

Lupinia

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Introduction

This story is preserved and presented here mostly because it still gets too much attention to remove from the website. I was pretty much fresh out of high school when I wrote it, and while I was better at writing than my peers at the time, I'm a little embarrassed to say I wrote this. However, you might enjoy it, if furry fiction written with other people's characters is your thing.

I don't plan to continue this story. At the time, I had elaborate plans for it, and it potentially could have worked, but I would need to start from scratch to make any sort of continuation worthwhile, and it's just not a priority.

Lastly, the bonus chapter, Press Conference, was actually the first in the series, and one of my first attempts at furry fiction. It was written after George W. Bush's presidential re-election in 2004, a time when the US political system seemed so broken that many people, myself included, pursued — usually unsuccessfully — immigration to Canada

About the Author, and Contact Information

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Chapter 1

Discovery

The beauty of nature is a wonderful thing, inspiring creativity and peace in most people. There are some who don't care for living outside the realm of man, but for others, the forest is the only place that's home. For Thaddeus Lovejoy, exploring the nearby Appalachian Mountains was always a refreshing vacation from his college studies. He would often spend his entire weekend camping in the wilderness, his trusty old Land Rover giving access to the more remote areas, away from the influence of society. Here, he was free.

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Thad bounced along the poorly-dug trail, his truck's suspension creaking in protest at this trip as he concentrated on the road ahead. This was a familiar trail, he had come up here to camp countless times before, but it was never an easy passage, and required his full attention. He had no trouble finding his pull-off area, where he donned his hiking pack and trudged off down the footpath to a gently-used fire pit in a clearing. This was no new experience, but his mind was on the midterm exam he completed earlier that afternoon, wondering if he had passed, and whether he'd be able to complete his homework. Engrossed in his thought process, he walked right past his camping spot without realizing it.

Several hours down the trail, Thad finally realized something was wrong. "Where the heck is the campground?" he wondered aloud, cursing himself for not paying closer attention to where he was going. Not only had he lost his destination, but he was also far from the trail, and without a map of the area. "I knew I should have brought that stupid map", he said to himself while fumbling with his compass. He got his bearings and headed south, which he figured would take him back to the truck, or at least a place where he could get a signal on his cell phone. He worried about it getting dark outside, when he spotted a small cabin up the hill from him. Excited, he started the climb to the building, which resembled a wall built in front of a cave as he got closer.

He knocked rapidly on the front door, looking in the windows for signs of life as he yelled into the cabin, "Hello? Anyone home? HELLO!" Finally, after no answer, he carefully tried the doorknob, and found it unlocked. Thad unsnapped the sheath on his large hunting knife and stepped cautiously into the sparsely decorated room, glancing around for the inhabitants. The living room was furnished with a soft-looking hand-made couch and armchair, and a slice of a log for a table. A collection of magazines and books about nature and wolves were scattered around the room, and a painting of several grey wolves hung above the couch. "Someone had a little time on their hands", he remarked as he pressed his palms into the exquisitely-crafted chair, then stepped around a partition wall and headed deeper into the cave.

A pungent odor struck him as he stepped into the kitchen, the heavy blood smell nearly making him nauseous. He held his shirt over his nose and fumbled through his pack for a flashlight, shining it over the dimly-lit room. He nearly puked when he found the culprit of the stench: A small deer carcass on the table that had been crudely gutted and shredded, its blood covering nearly the entire table, which had a beveled lip seemingly designed to contain such fluids. He quickly went to the next room, containing little more than a large bed, mirror, and closet. Curious, he walked toward the closet and carefully opened it, and was immediately shocked by what

he saw. In the closet, a fox stood on its hind legs, about the size of a 5-year-old human, wearing overalls much like a child's, its muzzle covered in blood. It swiped its forepaws menacingly at Thad, growling and snarling in a high-pitched voice. He suddenly heard something move behind him, and with a sharp blow to his skull, everything went black.

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Thad awoke laying on the couch in the living room, a throbbing pain in the back of his head. Morning light shone through a window, highlighting dust floating in the air. He felt something heavy on his stomach, and looked down at his torso to see the same fox kit sitting on him, wagging his tail playfully while playing with a stuffed wolf. The kit looked up and waved at him, grinning "Hewwo! What's your name? My name is Skippy. Is your head feeling better? Are you hungry?" Thad stared at the young fox wide-eyed, too shocked at its ability to talk to process the childish barrage of questions.

"Umm, uhh, umm..." he stammered, wondering if he was dreaming the whole thing.

