

Even a few streets away, they could already hear the sound of destruction and panicked screams reaching across the town. They exchanged no words, their eyes glued to the windshield. The large, tall neon sign next to the Dalmartan convenience stood tall from the distance, guiding them like a giant flame attracting a pair of moths. Their stomach twisted into knots, Jon out of a horrible familiarity and Sebastien's out of the terrifying prospect of the unknown

"Accursed bastards..." The puma grumbled, baring his fangs at just the thought of the Void Cult entangling another innocent victim with their schemes. It was senseless, bloody chaos that just left a trail of bloated corpses behind them.

Sebastien didn't ask about his comment, his face scrunching up even more.

The tires squealed as Jon slammed down on the brakes, tracks formed in their wake. He and Sebastien practically leaped out of the van, drawing their guns immediately and pointing them at the window, only to lower them in horror as they were met with a grisly scene. Holed up inside the convenience store was an obese fox—tatters of what used to be clothes still being hanging off his rotund, flabby frame—who was making his way through packaged foods like they were candy. Shelves and display counters were tossed to the ground, dilapidated. His feral-like growls as he dug into a family-sized bag of BBQ chips were covered completely by the ear-piercing alarm sound, a red light fading in and out across the blue walls and floor.

"What... what the *fuck* is that?!" Sebastien screamed, his hands trembling as he stepped back only for Jon to grip his arm.

"Stay focused! Didn't you go through training?!"

"To fight *criminals*, not... THAT!" He wildly gestured at the fox inside, stopping when the crazed beast stopped his binge to look at them with... *nothingness* written all over his expression before returning to his meal. "Oh my god, oh my god. What do we do?! We can't *shoot* the guy, Boss is gonna kill us if we shoot a civilian!"

"Well we *don't* shoot him with bullets, your idiot. Get me the tranquilizer gun." Jon ordered, trying to overpower the sound of the alarm. "Glovebox, you gotta push your hand deep into it to reach it."

"Y-yes, sir!" Sebastien threw the door open, leaping on his stomach into the driver's seat. He threw the glovebox open, legs kicking the air as he desperately searched through the clutter. He threw everything that wasn't the tranquilizer gun behind him, trash and knick knacks landing on the parking lot. "W-where is it?! Where-AH!" Only when everything else in the glovebox had been hastily thrown out did Sebastien finally grasp the gun. "Jonathan!" He said while leaping to his feet. "Catch!"

Jon caught the tranquilizer gun and immediately ran to the door. It *burst* open against his feet as he kicked his way in, pointing the firearm at the fox. "Freeze." He commanded, finger already on the trigger.

The obese fox paused mid-chew, staring at Jon with vacant eyes. Jon's heart pounded in his chest as he wondered if it would work on someone who was clearly under the influence of the cult's power. The fox tilted his head, looking as if he were trying to understand what Jon was saying. It was then that Jon realized the fox wasn't just overweight, he was massively obese. The bags of chips and candy strewn around the convenience store told a story of an addiction that was out of control, just like the fisherman who had his life destroyed in the span of an hour.

He was a walking wall of adipose-filled flesh, with rolls of fat spilling over the edges of his ripped-up shirt and onto the floor. The girth of his stomach blocked most of the view to his legs—cylinders of meat with width to match tree trunks that sagged across the floor. His chest hung off the air, a pair of man boobs dangling in the air as he struggled to breathe. His pillowy, doughy arms jiggled as they slowly swayed side to side motionless as the fox stopped eating. However, to Jon, the most haunting part of the vulpine's rotund body was their face; long, sagging sacks of fat had settled around his cheeks, *dragging* the man's face down, turning his eyes sunken and distant. Rings of fat wrapped around his neck and under his chin, eroding any kind of distance between his face and chest. It was hard to tell, but grime was *definitely* stuck between them.

"Calm down. We'll take you to the hospital." Jon whispered to the fox, his hand unshaken.

The fox blinked, then opened his mouth and let out a guttural, *beastly* growl. Saliva flew through the air. In spite of the hundreds of pounds piled on top of his body, the fox suddenly got on all fours and tried to leap at Jon, continuing to scream rabidly.

