Chapter 10:

Serathin continued to sit and wait in the bottom of the elevator, looking at the doors that he would soon be breaching as he looked down at his watch.  By this point the concert had likely been going for at least an hour and change, though he had no way of knowing since even the sound of the loud music couldn’t reach where he was.  Though he wished he could take out his game and continue to play he knew that as soon as he heard the first signal he would have to move quick. Draggor said that the window of operation wouldn’t be held open for long and he had to be ready to move as soon as he heard it.

But as time continued to tick by and no signal came he began to wonder if the plan got so mucked up that there would be nothing.  What if Draggor wasn’t able to bypass what he needed so that he could sneak inside undetected, or they couldn’t get the guards to be distracted enough that they were still watching the monitors of the vault?  Either way it was a bad sign and the sabrewolf began to wonder if he was going to have to bail. When he looked down at his watch he sighed, deciding to wait another half an hour before making his way up and out of the elevator shaft.

Meanwhile as the concert continued to go on Alkali paced back and forth in the skybox despite attempting to not look nervous.  With no real way of contacting his team except for rushed bathroom texts and checking his phone occasionally he had no idea of what was going on.  As the concert started to wind down Uncle Kage likely already had started the party in the main hall in order to help them with their cover story, but without him there it was up to Draggor and Xander to coordinate in order to get Serathin where he needed to go and tip off Zen.  Until he could rejoin them he would just have to stand there and sip his tequila, waiting to hear what happened.

Back at the hotel room Draggor was hard at work going through the security algorithms, not only to continue to legitimize his account in their programs, but also to track down a group of three security guards in particular.  He also had to keep track of the party, watching people begin to filter in so that they could hang out with Uncle Kage, and wait until the end of the concert. With the fact that they had patched into their security cameras he found himself with the ability to loop the cameras, but Serathin didn’t know that and they couldn’t start the fireworks until the end of the performance unless they wanted to ruffle a lot of feathers.

As he typed he suddenly heard the sound of cheering and looked over to see that Fox and Pepper had finished the last song of their set.  “Please no encores,” Draggor said as he looked down at his watch. “You’re already running long, I can only imagine the hybrid is climbing up the walls by now… perhaps literally.”

Much to his relief he saw them moving off the stage after thanking the fans for being there, which meant the concert was over.  “Call Ronnie,” Draggor said to his phone, hearing it ring a few times before it was picked up. “Alright, we’re going to go now.  Get ready to start the fireworks show.’

“Now?” Ronnie replied, looking at the switchboard that Zen had set up before he left, the lights flashing at him seemingly at random before he went back to the phone.  “Zen’s not here right now and he only gave me a brief description of how to work this thing, plus I’ve been hanging upside-down for a few hours and I think the blood is still pooled around my brain a bit.”

“We can’t wait,” Draggor stated as he began to loop the cameras.  “All Xander could get on the napkin he wrote on was the important parts of the new plan, and trying to arrange a new time to act wasn’t one of them.  Since Miko is onto the party as a means of distracting him we need to make it look like the fireworks are for the concert, which means you need to start setting things off now and slide a window-rattler in there!”

Ronnie felt himself swallowing hard as he looked down at the dozens of switches that were on the board, then at the forest of tubes that surrounded him.  Though he knew there wasn’t a self-destruct switch it felt like there was, and that flicking the wrong one would blow him to pieces in a very colorful display.  But he was told that he had a job to do, not only to signal the start of the incursion into the vault, but also to help legitimize Uncle Kage’s party and keep him out of trouble.  This didn’t stop the eastern dragon from putting one finger in his ear while leaning down and putting his finger on the first switch.

A few seconds later Alkali was still in the skybox when he saw the first firework go up in the air, which caused everyone that was filing their way out of the convention center to look up in awe.  With the convention center roof being glass it made for the perfect backdrop as everyone looked up and pointed as the brightly colored sparks that filled the air. Even Pepper and Fox came back out with they heard the loud pop, which was followed by a second one and then a third.  When the fourth one launched in the air the violet flower of flames was accompanied by a large bang that caused everyone to jump, even the bartender in the skybox the ferret occupied.