The fox tilted his head to the side and perked his ears. "Can you talk? My daddy said you's in big twouble. Didja get lost? I got lost one time, but..." He trailed off and looked up suddenly. Thad tried to follow his gaze, but couldn't move enough. Suddenly, a deep voice came from behind.

"Skippy, go to your room, I need to talk with our...visitor...alone." The little fox kit nodded and skipped off to the back of the cabin, happily wagging his tail. Thad looked up to see a 6' wolf standing over him on its hind legs, holding a large katana sword mere inches from his forehead. The wolf stared at him coldly, standing steadily still. "If you want to live to see tomorrow, don't even think of moving", the wolf commanded. Thad stayed put, looking for an escape. Suddenly, several large Dobermans burst through the door, and Thad saw his opportunity. He slapped away the katana blade and jumped to his feet, filled with adrenaline. He kicked the nearest Doberman in the groin, but as he was preparing to kick another, he felt two sharp objects hit him in the chest, followed by a searing pain that ripped through his entire body. As he fell to the ground, he caught a glimpse of two wires running from his chest to a gun handle held by the tallest of the dogs. The current flowing through his body caused him to convulse on the ground, and when he thought he was about to breathe his last breath, the pain stopped. The dogs tied his hands and feet while he was still limp and tossed him into the caged cargo area of a camouflage-painted Land Rover. As he landed in the back, his bruised head hit the back of the seat, and he lost consciousness once again.

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Severe aching all over his body greeted Thad when he woke up again. He felt horrible, but knew he had to stay alert to survive. He opened his eyes and looked around at what appeared to be a standard interrogation room, black walls, steel chairs, steel table, bright spotlight overhead, large mirrored window facing him. There didn't appear to be anyone else in the room with him, but he spotted two cameras pointed at him. A door opened across from his seat, and two huge, muscular wolves dressed in baggy military uniforms entered the room armed with swords, followed by a taller, yet more refined-looking Doberman wearing a business suit. The wolves stood against the wall behind Thad, one on each side of him, while the Doberman took a seat across the table from them. He stared at Thad with an intimidating expression on his face, then held out a badge to him. "I'm Commander Andrew Tanpaw of the Lupinian Secret Service. Please state your name for the record." He spoke cleanly with very little accent, his tone of voice quiet yet firm.

Thad glanced around the room, trying not to panic or become nervous. After all, he hoped to get a job with the FBI someday, this seemed like the perfect chance to practice his skills. He stared defiantly at Andrew and smirked at him "You can't hold me here, I know my rights, I demand a lawyer".

Andrew raised an eyebrow and laughed loudly, his voice echoing through the room. He collected himself and saw Thad's confused expression. "You don't seem to know what's happening here. You're no longer on US soil, you've stumbled into an entirely different country that I'm sure you didn't know was here. Your American rights don't apply here. So, I'll ask you again, what is your name?"

Thad looked at the snarling wolves surrounding him, then back at Andrew, and sighed, deciding to save his strength for later. "My name is Thaddeus Lovejoy", he replied.

Andrew nodded slowly, "And, where are you from, Mr. Lovejoy?"

"I'm from Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, at the base of these mountains."

Andrew jotted a few notes in a small notebook in his paw. "Now, the important question, what are you doing here?"

"I was hiking to my usual campsite, but I got lost. I spotted that house and went inside looking for help, and then this werewolf-thing attacked me."

"Why were you armed?"

"I didn't know what I'd find in the house, I wanted to be prepared in case the owner of the place was hostile. I sure as hell wasn't expecting to find talking animals."

The commander chuckled a bit "Well, what you found was our nation's Prime Minister having dinner with his son. He'll soon decide what to do with you." He stood up, turned, and walked out of the room, the guards following closely behind him, leaving Thad alone in the room once again. The initial shock of the situation had worn off, and his mind was flooded with thoughts. How could there be a whole secret nation inside the US? How come no one had ever talked about it? He had certainly heard rumors about werewolves and fantasy creatures in these woods, but everyone always assumed that they were myths, and everyone who went searching for the truth came home empty-handed, if they came home at all. Was he going to be executed? Imprisoned? Tortured? He started to scan the room as discretely as possible, looking for a potential exit, but he could find no opening in the room except the door, which he could see was still being guarded.

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While Thad's mind wandered, Andrew was discussing his interrogation with the governing council. The seven wolves listened attentively to what he had to say. They had experienced intruders before, but they were fair-minded and believed in giving any human newcomers the chance to redeem themselves. Their young captive didn't seem malicious or threatening, and he cooperated very well with Andrew's questioning. The Prime Minister, sitting at the center of the table, decided to talk with the newcomer himself.

