!

“…officers of the ZPD falls under the auspices of the Commissioner of police, not CLEAn; I’ll deal with Wallander and Dreys! Right now, we need…”
Focus Aurelia; grieve later, act now! “Are the borders locked down?”

“Madam Mayor?”

“Are the borders locked down Sgt. Raibert; yes or no?”

-ahem- “Yes Ma’am: Transit Authority has shut down Savanna Central Station, except for Emergency Aid transport. Oregon Territorial Guard, including Militia units from Monet, Burgess, Monte Cristo, and Briscoe Counties are staging at all land and river crossings. Port Authority has shut down the Aerodrome as well as all commercial piers in the city, while the Pacifican State Revenue Cutter service is interdicting any traffic in or out of the Zootopia Sound. They’re not leaving the city, ma’am.”

-growl- “Excellent. I am issuing an executive order as interim Mayor, the Director of the OEM, and the Chair of the ZATC; the police are hereby ordered to conduct administrative searches of all vehicles and containers larger than one cubic meter entering or leaving the greater Metropolitan area. Curfew will be in effect from 8:00 PM until 5:00 AM. All current Permits-of-Assembly are on hold, pending review by CLEAN; any further PoA’s will come before this commission for review. Gentlemen, I Want These Animals GONE from my city!”

I will be damned before I let it get any worse!

Chapter 25

When Nick Wilde had called Richard Davis Jr. saying Judy had suffered a massive panic attack at a subway terminal that morning, Dickie hadn’t hesitated to drop or delegate everything to pick her up; it wasn’t as if he had anything to do right now except try and smooth ruffled feathers of trade partners, what with the Port Authority shutting everything down. Dickie had arrived at the hospital and found Judy curled in a ball in Nick’s lap in the waiting room. The toddler had a pained and haunted look in his eyes. She looked up at Dickie’s approach, then rushed over and all but tackled him while repeating, “I want mommy!”

Nick leaned over and stared at the floor. “Her sister had us both put on Admin leave last night, but I’ve still let the precinct know we’re here. She wanted to go home, so I was walking her to the station.” Judy shivered in Dickie’s arms. “We got to Savvy Central at rush-hour, and they announced the closing of all out-of-polis travel, and the press of mammals, and the doors opened and…”

She let out an inarticulate gasp.

Nick looked up. “She… we ran for the park on Freemont. That’s when I called her sister, Jen; she got us here. I wouldn’t trust myself on a tricycle right now.” Dickie looked towards Dickie but seemed unable to focus on the rabbits in front of him.

Dickie slowly petted Judy’s ears while humming. “That would still be safer than going on your scooter.”

The snark seemed to help Nick focus, as he put on a watery smirk. “Hey now, no hating on the Baby; I only just refilled the tank for the first time last week.”

Dickie smiled in relief at his friend’s resilience. “I’ll make sure she gets home to her family. Are you going to be okay?”

Nick took a ragged breath. “Zib’s on her way to get me. We’re helping my mom move into her new place in VT Commons, so I, should be okay; at least, I’ll be with others.”
Once the hospital had released Judy, Dickie loaded her into his car and headed out of town. After passing a ZPD checkpoint on the bridge leading out of the polis, they were again stopped before entering Briscoe County. Dickie looked at the shattered doe in the seat next to him, as an EOD ferret from the Oregon Territorial Guard searched the undercarriage of his car. He still marveled at the hatred some mammals could have for one another; the Thule Society, Bellwether, even the Bullivian government’s suppression of Mestizo and Cholo communities, if the mass grave he, his mother and father had stumbled onto fifteen years ago was any indication. All this hatred over non-issues of race, species, and culture.

The coyote Lt. in charge of the checkpoint waved to one of the M-50/A7 Ontos Personnel Carriers, and the roadblock was pulled aside so he could proceed. He may not be the descendant of mighty warriors like Jacob or Judy, but he would do everything in his power to help her through this; even if it meant meeting her parents, sans support.

…

Nick, Zabrina, and Nick’s mother Viviane all looked around the new apartment. It was on the second floor of the building the Winters’ lived in, though caring for the newborns didn’t leave time for either of them to welcome the new tenant. That didn’t stop the other residents from greeting their new neighbor and helping her feel welcome. By the time the movers had finished putting the last piece of furniture in, Viviane’s Pantry and refrigerator were both full of local foods. Zabrina’s aunt, Amanda had even come by and invited them all to dinner that night at the Adame’s Queen Anne style residence overlooking Vulpington Commons.

As the Wilde matron basked in the welcoming glow, Nick was looking all around with a growing sense of agitation. “You’re sure you can get to the fire escape fine?”

“Yes Nicholas,” Viviane chuckled, “…I think I can make it to the window over the couch just fine.”

“What about the stairwell, or the elevator?” Nick was grasping his right arm while looking around. “It’s not a straight shot from the stairs to the street, and if the elevator gets stuck then you’ll…”

Both Zabrina and Viviane looked in alarm as Nick collapsed against a wall, the grip on his arm now drawing blood. “Dragul meu Nicholas!” They rushed to his side. Zabrina took Nick’s paw and eventually got him to let go of his arm, while Viviane stroked his head talking to him softly.

“Zib dear, you said the two of you came from the hospital. Did they give him anything to take home while he was there?”

Zabrina jolted slightly. “Oh! Antietam, Atreyu, AT-AT …something!” The young vixen was nearly in tears.

Viviane nodded her head. “Ativan; Nicholas has been prescribed it before. It’s in the bag you brought yes?” Vivian stood when Zabrina nodded in relief. “Stay with my son; keep talking to him. I’ll bring the bag and a glass of water.”

It was a tense few minutes before the medication finally started to take effect. The toddler was seated on the couch between the two vixens. “I just, I kept seeing those mammals trapped. The smaller, faster ones got to the door first, but the bigger ones didn’t stop; they didn’t even slow down. Those monsters had blocked all the service and fire entrances and drowned out the sounds inside with a block party out front.” Nick shivered as Zib and his mother held him. “They were in there for five hours before we arrived; if there had just been one door, one way out, we could have saved so many of them! Nangi never hurt a soul in her life, and now she’s…”
Zabrina clutched Nick to her side while she kissed his head. “Dragul meu, this is a hate from olden times; Satana himself could not birth a purer evil. Do not give them power over you by letting them into your mind, into your soul!”

Nick nestled into Zabrina’s grasp. “Never let them see they get to you, huh?”

Viviane petted his ears. “No Nicholas; never let them get to you. You are stronger than them, and better than them, and more beloved then them. Let that goodness shine through and drive their evil out.”

Nick barked a laugh. “We’re channeling our inner Judy, are we?”

“Sure,” Zabrina laughed a little. “Once the light of your greatness has blinded them, we just launch a tactical ballistic lagomorph at them; we have plenty in this town.”

Once they all were chuckling, Zabrina turned Nick to face her. “First, though, we have dinner with my aunt; I think it’s well past time my family met their future in-law. Tomorrow night, the Zootopia Interfaith Council is holding a vigil. Let us show these monștri we will not let their hate define us!”

…

Capt. Kamel stared at the request in front of him. “They cannot seriously expect this to get approved.”

Jacob shrugged. “Four of the nine board members of the Zootopian Interfaith Council are in Foxburough. Abram Square is capable of safely holding up to 5,000 medium and large mammals, and you’ve all seen how effective the FCDC is at coordinating community defense. Chances are, even if the request is disapproved, VT Commons will turn out anyway. At least this way, we’re not tying up resources trying to prosecute mammals for coming together in solidarity against the Thule.”

Canidae leaned back in her chair. “Approve it.” She sent a cross look to Kamel when he looked about ready to speak. “We’ve already locked down the borders, established a curfew; we’ve even made Gazelle reschedule her benefit concert. If we continue denying the citizens their voice, we’ll have city-wide riots on our paws, to say nothing about how weak it makes us look. Put Winterhorn on that exclusively and have the LoN aerial assets monitor County Line Road. We get ZNN to report on the event, it shows the Polis and the Thule that Zootopia will not be held hostage to hate.

“Next,” she shuffled the sheaf of papers in front of her, “…how are we doing on tracking down these, animals?”

Agent Swayze typed on his terminal and brought a list up on the briefing room monitor. “First, we’ve confirmed the identities of the driver and passenger in the Cloven Hoof bombing. The driver was a goat street racer; went by the street name ‘Zing’. His passenger was one Joseph Doltz; apparently, he was our swimmer from Foxburough. When we raided his house, it had the usual paraphernalia, as well as articles on several attacks on predators in the last couple of years, including one on his wife and son.”

“The pendulum swings.” McCaffrey lounged in his chair. “It’s no different than the fire bombing that radicalized Doug Ramses all those years ago; a sad story doesn’t absolve you of your sins.”

Capt. Kamel nodded and continued, while Canidae looked somewhat uncomfortable. “Well with CLEAN’s support, and the computer contacts in Doltz’s files, we’ve identified another dozen Thule members. Units from the Fourth and Eighth Precincts are moving to make arrests as we speak. Unfortunately,” the dromedary hammered a hoof on the table, “… Officer Tyrus Wallander was
among those contacts, and he’s since gone missing!”

Canidae nodded to the Capt. “I see. Anything else of note?”

“Yes ma’am.” McCaffrey sat up. “We looked over the approving signature for the PoA for the Oasis party. It was digitally signed, and the code flagged on an existing case: The Lemming Brothers Bank job. The same office issued the permit, under a Pamela Duff.”

Canidae soured slightly at the mention of the coyote administrative officer. “Do we believe she’s involved?” She sounded somewhat hopeful, if bitter.

“No ma’am.” Swayze shook his head. “She isn’t on any of the currently monitored e-accounts; plus, she’s not the right kind of predator.”

“What, she’s not lupine?” Canidae rounded on the mustelid.

Jacob waved her off. “No ma’am, she’s just an opportunistic sexual carnivore. If it moves and it’s male, she’ll go after it. Some of her co-workers remember her coming in with a hyena whose description matched William Laugherty, from the failed Meadowlands raid. They also say she dumped him within a few days, saying he was too creepy.”

