Chapter 8:

Seven hours later Alkali sat in the dim room of the casino, though exactly where he wasn’t sure of as he had been dragged in rather roughly by the two very large men that had cuffed him only minutes before.  Though he made sure not to struggle the ferret still found himself on the receiving end of some rather rough treatment as the cuffs he wore were undone only for a few seconds before they were weaved through the armrests of the metal chair and reconnected.  When it was clear that he was secured in place and not going anywhere the two left, letting the ferret sit there with only a single lightbulb hanging overhead to provide illumination.

He wouldn’t sit there alone for long; however, as the door soon opened once more, the familiar face of Miko Maus smirking at him as he walked in and closed the door behind him.  “Alkali Bismuth,” he said as he went up to him, circling around the chair he was attached to. “I have to say, I was slightly surprised by the boldness of your actions, even if they were quite stupid in the end.  Did you honestly think that you were just going to waltz in here and steal something as important as my reputation away from me?”

“Huh… thought you would be more concerned over your stuff, but to each their own I guess,” Alkali replied with a shrug.  “Though I admit… I am rather confused why you had your guys beat me up and bring me here.”

“I’m placing you under citizen’s arrest,” Miko stated simply as he went over to one of the shadows and pulled out a chair.  “Backed by the Securities and Exchange Commission that you attempted to steal from about an hour ago. I’ve already taken the liberty of calling them, they should be here in a few minutes.”

“A few minutes?” Alkali repeated, giving the mouse an impressed look.  “I suppose they are staying at your hotel, makes it easy. Won’t give you a lot of time to tell me why I’m here.”

“Give it up, Alkali,” Miko said as he threw his arms up in the air.  “There are no cameras here to give a show to, so you may as well confess.  I already have more than enough evidence in my vault that shows you stole the black box.”

Alkali rolled his eyes and shifted in his chair in a vain attempt to get comfortable.  “I don’t know about you, but I was enjoying your casino and the concert,” the ferret stated.  “As far as I know I didn’t steal anything, perhaps you can tell me exactly what I did that has gotten your fur all bristled up?”

Miko just laughed and sat back in his chair.  “If you insist,” he said as he pulled out a tablet, showing the face of a sabrewolf on it.  “Do you happen to know this individual?”

“Uh… that’s Arkham, the guy that worked for Uncle Kage,” Alkali replied as he squinted at Serathin’s picture before letting out a gasp.  “Did he rob you!?”

“You know very well he did!”  Miko shouted back before coughing and straightening his tie.  “So here’s what I believe happened, and feel free to chime in if I get something wrong here.  I believe that you arranged this little after-party that Uncle Kage had, though I don’t have the means to link him to this yet, and using that as a cover you had your little friend here break into MY vault and steal the black box as well as a number of other things.  Now was stealing the other items part of the plan, or did his greed get the better of him?”

Miko watched as Alkali just shook his head, grinning as he watched the ferret slowly crack under the pressure.  Before the ferret could deny anything he pulled up the archived footage of the vault, revealing the stills of the sabrewolf opening quickly opening boxes and stuffing his pockets full of cash and other valuables.  Even though Alkali continued to deny that he didn’t know what was going on he continued to keep his head away from looking at them, hands straining slightly at the cuffs that were around his wrists. When they got to the end of the slide show it revealed a full video that showed Serathin breaking into a hidden panel at the back of the vault.

“I think this movie is going to play really good at your trial,” Miko replied as let Alkali watch as Serathin opened the secondary safe, only to hear someone off-camera shouting at him to get down on the ground.  “I know that you can’t see them but those are my security agents I had waiting for him to finish so that I could catch him red-handed. I have to admit that I really enjoy this next part the most, which is your implication in the whole mess.”

Alkali watched as Serathin pulled something out of his pocket and pressed it, the vault door swinging shut as the voices that were shouting at him suddenly increased in panic before the door closed completely.  “Hey Alkali, I’m in trouble here,” Serathin broke the silence after he had pulled out a radio. “Get Zen to blow the vault now, we have to go!”