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Thad put his head on the table and closed his eyes, wishing that something would happen. He hated waiting, even if the ticking seconds were his last. He heard voices outside the door, and when he looked up, in walked the same large wolf he had seen earlier, this time with no guards or weapons. The bipedal canine was wearing very informal attire compared to the others in the building, just a pair of shorts and a black leather vest. He sat down across from Thad and leaned on the table.

"I'm Sir Felix Lockhart, Prime Minister of Lupinia" he said, his voice rough but not unpleasant. He extended his paw across the table. Thad hesitantly shook it, a bit wary of the grey-furred leader.

"I'm Thad Lovejoy, pleased to meet you" he replied politely, hoping to butter-up his captor.

Felix smiled and leaned back in the chair, his tail swishing rhythmically against the floor. "I understand that you're a student, Thad. What are you studying?"

"Information systems and telecommunications." Thad wondered if these canines would even understand a field like that.

The wolf nodded and crossed his arms "Have you ever considered a career in diplomacy? We need an ambassador to communicate more efficiently with the human world, and you seem to be exactly what we're looking for."

Thad was speechless. He'd been clubbed, tazed, arrested, interrogated, and now he was being offered a job? Not just any job, but a high-profile government career? Something wasn't right here. "You're joking, right? What's the catch?"

“There’s no catch at all. You’ll work for us, communicating with the US government on our behalf, as we prepare to let the world know that we exist. You’re welcome to move here, but it’s not necessary.” Felix laid out the framework of his idea to promote peace and unity between humans and fures. “If you decide not to take the job, we’ll wipe your memory of today’s events and return you to your home. I’ll leave you some time to think about it, just knock on the door when you’ve made up your mind.” With that, the wolf turned and walked out of the room, leaving Thad alone once more.

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Andrew confronted Felix inside the interrogation chamber’s observation room. “Do you really think this is a good idea?”

“Of course it is. The American government continually refuses to take us seriously, so if we get a human to talk to them on our behalf, perhaps they’ll pay attention.”

Andrew smirked, “The only way they’ll pay attention to us is if we shove a nuke up their...” He trailed off as he watched Thad knock on the outside door.

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Thad didn’t take long to make up his mind. These strange creatures had piqued his curiosity, and he certainly didn’t want his memory of this experience erased. He knocked loudly on the door, then sat down on the table. He waited awhile, and was about to knock again when the door opened and Felix walked in. “Have you made a decision?” asked the wolf.

“I have, I’ll take the job,” Thad replied.

“Excellent! Come with me, we have a lot to do.” Felix wrapped his arm around the young human in a friendly gesture and escorted him into the hallway, briskly leading him through the building. “You’ll get a tour of the capitol later, right now we need to get some paperwork taken care of.” They reached a checkpoint, where Felix, Andrew, and some other official-looking fures signed a clipboard before proceeding through a steel door.

Once outside, Thad looked around, expecting to see a human-style city. Instead, all he saw was an ordinary forest, with no signs of development anywhere. The building they had just exited was apparently underground, the door hidden against a hillside and painted to match the surrounding rocks precisely. All he could see was a Land Rover painted flat olive with no license plates. Felix got in the backseat and gestured for Thad to join him, while Andrew got in the driver’s seat and the two lupine guards sat in jumpseats in the rear. They proceeded down the trail and stopped at a clearing on top of a peak with a spectacular view to the east.

Andrew led the group down the steep side of the ridge to another rocky outcropping, waved his paw over what looked like an old beer bottle, and stood back as a door appeared in the rocks and swung open. Thad and Felix followed him into a large, dark room, while the guards stayed outside and kept watch. Andrew pressed a button to close the outside door, then pressed another and the inner doors opened.

Inside, Thad couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He stared down at a large, cylindrical open area, surrounded by walkways and doors on all sides. In the center, there were several elevators, with platforms at every floor, and bridges leading to the outer part of the structure. Dozens of bipedal animals of all ages and species wandered through the building, many of them wearing no clothes. Thad looked over the walkway railing and saw a grassy field ten stories down, where a few pups played tag. Felix walked up next to Thad and waved his paw in front of them. “Welcome to Capitol Peak, Mr. Lovejoy. Government offices are the top four floors, medical is the next two, residential units are the next two, and the last two floors are community shared space, such as school rooms, recreation, and so forth. The bottom floor is the Commons, and beneath it are tunnels to other caves and exits.