When Canidae sagged back into her chair, Jacob pressed on. “Something positive to report, Interpol has been able to identify five Thule cells in Europa from some of the cyber-intel we’ve collected.”

Jacob then nodded to Agent Swayze.

The agent balked for a moment, but then relented under Jacob’s stare. “Yes, CLEAn’s been able to do the same: three cells identified in the midwest, and one in New Amsterdam. We think that one’s the regional headquarters. We keep up this pace of progress, and the Thule Society may be finished world wide before the end of the year.”

The wolf closed her eyes and took a centering breath. “Alright, I’ll take what positive news on this matter I can. Anyway, on with business. The Surgeon General has been reporting their staff are starting to become swamped with cases of Acute Stress Syndrome. I’d like to bring in LoN psychologists and psychiatrists from the Johns Hopkins Institute…”

The evening light shone over Abram Square, as a few thousand mammals gathered for the Zootopia Interfaith Council’s candlelight vigil for those lost in the Thule attacks. The FCDC was out in force, both to keep the peace and to ensure everyone was well fed and had water. Mikhail and Petra Podanski baked dozens of loaves of bread, while the Castormans and Beors prepared hundreds of fish caught by the community. This simple, yet tremendously symbolic repast did much to unify the gathered mammals. Among the those present was the reporting team of Valerie Coneja and her ever faithful armadillo cameraman.

One of the first speakers was Pastor Carl Goreman, the white rhino preacher from the Southern Baptist Convention in Zootopia. “More than 150 years ago, mammals of all kinds who had been brought to the New World from Africanus as slaves, fled the War of Secession. Many of those mammals were our ancestors. They helped found a new Polis, one that was free from the ideologies of the Old World, and the rampant strife that seemed to arise from them. We may have faltered over the years, we may have lost sight of the goal that is Zootopia, but we have always found our way back.

“Today, we are united not by grief or strife, but because we are a communion of mammals who will
not let fear, and hatred tear us or this great polis apart. I want all of you, every single mammal here to look around for a mammal you’ve never seen before and go over and introduce yourself. I’m not kidding; git!” The crowd chuckled and began to mingle.

Another speaker was Michael Samaha, a Zebra from the Universalist Unitarian Church. “Twenty odd years ago I met a mammal, whose greatest desire was to join the Junior Ranger Scouts. I am ashamed to say that I and the other scouts treated him cruelly, and all for the accident of his birth; because he was a fox.” There was a murmur throughout the crowd. “The hatred and cruelty I showed that day haunted me. When I grew to adulthood, I cast my hatred to the air and wind. I became a minister and a scout master of the pack I belonged to as a child, teaching moral rectitude to young and old alike.

“Earlier this week, a mammal whose heart knew only hate, tried to attack that very pack as we prepared to go to the annual Jamboree. We were saved by the valiant efforts of the ZPD. I hope you can understand my trepidation when I came up to thank those mammals, only to come muzzle to muzzle with the very same fox I had tormented all those years ago; Officer Nicholas P. Wilde.” There was a stir in the crowd as one fox stood erect in the crowd.

“Nicholas, I have owed you an apology for more than twenty years, but I was too afraid to find you myself. More than thirty families now owe you their gratitude, for rushing in without hesitation to save a group of strangers. This city owes you a debt, for rising above our contempt for one of our own, for thinking ourselves better than another. And so, I call upon you citizens of Zootopia; rise above this hatred! Cast aside your fears and doubts and unite as one brotherhood of mammals; for as the Reverend Marten Luther King said, ‘Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hatred cannot drive out hatred, only love can do that.’ Thankyou.” He stepped off the lectern to thunderous applause.

Jacob slowly circulated through the crowd. He was trying his best to emulate the thoughts put forth during the vigil, but his mind was abuzz with emotions. He was eventually shaken from his reverie by a hoof tapping him on the shoulder. He looked up to find himself beside Father Tatapolis.

“Now, now, none of that.” Niko waved Jacob off. “Come, walk with me; I always think better when on the move.”

They slowly made their way through the crowd, taking in the sights and smells and sounds. They were standing in front of a small placard in the ground, commemorating Abram Kokkinos’ founding of Foxborough Parish. The priest spoke without looking up. “Something troubles you, and not just the obvious.”

Jacob also kept his eyes on the placard. “I find myself, more and more angry. I felt this way as a child, and it brought me nothing but misery. Now, I know why I feel this way; I have an enemy, and my heritage sings to me, to visit wrath upon them. But just as in my childhood, I know it will only bring ruin. I don’t know how to let that hate go, Father.”

Niko turned to Jacob. “The trite answer is to ask yourself, ‘What would the Good Shepherd do?’”

Jacob snorted. “Bullwhips aren’t really my thing. Besides, I already wrecked the money changers last month.”

Niko bleated a short laugh. “You certainly are a reckoning in motion. My advice to you then, is leave no room in your heart for hate, by filling it with love; love of family,” Jacob looked to where his mother was laughing while trying to converse with a smiling, if confused family of Okapi, “…love of friends,” Jacob noted Nick standing beside Pastor Samaha, quietly talking while Zib held Nick’s
paw, “…and love of those closest to you.” Jacob’s eyes came to rest on Valerie, her fur glinting in the candle light.

Jacob stood taller, then bowed to the Priest. “You’re right, as always Presbytera. And so was Pastor Goreman.” At that he headed over to Valerie.

The priest quirked an eye at Jacob. “Oh? And how is that?”

Jacob turned and walked backwards for a moment. “I need to meet someone new; Val’s worked with that camera mammal for like, five years now and I still don’t know his name.” He turned back and continued on, giving his fears and anger to the wind, and making room in his heart for what truly belonged there.

Bonnie had been ecstatic when Jen had called to tell her Judy was being brought home by Dickie Davis. Then Jen started to detail the things Judy would need while home, and Bonnie started to feel some concern. When the sedan door opened, and Judy stepped out, the family rushed to greet her. Bonnie’s heart nearly broke when the grey doe shrieked in alarm and fell back into the car. It took the better part of 20 minutes to coax her out of the safety of Dickie’s car.

Stu silently wept as he and Bonnie hugged their daughter. Once she was inside and laying down, Stuart let himself collapse in grief. “This! This is exactly what we were afraid would happen! We never should have let her leave!”

Bonnie could only give a half-hearted rebuttal, until Dickie spoke up. “I was, I think eight when my mother and father took me on a dig with them in Bullivia. We were well within the borders, had all the appropriate papers, and there were no indications that any revolutions were soon to be under way.” Dickie sat in the porch swing and let his head hang back.

“It was two-weeks in when I was helping my mom at the dig-site; a 5000-year-old pre-Columbian city near Caral. I found a skull, and showed it to my mom, who promptly freaked out. When our government guide saw it, he left for La Paz. He came back a day later with an Army platoon. We’d stumbled onto a 20-year-old mass grave of a mixed Mestizo and Cholo village the Bullivians had murdered for their land. Evil and hate will find you, no matter who or where you are.”

He stood and handed the empty glass to Bonnie. “Your daughter is one of the most driven, exceptional females I have ever met; there are so many people who owe their lives to her standing in the breach against that very evil. Please, don’t diminish her efforts or accomplishments by trying to make her less than she is, ’for her safety.’ She deserves better.” With that, he departed.

Now, Bonnie sat with her kits, and her brothers and sisters and their kits, as a benefit concert played on the television from Gazelle’s recording studio. The concert was being performed to raise money for mammals affected by the Thule attacks five days ago. Bonnie eyed Judy with all the love and concern a mother could. Gazelle had just finished her third set, the first with her, ‘guest’ dancer; a stocky but quite athletic cheetah who seemed to brim with bubbly optimism. Judy had giggled and then laughed without restraint when he first started dancing. It took a few minutes for her to calm down enough to explain to everyone that the cheetah was a friend and coworker, and that performing with Gazelle was a dream come true for him. Her smiles and laughter were often interspersed with crying jags to put Stu to shame; usually when Gazelle or another celebrity or prominent Zootopian would make an appeal to the audience to contribute.

Ever so subtly as the concert went on, Bonnie noticed a light beginning to shine in Judy’s eyes. It was a light she had seen since Judy was a little kit, and had only been dimmed twice: once, when
Judy had returned home during the Bellwether crisis, and three days ago when she was brought home after the Oasis attack. The past two days had been a trial for the mother. Following her daughter Jen’s orders to minimize Judy’s stress, and make sure she took her Lorazepam was daunting; ensuring Judy took her prescribed medication had always been a chore. Bonnie knew what that light returning meant, and it filled her with both hope and dread.

At a commercial break, the Hopps matron decided this was the time to talk to her daughter. “Well, while we have a few minutes Judy dear, could you help me in the kitchen to get some refreshments?”

Judy looked startled for a moment, then nodded. “Oh, sure mama.”

Bonnie was pulling fruit and nuts out to go on a platter, while Judy was getting a pitcher of sun-tea ready. “You’re going back, aren’t you.” Bonnie said rather than asked, her eyes clouding with tears.

Judy’s breath hitched. “Yes mama. I have to.”

“No, you don’t!” Bonnie’s voice was thick with emotion, but not raised. “You aren’t the only police mammal in Zootopia; you don’t have to do it all! You don’t… you don’t have to die fighting monsters!” Bonnie collapsed onto the floor, where Judy rushed over to hold her as they both wept. “Please don’t make me bury my baby!”

“Mama?” Bonnie looked into her daughter’s eyes at the question. “Who do I ask to fight them for me?” The older doe could only stare dumbfounded. “Who do I ask to take a blow, or even a bullet for me, because I’m scared and don’t want to? I know there’s evil in the world, and injustice and cruelty; and because I know, I have to act one way or another. So, I have to try, because who would I be if I didn’t?”

There was a thump and another set of arms surrounded the two does. “You wouldn’t be our little trier, that’s for sure!” Stu snuggled into the hug while all three cried at the new understanding.