Jon leaped to the side, dodging the rampaging bull of a fox. He winced as the vulpine's moans got louder and louder. The sound was horrifying, pure agony dripping from his wails. His mouth stretched painfully, mouth agape as a deep, gurgling sound managed to overtake even the ear-grating alarm.

"JON!" Sebastien stood in the doorway, that same sheepish, terrified expression lingering on his face as he pointed his gun at the fox. "D-don't hurt him!" He yelled as the crazed vulpine, his voice squeaky and boyish. "S-stop! I swear to god, I'm going to shoot. Arms up, NOW!"

The fox only cocked his head for a second before it started to slowly begin crawling towards Sebastien. The young intern backed away, lips quivering as the two vulpines found themselves in a stalemate—both of them constantly moving towards the door at a snail's pace, tension building in the air so fiercely that it could be cut with a knife. The horrible sound of the alarm continued, drilling itself into everyone's ears.

Jon could only watch—not wanting to aggravate the beastly fox any further—as it crawled towards Sebastien, the intern's hands shaking vigorously the closer it got to him.

The silence felt eternal... until Sebastien screamed. "GO AWAY!"

Without thinking about it, Jon fired down all three darts of the tranquilizing darts directly into the fox's neck. The crazed canine wailed, leaping at Sebastien with brandished claws sprouting from his fat-filled digits. His wail almost immediately corroded into a warbled, high-pitched screech, slowing down his furious stomps mere inches away from Sebastien. The fat fox lingered still, now only uttering droning moans. His head tilted back and forth, drool cascading out of his mouth in harmony with the droning howl until finally, he swayed forward too much to go back and he tumbled towards Sebastien like a giant domino flopping onto the ground.

"N-ngh!" Sebastien was crushed under the doughy, plump body of the fox. The two of them slammed onto the floor with a thundering *wham*, dust flying into the air from the sheer impact. A mountain of blubber completely enveloped his body, the vulpine's saggy man tits pushing against his face "Waitwaitwait, get off me!" He pushed his hands against the fox's chest, struggling in a futile endeavor to lift all five hundred pounds of canine lard away from him. Sweat rubbed all over his gloves and suit, the cloth turning moist against the literal *buckets* of sudor rubbing all against him, the pungent body odor immediately reaching his nostrils, the scent akin to rotting garbage. He wretched, looking away from the morbidly obese beast. His mouth hung open as he coughed out, saliva and sweat mixing on the floor. "G-god, what the hell is this?!"

Jon walked up to the pair, standing above them, unblinking at the sight in front of him. "Yeah, this is definitely part of the cult's work." He pinched his nose, pushing his feet against the obese fox and rolling him off Sebastien with a mighty kick. "We should tell the hospital to keep him secure and bound in the case that he's still under the cult's influence by the time he wakes up. He might've been drugged, but we can't afford to write off brainwashing and indoctrination."

"...Thanks for the help." Sebastien groggily said, his gaze remaining focused on the fluorescent light above him. "Is this how most of the people that are under the cult's power work?"

"Why do you think I wanted to take everything slowly? Trying to tackle these people head-on would only lead to disaster." Even in spite of the obvious concern for the rookie, Jon couldn't help but relish the vindication. A dose of reality was often necessary in the field, especially good for dealing with untethered idealism. "Now, did we learn something?"

"Don't patronize me." Sebastien slowly sat up, panting heavily as the strands of fur around his head draped over his face. "I just didn't know. Next time, I'll be more prepared."

"You better be." Jon extended his hand towards Sebastien, lifting the beaten rookie up. "Always remember this experience. If I wasn't there, you would've been dead."

Sebastien jerked his face away from Jon, immediately freeing himself from the puma's grip before going to check over the unconscious vulpine. He took his pulse, pressing his finger

through the supple amounts of fat around the fox's wrists. "He's stable, although I can't imagine that he'll be okay once he wakes up and looks at his body."

"No one is, but I'm sure that F.U.R. can help them. Those memory eraser devices work like a charm." Jon explained. "If there's anything sensitive that the device can't alter without affecting vital parts of their personality, F.U.R. can assign a psychologist free of charge."

"Still... I feel so bad for him. I know that we had to knock him out, but he's an innocent civilian." Jon interlocked his hand with the fox's, solemnly looking at the frozen, horrified expression on his face. "What do we do now?"