Andrew split from the group and went to his own office, while Felix led Thad to door marked “Vacant”, with a word in what looked like Russian underneath it. Felix opened the door and gestured for Thad to enter. “This will be your office, it’s fairly easy to get to. I need you to fill out and sign these papers. It might take you awhile,

so just pick up the phone and dial 125 when you're finished." Felix turned and walked out, leaving Thad alone in the sparsely-decorated office.

He felt small sitting in the tall desk chair, apparently designed for someone with long digitgrade legs, not those of a human. Similarly, the computer keyboard and phone keypad had much larger keys than what he was used to, and the only pens on the desktop were wide-bodied, like those pens for arthritis patients he'd seen at the office supply store. Hopefully they'll let me redecorate in here, he thought to himself while leafing through the papers he was expected to fill out. Everything looked fairly standard, except for a few extra fields like Species, Fur Colour, and on the order form for his suit, Tail Size. He completed page after page of forms, including citizenship and job applications, driver and weapon licensing, vehicle registration, and clothing order forms. He finally finished, and called for Felix to rejoin him.

"Alright, enough of the boring stuff. I'll get these filed away, and you get to go home for now. We need you back here first thing Monday to start your classes, mostly history of our nation and what we stand for so you can accurately represent us. Until then, do not mention your time here to anyone, or even acknowledge our existence under any circumstances. Any questions?"

Thad nodded "How do I get back to my truck?"

"Just follow the trail we came in on, you'll find it."

Felix led Thad to the exit, returned his knife, and directed him to the top of the ridge. Thad started hiking north, following a small deer trail that Felix had pointed out to him, his head still spinning from the earlier assaults and the flood of new information. Was he schizophrenic? Had he imagined all this? Perhaps he fell and hadn't woken up yet. But all the sensations were so real, the smell of the blood on the cave table, the wind blowing over him at the doors, the unusual sights and sounds from his canine hosts. Could he really have imagined them all?

After several hours of aimless hiking, Thad found his truck again, and nearly ran the last few yards to get back to it. He ran his hands down the sides of it, felt the cold metal against his skin, saw the setting sun reflected in the windows. He looked down at the ground and spotted a collection of very large canine paw prints, bigger than any normal dog could make. As he ran a finger through one of the muddy indentions, he decided that he hadn't been dreaming; this was real. He quickly fired up the engine and started back down the trail to home, wishing he knew more about these humanoid creatures. Hopefully the classes he was supposed to take on Monday would help him understand things better.

Chapter 2

History Lesson

The rest of the weekend seemed to pass instantaneously for Thaddeus. His brief adventure in Lupinia consumed his concentration, and Monday couldn't arrive fast enough. He made arrangements to skip class that day, claiming he'd caught the flu while camping, and loaded up the truck almost a full day early. While packing, something made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up, like someone was watching him. He glanced around, trying to look as casual as possible, and out of the corner of his eye he spotted his observer: A small white wolf, almost entirely hidden by the bushes. Thad knelt down behind the truck and faced the wolf, wondering if was one of the Lupinians. The wolf stared right back, standing on all fours, nearly passing for a feral canine, though its almost-human eyes gave it away. Thad started to slowly approach it, but it ran away as soon as he moved, disappearing into the woods.

On Monday morning, Thad headed up the mountain, this time with a GPS receiver to plot his course, and after some wrong turns down dead-end trails, he finally made it back to the clearing where the Lupinian capitol was hidden. He made his way down the steep foot trail, and waved his hand over the discarded beer bottle that opened the door before. However, unlike last time, no door appeared in the rocks. He tried it again, still nothing. Was he in the right place? He looked around, and out of the corner of his eye, he saw the same white wolf run through the bushes. It disappeared into the brush, and before Thad could go after it, the door appeared and rumbled open.

Once inside, Thad was greeted by the Lupinian Prime Minister, Sir Felix Lockhart. He smiled and bowed respectfully to the human. "Welcome back, Mr. Lovejoy. I hope your weekend went well."

Thad bowed and nodded "It was quite productive, though I think I was being followed by one of your residents."

The wolf laughed, "Ahh, you must mean Schnee, your new assistant. We wanted him to keep an eye on you and make sure you were safe. Schnee, come over here." He motioned to someone behind Thad, and the white wolf ran through the entrance on all fours. The nude white wolf then stood on its hind legs with the rest of the group and bowed. Felix gestured toward the snow-white canine, "Thad, this is Schneelocke, your administrative aide. He'll be available to lend a paw whenever you need something."

Thad bowed to Schnee and turned back to Felix. "So, you said I was supposed to be learning something today?"