The next morning, Judy called the precinct councilor, Dr. Pauline Dun.

“Dr. Dun’s office.”

“Pauline, uh Dr. Dun? It’s Judy, Judy Hopps.”

There was a soft chuckle on the other end. “Pauline is fine, Judy. How are you feeling.”

Judy let out a ragged breath. “Like week-old, used cheesecloth, but better than I was.”

“It’s good that you recognize that, Judy. I’m going to assume you are calling to ask when you can come back to work?”

“How did you know?”

Judy swore she could hear the smirk through the phone. “I’ve been a police grief counselor and psychiatrist for ten years. I’d like to think I know a thing or two about cops. Let me ask you: what would you like to do, the first day you get back, work wise, that is?”

Judy paused and thought for a moment. “I’d like to help with the support back end. I’ll do administrative support, if that’s what’s needed, but really, if there are officers sidelined because of short manning, then I can free them up to get back in the field. I can’t ask anyone else to carry my burden for me, no matter how light it might seem.”

“No one here would ever ask you to.” There was a motherly warmth to the badger’s voice. “I’ll
make you a deal; you’re at your family’s farm, correct?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Good; stay there until Sunday. If I see you in the precinct as much as five minutes before roll-call on Monday morning, then I’ll extend your mandatory medical leave for two weeks. Do you have a way back into the Polis? I would not recommend the train, even if your meds are working correctly.”

Judy assured the doctor that she had what she needed, and that she would be in at 7:00 AM Monday, precisely. Once that call was finished, she called Dickie. He was more than happy to come pick Judy up Sunday but was happily surprised when she suggested he come out Sunday morning and make a day of it.

“Not nearly as altruistic as it sounds, Dickie.” Judy smiled into the phone. “If you tell them that you respect and support my life choices, maybe it will help calm them down. If you don’t, I’ll load you into the Thumperton’s award winning Punkin-Chunkin cannon and launch you back to Zootopia.”

Dickie laughed over the phone. “Thanks for the warning; I’ll be sure to bring my ‘Evel Knievel’ stunt suit to all the family outings, in case I accidentally offend.”

...

A badger and two wolves stood on a raised dais inside a cavernous hall, decorated in red, black, and gold banners, and illuminated by decorative storm-lanterns. The smell of fear, death, and Nighthowler incense was heavy in the air.

“Look at us!” Madeline Lewis raged at the two foreign wolves. “There were hundreds of blooded and aspirants not three months ago, now there are only twenty of us left!” She took up a golden dish and hurled it across the platform, causing it to shatter and expose its bone interior. “What are you two going to do about it??” She pointed accusingly at the two.

“Be at peace, Fraulein,” the scarred wolf simply known as Der Autor placated, “…there is always a winnowing period, where the weak are culled. How else would we have arrived at your ascendancy?” The badger sneered in self-confidence at the praise. “As for what we will do, we shall strike at the one who has betrayed the Society, who betrayed The Truth!”

All three looked to a clipping from the Zootopian Gazette laid out on a concrete alter between them. It showed a short black panther standing next to a statuesque deer. Barely visible in the background, the form of a black hare in ZPD blues could just be made out. Madeline’s sneer filled with contempt.

“We’re going to kill Isaac Mauser and feast on his beloved!”

Chapter End Notes

On this spot in Zootopia, in 1735, nothing happened.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

When walking in dark times, trust in the light from the east to show you the path. Jacob comes face to face with the enemy.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

This chapter deals with the effects of psychological stress, as well as graphic depictions of violence. Reader discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jesus Christ, Tyrus! What have you gotten me into?! You said scare some prey, get payback for Bellwether; nothing about being accomplice to a gas attack that kills 30 people! I, I have to make it right. I have to…

“Hey Eddy!”

Gah! “Ty! Where the hell have you been?”

“Just drinking it in over at ‘The Howl’! Have you seen the news? We hit prey across the city! I tell you, it’s liberating you know; being able to tell those grass-munching cowards where they can go. It’s gonna…”

Oh God! 40 people across the city are dead, half of them weren’t even prey, and you went out to a freaking bar to watch it again?! I gotta get outta here!

“…Ya know what I mean, Eddy?”

“Yeah, definitely! So, what’s next?”

“That’s what I like about you, mam; you’re ready to go no matter what! Anyway, I got a call from Maddy, they’ve got a plan for that traitor cat down in the Seventh and his DA Doe Ho. I’m heading
to meet the team to do my part.”

Shit! They’re going after a cop directly? I’ve…

“Hey now, mam; I know you want in, but rules is rules, and they say you gotta be Blood to get inside. Don’t worry, you’ll get your chance. I’m outta here for a couple of hours. Do a beer run while I’m out, will ya? Thanks!” –slam- I’ve got to wait… 30 minutes should guarantee he’s really gone, then I go to the First Precinct and turn myself in! I get on Witness Protection for telling them that the Thule are going to attack Jean-Claude and Jean-Bonnette, or whoever they are! I can do this! What’s this betrayal compared to my last one?

Chapter 26

Nick walked into the precinct house without his usual swagger. The Lorazepam seemed to be working okay, but he’d still needed to take the Ativan one other time, while in the parking structure attached to Zib’s apartment building. Thankfully, she had been on the way up to meet him at her designated spot, but it was still a humiliating feeling; panicking because an old dhole had gotten her land-yacht stuck while backing out.

He was here, nevertheless. He had an appointment with Dr. Dun, and then a meeting with the Chief. As he was making his way towards the counselor’s office, he saw Judy talking to Jacob while conspicuously standing in the middle of the atrium; he knew that feeling. The moment Jacob noticed Nick, Judy turned around. Nick saw his own pain, fear and self-doubt reflected in his friend’s eyes. She didn’t run as she headed over to him, and he refrained from any snark when she wrapped him in a rib-creaking hug, one he returned full force. “We’ll get through this, Judy. We’ll help each other get through this.”

She sniffled as she buried her head in his shoulder. “I hate them Nick.” Nick did his best to wrap his friend up as much as he could in the embrace. “I didn’t even hate Dawn, after what she did, but I hate them so much. I’ve, I’ve never felt like this before and I don’t like it!”

“Good.” The deep rumble of Chief Bogo’s voice came from directly over the two small friends. “There would be something deeply wrong with you if you enjoyed that kind of vile sensation, which is part of what drives mammals to the Thule Society; they thrive on hate and do everything in their powers to stoke that hate in others. You need to stand firm in the face of that kind of evil.”

As Nick and Judy looked around, they saw nearly the whole precinct was there, keeping a respectful distance but ready to support them. The longer they looked, the more they saw mirror reflections of their pain in the various officers’ eyes; the pain of loss, the horror of having to kill, the tragedy of having to tell someone that their loved one was never coming home again. They saw they were not alone.

The two stood up and saluted Bogo. “Sir, Sgt. Hopps and Det. Wilde, reporting for duty in whatever capacity Dr. Dun clears us for.” There was a cacophonous cheer at Judy’s declaration that followed them into the Counselor’s office.

…

They were in the counselor’s office for two hours. They talked about their respective feelings, as well as any incidents that had occurred since their discharge from the hospital the week before. They
were both candid in their opinions about not wanting medication to function, but were accepting of the necessity. They both also acknowledged that they were not ready for field work, but still felt the desire to see the case through. In the end, Dr. Dun cleared them both for station house work only; Judy could go back to the ZATC, and Nick could head to the detective’s offices, but they would both need to come see her once a day for a week, and then once a week until she cleared them for full active duty. She also advised them to seek professional counseling outside of work, with a reminder that it was covered under their insurance and would go a long way to demonstrating a commitment to the process.

Once they were done, they both headed to Bogo’s office. Their knock was met with a gruff, “Enter.”

“Chief, Pauline cleared us for desk duty.” Judy said with as much poise as she could in her emotionally exhausted state. “Where do you need us, sir?”

The Chief looked up from the pile of papers on his desk. “Hopps, I need you back in the SLECC. Wilde go with her and work with Swayze; Edward Dreys turned himself in 45 minutes ago.” Both smaller mammals sucked in a breath at the mention of one of the two ZPD officers who had helped with the Thule attack on the Mystic Springs.

“Are you going to need us to talk to him, Sir? I can tell you that would be ill advised.” Wilde’s voice cracked with stress and he involuntarily bared his fangs.

“Not necessary, Wilde; I conducted the interrogation.” Nick and Judy sagged in relief at the Chief’s declaration. “What I need from you, Det., is to see if you can use one of the things he said to identify the local Zootopian head of the Society. Hopps, you’re coordinating with Winterhorn and Raibert. There has been a direct threat made to Sgt. DuPrey and ADA Deaux by the Thule Society. Jacob is in the field with a team moving to secure them both.”

Both of Bogo’s smallest officers snapped to attention and saluted before heading out. Nick and Judy arrived in the SLECC to a hornet’s nest of activity. They gripped each other’s paws once, then headed to their respective areas. “Special Agent Swayze, I’m Det. Nick Wilde; I’m supposed to work with you on tracking down the Thule leadership.”

The suited musteled looked up from the table he was at. “You’re cleared for duty? Not gonna have a panic attack on us?”

Nick could hear Judy bristling from across the room. Nick put his best con-mammal smile. “If I do, I’ll be sure to claw at you in a panic first.”

Jed snorted a laugh. “You’ll do.” He gestured towards a pile of papers, likely hard copies from Dreys’ interrogation. “Our friendly neighborhood chronic traitor didn’t give us a lot to go on; a nickname of someone he met once, a vague description of the two mammals they were with, and a very loose time frame of how long it took for Wallander to go to wherever these creatures skulk off to.”

Nick easily ignored the species jab, as Jed’s body language showed it was entirely subconscious; he was just an A-hole by nature. “Alright, let’s see; ‘she’, … ‘Maddie’, … ‘badger’, … ‘crazy’. I’m going on a limb and guessing you’ve already narrowed the selection down by demographics?”

