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## **“End Game”**

By Kellan Meig'h

### Chapter 08 – “Preparations”

Madelyn looked up from rearranging the guitar effects boxes in the front counter to see a familiar fur heading for their front door. The gray lapin, a Master Luthier, was carrying two guitar cases and he had a third one tucked up under his arm. Once through the door, he smiled and greeted her.

“Hi, Maddie. I finished these custom guitars Axel ordered. Is he around?” the male asked.

“He's in the back, Jim. Let me go get him for you.” she replied.

“No need, I heard Jim come in,” the equine male retorted, coming through the doorway to the storage area by the office. “You did all three?” he inquired.

“Just like you asked. One transparent black, one transparent wine red, one blueburst. All twelve strings.” Jim stated while he opened the first case. He pulled the guitar from its case, a solid-body guitar of his own design. It was the only style that Axel felt was actually a playable twelve string that was worthy enough to perform with.

“Oh, Jim, this is a beauty! You've outdone yourself!” he commented, taking the wine red guitar in paws and strumming a few chords on it. “It plays just like a six string, Jim. Now I'll have to convince myself to sell these and not keep one for myself.” Axel added.

“That's what Madelyn told me you might say a few weeks ago, friend.” Jim stated as he opened the next case. It was not what the tall equine expected to see but instead it was a honey amberburst solid body twelve string with 'Axel Svensen' inlaid down the fretboard.

“Happy Anniversary!” Madelyn said with a wide smile, knowing she had caught him totally off guard with this present.

“I . . . I don't know what to say . . .” Axel stated, still looking at the guitar in its case, gently touching it but not picking it up. “I . . . I almost forgot to get your present,” he offered up, picking up the third guitar

case when Jim nodded to him. "Here it is?" he said sheepishly, giving her the case to open.

Madelyn slowly opened the case, seeming a little hesitant to look inside. Stealing a peek, she smiled, then lifted the lid to see a cherry sunburst Jim Garcia semi-hollow body six string with her likeness inlaid in the peg head. A small inlay at the twelfth fret had her first name inset into it with silver.

"Oh My . . ." Her bottom lip started to quiver and tears welled up in her eyes. "You shouldn't have," she said softly, taking the guitar from its case and playing a few licks on it.

"So, um, you like it?" her hubby asked.

She looked at him, smiled and then started to cry.

"I guess that's a yes?" he asked. She just nodded, unable to speak momentarily.

Jim went out to his car to get the other two guitars that were for sale, allowing the two lovers a moment alone. He stopped and looked back inside after he had left the building, smiling at the two equines, wrapped up in each others arms. Gah, this had been hard to keep the guitars a secret from the two of them. It was worth it, though just to see their reactions.

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Torvald looked at the email on his computer, a message from Aslaug of all furs. It was a strange one at that; no subject line, no greeting, no 'Aslaug' signature, just a joke. He pondered it for a while, then walked across the hall to the tigress' workspace to get her take on it.

"Sweetheart, Aslaug sent a very strange email to me. I thought I would run it past you and see what you think about it." Tor proposed.

"Um, you're kidding, right? Aslaug sent you an email?" she queried.

"Yeah, she did. It was a weird one, too. She sent me a joke of all things." the blond fur offered up.

"So, what was the joke she sent?" the tigress asked, looking puzzled by this odd turn of events. Victoria was well aware of the Valkyrie's lack of interest in these so-called *Sejd* devices so an email was a very rare occurrence.

"The joke was quite funny and very fitting, too." the tall equine offered up. That got the tigress' attention.

"Well, are you going to tell me the joke or not?" she requested.

"Okay, here goes," he began, trying to keep a straight face. "What's the difference between a *Hedni* raiding party and the Salvation Army?"

"I'm afraid to ask." she replied.

"What the raiding party comes away with is classified as legitimate conquest!" That made them both crack up laughing.

"Does the filly really dislike the Salvation Army that much?" Victoria asked.

“I'm not sure,” Torvald replied, giving thought to the matter. “You know her, she really doesn't share a lot about her thoughts. She still refers to Christopher as WhiteChrist, even after all of these years.” That made Victoria smile. “You know, that joke was all she sent. No greetings, no other message.” he mused. “I'll have to mull this over, Victoria. I think she's trying to tell us something.”