Felix chuckled "Eager, are we? Alright, let's go talk to your instructor." He motioned for Thad and Schnee to follow him, then led the group to the central elevator shaft. Once inside the car, Felix hit the button for the second floor, and they rapidly descended nearly to the bottom of the underground facility. They left the car, and Felix led the other two to a door marked Lupinia Royal University. Thad looked around, noticing how similar this place was to his own campus.

The door led to what looked like a whole other building. It had a very modern design, with a large amount of open space, suspended walkways, and windows everywhere. Wait, windows? Underground? He looked closer, and the windows appeared to be some sort of hologram, projecting an illusion of the forest above, making the

area appear to be out in the open and naturally lit. Felix noticed his confusion and smiled, "Just because we have fur doesn't mean we're behind the technology curve." Thad nodded and followed Felix through one of the side doors and into a hallway with offices. All the rooms were marked with names written in English and Russian, just like the rest of the doors he'd seen.

At the end of the hallway, Felix paused at a door on the left and knocked with the flat of his paw. Thad read the sign on the door:

Kjatar Tavishen
History / Sorcery

Кжатар Тавишен
История / Волшебство

After waiting a few seconds, Felix knocked again, and the door opened. A tall figure appeared on the other side wearing a dark cloak. The creature's muzzle was the only part visible in the shadow, a muzzle that strangely seemed to be covered in bright blue fur. The figure spoke, its deep voice rumbling through the hall. "Who dares disturb my work?"

Thad glanced nervously over at Felix, who was staring up at the tall figure, seeming more annoyed than uneasy. Felix replied, "I'm here with your student for the day, remember? And must you use the creepy mage routine every time I bring someone new into the building?"

The cloaked figure chuckled and removed its hood, revealing himself to be a 7' tall feline with bright blue fur. "Very well, come on in Thad, we've got a long day ahead of us." He motioned for Thad to come into his office, then looked back at Felix, "I'll call you when we're done."

Thad slowly walked into the office and looked around. The room was dimly lit, and filled with candles, old books, and other mysterious artifacts. He stood nervously near the wall, watching the door.

Schnee looked in and waved at Thad, "I'll be in the café if you need anything, Mr. Lovejoy". He wandered down the hall, happily wagging his tail. That professor always gave him the creeps. Maybe it was the blue fur. Or the fact that he was a cat. Schnee decided it was the latter. After all, the felines had destroyed their own nation, they obviously weren't to be trusted.

Felix followed Schnee back down the hall, then headed back out to the main facility to pick up his adopted son Skippy from preschool for lunch.

Kjatar closed the door and flipped on the lights. "Sorry if I scared ya, I like having fun with new students, and humans. You happened to be both." He smiled and bowed, "I'm professor Tavishen, or you can call me Kjatar."

Thad returned the bow and introduced himself, "I'm Thaddeus Lovejoy, the new Lupinian ambassador."

Kjatar led Thad to the back of the office and offered him a seat at a small circular table. "It's a pleasure to meet you, and I hope I give you what you need to know to do your job."

"Let's start at the beginning, shall we?" The blue feline opened a tattered notebook covered with hastily-written text and yellow highlighter. "In the early part of the first century AD, North America and northeastern Asia were populated by many races of sentient creatures. In addition to humans, there were also the Lupines, Felines, Vulpines, Ursines, and Rodents. Not quite human, not quite animal, these hybrid creatures kept to themselves for the most part. For a few centuries, they lived together as one nation, located in what humans call the Rocky Mountains. Collectively, they referred to themselves as Fures, and their nation flourished, with no interference from humans."

"After four hundred years of peace, there were constant disputes between species. No one could agree on anything, except that they felt the Lupines held too much of the power. So, there was a rebellion, and one by one, the tribes split into several nations spread throughout the continent."

"This arrangement seemed to work for awhile, and gradually the native humans came to live in harmony with the fures. Some even believed that the fures were spirits to be worshiped. Unfortunately, the separation

bred even more unrest, and war erupted between the nations.”

“The Felines soon experienced a food shortage due to overhunting by the Vulpines. The Felines attacked the Vulpines, and after a bloody battle, the Vulpines surrendered and begged the peaceful Lupines to take them in. The Lupines allowed the Vulpines to live with them, and the Felines took over the Vulpines’ land and food supplies. However, it wasn’t long before the rapidly-multiplying Felines outgrew their new territory and food supplies and decided to go after a new food source, the Rodents.”

“The Rodents had just won a battle against the Ursines for control over the fields of central North America, and were far too confident in their ability to fight. When the Felines came, they weren’t looking for fields, they were after meat. The Rodents didn’t stand a chance.”