Jed handed him another printout. “Yep. We’ve got it narrowed down to these 30, for female badgers named some variation of ‘Maddie’, old enough to scare a cop. We were starting to check probate…”

“Madeline Lewis.” Nick set the paper down and looked at the Agent and his team.
Swayze gaped at the fox in front of him. “Wha… that’s it? You’re not even going to verify this?”

“He doesn’t need to.” Canidae walked up to the pair. “Lewis is a co-founder and now sole owner of ‘Madd-Rusch Brokerage’; she has a reputation in local governmental circles for abusive behavior, strong arm tactics, and just being generally unlikable. She does have a kind of terrifying charisma, though.”

Nick continued from there. “The Mayor is being politic; she said strong arm tactics, when what she meant to say was criminal abuse of power to force mammals out of properties she wanted. She generally targeted prey-dominated neighborhoods, then strong-armed or bribed city officials into not prosecuting her. ‘Getting Maddied for Christmas’ is a euphemism for prey getting evicted in the poorer parts of the city. She definitely has the connections to make Ronald Silver-Foxe get on board with the Lemming Brothers job.”

Capt. Kamel looked at the various monitors thoughtfully. “DuPrey said something about ‘finding their hall’. A corrupt land mogul would certainly have the connections to snatch up a property for their diabolical lair.” He noted the curious glances his way. “What? My daughter is into superheroine cartoons.”

The Agent threw his paws up in surrender. “Alright; I won’t ignore the rest of the list, but we’ll focus on the Lewis financial angle.”

As everybody was getting back to work, Judy caught Nick’s eye, and gave him a raised eyebrow. He simply smirked and whispered, “I, know, everybody!” Her snort indicated that she heard him just fine.

By the end of the first hour they stopped looking anywhere other than Maddie Lewis; a visit to her corporate offices found a Goldene Schlussel on display, next to an award for ‘civic awareness’. Nick was looking into a recently identified ‘Golden Valley, LLC.’ Maddie had formed with three other mammals: Taylor Rice, a brown bear CPA who lived in the Meadowlands, Jason Hoary, an African lion bank manager for Pacifican Northwest Savings and Trust and father to the mammal who attacked Little Rodentia, and Dietrich Ramos, a grey wolf whose family had emigrated to Zootopia from Brasilia 45 years ago, who was also the only fatality in the attack on Roger Bove. He might have overlooked the matter, had Taylor’s mangled body not turned up floating south down the marshlands towards the sound three days ago.

He and everybody else in the SLECC looked towards the monitoring stations following Jacob and Jean-Pierre. Jacob had left with a two car police detail to pick up DuPrey and Deaux. They were all just outside the Downtown district on their way to one of the Seventh Precincts TUSK block houses.

“Negative, command. Something's not right here.” DuPrey’s voice sounded tinny over the radio.

Capt. Kamel’s frustration was clear to hear. “Do you have more to go on than ‘bad-vibes’, Sgts.? If not, then get back on route.”

“Don’t need more than bad vibes sir.” There was a tension in Jacob’s voice that Nick and Judy had never heard before.

As the captain was trying to get Raibert and DuPrey back on route, the ornicopter escort reported in.

“Command, Rescue One. I have eyes on multiple quad-rotor aircraft. They look like delivery drones: twelve un-mamed, 10 Kilo capacity.”

Cpl. Foxglove chirped in alarm. “What are they doing?”
“Just loitering, Command; about 10 meters above the local skyline, but probably out of sight of the HVT. Orders?”

“Stand-by Rescue.” The LoN bat turned to the ZATC. “What are your orders ma'am.” Canidae squared her shoulders. “Can you see any company markings? Municipal Aviation regulations require them for all aircraft, named or unnamed.”

There was a moment of silence. “Command, Rescue Two; units are unmarked.”

“I want you to locate where they are being controlled from, then forward that information to local ZPD units.” There was certainty in her voice, but her expression towards Cpl. Foxglove asked if this was possible. The corporal nodded and smiled at the canid while relaying the orders.

Calm was just returning when Raibert burst over the radio again. “Spotter on the street; we’ve been made! Bugging out!”

“Command, Rescue One; all drones redeploying in pursuit of HVT!”

“Command, Rescue Two; burst of comms from the 1200 block west side just before drones moved. No joy on fix!”

“Ranger One moving to engage lead drone; wave pod hot.” The various monitors showed pandemonium. “Splash one moving to…” The camera from Rescue One showed a fireball in the street.

“Drones are Aerial Bombs! Ranger One and Two are weapons hot!”

Before anyone could counter them, the two MQ-12’s opened fire on the remaining flying bombs. Various cameras showed fireballs in the air as all but two drones were intercepted. Those two slammed into the road where DuPrey’s car would have been, had he not swerved at the last second. The resulting blasts still hurled all three cars onto their sides.

“HVT and escort are down, Repeat HVT is down!”

“Precinct One units, thirty seconds out!”

“I have foot-mobiles in improvised armor coming out of the west side buildings!”

“Raibert’s out of the vehicle and engaging foot-mobiles… taking fire! Taking fire! Foot-mobiles are armed! They’re rushing the HVT car!”

“Ranger One, I have no shot!”

“Check fire! Raibert just rushed the… One foot-mobile down! Crikey, that’s a vicious little rodent!”

“ZPD on scene, EMS and fire one minute out!”

“Foot-mobiles are retreating into the building, Ranger Two engaging! Splash one! They’re inside the building, going IR.”

“Ranger Two, I have two mobile heat sources, heading to the basement; crap, I lost them!”

“Shots fired! Shots fired! East side, second floor!”

Capt. Kamel’s voice boomed over the chaos. “Suppress and detain! I want answers, not corpses!”
A round of, ‘Copy’s’ was the reply, and thirty seconds of tear-gas and EM-pod attacks saw a black bear clutching a rifle tumble out of the building.

Once the smoke cleared and the area was declared secure, the damage was totaled. Several buildings were evacuated by the Fire Department, to check if the burning wreckage had damaged them. Two roads in Savannah Central had craters in them and building facades and glass on the first two stories nearest the bomb impacts were damaged. Both DuPrey and Jeannette were concussed, bruised, and cut but otherwise unharmed. Two of the five would-be attackers were declared dead on the scene; the jaguar hit by Ranger Two required special effort to get what was left of him into the medical examiners vehicle, while the red wolf Jacob had dealt with had a broken ankle, and a line of gunshot wounds running up her spine. The second floor where the black bear had been also had specialized transmission gear for controlling the drone attack. When police finally entered the west side building, they found a trail of blood leading to an old steam pipe service door. There were two gas-powered off-road quads, burn-out marks for two more, an empty FN-FiveSeven LoN service weapon, and a LoN green beret just the right size for a hare.

City Safety Inspector Adam Grisleigh brought several pictures up on one of the large screens in the ZATC Conference room.

“It looks like each drone had about a Kilo of TATP explosives inside, all rigged up with a crude impact trigger. If every single one had impacted the same point at the same time, that would have killed any one of them, ZPD cruiser or not. Structurally speaking, both areas are fine; you should be able to start repair work right away.”

Canidae looked drawn and angry. “So, was this an assassination attempt or not?”

“No ma’am,” Capt. Kamel said, “… we found radios and sewer maps with multiple entry and exit points along Deaux’s and DuPrey’s commute. There were also tire marks at what would have been the ideal intercept point. This was a well planned out snatch-and-grab. If we hadn’t been told about the grab, or if Raibert and DuPrey hadn’t been so paranoid, there’s nothing we could have done to stop it.”

“This is getting ridiculous!” Canidae all but shouted. “First, it’s fire bombs, then rifles, now remote bombs and EMP’s! How is all this getting into the city?!”

Kamel was drawing himself up to speak when Swayze cut him off. “Aside from the guns, everything else could be bought at your local convenience or hardware stores. You just need to know how to make them. The pulse outside the Cloven Hoof was just a side effect when the car’s battery was destroyed.”

Canidae deflated slightly. “Alright. So, what else do we know?”

Judy swept into the room from the SLECC. “Patrol mammals in the tunnels just found Wallander; he apparently was a part of the grab team but wrecked his quad and got left behind. He’s being taken to Zootopia General.”

Kamel leaned forward. “How bad are his injuries, and will he be able to talk?”

“No ma’am,” Judy said. “The blood-trail that starts at Jacob’s fallen side arm seems to come from where Jacob pistol-whipped him, breaking his jaw. He just fell off or rolled the quad when he greyed out from the pain and gave himself a concussion when he wrecked.” There was a grim satisfaction in Judy’s tone.
Kamel nodded. “If his paws are okay, he can write his confession when he wakes up. I’ll assign a squad to make sure he doesn’t bolt, or the Thule doesn’t decide he’s a liability.”

Canidae smiled wanly. “Good; I want answers and I want our officer back.”

Judy fidgeted in frustration as the ZATC broke up. “Stupid, stubborn, Efrafan! I’m going to tell Val and his mother about this stunt! Ooh, he’s gonna get an earful about this. If he had just stayed in the car…”

McCaffrey layed a paw on her shoulder. “If he hadn’t charged the attackers when he did, they would have been on top of the car before anyone could respond and we’d likely be dealing with three missing mammals, or worse, three dead ones. He stepped into the breach and saved lives, and that is what we’re all here to do.”

Judy grabbed Frank’s paw with her own shaking one. “He’s my friend Frank. I want him back.”

“We all do.” Frank squeezed her shoulder gently. “We all do, and there’s a very good chance we have the time to do so. This whole operation was aimed at capturing, not killing. If they didn’t kill him before now, I doubt they’ll do so until they get their house back in order. We’ll get him back.”

“…How the hell are we supposed to find him?!?” Nick’s voice had a frantic pitch. “I’ve used those tunnel systems to hide out or escape before; there are hundreds of miles of tunnels crisscrossing under the city! How are we supposed to find Jacob in all of that?!”

Nick’s audience was Cpl. Foxglove. “We’ve already ruled out the city; we need to know where the Thule are likely to have taken him.” She told him.

Nick boggled at the declaration. “You’ve ruled out the city? What, you have some super spy satellite or something?”