A few seconds later the screen shifts to multiple views of the cameras shaking and going out, all of them turning to static.  “That’s when your little fox friend decided to blow a hole through the wall of my vault,” Miko explained as he took the screen and put it away.  “Not exactly an elegant exit, though it’s perfect if you were trying to make it look like the black box wasn’t the primary target. Of course if you’re not going to tell me the whole story, perhaps I can get another to tell me.”

Miko snapped his fingers and the door opened once more, this time two different guards bringing the squirming demonspawn into the room while keeping his cuffed hands behind his back.  Just like with Alkali they got him into a chair that a third person brought in, strapping him down despite his struggles. Once they were sure Draggor wasn’t able to escape one of them left while the other two stayed behind.  Draggor and Alkali looked at each other, then at the mouse who just sat there with his hands behind his head.

“In case you were wondering why I still had all that lovely footage,” Miko explained with a chuckle.  “The second we realized that the data from the servers of your brokerage firm were tampered with we knew that you were working with someone that was good with computers.  Perhaps next time you won’t hack a system from the hotel room that your partner was registered at.”

“You were the one that cut off my internet?” Draggor asked, Miko continuing to grin as he nodded.  “You bastard, I was halfway through watching The Notebook when you turned it off.” Both Alkali and Miko looked at him with a slight frown, the demon looking at both of them before sighing and rolling his eyes.  “Fine, it wasn’t The Notebook… it was porn.”

“Enough!” Miko shouted.  “As soon as the SEC comes in you can lie to them all you want, I’m done with your shenanigans.  We’re going to catch this Serathin and Zen as well as scour the footage for anyone else that might have even thought about helping you in this farce.  Who knows, maybe you can all go to the same prison and talk about how badly you failed.”

Just then the tablet that Miko had put down began to buzz, the mouse picking it up and looking at it before his grin returned.  “Looks like you’ll be joined by the others sooner than we thought,” he said as he once more turned the screen around to show Serathin and Zen fall out of the car that had crashed into a light pole, the street light camera showing them attempting to crawl away along with a rabbit from the driver’s seat before they are taken down by police officers on the scene.  “That was uploaded from our security team just a few moments ago, looks like they didn’t get as far as they thought. I imagine they’ll be joining us soon so that the SEC can deal with you all at once.”

Before Miko could go any further there was a knock at the door, and when asked who it was they heard someone announce that it was investigators for the Securities and Exchange Commission.  Miko eagerly hopped off his chair and went to the door, opening it and ushering them inside. Alkali and Draggor could only watch as the male red fox and bull walked in and flashed their badges to the entire room.  The mouse offered them both a seat but they refused it, telling the guards instead to uncuff the two from the chair so that they could be moved.

“Thank you so much for your service,” the red fox said with a nod.  “I’m Agent Dusty Moongazer and this is my partner Agent Samson, lead investigators for the Securities and Exchange Commission.  These are the ones that attempted to breach into your vault and steal sensitive data?”

“Yes they are,” Miko said as he shot a smirk to the two in handcuffs.

“Alright then,” Dusty said as he took of his glasses.  “If we could go to the crime scene we need to take evidence for the report so that we can be sure that everything is done by the book.  If what you say is true, though, we’ll be putting these two away for a long time…”

“Just doing my civic duty,” Miko replied.  “I’ve left the area completely sealed off, the sabrewolf that originally infiltrated the area messed up the door controls so my men couldn’t get in, anyway.  They actually blasted their way out through some sort of tunnel.”

“Fascinating,” the bull said as he took a note.  “And your men found this tunnel?”

“Not yet,” Miko stated as they walked down the hall down to the security area.  “My team caught up with them as they sped away, managed to take them out before they could get on the freeway and escape.  Once we crack the vault, though, we can follow it to see where they came out.”

Just as they were about to go from the main casino floor to the secure area of the vault Alkali and Draggor saw that there were a number of news vans out front, all of them attempting to get inside the casino as they walked by.  “Damn, who tipped off the press?” Agent Samson spat. “Last thing we wanted was for this to become a three-ring circus.”