“When the Lupines heard what happened to the Rodents, they were horrified, and began planning an attack on the Felines. Their opponents were ruthless, but the Lupines were calm and calculating, executing precise attacks on critical parts of the Feline society. Eventually, the Felines gave in, and they scattered, along with the Rodents, living alone or with small packs of their species.”

“Over the centuries, more humans started flooding into North America, and settling in the area claimed centuries ago by the Lupines, on the eastern coast of the continent. The inhabitants of the Lupine colony panicked, and elected to move to a new territory on the northwestern tip of the continent, in what is now Alaska. Their thick coats allowed them to live in the bitter cold region, and their brothers in northeastern Asia came across to form a large Lupine territory, and to protect the Slavic wolves from annihilation by the early Russians.”

“Three hundred years passed, and all was well. The humans didn’t even notice the bipedal wolves and foxes, and the Lupines flourished once again. Their new nation, Volkvladenie, was strong, and they could see no end to their empire. Then, the humans overstepped their bounds.”

“The humans seemed to multiply uncontrollably, and they pushed deeper into the territory of the Lupines. The bipedal wolves had traditionally lived in harmony with the feral wolves of ancient descent, but when the Lupines concentrated their numbers in Alaska, the feral wolves were left on their own in the human nation of America. When the wolves hunted for food in human settlements, the humans became protective of their excess food supplies and violently attacked and tortured the wolves, making the tactics of the Felines seem compassionate. Wolves were tied to posts, their muzzles wired shut, and left for dead.”

Thad nodded solemnly, having heard the stories of the great wolf hunts in the west.

“Volkvladenie’s governing council elected to send spies into the US in an attempt to assist the wolves. The strongest Lupines were chosen for this assignment, and they ventured into the territory of the feral wolves. Once there, the scattered Lupines taught the wolves everything they could about the humans, how to avoid their traps, how to sense their presence, and how to escape if caught. The Lupines returned to Alaska, and the wolves managed to stabilize their plummeting numbers for a time. The humans were baffled by this sudden surge of intelligence among the wolves they hunted, spawning many legends about the wolves. Unfortunately, the humans eventually got the upper hand, and the wolves were hunted nearly to extinction.”

“Thankfully, Volkvladenie had some friends in the human world, and those compassionate humans led a strong campaign to get wolf hunting banned by the human government, and they helped protect the wolves as they repopulated their land. However, many residents of Volkvladenie felt that this wasn’t enough, and wanted to re-establish their presence in their home territory. After weeks of debate, the council complied, and several dozen Lupine pioneers made their way into the US. They settled in the wilderness of the human state of West Virginia, chosen for its temperate climate and plentiful deer population, and they chartered a new nation, which they called Lupinia.”

“The US government knows nothing of this nation, but they soon will. That’s where you come in. The Lupinian council feels that instead of fighting the humans, we should attempt to attain peace through diplomacy.” Kjatar closed his notebook and smiled at Thad. “Well, that covers the last two thousand years of furre history, any questions?”

Thad scratched his head, glancing through a book that expanded on what he’d just been told. “Well, I guess the main question is where did you come from?”

Kjatar laughed and leaned back in his chair. "I knew you were going to ask that. Unfortunately, no one really knows. The prevailing theory is that the spirits wanted humans and animals to live more peacefully together, so They created a mixture of the two. Unfortunately, humans don't see things that way, and most of them who know about us either want to be us, or they want to see us slaughtered. There are so very few who can see us with neutral eyes." He smiled, "But, that sort of speculation is generally best left for religion, not history."

"If the Lupines destroyed the empire of the Felines, how did you end up living here, much less working as a teacher?" Thad asked.

"Well, the war was a very long time ago, and relations between tribes have healed greatly since then. When the settlers from Volkvladenie arrived, my great-grandparents were offered asylum in the new Lupine nation."

"What about the Rodents and Ursines? What happened to them?"

"The Ursine empire was completely obliterated by the Rodents early on in furre history. The few remaining Ursines have survived as nomads in the Rocky Mountains. The Rodents didn't fare quite so badly, and they mostly live in tribal communities in the Midwest, surviving as scavengers. The Felines were emancipated a few decades after being taken over by the Lupines, and they live with the Vulpines and Lupines in a symbiotic community. Volkvladenie is still thriving, and a few years after Lupinia's establishment, they declared it to be a sovereign nation. The two now represent an alliance of fures that spans the entire continent."

"I see. So, what sort of government structure does Lupinia have?"

"Lupinia is ruled by a council of nobles, with the Prime Minister as its leader. Each province has a representative to the Royal Council to represent the will of the citizens."

Thad smelled someone cooking dinner in the nearby cafeteria, and remembered the raw deer on Felix's table when he first arrived. "Do you all always eat raw meat?"