The bat chuckled and waved dismissively. “No, that would be silly, and a breach of international treaty.” Nick relaxed for a moment. “We used the city’s cell network to ping his chip. We got two hits going north before he was outside the effective range of your tower network.” Nick could only stare. “Theoretically, we could subpoena access to the national network, but we don’t have the time to do that. If we can get a region, however, we could send one of our Dragonflies to ping the area and pinpoint him that way.”

It took a moment for Nick to regather his wits. “You LoJacked him?!”

“Oh no, the chips do way more than that. It just makes battlefield identification easier.” She shrugged casually. “But for any of that to happen, we need to know where the Thule are right now. So: where are they?”

Nick looked from the diminutive brown bat to the reams of information in-front of him; it was on him, everyone was depending on him to find Jacob before it was too late. Nick grit his jaw against the shakes that were trying to cripple him. He would find his friend, and he would bring him home.

…

“Gott in Himmel, these idiots will be the death of us!” Albrecht Schultz whispered to his towering compatriot. Never in his sixty years as the head of Die Schwartzalfen had he come across a group of mammals seemingly more determined to enact their own annihilation.
“Agreed, Alf; even if the LoN aren’t already homed in on their wayward Essende, when his remains make their way down the delta, they’ll backtrack it here in days.” Gunter Hann shook his head at the jubilant group of predators in the Zootopian Grosse Halle. “We’ve already hemorrhaged tens of thousands of Deutschmarks into this fool’s-errand. We just need to ensure they don’t follow us and drag the Army behind like scenting hounds.”

Madeline strode over to the two timber wolves. “Not the prey I had sought, but Jason is on his way back with the Essende pretender. Pah! Who ever heard of a hare in the military? It’s only slightly less repulsive as the idea of a rabbit police officer.”

Albrecht waved theatrically. “And the Truth reveals itself. This is a great victory!” He raised his voice to be heard throughout the Halle. “But it is your victory, not ours. With this hunt, you may blood a new pack of Jaegern. We shall return to Die Adolph and inform her of what has been done here today!” There were cheers all around as Madeline turned and faced the adoring crowd.

Once outside the Halle, Gunter helped Albrecht into their car. “I have safe houses set up in Haymarket and Hyenahurst. It will take a few months before I can arrange to safely leave, and we can’t be seen together until then.”

The aged wolf secured himself in his seat, as the car sagged under his partner’s weight. “Drop me off in Glacier Falls; my safe houses are in Ficus Grove and Otterdam. We shall meet at the Fishtown Market in three months.”

“Agreed.” Both mammals knew the other was lying about where they had their safe houses. If one was caught, the other could not be compromised. Conversely, one could not betray the other either. Such was the way of The Truth: sometimes, victory went to the cunning, not the strong.

…

There were dozens of mammals talking in the SLECC while Nick poured over the financial documents in front of him; the answer was right there, he just had to suss it out of all the background noise, like Judy trying to distract him. Nick dismissively waved her off. It was in the purchase history of the LLC. Madeline knew he knew it!

Judy headed back to the rest of the ZATC. “I’m worried about Nick; it’s almost Five, and he hasn’t eaten anything since coming in.”

Kamel glanced at the fox in question. “Perhaps it was a little too soon to bring him into something like this. Some mammals just handle stress differently than others.” He turned to Judy. “Dr. Dun should still be in. Why don’t you head to her office and see if she can talk some sense into…”

“I know where they are. I know where they are! I Know Where They Are! Ahahahah!” Nick suddenly bolted for the door.

The entire SLECC jerked at the outburst. Judy ran after him. “What?! Where?!”

“So the Hippy Nazi Theme Park! AHHHHH!” Nick’s response dopplered down the hall.

Bogo soon stormed into the SLECC. “What in Bondye’s name is going on? Why is Det. Wilde charging through the precinct screaming about ‘Hippy NAZI Theme Parks’?”

Judy and Dr. Dun came in just behind. The slightly out of breath rabbit saluted. “Sir, I think Nick figured out where the Thule are.”

Capt. McCaffrey looked at Judy. “Then why didn’t he just tell us?”
Dr. Dun headed over to where Nick had been working. “Det. Wilde is on at least one Benzodiazepine right now; if he’s having an adverse reaction, or more likely not reacting strongly enough to his dosage, combined with this,” she gestured to the whole SLECC, “… that could explain his sudden mania.”

The intercom cut in. “Chief, this is Larry in Motor-pool; Wilde just grabbed his old patrol car and took off screaming about, ‘saving Jacob from the Hippy NAZI’s.’”

The Chief looked pointedly at the doctor, who simply shrugged. “In his current state, he really shouldn’t be operating any vehicles. That said, his faculties are in perfect working order. If he figured something out, he probably can’t communicate it until he’s calmer.”

“I’m on it!” Judy headed over to the dispatch terminal. “Highway dispatch, this is Precinct One. Patch me through to Highway 40.”

“Copy P1, stand by.”

There was a short pause, then Pearl’s dulcet tone could be heard over the radio. “P1, this is Highway 40. What’s up?”

“Pearl, it’s Judy. Nick’s,” she looked at one of the monitors, “… heading westbound on Grand toward the Inter-District 20. He needs to get where he’s going, but he shouldn’t be driving.”

“Got it, Jude-bug. I see him.”

“AAAAAAAAHHHHHH!”

“And I see what you mean. I’ll get him set.”

Pearl lit the sirens on her pursuit motorcycle and followed the frantic fox, who pulled over rather quickly. Pearl reported her location, and that she would be leaving her bike for pick-up. “Nick, honey; are you okay?”

“Pearl! I’m on mind-bendy drugs and shouldn’t be driving but I know where they are!”

Pearl flinched at the manic look in her friend’s eyes but heard Judy over her personal radio. “Nick’s figured out where the Thule are holed up, but they have Jacob, so we can’t really wait for Nick to come back down. Drive him wherever he says; the Chiefs are mobilizing everybody to follow.”

Pearl shook her head and got in the driver’s side of Nick’s car. “Slick, I surely do hope you’re ready for this.”

“I can think, I just can’t talk! Go north!”

The patrol car took off. “How long for?”

“Until I tell you not to!” Once the vehicle was in motion and Nick wasn’t trying to do multiple things at once, he seemed to calm considerably, though he seemed to be crashing.

“Nick honey, I need you to stay with me! Where are we going?”

“Walton’s Wonder World park. Pacifican N.W. Savings picked it up in the fifties under foreclosure, kept it in escrow. Nobody wanted it or could keep it. Hippy religious retreat in the seventies came close; knocked down the old park rides, built log cabins and a stone church.” Nick’s head was lolling from side to side. “Golden Valley LLC. took a huge loan last year and bought it. Taylor was the loan
officer. Missed their payment last month, and the bank started looking hard.”

Pearl glanced at her friend as they drove. “You get all that Jude?”

“Yeah, just a moment… Okay I see what he’s talking about, Taylor is on the LLC, and we think he was one of the Thule leadership. There are three other members, one confirmed Thule, also dead, and at least one mammal we strongly believe is their current leader. We have LoN on their way to confirm. ETA is about ten minutes.”

Eight minutes later, the vehicle radio lit up. “City wide all available units, City wide all available units, this is Capt. Kamel. This is a general mobilization; proceed to the following coordinates…”

Nick gave an exhausted smirk as the whole police force began heading to the old WWW Park. His grin slipped as he glanced at Pearl. “Please don’t take me back. I have to help him.”

Pearl smirked. “Weren’t you paying attention there, Nick? They said, ‘all available units’, and unless you have other orders, we’re available!”

…

Jacob slowly came to consciousness. He felt a breeze through his fur, which seemed wrong; he should be in uniform. There was an acrid smell, blood and a burnt floral scent that was familiar, but just barely. He heard chanting in a foreign language. He opened his eyes, and was pleasantly surprised at the soft lantern light in the space he was in. He looked around and saw an African Lion in a stylized Black and Red Toga, and, he had Jacob’s Sword!

Jacob was now fully awake and sitting up. He saw he was in a stone hall filled with lanterns and Thule banners. There were a dozen carnivores including the lion, though the only other one that mattered to Jacob was the badger. Everyone was looking to her, deferring to her; she was the leader. She was the one he was going to kill. He noted there were incense braziers; they were the source of the smell. What was it Jean-Pierre said? Nighthowler incense? It didn’t matter, he had Inle-rah’s work to do. He just needed that lion to come over and let him get his sword back. The whole assembly were now facing him, and were chanting as, oh goody! The lion was coming over. This would have been a pain if he had to go through the badger first.

The lion grasped him by the neck and pressed him to the altar he was on, and raised the paw holding Jacob’s sword. Jacob grasped the lion around his thumb and coiled up his legs. When the lion sneered, Jacob realized the Pfeffa Nalnos thought he was afraid. Jacob sneered back and raked his hind claws down the inside of the lion’s forearm, driving them into the inside of the elbow joint and the nerve bundle there. Claws that evolved for traction in dry, hard scrabble earth and stone devastated the soft flesh of the lion’s arm. The cat roared in pain and shock. When the grip loosened, Jacob twisted his weight and rolled to the outside of the lion’s shoulder, in the beginnings of a joint lock. Once completing the roll and on his back again, Jacob pushed against the stone with his legs, dragging the lion off balance over the altar. The lion dropped the sword, and there was a look of confused shock in the his eyes just before Jacob kicked him in the throat, silencing him permanently.

Jacob stood up and calmly walked over to his blade, as the lion desperately pawed at his crushed trachea. When Jacob looked up, the hall was dead silent as the assembly gazed in shock at the mightiest of them falling before a hare. The badger shivered in rage and screamed. “No! Wir sind Jaegern!”

Jacob looked dispassionately at her. “Really? Huh, good to know.” He then clenched the blade in his teeth and leapt for his foe.
Nick and Pearl were the first to arrive on the scene by ten minutes and relayed what they saw to Judy; a torchlight procession of a dozen mammals in robes going into the *Grosse Halle*, while four rifle-armed carnivores stood guard outside. Nick had wanted to try to infiltrate, but Pearl talked him down. “Really, what are you going to do? Go in there and say, ‘Heil-pfthbt, Heil-pfthbt’, right in the Fuehrer’s face?”

