Chapter 1:

"Mister Bismuth," the dragon said as he and four others in clean, sharp-pressed suits sat on one side of the table while a ferret in a business suit sat on the other side. "Do you know why we’ve called you here to this meeting with the members of the board of the Federal Exchange Commission?”

Alkali adjusted his jacket and leaned back in his chair slightly, taking a moment to ponder the question before finally responding. “Well, considering that you’ve been investigating the entire office I would have to assume that it’s because someone has been insider trading,” the ferret guessed, watching the faces of the five as they stared at him. “Of course since you’ve been questioning everyone I’m also thinking that you don’t know where the leak is coming from?”

“It’s something like that,” the dragon said as he opened the manila folder, the others quickly following suit. “We’re just going to look a little bit into your time here with the company, check your trades and a few sample calls that you’ve taken. If everything is on the up and up than you have nothing to worry about…”

“I’m sensing a but there,” Alkali replied.

“Well, of course if we find that you are potentially involved in this insider trading ring then you will be considered a suspect for the duration of our investigation,” the dragon instructed. “Since we seem to be putting the pleasantries aside I’m going to tell you right now that if we find so much as a hair out of line you’ll be lucky if they’ll even let you inside this building again, much less being able to trade a single commodity. Then, should we dig deeper and find that you are in fact leaking confidential information, you will be held to the fullest extent of federal law and imprisoned for what will likely be the rest of your natural born life. Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

There was a tense silence in the room, the others that were on the side of the table with the dragon remaining silent as they watched the ferret. Alkali knew what they were doing, trying to see if there was anything that would give away any nervousness or something that would indicated that he was in fact the one or one of the ones that they were looking for. He remained seated but leaned forward and grabbed the water jug off of the table as well as a glass. Once he was done filling it he continued to leave the room in it’s awkward quiet state until he had taken a large drink, then set it down against his lap before giving them a small nod.

“Let’s begin,” Alkali said finally.

Several hours later the ferret walked out of the building, his jacket slung over one of his shoulders as he made his way down to the parking garage where his car was parked. When he got to it he saw a demon standing there, his red eyes looking up at him as he took a puff of the vaporizer that he had before blowing out a plume of smoke. “So,” the demon said once he had exhaled fully. “Did they suspect you?”

“Not even for a second,” Alkali replied with an assured smirk as he walked over to the other side of the car and got in. “Come on Draggor, we got bags to pack and then a casino to rob.”

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Once both ferret and demon had gotten off the flight they were blinded by the light that reflected off the ocean, the sun almost glaring at them as they held their hands up to shield their eyes. The second that Alkali had foiled the FEC investigation they went home and got their things, then boarded the flight that they had gotten weeks before. Had he been caught then and there the whole plan would have been for nothing, but now that the ferret had been cleared the information that he had stolen from the federal stock exchange would actually be useful. Of course that had been the longest and most time consuming part, now that they were done the finish line seemed to already be within their grasp.

After they had gotten their luggage they went into a cab and headed to their destination; the Golden Cheese Resort and Casino. It was quite the amazing hotel, when the two arrived to the building they looked out to see it towering over them as the cab pulled up to it. Next to the casino was the Paradise Springs convention center, one of the largest in the country that was currently home to the national Securities and Exchange Expo. Alkali had been planning on being at that convention for months now and being a commodities trader he knew that his presence there would not be questioned. That was the whole point, the ferret thought to himself as he and his friend got out and walked into the lobby.

“Look at this place,” Draggor commented as they walked under a floating statue of a giant wheel of cheese that hung over a reflecting pool. “It’s almost like you could tell who runs the place.”

“Well right now I could eat a wheel of cheese that big,” Alkali replied, waiting for a few moments to make sure that there was no one around them. “Before we talk about what we’re going to do for the week perhaps it would be best if we checked in.”

The demonspawn nodded and they moved over to the front desk where a lemur was standing there, seemingly waiting for them. “Welcome to the Golden Cheese Resort and Casino,” he said as he immediately began to type into the computer. “My name is Skyler and I’ll be here to help you with anything that you need. Checking in?”

“You bet,” Alkali replied before handing over his identification. “Alkali Bismuth, here for the SEE convention going on.”