“Just ignore them,” Agent Moongazer replied.  “We can give them a statement later.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that,” a voice behind them caused them all to turn, seeing a pink rabbit standing there with a microphone while two others stood behind him with a camera and a boom mic.  “I’m Chris from Channel Eight news, which is twice as good as the guys from Channel Four. We got a tip that there was an attempted casino robbery and we would like to get your statement.”

“No comment,” Agent Moongazer said as he moved to shoo them away.  “Now get back behind the line, we’ll release a statement-”

“We’re innocent!” Alkali shouted, loud enough to cause those outside the casino to pause.  “Miko Maus is trying to get in good with the Securities and Exchange Expo and is using us as a scapegoat!”

“Yeah!”  Draggor shouted as well.  “This is wrongful imprisonment!  Miko Maus is crazy!”

“Hey, knock it off you two!” Agent Samson said, causing everyone to calm down before he looked at the bunny who still held a microphone.  “Listen, you need to go back outside and just wait for us to have an official statement prepared.”

“Oh sure, cool cool…” Chris replied.  “I think we have plenty to run on right now while we wait, thanks for that.”

As the three turned to leave Miko suddenly let out a shout to get them to stop.  “Gentlemen, no need to run anything nasty like that,” he said before he looked to the two agents.  “This is my casino, so I will allow them to accompany us to the vault. Unless you want them to run with the story that these two just screamed at us.”

Though it was clear that they were not comfortable with the idea the two agents nodded and they allowed the crew to accompany them into the elevator, Miko’s eyes never leaving the sight of Alkali as they went inside the car.  “So how did the hybrid get into the security room unseen?” Miko asked as he pressed the button, waiting for his fingerprint to get scanned before they started downwards. “If he hacked the elevator he would have had to get inside first and by that time we already locked you out, Draggor.”

“You’ll have to ask him,” Draggor responded with a shrug.  “I still have no idea what you guys are talking about.”

The mouse just shook his head and they waited until they got to the ground floor, where they saw the three trained security guards standing there at the end of the hallway.  “This is where your friend got sloppy,” Miko explained, looking at the news camera as he straightened his tie. “While he thought that he had bypassed all the security in the area he didn’t know what when the vault is opened it sends a relay message to our office, which is what tipped us off to look down here.  Your friend here obviously tried to keep the vault cameras off our radar but since we already suspected that something might happen we took extra precautions, the second that we got that notification it was all over for your little heist.”

“Sir,” one of the security guards said as he went up to Miko.  “We have a drill team coming in ten minutes to breach the vault.  Since we can’t use the electronics to open the door they’re probably going to have to cut their way through.”

“That’s fine,” Miko stated as he motioned his head over at Alkali and Draggor.  “Let those two enjoy a few more moments of freedom before we bury them. I don’t have anywhere to be in ten minutes.”

“Perhaps we can speed this process along?” Agent Moongazer said as the red fox turned from the vault control panel and walked over to the mouse.  “It appears that your input panel is functional.”

“Functional?”  Miko said in confusion before turning to the guards.  “I thought you said that the whole system was shot.”

It was the three guard’s turn to look at one another, shaking their heads before the lead of their team went back to Miko.  “We received a communication from the security server to come down here and guard the vault until you arrived,” he stated simply.  “It also said that there was no way to enter the vault because there was a malfunction in the primary input panel and we would need to drill in once you got here.”

Miko’s look became disturbed as he went from the guards to the door, then from the news crew to the ferret and demon in custody.  Something strange was going on… but a further prompt from the red fox forced him to move forward and look at the glowing panel. It appeared that the SEC agent was right; everything appeared to be functioning normally and it was asking for him to input his password.  He glanced between the two agents that were flanking him before he put in the code, then used his thumbprint once more to open the lock.