The tigress give thought to this strange message for a moment, then spoke up. “Um, Salvation Army. What would they have in common with a raiding party?” she asked.

“Well, a raiding party would have a planned out goal, they wouldn't stop until they achieved their goal and they would be ready to move at any given moment. Just like the Salvation . . .” He looked at his wife, who was nodding in agreement to his unspoken thoughts.

“She's telling us to be on our guards, I'll bet.” Victoria put forth.

“Either that or she thinks we should ring bells and ask for donations in front of grocery stores,” he mused, trying to keep the mood light.

“No, she's telling us to keep on alert.” the tigress stated.

“Well, I won't argue. Your sixth sense is never wrong.”

“This isn't my sixth sense, Hon. I have a gut feeling about this one, since she didn't do anything except send that joke. Totally out of character for her.”

“Okay then. We'll arm up and stay that way until the trial.” Torvald suggested.

“I guess we should call the kits and tell them to stay alert, too.” Victoria pointed out.

Torvald nodded in agreement. “Yeah, better safe than sorry.”

Victoria thought for a moment, then told her hubby of her earlier phone conversation with her sister. “Not to change the subject, but Valerie and Barbara want to go ahead and buy our old house right now. They just called me right before you came into my office, asking me to draw up the papers.”

Tor looked at his wife funny, like he didn't understand her. “Um, are they sure?” he queried.

She nodded back. “They are very sure and I couldn't talk them out of it. They claimed it would help us make this place secure, since we could pay it off. You remember Tom Iskenderian said we should hope for the best but prepare for the worst.”

“I know he did. I just feel like we're taking advantage of Val and Barb.”

Victoria disagreed with that thought. “They're sure they want to do this. I think they want to be able to take a tax write-off this year.”

Tor thought for a moment, then agreed with that idea. “Yeah, a tax write-off is worth it.”

Victoria looked at the mound of paperwork on her desk and motioned for her hubby to sit in the side chair. “Tor, you need to sign these Power Of Attorney papers. They will let Axel, Gytha, Dana and Conrad

sign documents and write checks against our bank account to keep this place up. It's just in case we get thrown in prison, Hon.” she explained.

He grimaced, hoping that didn't happen. “Okay, give me a pen, please?” he asked. Getting the first paper ready, he voiced his thoughts. “I dearly hope we don't end up in jail. My retirement funds will go straight into our bank account but some fur will have to keep the place up.”

“Axel had volunteered to stay here while we're gone,” she offered up. “He really wanted our old home but Valerie already had first dibs on it. He knows if we do go to jail, when we come back he will have to vacate the house.”

“Maybe we should just sell the house to Axel and Madelyn if we go to jail?” Tor suggested. “It's not fair to ask a fur to vacate a place they have lived in for a long time. Besides, we might go to jail for a very long time and he might be long dead by the time we get out.”

“Don't even think that!” the tigress interjected. “I'm hoping in my heart that our 'Employers from On High' will step in at any moment and stop this insanity.”

“I'm beginning to think that isn't going to happen.” the stallion put forth. “I can't seem to call Hrist or Denise to get some answers, either.”

Victoria seemed very disturbed by that thought. Standing up, she attempted to summon the skunkette. “Denise! Denise Berger, we need to talk to you!” the tigress shouted. Within moments, the striped femme materialized in their presence.

“Oh, Hi Victoria, Torvald. Um, what's up?” Denise asked in an apprehensive tone.

“We thought you might be able to answer some questions, since you're our mission assistant.” Victoria brought up.

“Um, that might be a problem,” the skunkette replied. “It seems you're both on the 'inactive' roster at the moment. I really can't do much for you while you're on the list.”

“So, we're no longer Agents?” the tigress asked carefully.

Denise frowned. “You're both still Agents, alright. You're just not slated for any missions in the foreseeable future. That means I really can't do much for you. Sorry.”

“Has *The Almighty* abandoned us?” the tigress blurted out. She had to know before it consumed her.

“I . . . I really can't answer that for you.” Denise hesitantly replied. “You don't know how much this hurts me, not to be able to assist you two with this mess. Please, please forgive me?” She asked, wiping at her eyes that were welling up with tears.