“I see…” Skyler said as he processed the information. “I see I have you in one of the diamond suites, your company must really want you here in order to foot the bill for that.”

“Well I’m just in charge of the party,” Alkali stated as he took his information back. “You know how it is with brokers and booze. Don’t worry though, I’ll make sure that no one goes out the window like they did last year.”

There was a look of concern that crossed the ringtail lemur’s face before he realized what it was and let out a dry chuckle. “I certainly hope so,” Skyler said as he handed him a set of room keys. “Well you’re all checked in, hope that you enjoy your stay here!”

The two nodded and gave a small grin as they thanked him and turned away, though the second that the two had turned their heads they gave each other a look before heading towards the elevators. When they got there they found that the keycard was needed just to get up as they made their way up to the second to top floor of the hotel itself. Out of curiosity Draggor attempted to see if their keys would allow them access to the very top of the building, only to find they were denied. Once the car stopped and the doors opened once again to show a single door that led to the suite that the ferret had paid for.

“Risky business putting this thing under your own name,” the demon stated once they had gotten inside the room and closed the door behind him. “What if they decide that they want to look into their guests and find out that you’ve been staying here.”

“Well like I told the guy downstairs I am a broker after all,” Alkali replied as he took a quick look around the rather lavish accommodations that he had gotten for himself. “Plus I happen to know that these rooms are protected from people trying to listen in on conversations and things like that, which means its not likely that anyone is going to overhear us. Speaking of such things why don’t you call our friend and get him over here so we can start talking about our plans for the next week or so.”

“Can do,” Draggor responded as he pulled out his phone before stopping and looking around. “Hey… were you serious about the whole wanting to eat an entire cheese wheel?”

There was a moment of pause between the two as Alkali stopped the pouring of the booze he had found at the bar and raised a finger in the air, thinking about it for a second before pointing at Draggor. “Alright, order a few pizzas first,” he instructed. “Then call him. Or call him first and see what he wants on his pizza and then the pizza place… or just call him and bring pizzas. You know what, you call him, I’ll order the food…”

Forty-five minutes later Alkali and Draggor were in the living room of the suite accompanied not only by a small mountain of pizza boxes but also a tiger that sat there in a silk suit. “You know I didn’t think that I’d actually see you two here,” the tiger said as he tossed the crust of the pizza onto the plate. “Part of me thought that you were smarter than this and that you’d leave this crazy plot of yours alone.”

“Oh come on Nizzbit,” Alkali replied with a smirk. “You know that we’re not that smart.”

“Even so this is not some small favor you’re asking of me,” Nizzbit continued as he got up. “We’re probably breaking like fifteen federal statues here just talking about it, and I’ve got no beef with the Federal Exchange Commission. What can you promise me here other than just a lot of money that I already have?”

“We already told you what this was for,” Draggor spoke up from the kitchen island where he was nursing a bottle of scotch. “You help us with this, and we help you with your little problem. Or do you want the federal government to find out where exactly you got all that money from in the first place?”

The tiger held up his hands and waved them around in the air. “Point made,” he quickly stepped back before sitting back down and grabbing the drink he had been given. “Now I know you asked me for like, half a dozen guys and enough equipment for them to use but I may have hit a slight snag. It’s sort of what you call a… good news, bad news sort of deal.”

“Alright then,” Alkali replied as he leaned forward. “What’s the good news?”

“Good news is that I can pretty much hook you up with all the equipment that you need,” Nizzbit informed them.

“And the bad?” Draggor asked.

“Well people weren’t nearly as suicidal as we had thought in wanting to take this job,” the tiger replied with a shrug. “I managed to find a few people that were willing to take on the roles that you wanted, but it wasn’t six.”

Alkali paused and stood up, slowly walking over to the tiger with a drink in one hand and putting it on his shoulder. When Nizzbit looked up he could see a look on his friend’s face that caused him to swallow hard. “How many?” the ferret asked softly.

The silence in the suite could almost be felt as the tiger clutched his drink, taking one before finally answering the question. “…three.” He said, causing both ferret and demon to clasp their heads in frustration. “You’re lucky that I even got the three! They’re about as crazy as you guys are.”

