

LA-88 Nike Missile Base, California:

The facility was a maze, and Felix was used to looking over his shoulders as he walked through it. The police were good, but they weren't perfect, and he'd always been drawn to the most dilapidated, run-down parts of the area at night. It was post-apocalyptic and eerie, but it was also soothing. Given that he was currently being chased by drug dealers, he wasn't the only one who wanted the solitude.

Some part of Felix's mind was still screaming at him for getting in this situation in the first place. If they could catch him, they very well might kill him. He *had* to get out of there. The sounds of yelling and the occasional bullet behind him hammered that message home. Maybe he could hide someplace, wait them out.

That last thought hit him just as he turned a corner and ran into a dead end. A dead tree bleached white, like a massive piece of driftwood, was in front of him, but he could easily see that it wouldn't be tall enough to use as an escape route. They'd seen him enter, too... even if he somehow managed to position himself just right so he could hide behind it, they'd check. Then they'd kill him.

"Fuck it," he muttered to himself, then turned around. Gravel crunched as his hunters, currently out of sight, took their leisure going after him. They'd chased him here on purpose, he suddenly realized. Bastards. As they came into view, he braced himself for a bullet that never came.

When he opened his eyes, he saw six very confused people staring... at something in *front* of him. Empty air? "Where the fuck did he go?" asked one furiously. "We saw him go this way!" One of the other, a shorter individual, took out a walkie-talkie.

"Chad, he on the roofs?"

"No," buzzed the radio back. "He's not dead yet?"

"That's... odd." He switched the radio off. "Maybe we should get a new drop site. Only thing that makes sense is if there are secret passages or some shit around here." The man who had first spoken snorted.

"Gonna fire the asses of the idiots who checked the facility," he said as he turned around and walked away. The others followed.

After they'd been gone for five minutes, Felix let himself start breathing again. Then he collapsed against the wall and started shaking as the stress hit him all at once. He'd nearly been *shot*. This place wasn't safe, even if they said they were leaving, and his thoughts turned back to his family... what if the drug dealers went after them?

Well, they were in Oregon and he hardly ever talked to them, so he supposed they wouldn't take a road trip just to shoot them when they could just shoot *him*.

He was broken by his reverie by a cold wet nose nudging against his face. "Off dammit," he said, pushing at it. The dog didn't take the hint and, if anything, became more enthusiastic. Felix turned to the side, intending to tell it off.

It wasn't a dog. It was much larger and hairier than a dog and had a weird muzzle. "Hyena," he whispered, trying to back away but finding that he was already backed into a corner. "Good hyena," he said nervously. "Nice hyena."

It licked his face, and it was rather difficult to stay afraid of it. "So what are you doing here?" he wondered aloud, hesitantly reaching out to ruffle its ears. The hyena leaned into his touch, making an odd cackling sound. As it did, thunder boomed in the distance.

The rain hit almost immediately.

Halfway across the country, a Mr. Johnson sat watching Doppler radar. "Interesting," he muttered to himself, looking carefully at the chart and making a mental note to give the person who'd brought this to his attention a raise. Then, moving back to his computer, he started writing out an email.

Boston, Massachusetts:

"You okay?" she asked, scratching him beyond the ears. Much as the average person on the street might despise his kind, there were some benefits. Like belly rubs.

"Yeah," he said, yawning. "Not like I haven't run into bastards like that before. Usually they skitter away if you make snapping motions." She laughed, and it was music to his ears.

"All right. See you tomorrow."

He awoke in the night, curled up and his tail draped over his nose. Hunger. He got up, sniffed around. Images came to him. Strange pink thing. Food. It was weak, easy prey. Opening his mouth and inhaling the scent, he walked through the den-tunnel and prowled into the night.

Time passed. Several times, he heard things, and hid under bushes, or behind strange cold hard objects. All passed him without noticing, and while he knew that they were dangerous, he also knew that should he stalk them, they would never know he was coming.

Finally, he reached the lair of his prey. He silently made his way to the lair entrance, then stopped. It was sealed... how was it sealed? Confused and hungry, he scratched at it. A few seconds later, he heard footsteps, and quickly jumped away from the lair entrance and onto a ledge. He needed to get high up for this.

The lair entrance was opened to him, and the strange pink thing looked around... but not up. He crouched, getting ready to spring. Then, the strange pink thing looked right at him, and he froze with half-lidded eyes, hoping that maybe it wouldn't notice him. Then he could strike.

The thing made an odd sound, then some more odd sounds that were different. He tilted his head, confused. It clearly saw him, but it showed no fear. The thing made sounds for a few more seconds, then trailed off. Its eyes widened in fear, and it made to run away.

It never got the chance. He pounced, knocking it to the ground, and an instant later his fangs pulverized its skull and pierced the brain. Dragging the kill into the lair that used to be the strange pink things, he began to eat.

He woke up in the morning wondering why his face felt odd. Getting up (and noticing that he had been naked in her bed, had they hooked up?), he went to the washroom to clean.

When he saw the dried blood on his face, the memories came to him in an instant.

When he got to the police station, he walked up to the front desk. "I killed and ate someone," he said, his voice quavering. The police officer didn't even blink. He just pulled out a weapon and shoot him.

Isaac woke up screaming just as the bullet started to penetrate his brain in an echo of what he had done to her.

"You have problems," his therapist said six hours later.