"I already paged the local police force and hospital for an ambulance. In the meantime, we should do our own independent investigation in case the police miss anything." *Or if any of them are in cahoots with the cult.* "Check behind the counter. The guy on shift ran away after calling the police, and then our guy on the inside transferred the call to us first. He probably left the keys there."

Sebastien followed, and just as Jon thought, a key ring was placed on an opened drawer. "Here, Jon. What do you want me to do with these?"

The puma scooted over to the unconscious man, taking a pair of handcuffs from his belt and attaching one of the fox's arms to the door handle. "We'll go to check the security footage. This will keep the giant oaf from running off into the night like the other one in the hospital."

"Roger."

Twisting the key, an office littered with empty Chinese food takeout containers revealed itself. A security terminal with a large array of screens was the only thing of note in the room, so Jon didn't waste any time—kicking the boxes away to make some spaces for them. "Make sure that you stand guard in the door." He told Sebastien. "I just need to check something."

"What do you want to check? I mean, we already know what happened, right?"

"Never hurts to check, kid. Confidence and assumptions are the worst things that you can afford in this line of work." The computer didn't have a password, so Jon accessed the footage almost immediately. He ignored the... *unfitting* background with an anime woman with impossibly large breasts and enlarged the video feed from just a few hours ago. "It saves the footage every 2 hours as a separate file. The last saved footage was around 8:00 pm."

Sebastien looked at his watch. "The call was taken around 8:05 p.m. It's currently 8:40 pm."

"So that means that we'll only see the beginning of the attack."

Jon pressed the play button. The CPU whirled up intensely, all five angles of the recording appearing on the monitors. The fox was wearing a waiter uniform that looked like it belonged to some sort of restaurant. Definitely not one of the chains that were set up recently, but instead something local from the lackluster quality of the design. He was looking at the shelf

stocked with junk food—from packaged chocolate cookies to bags of chips—with a cart full of similarly equally caloric substances.

“Seems that he was a little bit of a glutton even before the cult got its hands on him,” Jon mumbled under his breath, earning an annoyed eye roll from Sebastien.

The footage continued to roll for a few seconds until strange, dark blue patterns began to appear all across the video feed. “What the hell?” Jon had seen corrupted footage before, and it *certainly* didn’t look like this. Glitches usually had a uniform pattern through the chaos, but the patterns that had begun to appear around the footage were like splotches of ink being spilled from inside the screen. “Sebastien, have you seen anything like this before?”

The fox furrowed his brow, rapidly looking over the screens in utter confusion. “Click out of the footage.” He firmly told Jon. “It could be a virus or something like that!”

The puma closed the window, and as if they were never there, the strange patterns disappeared to the screen. The sudden explosion of color from the desktop background made the two of them wince a little, a sinking feeling forming inside both of them.

Jon opened the video again. It buffered, and the splotches appeared almost immediately as the video began to roll. “SHIT!” He grunted, standing up from the chair and anxiously tapping his claws against the table. “God dammit, how’d they already corrupt the footage?! I didn’t know that they could fuck up electronics...”

“Well, maybe we can just alter the footage instead. The corruption seems to be across the monitors as a whole and not on the video window.” Sebastien quickly took his phone and charger out of his bag, throwing the pronged part that would go into the socket back into his bag—leaving him with the USB endpoint and the phone connector. He jammed the former into the PC while connecting it to his phone, a progress bar appearing on the screen. “Now, we just wait and... ta-dah!” Jon played the video on his phone, motioning for Jon to scoot closer. “Those weirdo cultists probably know how to influence old devices since they probably use them. Old hardware is really hard to track. That’s why most burner phones are so shitty and old.”

“I see...” Jon never really took too much stock in technology. Most of the time, he always left any kind of technology work to the people in F.U.R. “What do you see?”

The fox in the footage froze in the middle of picking up a large chocolate bar with nuts, every strand of fur in his body frizzling up. His tail and ears shot upwards, alertness and adrenaline seemingly running through his body. He was perfectly still, not even a movement of his chest from breathing visible. The only sign that the video hadn’t frozen up was the running timer on the upper right corner. The wait for anything to happen was eternal, lumps in their throats forming from the sheer dread for the inevitable needle drop. Twenty seconds of absolute nothingness... Jon could feel his face souring the longer he stared at it. In a macabre way, a wave of relief washed over him when he saw the fox spring back into life again.