The other two continued to give one another looks as Alkali paced around the room, still rubbing his head as he heard the demon say that there was no way they could pull something off like this with only three other people involved. Though the ferret didn’t want to agree with it he knew that Draggor wasn’t wrong; the original idea they had involved an ideal group of eight individuals pulling off various parts with the minimum being six. The fact that their crew had been cut down to over half meant that they were already running behind and they hadn’t even gotten started yet. It cause Alkali to go over to the bar and grab himself another drink while he heard Draggor and Nizzbit continue to argue how he couldn’t get them the manpower they needed.

“Hey guys,” Alkali said after taking a long drink, causing them both to stop and look at him as he rubbed his forehead. “It’s not ideal but this is the only chance we got to pull this off, and perhaps we can make some calls and pick up more people along the way when we need them. Please tell me that they all at least have some semblance of the skills that we need for this and that you already contacted them about the job?”

“Of course,” Nizzbit replied with a sheepish grin. “Of course I have to say that it wasn’t easy…”

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Six months earlier a museum and art gallery lay quiet, the cool and calm of the night translating to an almost deathly silence inside. The only sound being made was from a guard that was making his patrol through the area that had been set up for a display of items that were found from a shipwreck that had been off the coast. The security guard’s flashlight shined on the crown jewel of the entire collection, which happened to be a tiara adorned with a number of gemstones all set into platinum. The cougar looked at it for a few seconds more before she turned and used the security lighting to make her way back to the main entrance to continue her rounds.

Had the guard looked up a few more feet she would have seen the shadow the rested against one of the eaves that jutted out from the wall, a pair of green eyes watching as the feline left. Once the being was sure that he was once more alone he turned around until he was facing the wall, then held out his arms and fell straight back into the air. As he fell the trip was rather short, the wire that had been connected to the thief’s ankle immediately slowed the fall while still maintaining some semblance of silence. After a few seconds of free swinging the draconic sabrewolf pressed a button on the handheld attached to his wrist and the winch slowly lowered him down towards the display.

About half-way towards his descent that same electronic device gave off a tiny buzz, the thief looking at it before pressing on the communication device that he had lodged in his ear. “This is Serathin,” he said quietly, looking up at the cameras that continued to hold the loop he had put on them of an empty building. “Oh hey Nizzbit… uh… yeah, you know me, just hanging around.”

As Serathin heard about the offer that the tiger on the other end of the line he took out a spray and created a cloud of mist that cascaded its way down towards the floor of the museum. “So someone wants to break into a casino?” he asked as he quickly made his way down once more, making sure that he maintained the chemical fog that fooled the motion sensors into thinking that there was no one there. “That seems pretty straight forward, not really all that interesting in my opinion. I’m sure you can think of nearly a dozen other infiltration experts that can do the same thing for about half the price.”

When he got a few feet away Serathin stopped the winch and as he hovered over the glass box he suddenly stopped and put his hand against his communication device. “Wait… can you say that again?” he asked, checking his watch to make sure he had enough time before leaning against the glass box. “You’re kidding me… well, color me interested then. Just buy me the ticket when the time comes and I’ll meet you there… no, of course I won’t be in prison by then, although I need to hang up with you before I do.”

Serathin quickly hung up the phone and took out his tools, his grin growing wider as he looked at his prize within. “This is definitely going to make a great birthday gift…” he said to himself as he began to work on the security base.

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Three months after that a fox looked out over the quarry that he stood at, idly twirling his green braid as he watched the crews working below. “Come on then,” he said angrily as he watched them continue to work their way through the stone. “My granny could have gotten through that by now with her bare hands…”

As he continued to watch a wolf in a construction worker outfit came up to him holding a cell phone. “Mr. Zen,” the younger male said, causing Zen to turn around and look at him with an air of contempt. “I know that you said that you didn’t want to be disturbed right now while you were working on this part of the project but I have someone who insisted that they needed to speak with you right away. They said that it’s a project that you’d be very interested in and it would give you a chance to let off some steam?”