The skunkette, without warning shimmered out of sight, crying.

Victoria looked at the spot where Denise had been standing just moments ago, attempting to keep her composure. She tried to dismiss a thought that was burning brightly in her mind but it just wouldn't go away, no matter how hard she tried. Just as she began to speak, her hubby voiced her inner thoughts for her.

“We have been abandoned.” Torvald stated, sitting back down in the side chair. “We've risked everything for the good of all furkind and this is how we're repaid? Gah! If I could, I would ream that lion a new one with a bulldozer! We have almost bought the farm too many times to count and they just turn their backs on us? What in the world did we ever do to deserve this?”

Victoria sat back down at her desk, wiping at her eyes. “I don't know what we did but I can tell you what, I am completely done with being an Agent for those . . . those . . . Ooooh!” It was clear she was pissed off too.

“Go ahead and say it.” her hubby suggested.

“No, I'll just think it loudly. Besides, I'm sure they know just how I feel about them at the moment.” she retorted. She stood, motioning for him to follow her. “Come on, let's go get down a bottle of Scotch and celebrate! We're officially abandoned!”

“Don't you want to wait until either Christopher or Odin gives us a real 'official' version of what Denise just told us?”

“No Tor, I don't. We're abandoned, so why wait? Come on, let's get ripped!” she stated, dragging him along behind her by the wrist.

Torvald just shrugged, following his mate to the kitchen. He had a bad feeling his head would be getting even with him in the morning.

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Ingvar was standing in the presence of his boss, Rumjal. The fallen minor deity was smiling, happy to hear the Council's plans were advancing nicely.

“The Council will be pleased with this news,” the rotund elephant mused, patting the Agent on the shoulder. “So, have you began to turn them?” he asked.

The leopard shrugged, frowning at that question. “I have a problem, Boss. Well, I guess it's really two problems. There's this huge, and I do mean HUGE wolf that seems to be guarding the residence off and on. I'll bet he's a Valkyrie's mount, if anything.” Ingvar looked at the floor, then back at Rumjal. “And there's this femme staying there that's a bodyguard of some sort, too. She scares me, Boss. Her soul is weird, like there's two souls intertwined inside her.”

“She's a chimera, most likely, a hyoo-man creation, an artifact.” the deity set forth. “The Council has faith in you that you will finish this mission shortly.” he stated. “The Svensens will make a very powerful pair for the Council's arsenal. They have knowledge of what lies beyond and they can prove without a shadow of a doubt that *The Big Fur* and *AllFather* don't really care about the furs on her planet. Think of the implications, Ingvar. They would be very dangerous.”

“Yeah, I can see your point.” the feline agreed.

“They will be immortal, too. Indestructible Malefic Agents, Ingvar. A deadly combination for sure. All you need to do is deliver them to us.”

“As you wish,” the dark feline replied, bowing to his employer. “I will bring them to you on a silver platter.”

“Just deliver them, Ingvar. I will send you an assistant to help turn them.”

“Thank you, Boss. I will deliver them to the Council.”

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Victoria lifted her second tumbler of Bowmore Darkest Sherry Cask Finish fifteen year-old Scotch and took a small sip, actually enjoying the intense chocolate and raisin hints in its smooth, peaty finish. Thinking for a bit, she sat the glass back on the counter and shrugged her shoulders.

“This is too good to get ripped on, Hon. Maybe I had a bad idea.” she put forth to her hubby.

Torvald sipped his spirits again, nodding in agreement. “You're right. It would have been different if this were Johnnie Walker Red or something like that.”

“My former commander when I was in the Army preferred Jack Daniels,” Cami offered up, savoring the taste of the Scotch.

“I used to drink Jack Daniels before Tor and I were married. My first husband had a drinking problem that almost rubbed off on me. He stopped drinking completely about a year after our divorce was final and I became strictly a social drinker, not a *'Let's get ripped'* drinker.” the tigress shared.

“I don't think any fur could say they remember Victoria being drunk at a party.” Torvald suggested. “This is the first time in a while that we've sat down together and had a sip of something stronger than mead.”