The boom was loud enough that it caused Serathin to look up, then pick himself up and immediately begin to feel around the elevator doors.  Since they were security doors they wouldn’t just be able to be pulled open, luckily with most safety-compliant areas there was a means to disable the lock in case of fire, and once he found the switch it was just a quick override and the doors slid open.  It revealed a plain white hallway that stretched from the elevator to the vault, the only things there being a set of cameras overlooking the entire area and shiny steel door of the vault itself.

“I wonder when the lasers come out to cut you in half…” Serathin mused to himself as he continued to look around with his bright green eyes.  As he slowly made his way inside he did see something along the wall that caused him to pause, leaning in to investigate the pinhole-sized opening in the otherwise smooth tile.  “Well, looks like the security plans were right and he opted for a more traditional laser instead, time for round two.”

Back in the hotel room Draggor was busy fighting another firewall, but this wasn’t one that was part of the casino.  Instead it was for the local power grid, specifically the one that Miko had set up to keep power to the vault itself.  Since Serathin mused that they wouldn’t just have a means to turn off the lights down there he would have to do it for him, typing in various commands to get into the controls for the power box of the casino.  It took him a bit longer than he thought but seeing the fireworks continue to go up into the air he knew that Ronnie was taking his time to try and draw them out as long as possible.

The second he was able to get into the system he radioed to Ronnie to let off the second window-rattler.  The demon was answered a few seconds later with another loud, rattling boom that caused all his computers to shake slightly.  “So far so good,” he said with a sigh as he watched the real footage going on in the vault security highway, seeing Serathin standing there as he got ready to cut the power.  “Let’s hope it stays that way.”

When Serathin heard the explosion of the second firework he immediately put on a pair of green-tinted glasses and pulled out a small aerosolizer.  As he flicked on the disk the invisible gas began to pour out of it, though it didn’t stay that way for long as he was suddenly plunged into darkness.  The second the lights went out the gas showed up as an opaque smoke through the lenses of his glasses, though as it began to fill the hallway it glowed when it passed by the small hole he had found earlier.  It wasn’t long before he saw multiple beams in the hallway, a grin spreading on his face as the sensors caused the molecules in the gas to become excited.

“Love this part,” Serathin whispered to himself as he mapped the fastest way through the sensor arcs.  Though at first it appeared that the security company that installed them had gotten most of the areas covered he saw the areas with weak or no overlap, which consisted primarily to be around the ceiling.  He quickly pulled his gloves out and rubbed them together, making sure they still were still sticky before bracing himself against the wall. Luckily for him the hallway itself was rather narrow, which meant that he didn’t have to put any suction cups or get a lead going so that he could move to the other side of the sensor grid.

About halfway through the lights suddenly turned back, momentarily blinding the hybrid before he shook his head enough to get the glasses to tip up onto his forehead.  When he looked down he could only see the shine of the floor beneath him, the highlighted sensors no longer there as he carefully made his way forward once more. At this point there was no turning back, he thought as he tried to remember where the next arc of the sensor was to put his hand against the wall.  At this point his arms had started to shake from exertion as he slowly started to move his feet and slide them along the wall once more, no longer knowing if his suspended body was still over the wall of sensors or not.

Though he wanted to get all the way to the other side of the wall Serathin suddenly felt his hand slip.  He used what little momentum he had to roll forward, still landing on his feet as he waited for the sound of alarms to blare.  As the seconds ticked by and nothing seemed to happen he breathed a sigh of relief and stood up, going towards the final challenge.  Though the door itself was thick the metal that surrounded the thumbprint scanner that was needed to enter wasn’t, the sabrewolf carefully taking off the casing so that he could put his own decrypter in there to work out the password.  Even though it was a biometric lock it still relied on codes and patterns in order to work.

“Serathin is at the vault door,” Draggor reported as he watched the sabrewolf continue to work on the entry pad.  “I can’t tell how long he has but it looks like he’s going to break in pretty soon.”

“Well that’s one part of the plan that’s done,” Xander replied as he sat outside of the casino, watching the fireworks as he waited.  “Are you sure that you don’t want me to do this next part once Zen makes contact with Serathin? I’m more than willing to go in there and get this guy for us.”

“We can’t risk the facial recognition software dinging you,” Draggor replied as he glanced over at the cameras that were focused mostly on Alkali who remained in the skybox to watch the fireworks.  “Alkali is still serving the purpose of keeping their eyes on him and I have to stay here. Don’t worry though, once the call goes out we’ll make sure that he’s in position.”