Almost immediately Zen’s demeanor changed from angry to ecstatic as he came down from his perch and slapped the other worker on the shoulders so hard it caused him to shudder before taking the phone. “Nizzbit you pile of flea-bitten fur,” he greeted as he walked further into the shade of the tent that had been set up. “I haven’t heard hair nor hide of you for nearly two months now, I swear if I had to do another one of these commercial jobs I would take a stick of dynamite and shove it somewhere the sun didn’t shine just to stop being bored for-“

Zen stopped his rant when he heard the voice on the other side of the line, pausing mid-drink of the canteen that he had grabbed in order to listen to the entire offer before nearly spitting it out. “Well for a job like that I’m going to need a couple of specialty items, not only the usual stuff like C-4 and detcord but some really juicy steak if you know what I’m saying.”

There was a few more moments of silence from the fox as the grin on his face grew even wider. “Well you definitely know how to pick the prime cuts,” Zen said as he went over to his computer and began to type a few things in. “Alright, I’m definitely in, but I’m going to send you over a shopping list since some of those things might not exactly be on any standard online store. I’m almost done with this job here and then I’ll fly in as soon as I get my check from this place.”

Once they had hashed out the final details Zen hung up the phone and breathed a sigh of relief before laughing to himself. He sat in the chair for a while typing out a few things to send into an e-mail, though he knew that he would have to wait to actually send it until he was on a more secure line. The red-furred vulpine was practically trembling with excitement as he walked back out of the tent and saw the wolf that had given him the phone in the first place. He tossed the phone back and took the binoculars he had given him, though when the canine informed him that he was going back to the office Zen wrapped an arm around his shoulder and brought him back up to the perch that he had been on before.

“You know…” Zen said as he gave a look in the quarry with the binoculars to make sure it was now empty before flicking a nearby switch, causing an alarm to sound that rang through the entire area. “A lot of people think that all there is in life you have to work towards and any obstacles that might fall your way you just have to think about how to solve them.” As the wolf continued to watch the fox with a confused expression on his face Zen took the remote that had been sitting on the table and held it up. “Clearly none of those people have ever worked with several tons of high explosives.”

The second that Zen pushed the button the ground underneath their feet rattled as the area that had only just been recently cleared by the crew erupted into a cloud of dust and fire. The hardened rock splitting open from the sheer force as the entre valley of the quarry detonated in line. “Ahhh….” Zen said as the plume of dust washed over them, both he and the wolf putting on a pair of goggles just before it got there. “Beautiful…”

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In the present Nizzbit, Alkali, and Draggor all walked down the street of the bustling entertainment district, bumping elbows with a number of tourists and such as they made their way down the street. At this point they had gotten slightly off the usual beaten path of gaming parlors, theatres, and other such things and arrived at an area that was not as glamorous. The tiger led them into one such club, paying off the bull bouncer before the three of them made their way to an empty table and ordered drinks.

“Where are the other two?” Draggor asked as he looked around. “I thought you said that we were going to meet up with them here and then get the last member of this motley crew.”

“Well…” Nizzbit replied as his hand went to scratch the back of his head as he grinned at them sheepishly at Alkali. “That’s not quite what I said. We are here to assemble this team of crazies, but I thought that we would start with this one first. It’s… also the reason why I haven’t told you who it was yet.”

“Why?” Alkali asked as he looked around before turning back to the tiger. “Who is it?” As the feline gave a nervous chuckle the ferret once more looked around his surroundings and as he took them in an epiphany came over him that caused him to shoot a dirty look at Nizzbit. “You didn’t…”

Before Nizzbit could say anything the lights in the club suddenly dimmed and a cobra slithered up to the microphone to a round of applause. “Thank you all for coming here,” the serpentine host said as the spotlight settled on him. “We have a wonderful show for you tonight, I want you all to put your hands together and give a warm welcome to our feature comedian… give it up for Xander the Blue!”

As the crowd let out a cheer Alkali’s jaw dropped when he saw the blue dragon come out onto the stage, then slowly turned his head own towards Nizzbit. Before the comedian could say a single joke the ferret had already gestured for both tiger and demon to follow him out into the back alley of the club itself. “You know if I wanted my boyfriend to help us on this I would have just asked him,” Alkali said after they had closed the metal door behind them. “There’s a reason that we’ve left him in the dark about this in the first place!”