The panel went from blue to green as the code was accepted, the vault door shifting and groaning as the internal mechanisms pulled the heavy metal door open.  Even before it was completely finished Miko pushed his head inside to see the damage that was caused in his vault from the blast. His mouth dropped open and he stepped inside as the others waited for the door to stop before they stepped inside, themselves.  The SEC agents went in first followed by Alkali and Draggor, then the news crew before finally being joined by the guards as they looked over the destruction of the vault…

...except there wasn’t any.  “Wow…” Chris commented as he motioned for the camera guy to show the entirety of the pristine vault.  “I didn’t realize that there were bombs that cleaned up after themselves. This is truly a land of wonders.”

“No…” Miko said as he went over to the wall where he had seen the sabrewolf stand next to in the footage.  “The sabrewolf escaped, we saw him in the tapes… the explosion…”

“If there was an explosion here it hides it well,” Agent Moongazer said as he looked around.  “No sign of any theft either… I thought you said you saw the thief stealing things other than the black box?”

“Of course I did!”  Miko shouted as he ran over to one of the boxes that he saw Serathin taking items out of and used his master key to open it.  “This box contains the cash that we keep on hand for our OTB section, there is over fifty thousand in-” the mouse trailed off as he pulled out several stacks of money, looking up at the two SEC agents as they began to shake their heads.  “...cash.”

“Mr. Maus, while this is fascinating we’re really just here for the black box data,” Agent Samson said.  “Can you please just take it out for us so that we can investigate your claim that Mr. Bismuth and his companions tampered with federal property?”

“Of… of course!”  Miko replied as he went to the back wall and opened the secret wall panel, revealing a small wall safe embedded within.  “I saw him take it, and even if he didn’t there’s no way that he could have hacked the thing without leaving some trace. This is going to show you that they were trying to manipulate your data.”

“Well as you know we have no direct access to the data itself,” Agent Samson said as he waited for the mouse to open the safe, then took what appeared to be a USB drive from his pocket and plugged it in once Miko used his retina scan to unlock it and handed him the black box.  “But this will tell us if the data has been changed or accessed since the time lock was activated. If it’s red then we know that Mr. Maus is telling the truth, if it turns green… well, I’m not quite sure what to believe at this point.”

All eyes were on the USB drive as it appeared to be scanning the data inside the black box, though the agents said that it would take a few minutes to scan.  Time seemed to tick by increasingly slowly as they waited to see the results, the news crew and the guards leaning in even closer while the rest remained content to stand and watch.  Miko began to straighten his suit nervously as Alkali and Draggor just looked at one another, then back down to the drive. Finally the blinking light stopped and remained dark for a few seconds before turning bright green.

“Yes…” everyone turned as Chris put his hand in the air.  “That’s an award for me. Thank you so much for inviting me down here, been super fun and I can’t wait to get my journalism accolade from this.”

Miko turned frantically from the agents to the news crew, then his look of shock turned to one of anger as he shouted at them to wait.  “This is clearly one of their crew in disguise!” he shouted as he went over and knocked the baseball caps of the boom guy and ripped the camera away from the other.  “Take off your mask, hybrid!”

The news crew quickly backed away and the three guards moved to restrain their boss as he continued to try and paw at the crew.  “Sir, we are respected journalists!” Chris shouted while they rearranged their clothing. “Well… we’re journalists! C’mon guys, let’s get out of here before this mouse goes mental on us.”

“Wait, hold on guys!” Alkali said, breaking his silence with a hardly contained grin on his face.  “Don’t you want to talk to us about the impending lawsuit against the Securities and Exchange Commission?”

As the camera guy quickly raised the camera back up the agents sprang into action, quickly blocking the view of the news crew as they told them to leave.  Though they complained the three left under the escort of Agent Samson, leaving the red fox with the still-restrained Miko as well as Alkali and Draggor. “Mr. Bismuth…” Dusty said as he put his hands together in front of his face.  “On behalf of the SEC we’re sorry for the false claims put to you by Mr. Maus, as you know we have to investigate all claims seriously when they deal with matters-”

“Stop!” Miko shouted, the three guards pulling away as he told them all to get off him before straightening up his crumpled suit.  “You think you got me beat… but I still have the security tapes! Obviously this is some sort of ruse, but I still have proof that they were in my vault!”