“You have mead?” Cami asked in astonishment.

“Make it myself. Would you like some?” he asked.

“Just a small glass, please? I'm supposed to be 'On Duty' here.” She smiled, thinking about the last time she had sampled some mead. She had been on her second tour of combat in the Middle-East when her squad had liberated a town from the Nazi-backed insurgents. The townsfolk had thrown a celebration for them and she had been introduced to the fermented honey drink.

“Here you go, Cami. You might need this glass of water to thin it a bit, though.” Tor stated as he sat her drink and a glass of ice water on the counter in front of her. “I tend to make it a bit strong at times.”

“Mmm! This is good!” the femme wolverine commented after tasting Tor's brew, enjoying the flavors still tingling in her mouth.

“Every fur seems to enjoy his mead,” the tigress pointed out. “Um, you were going to tell us about yourself yesterday and we got sidetracked.” she brought up.

Cami, nodded, then began to tell her story. “As you might have guessed, I'm not a normal fur from this planet. I'm actually a chimera, created to be a soldier. Officially, I'm an Indiana Mil-Tech Model Fifteen-X Advanced Heavy Combat soldier, based on a Brandon Biotech Model 67 Proof Of Concept design with a few specialized enhancements for my job. I know you've met Lisa Gallegos. She's a chimera, too. We both

worked at the same . . . brothel.” Cami admitted.

“So, you're a created life form?” Victoria asked.

“Yeah, I'm part human, part mustilidae, um, wolverine and a little smidgen of feline, hence the claws.” She unsheathed her claws that were substantially larger than Victoria's. “I also have a microprocessor and some communications hardware under a removable plate on top of my skull. The processor has an interface inside my brain that allows me to 'see' a virtual screen that I can use to 'talk' to other RedTooth devices, such as my gunsight camera, my cell phone or my laptop.”

“Were you full-size when you were born, I guess that would be the word for it?” the tigress inquired.

Cami nodded. “Yeah, I was just about fully grown when I was taken from my growth chamber. We go by our incept date for age, though. In case you're wondering, I'm actually only seventeen years old.”

“I wouldn't have guessed that,” Tor stated. “How old were you when you served in the military?”

“I was a year and three days old when I first set boots on foreign soil.” she replied.

“Gah! That sounds crazy, if you ask me!” Victoria blurted out. “You were just a baby!”

“You're not the first to say that, Victoria. I was all of six foot, one inch tall in my bare feet and one-hundred ninety pounds. A pretty big baby, huh? Besides, I was toting a 3.55mm rotary fletcher rifle with an eighteen thousand round backpack magazine that weighed five hundred and seventy-seven pounds, full up.”

“You mentioned that you worked at a brothel. Care to elaborate?” Torvald asked.

“Um, yeah, about that.” Cami began, sounding somewhat embarrassed to bring it up. “On my home planet, chimeras were originally designed as soldiers but it didn't take very long for some twisted shit to realize we could be used as sex slaves. For the most part we were furry in nature and we had no civil rights in some states and countries. Those places were a hotbed for extreme sex brothels.”

Cami sipped her drink, then continued. “Either we were sold directly into slavery or we ended up there after our stint in the military if we couldn't find work. I actually went looking for employment at a brothel that was run by a former soldier after serving in the Australian Army. The man that ran that place, Chuck Waddell, had a soft spot for his ladies, allowing them to buy their freedom, their ownership through a contract agreement. Since I was self-owning at the time, he offered me a security job after a brief mix-up in the very beginning. Lisa worked there so we became close friends. She eventually purchased her ownership and left the brothel but we stayed in touch.”

“When Mitchell married her, they still kept in contact with me and eventually offered me a job with The Celestial Courts, doing security-type work. I had just come off of a stint as a County Sheriff on my home world so I was ready for something new. You two are my seventh assignment, but it's the first as a bodyguard. Usually I'm tracking down somebody that jumped bail.”

“I hope you've never had a failed assignment?” the tigress mused.

Cami smiled as she replied, “No, I haven't. This seems like a pretty simple job to me. Just keep an eye on you two while we wait for your trial.” The femme wolverine gave them a pensive smile as she added, “I

hope you both beat your charges. I read your files before coming here and I have to say, someone really wants you two out of the picture in a bad way.”