The fox tore into the chocolate bar, throwing the wrapper and aluminum onto the floor. He gobbled it down in a few mere bites, swallowing each large chunk whole in pure gluttony. He probably didn't even manage to taste the sugary delight with how quickly he scarfed it down. His pupils dilated—turning into glassy large orbs that showed nothing else but single-minded, completely base needs-driven thought were passing through the fox's brain. The sound of his crunchy, compressed groans coming from the phone speakers was like nails on a chalkboard. It was as if in a few seconds, he had turned completely feral.

The fox tore through bar after bar, greedily scarfing them down. The speed at which he was devouring them made it hard to see at first, but just as Jon feared, all that sugar and calories were immediately being digested into adipose tissue. Already knowing how things would end up, Sebastien turned his head away from the video feed, handing the phone to Jon.

"Suit yourself," Jon grumbled, rolling his eyes at the rookie's fear.

He watched as the fox's body grew bigger and bigger until he ripped off his uniform shirt to make room. A pouch of fat was beginning to spill over his pants and a muffin top formed outwards. The fox was unable to stop himself from bloating, his breathing heavy and drool beginning to build up from the back of his mouth. The fox was completely oblivious to what he had become, ravenously grabbing more food from the shelves, and stuffing his face with chocolate and snacks without a thought of consequences.

His limbs began to balloon in unison with his stomach; arms and legs swollen to proportionately absurd sizes in the span of a few minutes. His burgeoning stomach began to press against his pants, a few seconds of horrible pressure before his belly *burst* forward with the momentum it built up while compressed. The button was sent flying as his pants were undone, lunging it towards the camera lens and bumping the angle of the recording.

Jon watched quietly as the fox then set his sights on the vending machine. The vulpine threw the machine to the floor like an angry child throwing a toy to the ground. The glass shattered from the impact, sending the fox into another frenzy as he took all the candy bars and packaged cakes to eat without savoring them. He swelled even further, his face beginning to contort. "God... Help this poor man." Jon mumbled, memories of the cult's victims flooding through his mind. Just like the others, the poor creature's metabolism had seemingly gone haywire; it seemed like no matter how much he ate, it wouldn't be able to satisfy his stomach or craving for sweets. He was becoming so massive that he probably wouldn't even fit through the doorway he effortlessly came through mere minutes ago. It was heartbreaking; Jon felt so helpless watching him in this state, unable to do anything but watch as he started piling on more weight with every passing second. The timer kept ticking on-screen as if nothing at all was happening. Meanwhile, the fox just kept eating away at whatever snacks and treats he could find until there were none left in sight—all while continuing to get bigger and bigger in size. By now, the clerk had begun to run out of the store after failing to intimidate the fox into stopping, a horrified expression on his face.

The fox lay motionless afterward on the floor in a pile of wrappers—his midsection had grown so enormous that his uniform pants couldn't even stretch far to contain his thick legs anymore. His breathing had become shallow and slow; almost like he was in a sort of peaceful trance after having eaten so much. He had reached a point of fullness that could've potentially killed him if he kept going further.

Finally, the timer ticked down to zero on the feed before turning off completely on its own accord.

"Dammit! Didn't see any kind of drugging there... Whatever they did to him, they must've done it before he even arrived at the store..." Jon raised his fist into the air, slamming it against the counter. The phone and keyboard jumped into the air from the impact, Jon looking down at the desk for a long time, sweat dripping down the side of his face until he finally turned to a concerned Sebastien, a tired look of disappointment on his face. "We have to stop these cultists. They're turning people into... these *things*."

Sebastien nodded, his expression serious. "Shouldn't we get this guy to a hospital first?. He needs medical attention. Are the paramedics taking long?"

The pair turned their heads to the door as the sound of sirens answered Sebastien's question. They rushed towards the entrance, the police already flooding the establishment while manhandling the rabid fox—the vulpine now barely conscious as the policemen unenthusiastically read him out his rights. The rest were all hastily looking for more perpetrators, guns already up.