“Oh, this is going to be my favorite part,” Draggor said as his grin widened as Miko held up his now cracked tablet, only to show footage of an empty vault with nothing happening to it.  “Oh man… that was so much better than I could have ever imagined…”

Alkali kicked the demon before going over to the SEC Agent and nudging him with his shoulder.  “I think it’s time that you took the cuffs off,” the ferret said, turning around and wiggling his fingers.  “You know, unless you want to keep going in the investigation. I’m sure that Mr. Maus over there has so much more information that he would want to give you about this whole robbery thing.”

“You can’t be finished with them!” Miko nearly squeaked at this point.  “They practically told me that they were going to rob my vault, and they’re with Uncle Kage too!  All of this was-”

“That’s enough!” Dusty shouted, holding his hand to stop the mouse dead in his tracks.  “We can’t arrest someone without hard evidence, and the fact that you told us you did and then didn’t looks very bad for you no matter what you accuse.  I assure you that the SEC will be launching into a full investigation into your conduct today… and if we find even one comma out of place in your finances then you won’t ever have to worry about having anything to rob ever again.”

Though Miko continued to rant and rave Agent Moongazer quickly ushered Alkali and Draggor to the elevator, followed by the guards who left their boss writhing in the vault.  “We’ll just… let him tire himself out,” the leader of the group said, the ocelot nodding to the red fox as they rode the elevator up and out of the secure area. Once they were there the guards went their separate ways as Agent Moongazer moved the other two to the back of the casino where there didn’t appear to be any news vans.

“Boss is going to have a field day with this one…” the vulpine agent said once they were in the cool night air outside, rubbing his muzzle before looking at Alkali and Draggor.  “Clearly Mr. Maus tried to do… something here, what it is I don’t know, but we’re definitely going to look into it. Considering this is an active investigation I would think that you know enough not to talk to the press.”

“Of course,” Alkali replied.  “Last thing we would want to do is embarrass the Securities and Exchange Commission for doing their job.”

Agent Moongazer sighed and provided them with contact information, then told them to probably go stay in another hotel for their last night of the convention before handing them some money.  Both Alkali and Draggor thanked him and walked away from the casino, quickly getting out of range of the cameras and the agent before beginning to laugh hysterically. “I can’t believe it!” Draggor said as he had to lean against a light pole for breath.

“I wish I could have taken a picture of his face!” Alkali said between breaths.  “Priceless!” Their laughing continued until they heard the sound of bushes rustling, stopping and turning to face the potential threat as their mood sobered up quickly.  They took a step back as one of the guards from the vault stepped out from the bushes, the dragon looking at them as the ferret and demon waited for him to respond.

“Alright guys…” the dragon responded as he reached up to his face, pulling off the latex mask to reveal the sabrewolf underneath it.  “Someone actually want to clue me in on what the hell just happened tonight?”

“I think we should probably get you changed out of that outfit first,” Draggor said as he stepped up on the nearby bench and looked around before motioning to a car that was parked in an adjoining parking lot, two of the huscoons getting out of it with one of them holding a duffle bag that they ran promptly up to the disrobing hybrid.  “Thanks for trusting us, though, I know that we called kind of a serious audible there but we were in a time crunch and we couldn’t get back to you in time to tell the entire story and I couldn’t risk calling you. It appears that you got the jist of it, though.”

“Well we’re kind of wondering what just happened, too,” one of the huscoons said.

“Yeah,” the other chimed in.  “We’re sitting there waiting to do a heist and then suddenly we’re told that we’re not doing a heist?”

“Look, it’s a long story,” Alkali said as Serathin got dressed.  “There’s a bar nearby where the others are, let’s go there first and get a drink and then I’ll tell you what happened.  Trust me, it’s better if we start this one at the beginning…”