“You know we're Agents, right?” Tor questioned.

“Yes, I do know that.” Cami replied. “I still feel like you're both being railroaded or possibly caught in the crossfire of some bigger struggle.” She thought of a moment, then brought up something. “Um, do you think it's the Malefic Council that wants you as their Agents?”

“I wouldn't put it past them,” Victoria replied, sipping her Scotch afterward. She savored the flavors for a moment, then continued. “Tor brought that up just recently. I really hope it's not the case.”

“I've had a run-in with a Malefic Agent on my home world.” Cami admitted. “It took almost forty rounds out of my Desert Eagle .50AE to put him down.”

She shuddered at the thought; that Agent had broke into her jail room with ease, looking for what must have been a Celestial Agent that was bailed out earlier in the day. He still had managed to kill two of her deputies before she dropped him. When the coroners arrived, they found the Agent still breathing, just barely. He took a grenade from his vest and pulled the pin with his last shred of life, killing two more good men. If there was one thing she would like to do, it was get even for the loss of her people.

“From your description, yeah, that sounds like a dark Agent, all right. Tough to put down.” Tor stated.

Cami looked at her mead, then back at her charges. “Tell you what; I'll fix dinner tonight as long as you two sit here in the kitchen so I can keep an eye on you while I cook.”

“That's fine by me.” the tigress agreed.

“I'll make some coffee while you cook.” Tor offered up. “Just let me know if I'm getting in your way.”

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The two rhinos stood by their vehicle, waiting for the elder agent to finish his call. They were burly, even for rhino standards. Each one was close to seven feet tall and they both weighed in at a combined five hundred-fifty pounds. They looked even more imposing in their dark navy blue suits, white shirts, black ties along with the ever-intimidating Ray-Ban Aviator sunglasses. Tasha Cumberow had chosen them specifically to look into the facts surrounding Wilhelmine being under investigation by the FBI.

“I understand, Tasha. No broken skulls.” the darker gray agent repeated back to his boss. “We'll be as discreet as possible,” he added, frowning at the thought of being 'discreet'. He ended his call and pocketed his phone afterward.

“Well? Did she rein us in?” the younger agent asked.

The elder agent nodded. “Yeah, she said no busting the place up. You know what Jesse, I hate to have to be 'discreet.’”

“I understand, Randall. No fun in that,” the younger agent proffered up while he straightened his tie.

They went across the street to the front entrance to the L.A. Downtown branch of the FBI and started



up the steps.

“Showtime, Randall.” the younger agent stated with a slight smile on his mug.

“You gotcha, Jesse.” the elder one replied. “Let's try to keep the collateral damage to a minimum, eh?”

“Sure, I'll try my best.”

The two agents walked through the front doors, trying to be as inconspicuous as a pair of huge rhinos could be. On approaching the front desk, they both flashed their badges quickly at the femme white lapin behind the counter before Randall announced them.

“Special Agents Trask and Donohue. We're here to see Agent Brian Thomkins.” he stated as they continued on their way to the elevators.

The receptionist tried to stop them, since she hadn't given them clearance yet. “Sirs? You can't just go up to see . . .” She stopped talking when the security guard by the elevators drew his weapon.

“Stop right there!” the wiry wolf snarled, drawing a bead on Jesse Trask's forehead with his AimPoint laser targeting sight.

“Special Agents!” Randall blurted out again, showing his badge to the guard. The guard paid that no never-mind.

“Get your paws up where I can see them! Both of you!” the guard snapped at them. “Either one of you so much as flinch and I'll drill both of you!” he added, slowly reaching for his two-way radio. “Base, this is unit twelve. I have two suspects in the lobby, armed. I need backup,” he stated in a clipped tone into the two-way.

“Hey! We're not suspects, buddy. Just put the pistol away and w . . .” Jesse was cut off by a deep growl out of the wolf's throat.

“You just shut the hell up and get on the floor, face down with your arms and legs spread! Now!!” the guard spat out.

While the two 'Special Agents' assumed the required position, several more guards made their appearance. Among them was the head of security, Robert 'Bob' Bowen.