Xander sighed and said agreed, then hung up his phone.  As he began to walk down the strip in order to alleviate any potential suspicion he saw something that caused him to pause.  It appeared that the concert and subsequent fireworks display had brought the attention of the news, the dragon walking up to the three that were on the corner of the street that appeared to be reporting.  He waited for them to finish, then went up to the reporter and introduced himself.

“Hey man, I’m Chris,” the pink rabbit said.  “Just out here covering some fluff piece for the news because I can’t get any action out here ever since I threw a microphone at my producer.”

“You threw a microphone at your producer?” Xander repeated in surprise.

“Nah,” Chris replied with a chuckle.  “I just like to start off like that because it makes me sound like a bad-ass, I’m just new to the beat so I get all the stuff that the others don’t want to cover.  I mean I know of two guys right now covering a double murder off the interstate, lucky.”

“Yeah, sounds like it,” Xander replied.  “Anyway… I was wondering if you wanted to hear a hot tip that I got from, you know, the street.  I heard something is about to go down with Miko Maus and the Golden Cheese casino. Some big story with the Securities and Exchange Expo.”

The lapine looked at his cameraman and boom mike operator, then back at the blue dragon.  “Normally I’d say that you’re full of it,” he said bluntly. “But since I had to cover this thing since it got here I would love to see it end with a bang.  Alright, I’m in, where is this all taking place?”

“Inside the casino itself,” Xander replied as he pointed to the front doors.  “You’re going to want to get in right away, I have the feeling once this goes down they’re going to shut everything down.  I happen to know that there is a party that you could probably pretend to cover, just tell the cockroach in charge that you know me and he’ll let you hang there for a while.”

“Excellent,” Chris replied as he shook Xander’s hand.  “I hope this is true, man, I smell a journalism award coming my way.”

Xander nodded and waved off the news crew, then went back to his phone to call Draggor again.  “We got a little extra boost to the ferret’s plan,” Xander exclaimed. “How is our thief handling the vault, and is Zen ready on the other side?”

“Zen told me he has about ten minutes until he’s completely set up,” Draggor replied as he watched the sabrewolf on the camera pulled the wires out of the system and pulled out another device,  “ and Serathin has probably about two minutes before he’s on the other side of the vault. Hopefully he doesn’t decide to plug in the original USB I gave him before we can get him the message.”

Back in the security hall Serathin had just hooked up his decoder to the second part of the lock, an input panel with what was likely a random code.  As he waited for his computer to do the work he took a second to examine the rest of the door to make sure that there were no other redundant systems to catch him.  His search proved fruitful as he found what appeared to be a last minute addition to the door, a groove drilled into the metal with what he gathered was probably a magnetic sensor on the end of it.  If he had opened the door it would have broken the connection between the magnet and the steel and likely set off alarms throughout the whole casino.

“What do they think this is?” Serathin asked no one as he pulled out a small, flat square of metal from his pocket and slid it into the area where the groove met the door.  ‘Amateur hour?” After he had secured the dummy switch into the trap he heard a beep and saw that his decoder had found the password, looking at it before punching it into the keypad that now hung a few inches below.  Once he did that the first light turned green and then he fed the digitized pattern into the thumbprint scanner and unlocked that one as well.

“Jackpot!”  the sabrewolf said as the door swung open and revealed the inner vault, most of the walls having barred gates with stacks of cash behind them, while the rest of the areas were safety deposit boxes that contained the valuables of those rich enough to store them.  Though it was extremely tempting to just start going to town he knew that the real target was the black box and establishing a connection so that Draggor could get the data they needed.