Kjatar licked his lips, smelling the meal too. "Well, we all have the ability to eat fresh prey without the health problems that humans get from it, and meat loses a lot of nutritional value when cooked, but some of us still prefer our meat dead and well-cooked. You'll be able to get a safe meal here, if that's what you're worried about."

"Well, I think that covers everything I wanted to know," Thad's stomach rumbled quietly, "how about some lunch now?"

Kjatar nodded and stood, "Sounds good to me, I'll tell Felix to meet us in the cafeteria." He picked up his phone and motioned for Thad to go on. "I'll be there in a moment, it's on the first floor and to the right."

Thad followed the scent of food downstairs and halfway down the main hallway. The dining room was nearly empty, with only a few wolves scattered at various tables. He went up to the buffet and glanced around the deserted kitchen, figuring that it must be self-service. Grabbing a tray and a large plate, he looked over the steaming trays, looking for something familiar. He saw mouse, deer, pheasant, squirrel, and gopher, but no beef or chicken like he was used to, and almost no vegetables. He decided on a well-done deer steak and some mini pheasant drumsticks that looked and smelled remarkably like buffalo wings, and took a seat near the door and waited for Kjatar. The blue cat entered the room as he was sitting down, followed by Felix, Schnee, and a small fox riding on Felix's shoulders. The group got their meals and gathered around Thad at the table.

Felix set little Skippy down on a booster seat and started cutting up some squirrel ribs for him. "So, any questions left unanswered?" Felix asked while tying a bib around Skippy's neck.

"Well, I think Kjatar covered them all, though there is one more thing I've been wondering. How come so many of you go without clothes?" Thad asked while slicing through the tender steak.

"Heh, why should we have to wear clothes? We have fur, which covers up anything that'd need to be hidden. Clothing is merely a formality, and a fairly restrictive one." Felix started on his own meal, keeping a close eye on Skippy.

The little fox giggled and gnawed on a squirrel rib. "I r'member you, you came into our house and daddy hit you on the head and I got to watch over ya and..."

Felix interrupted Skippy and patted his head, "Eat your food, little one, before it gets cold." Skippy nodded

and quickly stripped the rib bones of their meat, one after another, playfully wagging his tail and humming to himself.

Thad chuckled, watching the hyper fox kit. "He's adorable, how old is he?"

Felix started to answer, but Skippy quickly held up a few paw digits and said "I'm four!" Thad laughed and instinctively petted the cub's head, like a puppy. Skippy grinned and turned his attention back to his plate.

The rest of their meal was fairly quiet. Schnee took their plates to the return window, and Felix picked Skippy up and led the group out the door. Kjatar bowed to them and headed back to his office. "It was nice meeting you, Thad, if you need anything just give me a call." Thad bowed to him and followed Felix to the main exit, with Schnee close behind.

Felix held Skippy on his shoulders and looked over at Thad, "I need to take this little guy back to his preschool class, then I'll be in my office. If you need anything, just give me a ring. Schnee will show you to your new office."

"Thanks for all your help today, and it was nice seeing you again Skippy." Thad waved at the little cub and went out the door to the college, heading for the central elevator with Schnee silently following him. They rode to the top floor, and Schnee pointed to a door with the usual bilingual nameplate, stating Thad's name, and his new job title, Royal Ambassador to the United States.

Schnee took a seat at a small desk and pointed to the door next to it, "Your office is back through there, Mr. Lovejoy. Just hit Intercom on your desk phone if you need anything." The white wolf bowed and started typing something on the large-key keyboard in front of him.

Thad went through the door into his private office, staring in awe at the furniture. Everything was made of finely-finished hardwood, and it all looked hand-made. The chair had a tag on the arm that read 100% Deer Skin. He sat down, leaned back, and nearly fell asleep in what had to be the most comfortable chair he'd ever felt. On the desk, there was a government ID card with a holder that could be clipped to a pocket, a new stamp for his passport, and a beautiful leather briefcase containing letterhead notebooks, engraved fountain pens and mechanical pencils, and a brand-new laptop. Behind him was a bookcase decorated with intricate carvings, and stocked with books on Lupinian history, government, laws, customs, and a picture-filled book about wolf behavior and society. He fired up the computer on the desk and started checking out some websites, waiting for his first assignment, hoping that he wouldn't disappoint the Lupinians.