“Anthony, what's going on . . . Oh Shit!” the hedgehog blurted out when he picked up Jesse's identification. “Gah! Anthony, back off! All of you, back off!” he demanded of the security detail, giving the two rhinos plenty of room.

“Thanks for calling off your kalis, Bob,” Randall offered up after getting back to his hooves.

“Randy! Why didn't I know it was you two!” the security chief blurted out. “You could have called me and warned me at the very least!” he added.

“Sorry, Bob. We were sent here in a big hurry this time. We honestly didn't have time to call you and set up a meeting.” Jesse offered up.

“Well, come with me, then.” Bob Bowen requested. “Let's get you signed in properly.”

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Randall and Jesse were riding the elevator up to the third floor, both now sporting tags hanging from their suit jackets that indicated they were 'Visitors with Credentials'. Jesse poked at his tag, then frowned.

“What's the matter, buddy?” his partner asked.

The younger rhino looked at his partner with a scowl. “Why didn't they just put ear-tags on us?”

“Now come on, Jesse. It isn't that bad.”

“I guess not.” he replied. “I still don't like it.”

The elevator stopped on the third floor and they stepped out into the hallway, following Bob's directions. A few moments later, they were standing muzzle to muzzle with Brian Thomkins.

“Um, I was told by Agent Bowen to expect you two,” the onager pointed out. “What can I help you with?”

“I'll be blunt, here.” Randall stated, pulling his sunglasses down just enough to look over them. “We want to know who put you on the tail of Wilhelmine Marie Delancey.” He hesitated for a moment, then added this; “We were specifically chosen for this job and we were told by our boss that we couldn't lean on you for answers.”

Jesse cracked his knuckles, glaring a hole through the equine in front of him. “Yeah, normally, one of us would just get ya in a hammerlock and the other one would pound on ya until ya told us what we wanted to know.”

Brian gulped, then spoke up. “Um, I was told about this . . . situation . . . by an informant.”

“And what's that informant's name?” Randall asked. “Remember, we can't lean on you.” He did step closer to the smaller ungulate in an intimidating manner.

“You didn't hear this from me. The informant's name is Ingvar Gamel.”

Jesse nodded, giving thought to this. “So, do you know where we might find this Ingvar Gamel?”

“No, I don't. He's a drifter of sorts but I think he might still be in Mission Viejo. That's where he called from, the last time I spoke with him.”

“Thank you.” Randall offered up. “You've been more than helpful. I expect you will end your surveillance of Mrs. Delancey. Capish? She's a kind fur that despite packing the magical powers to obliterate this building and make your life a living hell, she means no fur harm.”

Agent Thomkins watched the two rhinos walk out of his office, finally remembering to breathe once they were out of sight. Never in his life had he been more intimidated by two agents before. Even though they had indicated they couldn't harm him, that thought wouldn't leave his mind. He looked down, noting he needed to change his pants now. There was a damp spot in the front of the crotch.

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Nancy looked around at the huge room, white from floor to ceiling, wondering just what she had gotten herself into. She had agreed to take a mission, just to see if it was what she wanted to do for some time to come. Her mission assistant, a leopard-spotted skunk, had told her to just wait patiently while she retrieved Nancy's partner for this assignment.

She mused about her conversation with her hubby Trenton, right before she was transported here. He had decided not to go back into Telecom after that one trip to the mountains. Apparently, his partner Paul wasn't bothered by the whipping winds and the swaying tower they were working on. It was fortunate that the graying coyote had been there to help Trent off the tower after he froze up from fear. She didn't blame him for wanting to keep both hooves on the ground. Nancy was sure she would have went back to her old job, too in that case.

One of the compelling reasons for her to take the assignment was the news that she would indeed die from her previous injuries that had occurred during her immortal life if they removed her immortality. She just hoped she would be able to get along with her work partner.

While she waited, she heard Megan's voice as she shimmered into existence in the room and another voice, male, that was very familiar to the blond femme.

“What do you mean, I have a new partner?” the tall, blond equine with the white blaze down his muzzle blurted out. “Gah! Now I'll have to train another . . .” The male's voice trailed off when he saw exactly who his 'new partner' was.

“Nancy?!?”

“Dad???”