Bogo and Winterhorn were the first two officers after, each with a full squad of SWAT officers. Bogo readied his riot shield. “You two stay back; you’ve done your part. We’ll take it from here.”

At a hoof signal from Winterhorn, four Marksmammals tranqued the guards. The sound of chanting drowned out the sound of four mammals falling to the ground. The entire team moved forward, with Pearl and Nick following close behind. They were halfway to the old church, when the night was rent with a lion’s pained roar. The sound ended as suddenly as it began. As they rushed forward, they could hear an enraged screaming from inside, then general chaos. They stacked up on the main entrance as the doors burst open. Three robe-wearing mammals rushed out into the awaiting arms of the police. A fourth was coming out when a black and silver blur flashed by the mammal’s legs; he screamed and collapsed to the ground. The blur stopped in front as he was falling, and a blade flashed up. The screaming stopped as a wolf’s head rolled to a stop at Bogo’s pedal hooves, its jaw snapping reflexively for a moment. Everyone could now see that the blur was a naked, blood-soaked, blade-wielding hare.

Jacob turned and noticed a host of mammals. Were they foes? He screamed a challenge.

Nick came to a stop at the flank of the SWAT team. Everyone was staring in shock, while Judy was yelling into his earpiece. “Nick, we have to snap him out of it! Stomp the ground and shout, ‘Mayzon In LaRue!’”

Nick gaped for a moment, then frantically whispered. “You want me to what?!”

“Stomp the ground and shout, ‘Mayzon In LaRue’! Do it now!”

Nick, ever trusting his friend, did his best. He stomped the ground and shouted, “My Cylon’s in the Loo!”

For an instant, all was still as everyone stared at the fox. Chief Bogo and Chief Winterhorn stared at the fox. Pearl Swineart stared at the fox. The half crazed, blood-soaked, murder hare stared at the fox.

-FZARK- “GRRK!”

Nick shot Jacob with his wireless taser. His chest heaved in great gasping breaths. “Oh my God! Oh my God! I shot Jacob! Is he gonna be pissed? Oh my God!”

Pearl looked to the assembled mammals as she gently disarmed Nick. “Perhaps we should get these two into separate ambulances before Jacob wakes up and does to Nick what Nick just did to his language?”

…

Jacob slowly came to consciousness. There was a rhythmic beeping, as well as the feeling of someone petting his forehead and subdued conversations. He slowly opened his eyes, only to pinch them shut and groan at the harsh fluorescent light. This elicited a surge of sound.
“Umbra amora!”

“Jacob!”

“Rah-Roo!”

Jacob opened his eyes again and saw his family, as well as Valerie, Judy, and Dickie. The doors opened to admit Zib, and a hospital-gown-clad Nick. Judy spun and hugged Nick, much to his discomfort and everyone else’s laughter. Jacob waved the vulpine over, once he was extracted from Judy’s grip and she was back in Dickie’s arms.

“Hey, Nick?”

Nick advanced with a little trepidation. “Yeah buddy?”

“Where the hell did you come up with, ‘My Cylon’s in the Loo’?”

Nick lifted one of his manual paws and rattled a prescription medicine bottle. “Lovely Drugs.”

Chapter End Notes

"The Efrafans were a lagomorphic slave race bred for food, currency and war by Purrsonian lions in the middle east prior to the first millennium, BC."

Excerpt from a Zootopian Highschool history textbook containing everything taught about Efrafans.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

If you ever lose your way, look to the east and you will know your path. Jacob comes to grips with himself and his history.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Relax Jacob, she’s not here to hurt you. Just answer Dr. Quinn’s questions and get this started so we can move on with our life.

“So, Mr. Raibert; you were involved in a rather horrific incident last week. You were subjected to an aerial attack, abducted, exposed to mind-altering substances, which I understand have been flushed from your system, and subsequently engaged in an extremely violent exchange. However, there are always concerns of long-term effects. Let’s start with the basics and establish our baseline: have you noticed any changes in your sleep patterns, difficulty getting to sleep, or nightmares?”

“No ma’am, no problems sleeping.” -scribble-

“How about eating habits? I understand from your records you have a tendency towards, shall we say, non-traditional dietary habits, for a Zootopian that is.”

“No ma’am, my appetite’s fine.” -scribble-

“How about your relationships; any changes there?”

“No ma-am, everyone’s been very supportive, though some of my coworkers have been a little more pensive around me lately. It’s understandable, considering how they found me.” -Scribble-

Oh boy, here it comes.

“Mr. Raibert, in order for there to be any progress here, you need to be honest and candid with me. I
understand the ‘strong male culture’ abhors the idea that you should be anything other than an\nunmovable rock in the face of adversity, but you can’t expect me to believe that you’re ‘okay’ after\nwhat you’ve been through.”

Alright Jacob, full disclosure time; this is privileged information, just say it and be done!

“Doctor, three days ago I killed four mammals, and maimed another eight, and I feel nothing! I am\nanything but okay.”

Chapter 27

Jacob, Nick, and Judy were all at Dickie's private cinema for the day. They were all on\nadministrative leave, and Dickie had offered them the use of his home. Judy had suggested a\.marathon of some sort. Much to Nick’s distress, they chose the old Battlestar Galactica series, to see\nif his Cylon really was in the loo. They were taking a midday break to get something to eat.

Jacob shook his head and gestured with a taquito. “‘Bonanza’ and ‘Little House on the Plains’ may\nhave tried to paint it otherwise but make no mistake: the Range wars were nothing more than a great\ngaggle of gang turf wars.”

Judy shook her head and swallowed. “I’m not saying it wasn’t nasty, but war is nasty. You know\nthat Jacob.”

“War isn’t the fighting, Judy.” Jacob leaned on the table and looked into the air. “War is two or more\ngovernments in conflict with one another. There are rules in war; boundaries you don’t cross for fear\nof losing support at home or escalating the conflict out of control. Gang wars don’t have rules. The\npoint is to escalate, to be more brutal than the other guy so they’ll give up and leave. It’s what I did\nfor five years.”

Nick leaned over and gripped his shoulder. “Hey, you’re not that mammal any more, Jacob.”

Jacob dragged his claws across his head. “Aren’t I? You saw what I was like at the camp.” He\ clenched his paws. “I had no restraint, no remorse. I was an unfeeling monster.”

Nick looked Jacob in the eyes. “Just like your gang days, right?”

Both Jacob and Judy balked at that statement. Jacob was about to rebut, when he saw the look of\compassion in Nick’s eyes. “That’s right, Jacob. You weren’t a monster then; you were a confused,\angry youth who was taken advantage of by a narcissistic bastard. You had as much control over\who you hurt then, as you did at the park.” Nick then brought Jacob into a friendly head butt.\“Alright, enough talk. Let’s grab the grub and get back to the show. I think we’re coming up on the\two-parter about the Space-NAZI planet.”

Judy huffed in exasperation. “Sure, but first I need to hit the head.”

Jacob grabbed the platter. “Make sure Nick’s Cylon isn’t there; they’re sneaky like that, hiding in all\the chrome.”

…”

Jacob and Valerie had been offered use of the Grisleigh’s cabin for a week while the Grisleighs
attended the annual Inter-Tribal Council. The break from the city was greatly appreciated, but they still needed supplies. They decided to head to Beaverton, as Horace would be at the VAA Hall for a fundraiser dinner.

Jacob and Val were sitting with Horace, who was taking a short break from serving. “Turret! How’s the mayoral race coming? Or is that why you’re in Beaverton instead of stumping in the Savvy?”

Horace huffed at his diminutive friend. “Taking a break from ‘Focus-groups’ and Swinton’s attack mammals. Canidae would be a fine candidate if she didn’t have that power-hungry savage as a running mate.”

Val took a sip of her water and leaned in. “Rumor is she’s planning an attack-ad campaign against your father, citing his refusal to air her campaign ads against you as, ‘clear signs of corruption and nepotism’.”

“Yeah, he mentioned that at our last family dinner night, just before mom bopped him on the nose for talking shop at the table.” Horace got a far-off look for a moment. “It’s weird, but I get along better with my father as a peer than I ever did as his son.” He shook his head. “Mom just seems to be trying to make up for lost time by doting on me. It makes her happy though, so dad and I just let her. I wish she’d lay off though about…”

“…Grandchildren.” The three mammals spoke in unison, then started laughing.

Horace smiled and scooped some spaghetti up. “Well, if Swinton wants to go after dad to discredit me, she’ll be trying to punch way above her weight class. Besides, all my dirty little secrets aren’t secret.”

Jacob chewed thoughtfully. “She may try going after your service record; Zootopia isn’t exactly a veteran-friendly city.”

Val waved at Jacob with a fork. “Nah, she’s more likely to go after Harriet than his military service. She’s the low hanging fruit; young, eligible, wealthy bachelor decides to run for public office with a married cow as a running mate. The scandal all but writes itself.”

“Dad really would go after her then, hammer and tongs; the Hornsby’s have been family friends since he was a calf.”

Jacob smirked. “Maybe we could redesign your campaign poster with your ‘War-Face’ picture from Antakya. Do you still have that one Val?”

“Yeah, the SID declassified those photo’s while you were in the academy.”

Horace smirked at Jacob. “Then what we need to use is your, ‘conquering warrior’ photo; the one without Brisby swooning against it. I could have my focus groups turn it into a, ‘Come at me Bro’ meme.”

Jacob stopped eating and stared at the table. “That was… I did some horrifying things back then. You lucked out by getting out of there before the fighting got seriously dirty.”

Horace looked at his friend thoughtfully. “Did you commit any war crimes?”

“What? No!”

“Did you enjoy what you were doing?”
“No! I’m not a monster!” Jacob started at his own words, as Val rubbed his back.