“He’s the only one with the skills you need to get this done!” Nizzbit replied, gesturing towards the club with a slight hint of anger. “Trust me, I called everyone in the rolodex on this one to try and bring in a con artist that wasn’t Xander, but in the end it’s either him or we’re going to be down another person. I don’t know about you but I think we’re going to have to face the fact that it’s all hands on deck, if you really want it that badly you’re going to have to bring him in, I’m sorry.”

As the three stood out there in the back they could hear the sound of the audience laughing, Alkali holding his fingers to his muzzle as Draggor looked up at him. “He’s right you know,” the demon said as he took a puff on his vape. “If we’re going to bring someone in on this why not someone we trust? This might actually be a good thing you know.”

The three continued to stand outside as they waited for Alkali to make his decision. As the one that had put everything together in the first place if he decided to abort the mission now there was nothing they could do to stop him. The other two watched as the ferret weighed out all the options, no doubt going through all the scenarios that could possibly happen if they brought in his mate. After a few minutes of mental back and forth Alkali finally sighed and rubbed his hands down his muzzle.

“Well if we’re going to prison at least we can all do it together I guess,” Alkali said as he sighed again. “Come on, let’s go and get our fifth member here…”

About an hour later Alkali was once more in his suite, looking at the group that had gathered there. Nizzbit had once more maintained his position on the couch that he had been sitting at before while Draggor decided to take a seat closer to the area where they were going to make their little presentation. Serathin and Zen were both chowing down on the leftover pizza they had and finally Xander sat there at the small bar the room mixing himself a drink. The ferret cleared his throat and got all of their attention, three sets of eyes looking up at him.

“I suppose you’re all wondering exactly why I brought you all here,” Alkali started to say, holding onto his hat. “I know that Nizzbit gave you a few details of what was happening and who we were going to steal from, but the rest I kept rather close to my chest. Since this is what you would call a high risk, high reward scenario I’m going to be completely upfront about what’s about to happen so that no one is in the dark on the what we’re doing or the risks involved.”

“Well Nizzbit said that we’re going to rob the Federal Exchange Commission?” Serathin asked once he had swallowed the mouthful of pizza. “I mean that’s why I came here in the first place.”

“Wait,” Zen chimed in. “I was told that we’re going to be blowing our way into a private bunker.”

“They’re both true actually,” Alkali said as he motioned to the convention center that could be seen in the view of the suite. “Right now the Securities and Exchange Expo is going to be going on and at the end of it they’re going to be releasing information that’ll cause the entire financial sector of this country and possibly the world to fluctuate. Now anyone that has access to that information beforehand and get ahead of it could easily make a fortune, so naturally they’ve not only black boxed the data so no one can possibly get to it but have put into what is arguably the most secure place that has ever been constructed… a place that happens to be twenty four or so stories beneath our very feet.”

The ferret paused as he let that information sink in, all of the others looking back and forth to gauge what their reactions were. Even though they weren’t all completely savvy to what Alkali had been talking about they all knew what he was getting at; if anyone got to the information that the Securities and Exchange Commission had here they could play the stock market for a lot of money… but at the same time what they were thinking about was not only theft but also a number of federal crimes that could land them all in prison for the rest of their lives… if they were lucky. Despite that everyone there seemed to be on-board with the notion, though some more than others as both Serathin and Zen gave each other an eager and devious grin.

“Wait wait wait,” Xander spoke up, everyone surprised that the dragon which had been kept quiet for most of the time suddenly started to talk. “Alkali, you told me specifically that we weren’t going to be robbing a casino. I don’t know about anyone else here but this sounds a lot like robbing a casino.”

“Hey yeah,” Serathin continued on. “I was also told that this wasn’t a casino heist too.” Zen nodded as well and Alkali had to hold up his hands to get them to quiet down.

“Guys,” Alkali stated simply. “We’re not robbing a casino… we’re robbing the owner of the casino.”

“You mean…” Xander started to say before the ferret nodded.

“That’s right,” Alkali replied. “We’re robbing Miko.”

Chapter 2: