

Interstate 55, Greyhound Bus #17- May 13th, 2:19 PM

The long metallic bus rode along the interstate, passing other travelers along the way. The people riding inside were focused on their own trips, doing what they could to pass the time. Some were fast asleep, resting from the long drive. Others merely read books or listened to music that they brought themselves.

One passenger, however, was gazing out the window and watching the cars pass by. His long ears swiveled slightly as he stared, not listening to his fellow passengers. His reflection showed a green eyed rex rabbit with short black hair staring back at him. He was garbed in a green t-shirt with jeans and a pair of black and white sneakers. A gray hoodie was lying next to him, covering up a vanilla folder underneath. This rabbit was Bryon Walden, otherwise known as the hero Phantom.

Bryon had been living in the city of Colmaton for several months now, staying over at a new friend's place. One night, a mysterious package was delivered to him with no return address. Out of curiosity, he opened the package in his room. Inside was a vanilla folder with a note and several papers inside of it. The note consisted of cut pieces of newspaper that formed the following message:

"The truth lies in Chicago. -HM"

Puzzled, the rabbit opened the folder and took out several pieces of paper from it. The papers were marked with graphs and charts along with strange notes written on them. Bryon's eyes widened with shock as he read each document, his head swimming from the information.

At that moment, the rabbit decided to travel alone to Chicago. He left a note to his friends, explaining that he was away on business for a while. He took only a few articles of clothing as well as some toiletries and the folder in his backpack. With some of his money in his pocket, he left Colmaton by bus, taking several stops along the way.

"It's hard to believe so much time has passed," Bryon thought to himself. "All these years I spent searching, only to go back to where it all started..."

He was brought out of his reverie by a voice on the bus' intercom.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your driver speaking. We'll be reaching our stop in Chicago in approximately seven minutes. Those departing please gather your things. Thank you and have a nice day!"

The rabbit reached up above his seat and yanked down his backpack from the rack above. After putting on his hoodie, he placed the folder back inside his backpack and slipped it on his back. He took a moment to look back out the window.

From the horizon, there rose a series of skyscrapers dotting the landscape. At a distance, Bryon could see the Sears Tower standing out amongst the buildings. A sense of warmth filled him as he gazed at his hometown once more.

"All these years and it looks almost the same as before... It's amazing how well the city has done for itself. Especially since that day..."

Bryon shook his head to clear his head of any dark thoughts. *"No... I can't let myself go that route. I have to focus on the task at hand. If what those files say are true..."*

He looked out at the window as the bus passed through the city limits, entering Chicago proper...

Hyde Park- May 13th, 4:50 PM

Bryon's hood was worn over his head as he walked the streets of his old neighborhood, seeing the people pass right by him. Considering how cold the city could get, it wasn't unusual for someone to be wearing an outfit like his. The rabbit gazed at the buildings before him, memories flooding back to him.

"I remember when I went to school here," he thought to himself. *"I used to go to the farmer's market here. The shopping center here had some decent cheap food as well. Considering how much I paid in rent, that was a good thing."*

He smirked as he walked up 57th Street, seeing the small shops and businesses set up. *"They had a lot of bookstores and small restaurants here. I remember going to the fair this street set up every first weekend of June. They were kind of fun."*

Sometime later, he found himself gazing at the various colleges dotting the neighborhood. College students were walking from their classes, heading back home for the day. *"Ah... I remember when I was studying at Chicago University. I didn't get to finish my studies because of what happened that day..."*

Sighing to himself, Bryon resumed his walk, tucking his hands in his pockets. *"If I remember correctly, the Institute I went to was across the street from the university. And that would mean..."*

The rex rabbit stopped in front of the university and looked across the street. His memories showed a familiar building where he used to go to after school... The Callahan Biological Sciences Institute.

However, instead of the institute, there was a large bronze statue in its place. The statue depicted a female fox wearing a flowing robe with a halo and wings on her back. Under her left arm was a stone slab with words etched into it. Her right hand was grasping a lantern in front of her, acting like a beacon to those in front of her. Under the statue was a plaque with something etched into it.

Bryon made his way over to the statue, taking the hood off of his head. Kneeling down on his knee, the rabbit read the words etched on the plaque:

"On March 13th, 2006, Hyde Park and the city of Chicago underwent the most tragic events in the history of the city and the United States of America. This statue was erected in memorandum of the lives lost from the Chicago Incident. May the dearly departed find peace in the afterlife..."

Tears started to form on the corners of his eyes as he bowed his head in silent prayer. He remembered the chaos and bloodshed that happened after that day. The monsters roaming on the streets, tearing everything apart... The people panicking for their lives... The soldiers fighting off the beasts...

The sight of his parent's bodies lying in their home, not moving or breathing at all...

Bryon's body shook as he tried to keep himself from crying. Even though it had been years since the tragedy, the rabbit still had nightmares about that day.

"Mom... Dad... Everyone... I'm so sorry this happened... I will find the truth. I will find out who did this! Mark my words!"

Unknown to the rabbit, a small camera perched atop a nearby lamppost was looking down at him. The camera's lens shone as its images were transmitted elsewhere...

Unknown Alleyway in Bucktown, Logan Square - May 13th, 5:30 PM

Deep in a hidden alleyway, a rather foul stench was emanating outwards. If one were to describe the scent, it would be a mixture of sewage with strange chemicals. A mysterious figure was hidden in the shadows, talking to someone on a cell phone.

"I see... So our little friend has arrived in the city after all."

The figure nodded its head as they listened to their phone.

"Knowing the police, they'll be coming for him. I'm also going to wager a bet that they'll have a huge bounty on his head. That'll draw out the vigilantes and hunters as well."

A dark chuckle emanated from them.

"In any case, inform me when the situation changes. And notify our contact as well."

With a click, they hung up their cell phone. Looking up at the sky, they chuckled once more.

"You've fallen for my little trap, rabbit. Soon, you'll play a bigger role in all of this..."

Chicago Police Department, Central District- May13th, 5:30 PM

The Central District was quite busy, police officers rushing to and fro inside the building. Officers and detectives were answering calls and escorting newly arrested crooks for booking. At one of these desks, a fennec fox dressed in a detective's outfit was busy gazing at his computer screen, carefully looking at video footage from the street cameras. On his desk was a detective's badge, its metal brightly polished. On his desk was a small sign that said, "Detective Marcus Deskins".

The detective was about to call it a day when his eyes caught something suspicious. One of the cameras had picked up a rex rabbit kneeling in front of the Chicago Memorial, his face visible to the camera. Curious, he froze the image and typed a few commands, bringing up a database of photographs. Marcus

then placed the image into the database and started the program. The program ran through various pictures before a message was displayed on the screen:

MATCH DETECTED. NOW DISPLAYING FILE...

Half of the screen was then filled with a picture of a rex rabbit followed by the following information:

WANTED! BY ORDER OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIONS!

Name: Bryon Walden

Date of Birth: April 26th, 1986

Height: 6'1"

Weight: 185 pounds

Hair Color: Black

Eye Color: Dark Green

Species: Rex Rabbit

Status: Alive

Bounty: \$20,000,000

Suspect is wanted in connection with the Chicago Incident on March 13th, 2006. Use extreme caution if encountered and capture on sight.

The fennec fox's eyes were wide with shock as he read the screen. *"No way... That guy's here?!"*

He looked over at his desk and yelled, "Chief Emerson! Come here, quickly!"

The office slightly shook as a muscular rhino made his way over to Marcus' desk. The man, Frank Emerson, wore a pair of overalls with a white button-up shirt and a red tie. "What is it, Deskins? This better be good..."

The fox turned his computer screen towards the rhino. "Take a look at this..."

The rhino stared intensely at the computer screen, muttering as he looked at the images. The man's jaw dropped as he read the file. "Son of a bitch... So he's shown up after all these years. Where was he last sighted?"

"According to the camera data, he was at the Chicago Memorial in Hyde Park, near the University of Chicago."

The rhino grimly nodded at the fennec fox before he printed out multiple copies of the wanted criminal. He gathered the pile and held up one of the posters for the rabbit. "Listen up, everyone! As of right now,

a wanted criminal named Bryon Walden has been spotted in Hyde Park. I want an APB sent out to every district in the city! Go get every available patrol officer to start searching for him! I also want the BOS contacted about him as well! I want that damn rabbit in custody!"

The officers rushed up to the desk and took a copy of Bryon's poster. The office was a flurry of activity as they alerted the other districts of the rabbit's return.

"You've made a huge mistake coming back here, Bryon..."

Washington Park, Chicago, Illinois- May 13th, 7:30 PM

The rex rabbit had his hood on his head again as he was taking a rest on one of the park's benches. Watching the people passing by, he contemplated on his next move. *"I better find a place to rest for the night,"* he thought to himself. *"Once I find one, I'll begin my investigation."*

His stomach growled slightly, making him pat his belly. *"But first... I think I'll get something to eat. I wonder if there's a good restaurant in this neighborhood."*

Bryon slowly got to his feet, groaning as he stretched his muscles. The rabbit walked down Morgan Drive, heading towards the busier part of the neighborhood. As he approached Garfield Boulevard, a pair of police officers was standing by the park entrance acting as guards. When the rabbit passed them, they looked at a copy of his wanted poster then back at the retreating figure. Quickly, one of the officers spoke into a radio and followed behind the rex rabbit with his partner. The rabbit's ears twitched as he heard someone talking towards him. He then heard the sounds of guns being cocked, making him turn around.

The two officers were pointing their service pistols at him, ready to fire on a moment's notice. "Don't move, Bryon! Put your hands on your head and get on the ground!"

The rabbit backed away in fear as he looked at the officers, stepping away slowly from them. Their commands were lost on him as his fear got a hold of him. Then, he made a reckless and foolish move...

He ran from them.

The officers were in pursuit of the rabbit, calling for backup. As the rabbit ran down Garfield Boulevard, he could hear police sirens getting closer to him. Spotting an alleyway, he tucked and rolled to his right, hiding between two different buildings. He hid behind a dumpster, using his invisibility powers. The police officers caught up to him a few moments later, peering down the alleyway and searching everywhere for him.

"He must have gone somewhere else... Keep looking for him!"

The police officers ran down the street, continuing their search. He waited for several tense moments before the police were nowhere to be found. Letting out a sigh of relief, he turned off his invisibility and reappeared in the alleyway. After getting onto his feet, Bryon carefully peered out of the alleyway and searched for any signs of the officers.

"They must have gotten an image of me somewhere in the city. Knowing the police, they've got my face plastered all over the city. I should have used my invisibility a lot sooner..."

He leaned against the wall, placing his hand on it and sighing to himself.

"Still, I can't afford to get caught here. Not until I find proof of my innocence..."

His ears twitched as he suddenly heard the sounds of a gun being cocked.

"Don't move, varmint. Keep your hands where I can see 'em."

The rex rabbit slowly turned around, taking a look at his assailant. Standing in front of him was a female American paint mare with long golden blonde hair. Her golden colored eyes shone under a brown leather cowboy hat and leather domino mask. Her chest was held back by a brown dress with Native American patterns and a V to show off her cleavage. A brown and red Fringe Braid vest was also on her person, with a pair of leather/cowhide pants covering her legs and a red leather belt with a large buckle that showed the Texas flag. Her feet were in a pair of long brown leather boots with silver spurs on the heels. In her hands was a revolver of sorts, pointed straight at the rabbit.

"Who... Who are you?"

"The name's Calamity Jane. And I'm itchin' ta' turn ya' in, varmint!"

She raised the revolver up to Bryon's eye level, smirking at the fugitive. The rabbit backed away slowly, fear in his eyes. At the last minute, he tucked and rolled away from her arm and ran around the corner.

"Git back here!" Calamity yelled, giving chase after Bryon. The rabbit could hear the mare woman behind him, keeping pace with him. He was about to run around another corner when the rex rabbit felt something land on his back, forcing him down to the ground. His face dug into the asphalt as he felt his hands tugged behind his back. His wrists felt the cool metal of handcuffs, a clicking sound ringing his ears. His head had smacked against the asphalt hard, making his vision swim.

"Don't even try to break outta these, ya rodent. You're not going to be able to break these. 'Sides... Ya' got a big price on your head I'm aimin' to collect."

Police sirens were the last thing the rabbit heard before he lost consciousness.

Metropolitan Correctional Facility: Visitor's Room #9- May 14th, 11:15 AM

Florescent lighting was the only source of light in this dreary room; a clear plastic partition dividing it into two halves. Guards stood around the perimeter of the room, ensuring that neither the guests nor the prisoners would try anything reckless or dangerous. Security cameras were hung all over the room, keeping a sharp eye out for anything suspicious. A metal folding chair was on both sides of the table where the guests and inmates could sit and talk to one another. Phone receivers were on each side of the partitions for communication.

It was in this room that a tribal wolf dressed in a gray woman's business suit and skirt was seated, waiting for her newest client. Her long black hair flowed behind her as her flat heels tapped lightly on the concrete floor. *"Lovely décor,"* she sarcastically thought to herself. *"Then again, this is a correctional facility, not a hotel."*

This woman was Jenna Ronfauni, a legal assistant to the international law firm, McGown and Associates. She and her boss/friend, Candice Merryweather, were actually the heroes Strikira and Legal Beagle in their civilian careers. The two of them were on business in Chicago, meeting up with the Acting Director of the Chicago Branch. As the meeting progressed, a news bulletin flashed on the TV screen, showing Bryon's face on it with the caption: "Suspect in Chicago Incident Arrested!"

Jenna had read about the infamous Chicago Incident, shocked at how a virus could nearly wipe out the city. As she looked at the suspect's face on the television, the tribal wolf couldn't help but get the feeling he wasn't guilty. She couldn't place a finger on it, but Jenna felt that she had met the rex rabbit somewhere before. After some persuasion to the Acting Director of the BOS, she and her partner were given permission to be his defense. After all, no one else in the city or country would dare defend a "terrorist".

Her reverie was broken by the sounds of a door opening on the other side of the partition. Looking up, she saw Bryon being led inside the room. His hands were shackled together and a long chain was attached between his feet to keep him from running. An orange prison jumpsuit had replaced his clothes, clashing with his fur patterns. His eyes bore a forlorn look upon them as he was lead to the chair in front of the tribal wolf. Taking a seat, he picked up the receiver on his end as Jenna did the same.

"G'day, Mr. Walden. My name is Jenna Ronfauni, legal assistant for McGown and Associates."

The rex rabbit took a good look at the tribal wolf, feeling a sense of familiarity towards her. "Odd... She reminds me of someone back in Colmaton. I wonder...?"

Shaking his head, the rex rabbit let out a sigh before he spoke. "Rather strange that someone would want to defend me. Every law office in the city refused to take my case..."

"Well, Miss Merryweather and I feel differently. We want to help you."

"I see..." He looked around the room for a moment with a puzzled look. "Where is Miss Merryweather, anyway?"

"She's collecting the evidence for the case, Mr. Walden. I'm here to ask you some questions about that day."

Bryon sighed softly to himself and looked into Jenna's eyes. "It's strange... Most lawyers would take such a case simply because they want to gain something for themselves. But when I look at you, I see a strong will and determination to find the truth."

He leaned back in his chair, smiling softly at her. "All right... I'll trust you. What do you want to know?"

Jenna nodded slowly at the rex rabbit, taking out a yellow legal pad and a pen. "Well... Let's start off with what you were doing that day, Mr. Walden," she said, ready to write down his statement.

The rex rabbit began to regale his tale to Jenna, telling her everything that he did that day...

An hour later, the lady wolf was seated at a café in the Jefferson/Roosevelt district across from her partner, Candice Merryweather. Candice was a beagle hound with green eyes and blond hair reaching to her shoulders. She wore a similar looking suit to Jenna, except the fabric was light blue. Brown leather briefcases were by their feet with metal plaques bearing her names on them. The young dog was holding a tea cup in her hand as she looked at her partner.

"So, Jenna... What did our client have ta say? "

Jenna placed her legal pad on the table, looking down at it as she read.

"Accordin' ta Mr. Walden, he had entered the Callahan Institute at about 3:32 PM. The rabbit then helped a Dr. Marco Anders comparin' results for a research team until roughly 9 PM, when one of the security guards talked ta him in the room. Bryon, however, stayed behind and decided ta sneak inside the office for the Institute Head's office. But when he was inside the office, he got caught in an explosion and was knocked out."

"That doesn't sound bonzer for our client... Why did he plan to break in there?"

"Well... Dr. Anders said somethin' interesting ta the rabbit, actually. Apparently, a research team was studying the New York Virus to find a cure. However, the head of the Institute had been decreasing their funding for some reason."

"Decrease their fundin'? That makes nah flamin sense... Besides, those blokes on the prosecution will more than likely say that Bryon made that up."

"Maybe... But that's what that bloke believes ta be the oath."

The hound takes a sip of tea and sets the cup down on the table before grabbing her briefcase and setting it on her lap. "Well... I've managed ta get a copy of those files made for the case. I've been lookin' through them and there are a few rather strange things about the case..."

She took out a file marked "Case CI-89602" and opens it atop of the legal pad. Candice then slid out a small printout with pictures of the explosion sites attached to it. The hound carefully read over the report as her brow furrows.

"First, there's the analysis of the explosion residue. The lab results indicated that the explosives used at the Institute were made of highly expensive materials. I've gotten a copy of the market prices for these materials."

She then pulled out a small folder titled "Bryon Walden's Finances" and opens it next to the report.

"The prices for these bomb materials are far too expensive for a college senior to afford. His bank account and credit score showed no evidence of any extensive loans taken out to buy these. Also, his part time job at Burger Bob's doesn't exactly pay a high salary. His parents, Marcia and Victor Walden, only gave him enough money to pay for tuition as well as book and school supplies."

Jenna furrowed her brow as she thought on the beagle's words. *"Wouldn't someone else have purchased the supplies for the explosives, then have him do the deed? But then that would make Bryon guilty of carryin' out the crime. And I know for certain he's innocent. I better not brin' this up to her..."*

"Wouldn't the prosecution team say he took the money from his parent's accounts for the materials?"

"That's highly unlikely. Bryon's bank account was linked to his parent's bank accounts as well. They're the only ones who control money transfers between accounts. If Bryon tried to transfer money to himself, they would know about it."

Candice replaced the report and folders inside the briefcase before taking out another folder titled "Witness Statements" and opening them up.

"Second, we've got these statements from both Dr. Anders and some of the explosion survivors. Dr. Anders says he remembers tellin' Bryon about the project's fundin' bein' cut by the head of the Institute. The survivors also corroborate with the story, sayin' they've heard somethin' similar as well."

"So they were aware of the virus bein' in the Institute? How come there weren't more guards or cameras there?"

"Actually, there were cameras installed in the buildin'. However, the faculty was not made aware of them bein' there."

"I guess the head didn't want them to know. It would probably be easier to catch troublemakers unawares if they didn't know."

Candice nods at Jenna and places the folders back inside the briefcase. She then takes out a large computer hard drive inside an evidence bag.

"Finally, there's the hard drive of the main computer system in the Institute."

Jenna stares at the hard drive with a puzzled look. "But I thought the explosion would have melted or warped that thing?"

Candice shakes her head. "Not this one. This was actually in an underground section of the laboratory that protected the device from the explosion. However, some of the files seemed to have disappeared or been damaged somehow."

"Damaged? Which ones were affected?"

“Strangely enough, they are the files pertainin' ta the head of the Institute as well as the directors of the different projects that were workin' there. I can't find nothin' about their identity or where they came from. Also, some of the security footage was damaged and pieces of it were missin'.”

“Hm... That raises the possibility of sabotage,” the wolf said. “Maybe the fair dinkum blue culprit tried ta delete them ta save their identity. And if that's the case...”

“Then the guilty person could either be one of the project directors or the Institute Head...”

The two of them sat in silence, pondering on all of this information they've gathered.

“Right... I reckon we need ta gather more proof, then,” Candice said, finishing her tea. “Jenna, I reckon we best head back ta headquarters. There's something suspicious about all this.”

Jenna nodded at her partner and took the hard drive with her, placing it inside her own briefcase. “I'll go and have some of the science team members look into the hard drive. If we recover the data, we might be able to shed some new light on the case.”

“That's a bonzer idea. I'll bloody go and talk ta the director about our findin's. I get the feeling we may need help on this one.”

The two ladies gather their things and pay their bill before making their way back to the BOS.

Abandoned Church in Loop Neighborhood- May 14th, 9:00 PM

Bits and pieces of the stained glass were found near the window sills. Slivers of light shone through the holes, barely illuminating the church. Candles and gas lanterns were lit to provide light throughout the room. However, shadows were still cast within the back of the room. Trash was found lying on the floor, one of the few signs of life in the room. The altar had been taken out and only a few pews were left inside.

Right at the back of the room, two figures were speaking to one another, hidden in the shadows; they were speaking in hushed whispers, their voices barely heard in the room.

“And you're certain you can do this task?”

“Relax... I've got it covered. I'll have them weeping before lunch.”

“That's not good enough for me. Overconfidence can be a person's greatest enemy.”

One of the figures snorted, trying to hide its laughter. “You worry too much. Besides, they're nothing but amateurs.”

The other figure let out a sigh and crossed its arms.

“Very well. I'll leave this in your hands. But if you fail...”

The other figure held out something sharp in front of them, the object dripping some kind of liquid. A drop fell to the floor, burning a hole into it. Smoke and sizzling rose in the air as the first figure gulped nervously.

“Er, heh heh... N-No worries, boss. I-I’ve got this.”

The first figure bowed to the other before taking its leave. The other figure watched as its guest left through the front doors of the church. The slam of the doors echoed into the air, signaling the guest’s departure.

“Fool...”

Shaking its head, the other figure walked past a pair of back doors, entering an old priest’s office. Moonlight shone on a single desk in the room, showing more dust and disarray within the office. Lying on the desk were two vials glowing red and blue. An evil grin flashed across its face as it walked over to the desk. A pair of black gloves reached out from the shadows and grabbed the two vials.

“It’s almost ready... As soon as that device is completed, we can move on to our grand plan.”

The figure flashed an evil grin as it gazed out at the window.

“Sleep well, little city... For soon, you will be the stage for one of the greatest events in both history and science!”