Horace nodded. “That’s right, you’re not. You were a soldier, doing a soldier’s duty against an evil foe. An angry, bitter, spiteful soldier, but a soldier none the less.” The bull leaned back in his chair. “We’ve come a long way from the angry young mammals we were when we met, eh LaRue?”

Jacob snorted around his spaghetti. “What are we, a couple of old war horses playing chess in the park? That was five years ago. Besides, I’m still an ornery little cuss.”

“Not even close, Umbra.” Val patted Jacob’s thigh. “You’re positively docile compared to the mammal who led an Efrafan charge into the Nasiri.”

... 

The week away from the city had done wonders for Jacob’s general disposition, and Dr. Quinn had cleared him for administrative duty. With the worst of the chaos from the Thule Society’s short-lived reign of terror over, the ZATC had transitioned into an advisory board that met for a half-day every week. Jacob also used that as his day for checking in with the LoN offices, leaving the remainder of his time spent as a Liaison Officer in the Seventh precinct. He was finishing up briefing the various shift sergeants on the ongoing search for the last two high-profile fugitive Thule members.

“We now have names for these two: this is Der Autor, the Author. Albrecht Schultz, Germanic grey wolf, age 73. Notable characteristics are significant burn scars on his left manual paw and the left side of his muzzle including his eye and ear. He tends to disguise them with hats, gloves, and glasses, though the scarring does give him a pronounced sneer.” Several photos from various cameras in multiple cities were shown on the projection board.

Jacob put up a second picture showing a massive Black Forest wolf. Recently promoted Sgt. Zuckerman whistled at the picture. “Who is this gentle giant with pecks like melons and knees of fringe?” There was a quiet round of chuckles.

Jacob waited for the room to settle again. “This huge fellow is Der Schauspieler, the Actor. Gunter Hann, Melanistic grey wolf, age 30. Notable characteristics,” Jacob paused to look at Zuckerman, “…did I mention he’s huge?” This brought another round of chuckles. “We think he might have an allergy to a number of chemicals, including those in fur dyes, based on purchase patterns for rash treatments wherever he’s been sighted, which would explain his consistent lack of disguise. That, and he tends to stay out of sight unless ‘acting’. Reports from the various captured Society members who were at the WWW campsite all say they, ‘departed to update Die Adolf’. We believe they are still in the city.”

Sgt. Lupinski squinted at the images. “What makes you sure of that? I can’t imagine they want to stay here.” Her question got a round of nods from the assembled mammals.

“History; every time these two have hit a location, whether successful or not, they remain local for between three and six months to allow pressure to die down before trying to leave. This is why Det. Wilde at the First proposed our current course of action; the ZPD will engage in aggressive searches for these two for the next month, then slowly dialing the intensity back while ramping up surveillance of possible associated egress methods. If we catch them in the sweeps, great! If not, we continue surveillance until they try to move. Brief your officers to be on the lookout for these two. The rest is confidential; if your patrol mammals get antsy, send them my way.”

Jacob tuned out the remainder of the brief until dismissal, then followed Jean-Pierre to the detective’s office. The board that once held every detail of Jean-Pierre’s research into the Thule Society now had the face of a male maned wolf, as well as a world map with pins and lines connecting them. “New pet project? Looks like you’re tracking the guns the Thule were using.”

The detective glanced at his board. “More old history from my Legionnaire days.”

Jacob snorted. “You need to sell your story to Tinsel-Town; then you and Jeannette could move out to a private island or something.”

Jean-Pierre sat down and faced Jacob. “Not until I’m done writing that story. We’re still tracking down all the Thule Aspirants. I need you to work with Det. Grimes on sifting through everything CLEAN is giving us, so Lupinski and Zuckerman can sick the patrols on these punks. Damn.” Jean-Pierre pushed off his desk and rolled to the wall. “Part of me wants to be out there busting these little monsters, but I know if I was, I’d likely do something to get myself fired.”

Jacob was about to say something, when he saw a familiar anger in the puma’s eyes; not the misdirected anger of youth or the hatred that marked the Thule, but a righteous anger of knowing there was evil about and not being able to act against it. It was a look he had seen in his own eyes, in Anatolia, and during the Thule case. Where he hadn’t seen it, was in the mirror this morning. Maybe that was something to talk to Dr. Quinn about.

Jacob looked at the Detective and let out a sigh. “Yeah, I know what you mean.” He was about to leave when he paused. “By the way, How’s Winters doing? I heard one of the twins was colicky.”

“Lilly convinced Bill to let her parents have them for the next couple of days.”

Jacob quirked an eye. “Oh? Those two have big plans?”

Jean-Pierre chuckled lightly. “Yeah; dinner at the Coyote Moon, then catch the latest Star Wars movie, and then sleep through the night.”

…

It was a week since Jacob’s last meeting with Dr. Quinn. He had mentioned to her the little revelations he’d had with his various friends, including the conversation he’d had with DuPrey, and the realization that he had very strong feelings about every period in his life that was defined by violence, except the fight in the Thule Campground. She then hit him with what he considered a bombshell: Night Howlers had been proven to act on and suppress the emotion centers of the brain first, without impacting the ability to form new memories.

Jacob could only stare at that. “Why wouldn’t you just tell me that up front?!”

“You wouldn’t have believed me, and I didn’t want to risk just handing you a convenient emotional out. We need you to heal, not just scab over.”

With that, Jacob was back on the full active roster, though she did want him to come in once every two weeks for the next three months. Jacob was reminded of something Hannah Grisleigh had mentioned; that there were medical professionals, and then there were Medicine mammals. One fixed the body because that was their job, while the other healed the body, mind, and spirit because that was their calling. As far as Jacob was concerned, this Dr. Quinn really was a Medicine Mammal.

This night was also about spiritual healing; Rabbi Loewe had been brought home, and Jacob was invited to visit him. Jacob was under no illusion that the elder lion was on anything other than hospice care, though he was slightly surprised to find that Dusan had asked for him by name. When
he arrived at the Lowe household, he found more than a dozen of the Eweden of every species fussing about while Rabbi Loewe’s daughter, son-in-law, their children, and grandchildren all sat or stood in the living room.

Sasha Stood and greeted him. “**Mały Lew**, thank you for coming.”

“**M’saia , Pfeffarli-fa** DeLacour. I could hardly refuse, though I have no desire to impose. **Pfeffarahéan koith m’zyzéveer**, ‘Old lions deserve their rest’ as my people say, and your father has certainly earned his.”

She smiled beneficently. “Bless you, Jacob. You could never be an imposition. An unholy terror perhaps, but never an imposition. Come, my father is this way.”

She guided him to Dusan’s room and closed the door once he went inside. The aged lion was recumbent on a pile of pillows, his once powerful frame was wracked by the ravages of time, but his eyes were as bright and clear as fresh water.

“Ah, the mighty hero! Come closer. I am soon to meet God, and I would like to give him a true account of the mammal who has helped rid his earth of so vile a blight. If the Ephraimites had been such as you, they might still be among the tribes of Judea.” Jacob frowned slightly but came forward. “Oh now, none of that. I am old, and the most pass into God’s paws.”

“I’m not upset over your passing, **Pfeffa-Rah , M’saion Frith-Rah narn** : all things happen as and when God wills them. I just… it saddens me that your life should be book-ended by such evil. And I’ve read the Book of Judges. Jeptha had the right of it; my kinsmem needed to be stopped.”

“Hm, there is still some foolishness of youth in you. You may be right about that tribe of hares from Babylon, but as for my life?” Dusan leaned over. “I have seen the rise and fall of a terrible empire, and now I have seen it’s death throws, while my people, the Flock of almighty God, endure and flourish. I have seen this, because of you Jacob.” Dusan leaned back onto his pillows. “I understand the Efrafan’s have a tradition; a right for the dead?”

Jacob stood ramrod erect. “Yes, the **Methrah Bralante**. We sing of the accomplishment of the one passing into God’s paws, celebrating their life and guarding their grave so that **Keharr** may not claim the soul before **Inle-Rah** may do so.”

The old lion closed his eyes. “Then it would seem I owe you a story, if you are to give me a proper Efrafan send-off. Also, one moment. Sasha?”

“**Abba?**” The lioness opened the door and looked in.

The Rabbi gestured to Jacob. “I have decided that young Jacob here, shall sit **Shemira**.” He chuckled at her startled look. “He is fresh from driving the Thule from our city; I could ask for no finer sentry.”

Jacob did not leave for two hours. The next night, the family called Jacob to tell him that Rabbi Dusan Loewe had died in his sleep. Jacob was at their home soon after; in full regalia, and with his mother’s sword at her insistence. There he stood guard until the dawn. He was relieved when the **Chevra Kadisha** arrived to prepare the Rabbi.

His funeral service was, as Eweden tradition called for, brief and simple. The burial at Zootopia’s Meadowlands Habirewe Cemetery however, was staggering. The procession of cars was three miles long. There were several families traveling who were caught up in the parade by accident. However, when they arrived at the destination, no matter the species or denomination, they were welcomed by
the Eweden community. The event soon grew to the point that news teams came to determine what was happening.

Once his body was interred, Sasha stepped forward. “My father was a mammal of God, but he was also a mammal of the community. He has asked that one part of that community honor him in their way.” With that, she motioned to Jacob and stepped aside.

Thirty Efrafan and Lapino hares in their finest attire and sheathed swords stepped forward and surrounded the grave and family. His sister stood next to Sasha and translated for the crowd. Once arranged, Jacob looked at the crowd. “Sainte atha ma U Hrair, kan zyhlante hray u vahra ma hyaones.” (My heart has joined The Thousand, for my friend has stopped running today.) “Rabbi Loewe Pfeffa-rah a Frith rah varatha laynt.” (Rabbi Loewe was a lion and a Friend of God.) With that, he began to sing: he sang of Dusan’s birth in Prague and of his growing in the Flock. He sang of the trials of living in the Tannerman Era, and of how he led the Eweden community despite the rampant prejudice. He sang of the triumph of reason over fear, and the end of that era. He sang of a life filled with community and love and family; a life triumphant over the Thule Society. Jacob sang for thirty minutes straight, while the Efrafan and Lapino chorus intoned, ‘Ms’aison Pfeffa-Rah’. When he had finished, he bowed his head. His voice never broke, though tears poured down his muzzle.