"Boys," Jon mumbled, raising his badge up. "We'll be taking it from here. The only thing I need you to do is to take evidence and stand real pretty."

"Oi, who are you?!" A skunk asked. He was one of the cops—probably the youngest one out of the bunch. "Do you know who you're even talking to?! We're the *popo*, fuckhe—"

"Shut up, Nathaniel. For the love of God. Please." A badger wearing a trench coat grumbled, pushing the young policeman out of the way. "Everyone!" He called out to the rest of the force. "Listen to the men in the suits. They're professionals, and we're working with them. No moaning or complaining. If you think that you know better than them, you *don't*." The last word was spoken through clenched fangs, everyone around him begrudgingly lowering their guns and retreating out of the store to call forensics.

He walked over to Jon and Sebastien, hands deep in the pockets of his coat. "Sorry about that, fellahs. The idiots here are eager to shoot something and get praise from the masses ever since those strange happenings with the foxes started."

"Don't worry, I'm used to the police being useless." Jon mumbled. "Commissioner Bertram, is it?"

The badger nodded. "Correct. You folks are the only two experts the agency sent, right?"

“...Yes?” He asked, the question obvious.

“I figured. I couldn’t believe that some geek tried to pass himself off as one of you.” Bertram sighed in exhaustion, pinching the bridge of his nose. “He’s behind the danger tape we set up around the perimeter. He says that he knows something about the... *paranormal entity* inside the store, whatever *that* means.”

“Oh, Christ. Sebastien,” Jon called out. “Didn’t you say that there were ghost hunters in the town?”

“Oooh... *Oh no.*” The intern’s face contorted with unadulterated second-hand-embarrassment even before either of them met the supposed ‘expert’ outside the store. “What the hell is he blabbering on about? I saw a lot of stupid true crime idiots talking about the town while I was doing research before coming here. I wouldn’t be surprised if some of them thought that whatever old tale they heard on the internet was somehow related to the cult case.”

“I’ll just deal with this before it gets out of hand.” Jon pushed past Sebastien and Bertram, stress pounding down on his head. Every single bad thing through the day was like a domino falling onto another, this final annoyance serving as the final theatric for the Rube Goldberg machine of a day he had.

Behind the danger tape was... a *monstrously* overweight red fox. Jon’s hands moved to his gun holster, but before he could brandish his firearm, he realized that the vulpine in front of him wasn’t crazed at all. His clothes *were* ill-fitting him, but with the way he was standing behind the danger line—completely transfixed by a video on his phone—told Jon that it was probably from a lack of self-care rather than cult-induced madness. Jon didn’t know if it was worse or better that he had to deal with a genuine sound-of-mind person instead of a crazed beast that needed to be knocked out.

His belly surged out of a graphic t-shirt—the garment *barely* managing to go past his moobs and reaching down onto his knees. A pair of thick, tree trunk thighs filled out a pair of orange shorts that looked like they would rip the second that the young man bent down even slightly. His hair was tied back was a man bun with a neon green dye at the very top. The worst part of all was the disastrous stubble placed upon his three chins. The man was a walking stereotype of a NEET, and Jon had dealt with enough of those in his life to know that they rarely had anything of substance to say.

“Hello.” He coldly greeted. “Commissioner Bertram told me about your... expertise, I’ve heard?”

“Yep!” The fox cheered, hopping on his feet, and the entirety of his body jiggling like a giant pile of jello. “My name’s Chase. I’m—”

“Yes, yes. A paranormal expert or something like that.” Jon pinched the bridge of his nose, face to the floor. He wanted nothing more than for this day to be *over*. “Look, we’re dealing with something dangerous here, and I don’t want any civilians involved.”

Chase pouted, tilting his head. “Are you sure that you don’t want to consult a second opinion? It could heavily benefit your invesitgat—”

“Shut up. Shut. Up.” Jon hissed. “Go back to whatever motel you’re staying at, pack up your things, and *never* come back here. You’re already a fat fox, so you’re at higher risk of whatever... *illness* is going around here.” He had to hold his tongue back from both spilling too much information and insulting the rotund, nerdy vulpine in front of him. “If you try to interfere again, I’ll have you *shipped* out of here, understand?”