“Now if I was a secret safe within a safe hidden by a psychopathic rodent where would I be…” he mused to himself as he looked around the vault, assessing the security of each area.  “Smart money would be where the money is, but that would be where normal burglars would hit first, so he would probably not want to put it there... Same for the safety deposit boxes, in fact the only place where someone robbing the place wouldn’t go is the logo…”

The sabrewolf tilted his head as he looked at the back wall of the vault, seeing the giant gold plaque that was the callsign of the Golden Cheese casino hanging there.  For someone robbing the place it would be easily overlooked and that was exactly what Miko wanted. As he began to step inside though he was careful not to touch the floor, looking up at the vaulted ceiling of the room.  “There’s no way that’s three floors,” Serathin mused with a frown on his face. “Looking at four minimum, who builds a vault like this…”

Serathin sighed and grabbed the hand crossbow out of his bag, firing it at the opposite wall as the tether connected to it was long enough for him to retain a grip on it.  After giving a few experimental tugs to make sure the suction had fully adhered to the smooth stone wall he threaded the rope into another suction dart and fired it at the ceiling.  Fear gripped the sabrewolf as he watched it streak towards his target, losing momentum with every second. If it fell down now the hybrid doubted that he would be able to catch it in time and it would activate the pressure sensitive floor and alert anyone watching.

After what seemed like ages the dart hit the wall with a loud noise and stuck there, Serathin breathing a sigh of relief as he took the last one and stuck it over the vault door.  Once he was finished he took the pulley system out and attached it to the harness he had been wearing, securing it in place before attaching it to the rope he just draped over the vault.  “Well, this is either going to be awesome,” he said as he readied himself, “or I’m going to fall immediately and smash my face open so that I can lay there bleeding until security comes to arrest me.”

With one last breath for confidence Serathin began to pull himself up the hanging rope, feeling it tense as he put all his body weight onto it.  When it became clear that he wasn’t going to be falling anytime soon he began to climb up it to where the ceiling dart hung, carefully transfering the lead from one end to the other before sliding back down to the other side.  When he got to the opposite wall he connected another rope to the ratchet system on his belt and lowered himself until he was hanging where someone would be standing. As he looked over the cheese wheel it appeared that it was bolted to the wall, and even if he could find a way to get his fingers underneath it he couldn’t imagine pulling it off with his current strength.

“Going to need some serious tools to get this thing off,” Serathin mused as he hung there, looking at his reflection in the shiny surface.  “But that can’t be the way to do it because Miko needs access, unless…” Slowly the sabrewolf took his hands and pressed them against the smooth surface of the gold, then with the proper application of pressure in the right direction caused the cheese wheel icon to rotate.  “Clever mouse…”

Serathin continued to spin the cheese to rotate it until the missing wedge was over the bottom of the wall, which revealed the hidden safe and the lock to open it.  “A retina scanner,” the thief mused as he pulled out his phone and tapped on an app with the icon of an eye. “Hopefully they haven’t fixed this little security exploit...”

When the sabrewolf tapped the start button on the icon images of numerous eyes began to flash across the screen, then Serathin held the screen up to the retina display.  After a few seconds the lock screen turned from red to green, the safe door opening up for him. “Hello beautiful,” the hybrid said as he pulled out the box with one hand and fished in his pocket for the other.  “Alright Pandora, tell me your secrets.”

“He’s about to open the box!”  Draggor shouted into the phone as he watched Serathin look around for the USB that he had given him.  “He doesn’t know that he’s not supposed to?”

“It was electrical tape and chalk!” Xander shouted back.  “You’re lucky he knows anything about the plan at all!”

The demon pulled his hands down against his face before he pressed a button to switch over to Zen.  “Hey, I don’t care if it’s ready or not,” he told the fox. “You need to get in contact with him now!”

“I’m not done calibrating yet!” the fox shouted back.  “If it’s too loud it’s going to set off the sensors!”

“You didn’t tell us it could do that!” Xander yelled.

“Everybody stop SHOUTING!” Draggor practically screamed, everyone remaining silent.  “Listen, in ten seconds the hybrid is going to plug my program into the black box and we’re all screwed.  Either start it up or start running.”

“Alright…” Zen said as he flipped on the switch to the speakers that he had connected to the metal wall.  “Hope he doesn’t jump easily...”

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Back in the vault Serathin sighed as he continued to search his pockets for the USB that was in the original bag, growing angrier with every second that he couldn’t find it.  When he did finally find it he held it up in triumph. “Serathin!” a voice seemed to shout right at him, causing him to fumble both the box and the drive before he stretched to grab them both before they fell to the floor.  “Don’t put the drive in the box!”

The sabrewolf, who had gotten upside down but still had both items in his hands, hung there in confusion as he realized who the voice belonged to.  “Zen, is that you?” he asked. “I didn’t think that we’d be able to talk to each other before you blew out the vault wall.”