Jacob’s voice called out, strained but clear. “Hrarail nildelai, a dayn Keharr halme kimthile.” (The birds are circling, and Keharr comes to claim his prize.) “Hayessi mitéathpli u zorn?” (Who will stand in defense of the fallen?) Thirty hares simultaneously drew their blades; swords of every type and make and era throughout Europa and Asia Minor. “Very well. I give it you strictly in charge; this is now holy ground and we shall defend it until the appointed hour. We are Efrafan, the Sons of Efraf.”

The assembled hares cried out in unison, “Ms’aison Efrafil!” The grave of Dusan Loewe remained guarded for three days and nights, until the night of the new moon.

Chapter End Notes

The empires of the ancient world were not always at war with one another. Indeed, kings often traded directly, as such gift giving could strengthen ties and prevent wars. One instance where historians believed this practice backfired dramatically was in the gifting by the Nemean Lion kings, of a Hrair-lion of war hares called Ephraimites to the Lion Pharaohs of ancient Kemet's 17th Dynasty.

At around the same time that the slave/warrior hares were being integrated into the Kemet Imperial army, the commander of said force was a Habirewe who had been adopted into the royal family in order to keep the peace. The so called, "Lion of Judah" saw an opportunity to usurp the Pharonic kingdom for himself. There is some dispute, especially amongst biblical scholars, as to whether these Ephraimites were responsible for the legendary 'Seventh Plague' of the 'Seven Plagues of Egypt'. What has been found, is that they fled with the Habirewe into the Levant when the young Pharaoh Seqenenre Tao II was found murdered.

In 1930, archaeologist John Garstagg found evidence of collapsed tunnels under Tell es-Sultan, the present day site of ancient Jericho. Within those tunnels were found the
remains of at least one hare in armor similar to what one would expect to find on an animal serving the Habirewe King Joshua. Again, biblical scholars have strongly debated the evidence, though more temporal thinkers believe it likely that Joshua's horn and drum march was meant to distract Jericho's defenders from the sound of Ephraimite sappers under their walls.

The last time anyone finds mention of the Ephraimites is in the Book of Judges. When Judea had finished an Amonitish war, the Ephraimites felt they were not properly compensated, and openly rebelled. Jephthah, who was the Judge of Israel at the time, was forced to put down this revolt. The destruction of the Ephraimites was so complete, that outside of Biblical mention, and one cryptic trade reference dating back 3500 years ago, there has been no memory of these Ephraimites amongst mammals since then.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

As the light of the past has illuminated your path west, so too shall your light show the way for the future. Jacob begins his new life.

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Chapter Notes

One of the key themes I intend to address in this story is language, and its importance in cultural identity. There is copious use of culturally specific language throughout this story, especially among the Efrafans and their kin. I have derived this language from the site 'Bits-n'-Bobstones' (http://bitsnbobstones.watershipdown.org/lapine/overview.html).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The wedding ceremony for Katarin Yasmin Rautha and Ilkin Kadir Demirci, who was now Rautha had been magnificent. There had been some haggling between the Rauthas and Lily Winters over the wedding dress; Reynard had wanted to make the dress as a gift simply for the chance to make it, despite never having met the Rautha matriarch. Katarin had wanted to pay for the dress, but eventually the Rauthas agreed to pay for the cost of materials, if Katarin agreed to pose in the dress for a fashion magazine to help promote Reynard. This would also double as the wedding photo shoot. Katarin and Kadir both agreed to have Jacob serve as Koumbaros. He almost broke down crying when he saw how happy his mother was, taking her first steps around the altar with Kadir as a married couple; this was a far cry from what his grandfather described of Katarin’s civil marriage ceremony to Nathan Raibert.

While the rite itself was for family and close friends, everyone who knew Jacob had wanted to come to the reception. This resulted in the FCDC holding a pot luck affair in Abram Square proper to try and support the crowd, rather than trying to find a caterer or a space. It looked as if the entire population of Foxburough Parish had come to wish the new couple well. Naz Aksoy, still half-heartedly fending off the attentions of Giuseppe Alagona, was once again playing chaperone to the growing crowd of small children, though now she was being helped by a small team of mammals including Viviane Wilde. Rumor had it that Naz and Viviane were looking to open a daycare center, and were in negotiations with the Adame’s to lease one of the smaller buildings on Upper Canal St.

Half of the First and Seventh precincts were also in attendance, as well as several of Jacob’s acquaintances through Nick and Judy. Catherine Montaigne was in fine form and flirting up a storm with a thoroughly flustered Ben Clawhauser, while the Fangmeyers prowled the crowd in search of
love for the afternoon. Even Percy Dovetail, the effete makeup artist of the First Precinct was there, though most people were shocked to meet his wife who was one of Reynard’s most prominent models. Jean-Pierre and Jeannette were there as well, though Jeannette could only make a brief appearance due to ongoing work on the ever-growing RICO case against the Thule Society members in custody. Likewise, Horace was not in attendance, as he was at the first round of electoral debates. He assured Jacob and Val that it would not be a drunken political debate, much to their dismay.

Nick, Zib, Judy and Dickie joined up with Jacob and Valerie at a Gazebo on the green outside St. Augustin’s. Nick plopped down onto the bench with an arm and tail lovingly draped over Zib who returned the gesture. “Mom has been exhausting with her, ‘hints’ about grandchildren. I really hope this daycare thing works out for her. It’ll hopefully distract her from pestering me and Zib.” Said vixen gently jabbed him in the ribs. He responded by nuzzling her. “I didn’t say I disagree with the sentiment, it’s just exhausting trying to fend off her questions.”

Judy chuckled and shook her head. “Take it from the rabbit, Slick; being surrounded by little ones will only make it worse. You two best get to work appeasing her.”

Zib blew a raspberry at the rabbit couple. “You two just want us to act as a distraction for your own parents.”

Judy nodded imperiously. “You’re damn skippy we do!”

Jacob waved a finger at the saucy doe. “Language, Hopps; you’re on Holy Ground. I will go inside and get a Thurible with which to bludgeon you back to purity.”

Nick shook his head in mock dismay. “What is it with you long-ears and the hitting. Do you just intend to punch your way through life, Jacob?”

“Well, sure.” Jacob shrugged. “It’s worked on Thules, fools, thugs, NAZI’s and Nasiri. I don’t see any reason to stop now.”

“You’ll need to taper off a little at least.” Val stroked on of Jacob’s ears. “My sister Esmeralda sent me a text this morning; Mare Coneja is arranging a visit in about a month. She was going to try for next week, but I convinced her to wait until after your mother’s honeymoon.”

Nick smirked at Jacob’s flustered expression. “Better break out the good armor for the old Battle-axe.” As soon as the words left his muzzle, he gaped with everyone else for a moment, aghast at what he had just said.

Val looked sternly at the todd. “My mother is not a battle-axe.” Nick hung his head in shame. “She’s far too blunt an instrument to be called that. She wields guilt like a great stone cudgel.”

Everyone snorted a chuckle at that, though Nick still looked sheepish. “Still, I shouldn’t have said that. I am sorry. What can I do to make it up?”

Val thought for a moment. “Contacts; I’m looking to do a piece on the dispossessed in the city, focusing on the vulnerability of that population. I have my own sources that say a number of the Thule Blooding victims were homeless mammals that were simply scooped off the street. I want to bring attention to them, force the city to acknowledge its own no matter what strata in society.”

Nick nodded. “I can do that, but you’re going to have to go to them, and they’re not in the best parts of the Polis.”

Val smirked triumphantly and pulled a folding knife from her purse. “Well since I finally got my
Navaja back from the cops, I should do fine.” She glanced at Jacob to see his slightly drawn expression. “I will be, and I’ll be careful.”

Jacob squeezed her. “I know; you wouldn’t be the mammal I love if you let fear stop you from going after your dreams, and I absolutely won’t have that.”

While most of the mammals were ‘aww’ing at the schmaltzy moment, Dickie looked thoughtfully at the blade. “You Efrafans sure are big on your blades.”

Val looked at the buck. “What this? This is just a knife I bought when I was 13. My sister inherited Avellaner’s Killij.”

Judy looked thoughtful for a moment. “You know, I always wondered about the whole sword thing, Jacob. You have two, Val’s family has one, and the news on Rabbi Loewe’s funeral showed like, 30 armed hares. What is all that?”

Jacob settled into his seat. “Well, that’s sort of the story of Efrafa itself, if you’re willing to sit through it.”.

Dickie smiled knowingly while pulling out his phone to record the story; his mother would have his ears if he failed to get her a copy of this story. “You’re going to need the practice for when you two start telling your own children.”

Jacob glanced around and saw his friend’s rapt attention. “Alright. The story of Efrafa starts where the story of the line of Ephraim ends, during the campaign of Alexander the Great against the Achaemenid King Darius of the line of Nemean Kings. Once, so they say, Campion, first son of Ruth who was called Rautha, sat astride his ostrich. His shortbow, sword and lance were by his side, ready to be drawn at a moment’s notice. His general, Ephraim of the line of Ephraim who was called Sthrath-rah, or ‘General Woundwort’ sat astride his own mount next to him and looked down onto the encampment in the Plain of Issus. From far below they could faintly hear a booming sound, as of a vast host of lions.”

The Beginning

Chapter End Notes

I would like to thank everyone who has joined me on this journey into my vision of the world of Zootopia. It is my hope that you have been as entertained by reading it as I was in writing it. While Jacob’s story is hardly finished, I would like to say that there are so many stories within this world that have yet to be told: the history of other portions of the world, the lives of the Nations, States and Polis’ which Zootopia interacts with, and the mammals who live in them. I could never hope to tell even a fraction of those stories; but if you feel inspired by what you have read, if you feel there is a story to tell, then in the words of our favorite police rabbit, "I implore you, try!"

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