"No shit."

Six more hours later he found himself jabbed with a needle in an alley, then stuffed into a car, helpless to resist.

Los Angeles, California:

There was a knock on the front door. Felix got up from doing a jigsaw puzzle and opened the door. Three men in stereotypical government suits and sunglasses stood, staring steadily ahead. "Yes?" he asked, puzzled.

"Felix Rey? FBI. Also, can we come in? It's hot out here."

"Government should change the dress code," Felix drawled, but opened the door the rest of the way and gestured for them to come in. "Maybe then you wouldn't get so hot." All three of the agents looked mildly irritated, but their expressions changed to gratitude when they actually entered.

"Let's get down to business. Yesterday you reported that you had been shot at by drug dealers at the LA-88 Nike Missile Base. We aren't here about that, though. Not directly. Jones?"

One of the agents put his briefcase on the table and opened it, removing a file folder. "You mentioned that you saw a hyena. We think it belongs to this guy," he said as he slid a photo across the table. Felix picked it up and looked at it. He recognized the photo.

"That's the drug dealer who shot at me." Jones nodded gravely.

"He belongs to a small, local drug cartel. They've been implicated in more than a few murders, and we think that they use hyenas in their crimes to help dispose of the evidence. Little bastards even eat the teeth." Felix's first instinct was outrage. How dare they say that the hyena was a vicious killer?

A few seconds later he mentally kicked himself. There were any number of ways that the hyena could have been induced to eat a dead body. Why, he was willing to bet that the hyenas were starved in between meals.

"And unfortunately," the first agent continued, "tests on the two recovered hyenas show that they've contracted an infectious disease, spread by skin-to-skin contact. Mr. Rey, you may have been infected. Have you come in contact with anyone since your encounter?"

"No. Aside from yourselves."

"We're vaccinated. You aren't. Mr. Rey, you need to come with us. We can take you to a CDC facility where they work with infectious diseases with animal vectors." Felix put his head in his hands.

"Can I at least pack?" Jones nodded, his eyes empathic.

"We do need to report back in two hours, though."

Unknown Location:

Isaac awoke to his face being licked by a rough tongue. Getting up, he shook himself free of the last vestiges of sleep and surveyed his surroundings.

There was a jaguar in front of him, a massive creature with a paw of solid, smoking obsidian. Where foot met leg, flesh and obsidian mixed in a swirling pattern. Despite being made of stone, the paw could easily be mistaken for flesh.

It licked him again, and he shoved it away. Everything but the jaguar was black, or more accurately there was nothing but the jaguar. He was in a featureless black void. There was a floor, but it couldn't be told apart from the rest of the utter blackness.

"Good. You've awoken," the jaguar rumbled. Isaac scooted away from it.

"You! This is all *your* fault, isn't it?" The cat's expression turned ugly.

"Don't blame me, you arrogant little twit. And show some respect to your betters." Suddenly, his tone became condescending. "Then again, I suppose I shouldn't expect one of you brutes to have the necessary brains to understand what's going on here. If you say sorry and ask nicely, maybe I'll tell you."

Isaac's response was instant, and caught the both of them off guard. One hand grabbed onto the obsidian leg and squeezed, hard. The other shoved the jaguar over, twisting him in such a way that the leg snapped. The great cat let out a hiss of agony as it crashed down to the ground. "Better my ass," Isaac snarled. He felt... odd. Not just enraged, but like he was burning up in a volcanic heat.

The jaguar chuckled. "Defiant. I like that. Need it. You will make a good bond partner." Isaac stared warily at the creature. "Haven't had anyone snap off my paw for a while." He laughed wearily. "Yes, you're right. This is my fault. I didn't exactly have much choice in the matter." Isaac glared for a few more seconds at the jaguar, then focused. Maybe he could kick the damn thing out of his head.

The cat's appearance slowly grew fuzzier, as if it was a television signal being interrupted by static—and at the same time, he felt absolute agony as what felt like dozens of knives pierced his flesh. For a split second, he saw the image of a medical ward, with bizarre, spidery machines taking him apart. Almost immediately Isaac lost focus, and he screamed in pain. "That wasn't my fault," the cat said quietly.

"What's happening to me?" Isaac cried, curling up in what suddenly seemed to be a corner.

"We've been captured," the cat said grimly. "I don't know by who. I don't know why, either. But they're operating on you, and it isn't pretty. I just know—" The cat stopped suddenly, pricking his ears in sudden tension. "There's something else here," it hissed quietly.

There was an odd gurgling sound from the shadows, and suddenly they swept away, revealing a horrible *thing*. It had the shape of a man, and it wore a formal suit, but it very clearly wasn't human. It was too slim, too gangly, and where its face should have been, there was only a gaping maw with two deep pits above it. The skin was white and pasty, as if it had never seen the sun, and it approached Isaac and the cat without actually moving.

"*You*," hissed the jaguar, pinning its ears back and snarling. An angry red light began pouring from its eyes—it was best described as the color heat would be, if heat could be seen. The humanoid figure gestured, and the jaguar flew backwards, smashing into the ground and shattering into a million pieces, which turned to lava and started to flow together. Again, the humanoid figure gestured, and the movement of the pieces of lava slowed to a standstill.

The humanoid figure turned towards Isaac and made another odd gurgling sound. Then, as quickly as it had come, it vanished without as much as a flicker.