“Listen, I can’t hear you on the other side of this,” Zen replied after half a minute of pause.  “Draggor is attempting to translate what you’re saying through lip reading, but I hooked up this system to reverberate through the wall so you could hear me.  Uses similar tech to sonar, was a real pain in the tail to switch out.”

Serathin’s body began to slowly turn as he hung there while trying to process what was being said to him.  “So… you’re not going to blow up the wall,” he stated, trying to look over at one of the cameras as best he could.  “We’re not going to crack the black box either. What exactly are we doing here, then?”

“Miko knows what the real target is,” Zen replied.  “While we’re not sure what you’re saying, we are basically telling you that we have to make it so that a robbery never took place here.”

“Are you serious!?”  Serathin shouted, spinning around his harness as he accidently kicked the wall.  “Why am I even here hanging from the walls and ceiling if we’re not going to steal anything!?”

“Okay, that we could definitely translate,” Zen stated.  “We still need you to be there because you have to find out what kind of key they’d use to check if the box is still valid.  Once you do that Draggor can figure out what to do from there. He says he put a data check device in the second bag along with the uniform, you need to plug it in and then read to the demon what the serial number is.”

Serathin looked back at the other side where he had left the two bags at the vault door, sighing loudly before climbing the ropes back to the other side.  Between the hallway he had to climb over and the ropes the sabrewolf was starting to get worn down, but kept strong as he finally got to the vault door and disconnected himself.  Once his feet were firmly on the ground he rifled through the bag before he found a larger square rectangle with a viewscreen on it. Shrugging he plugged it in and watched as the screen came to life, cycling through a large number of letters and numbers before it settled on string of fifteen numbers and letters.

“Awesome,” Serathin said before looking over at one of the cameras.  “Alright Draggor, this appears to be an Apex Series nine-thousand fifty.  Got it?”

Once more the sabrewolf jumped slightly when he heard Zen’s voice as though it was coming out of the wall next to him.  “Draggor said that you said it was an Adex series five-thousand. Was that right?”

“No!” Serathin replied as he motioned at the camera that was wrong.  “It’s an Apex Series nine-thousand and fifty!”

“Oh, he got it now!”  Zen replied about a minute later.  “It’s an Asex Series six-thousand ninety!”

“C’mon man…” the sabrewolf said dejectedly before he grabbed one of his suction darts and hoisted himself on the wall, putting the screen of the device against the camera.  After a few seconds Zen rattled off the correct number and Serathin nodded, giving a thumbs up to the camera before sitting down and resting for a second.

“Alright, so now that we know what the serial number is what do we do next?” Serathin asked before taking a drink of water.

“Well now that we have the serial number Draggor is going to get something ready,” Zen explained through the wall.  “Now this part is very important and I’ll walk you through what needs to be done, but the first thing that we need you to do is put everything back where you found it and make sure it looks like no one actually broke in.”

“Oh come on!” Serathin shouted, having to cup his hand under his mouth to catch the water coming out of his mouth from the spit take.

“Sorry, it has to be done,” Zen said through the wall as the sabrewolf sat there fuming.  “Oh… and you’re also going to have to set off an alarm and get yourself caught on camera.”

“What…” Serathin said before his eyes widened as the gravity of what was just said caused his brows to furrow and his fangs to bear.  “WHAT?!”

Draggor sat on the other side of the screen watching what he assumed was a string of obscenities and insults from the sabrewolf, though he still couldn’t hear any of them.  “It appears that we may have to explain the plan to him in a minute when he has a chance to calm down,” the demon explained to the fox on the other end of the line. “As soon as he does make sure you go through the details so I can make my home movie.  Then after that I can finally put this thing to rest.”

“Sounds like a plan to me,” Zen replied.  “It’s a shame that I can’t blow up a casino vault, but I suppose this will have to do.  At least I got to put on a pretty good fireworks show.”

“That’s right,” Draggor said, taking out a USB drive with a light on the end of it and looking at it before plugging it into his computer.  “The second you’re done get up here, I don’t know how much time we’re going to have before this all falls off the rails, but I imagine we’re not going to have a lot of time when Miko realizes we’re inside his vault.”