Chase recoiled, stepping back with the chipper demeanor from earlier completely eroded. “...Suit yourself, mister detective.”

“I will.” He mumbled. “Now, shoo. The adults will be doing the talking from now on.”

Dejected, Chase sighed in defeat and walked away from the crime scene. Jon stayed put, glaring at the fat fox in case that he tried turning back. Fortunately, it seemed that the dressing down was harsh enough to deflate his naïve spirit. *Thank Christ*. He wasn’t sure if he could handle more arguing after the spat he had with Sebastien earlier.

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“What’s the matter with the kitten?”

“Hm?” Sebastien turned to the commissioner, ears rising up. “I’m sorry, what did you say?”

“I wanted to ask what has Jonathan’s panties in a twist. He’s out there fighting with that tubby little fella like the bastard owed him money.”

“Ah, I dunno.” *Better to be professional than honest*. “My deepest apologies for zoning out. I was just worried about the suspect.”

Looking back at the fox, he couldn’t help but feel a pang of disgust and guilt as he saw the barely conscious man being put on top of a reinforced stretcher made for hippos. They just *barely* managed to get him there with four paramedics all working in unison to haul his massive weight. The sight was as impressive as it was unsettling. It was one thing to see the aftereffects like he saw with Shasta in the hospital, but it was ten times worse when seeing glimpses of the slow descent into gluttonous madness.

“I think it’s ‘cause all the drugs people like him take. Terry was always a troublemaker. Antisocial, criminal record, broken home... I’m surprised that it took this long for him to end up in a situation like this.” Bertram’s explanation spoke about the fox as if he was a *thing* instead of a person. Cold, and detached—every detail that made Terry who he was was a calculation of how likely he was to have ended up in his current situation. “Don’t feel too bad, kid.”

“I’m not a kid, commissioner Bertram.” *And I don’t think being un-empathetic is the best course of action either*. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have an interrogation to do.”

“You gonna try questioning a druggie in the middle of a high?” The badger scoffed, a dry, raspy laugh coming from his ash-coated lungs. “Good luck with that, kid.”

“Thanks. Won’t need it.”

Sebastien pushed past the medics to see the fox who he now knew was named Terry. The medical staff was taking a break before pulling him into the ambulance, all of them resting beside the vehicle while gathering their breath. *Perfect. I can talk to him without anyone bothering him...* He gently approached the stretcher, making sure that he wouldn’t freak out the already dazed man. “Hello?” He asked to check if Terry was awake.

The obese fox slowly blinked at him, his mouth hanging open as he groggily tried to spit out a ‘hello’ through his slurred speech.

“Hi. My name’s Sebastien. Someone told me that you’re named Terry, right?”

He nodded, the sagging pouches of fat around his face jiggling.

“Good. Good. Hey, I really want to apologize for knocking you out. If you can help us, we can help you back. Figure out who did this to you.” It almost felt as if he was talking to a child—a lullaby-esque tone carried through his words. “Did you ever talk to someone who was trying to introduce you to any group meetings? Self-help, therapy... anything like th—” Sebastien suddenly froze, his arm squeezed by Terry’s pudgy, fat hands. His tail shot up straight as he expected him to turn rabid once again, but instead, a face of absolute *terror* written all over his face.

“I’mhm Shorry...” He mumbled, the flab around his arms shaking.

He could barely keep himself stable, and before Sebastien could even process what the apology meant, Terry’s chest began to rapidly rise up and down. The stretcher underneath shook as his body began to convulse intensely, loud gurgles coming from the back of his throat.

“MEDIC!” Sebastian screamed. “GET THIS MAN TO THE HOSPITAL IMMEDIATELY! He’s having a heart attack, stabilize him!”

The paramedics rushed to Terry, pushing Sebastien aside as they pushed the stretcher into the ambulance with nothing but adrenaline and danger. They groaned loudly, slowly lifting Terry through the ramp they installed. Sebastien could only stand helplessly as the man he tried to help was readied to be rushed to the hospital.

As the door closed—red and blue light overlaying on top of his orange fur—Sebastian watched on as the ambulance drove away into the night, that multicolored light peering through the thick leaves.

“...*Fuck.*”