Chapter 3

Bonus: Press Conference

As news of the US election results spreads across the globe, world leaders started to make decisions based on the President's re-election. For one small nation, nestled within the United States itself, this was the night to take a stand, to show the US that they were a sovereign nation, and that they were not afraid to dissent. In an auditorium near the capital of this heavily wooded country, reporters from all over the world gathered to hear the announcement of the Prime Minister of Lupinia.

"What in the world is taking so long?" asks a young female reporter from ABC. "What could possibly be causing these delays?"

A nearby reporter from Fox smirks "Maybe they got distracted chasing their tails"

The ABC reporter scowls at the Fox guy, but suddenly a small arctic wolf steps up to the podium and addresses the crowd. "Ladies and gentlemen, the Prime Minister will be with you in a few moments. We ask that you hold all questions until after his statements are complete." He glances stage left for a moment, then holds his paw up to silence the crowd. "Please rise; and now, the Prime Minister of Lupinia, Sir Felix Lockhart".

A tall grey wolf steps into the room, surrounded loosely by Dobermans in suits and sunglasses. He steps up to the podium, his long headfur in a loose ponytail, and waves solemnly to the audience. Immediately, cameras begin to flash and video indicator lights come on. All eyes are on this reclusive leader, making his first public statement of the year. He glances around the room, his blue eyes sparkling in the plethora of lights, and begins his speech.

"Good evening, everyone."

"As many of you know, the American presidential election has been decided, and incumbant president George W. Bush has been declared the winner. Both candidates have called for unity and an end to divisive partisanship, but they have failed to realize that George Bush himself is the root of this divisiveness. His administration's policies have alienated the global community, increased tensions among enemies, and even alienated his own people. And now, he will be in power for another four years. This is unacceptable."

"As Prime Minister of the Republic of Lupinia, I hereby announce that this nation is renouncing all support and alliances with the United States. We refuse to be associated with a nation that is responsible for such atrocities and crimes of war, nor do we have any sympathy for a nation that willingly re-elects the leader responsible for such reprehensible actions."

"On behalf of the High Council of Lupinia, I hereby announce that our borders with the United States are to be closed until further notice. We are discontinuing tourism visas until further notice, and we will no longer be exporting any of our agricultural or lumber products to the US."

And now, I'll take a few questions"

Immediately, the room erupts with voices, each reporter trying to get his or her question heard by the canine. Felix flinches, his sensitive ears ringing from all the noise. He holds a paw above his eyes to see over the bright stage lights, and points to a young female in the second row. "I'll take yours first, ma'am."

She quickly stands as the room calms and focuses their cameras on the lucky lady in their first-choice seat “Charley Parker, ABC. Mr. Prime Minister, how do you plan to secure your borders on all sides if the US decides to take military action against your trade sanctions?”

“Well, we’ve gained a lot of support in the international community, and we have military alliances with Great Britain, Australia, Russian, and many other powerful nations, as well as NATO and the United Nations. We are a peaceful nation, and we have no desire nor intention to engage in military action against the US, but we have allies if we need their help. Next question please, we’ll take yours, sir.” He points to a large balding man in the first row.

He casually stands and smirks at the wolf. “Richard Levinthall, Fox News. Our sources tell us that you’re planning to abdicate your position and relocate to a zoo in Pittsburgh. Can you confirm?” Several reporters laugh.

Felix stares at the man with annoyed look on his face. “I have no idea where you heard that, nor do I have a clue how your network got a press pass to this event.” He waves his paw and several large Dobermans and Rottweilers pick the man up by his arms and escort him from the room. He wags his tail lightly and points to a scrawny young man wearing jeans and a Maroon 5 t-shirt “I’ll take your question, young man.”

The student stands up and nods to Felix. “Chris Anderson, WXJM Harrisonburg. Is it true that your administration is planning to legalize marijuana, and if so, will you consider issuing ‘hash visas’?”

Felix stares at the young student for a few moments, trying to figure out if this kid is serious. “Well, one of the representatives from the province of Cumberland has proposed a marijuana legalization bill, but it has not even been read to the council yet, and my administration does not have an official position on the measure yet. As for the other part of your question, we will not likely be issuing that sort of visa to anyone. No further questions.” He steps away from the podium, pausing beside it for a last photo opportunity, then exits the room with his security guards following closely. Once out of the room, he leans against the wall and looks down, his ears and tail drooping sadly.

“Don’t worry, it’ll be better in four years.”

Felix glances up to see the familiar face of his US ambassador, Thaddeus LoveJoy. He smiles and perks his ears a bit. “Well, I sure hope so, Thad, it’d be hard for it to get any worse. C’mon, let’s go get some buffalo wings”. He walks alongside his human friend and heads for the capitol’s restaurant, starting to feel more hopeful by the minute.