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Dr. Ivo Robotnik, known as Dr. Eggman by most, was a betting man.

One wouldn't expect a pragmatic and intelligent man like him to take many bets. They may, however, consider a man of his particular moral standing to make some easy gambles, especially with such eccentricities as his own. Yet they'd also expect anyone to cut their losses and give up after so many defeats at the hands of their adversary. Logic and statistic would state that such low odds of success, with proof to show, were insane to strive for, certainly.

Dr. Robotnik, however, continued to roll the dice. He did not give up. Such low odds of besting Sonic The Hedgehog and his allies, yet the thrill of each battle fought on any sort of equal footing with the rodent gave his intelligent mind a rush that few things in this world could hope to achieve. Sonic was irritating, annoying, unbearable and all manner of negative traits. Oh, how he *hated* that hedgehog.

Above all else, though, Sonic was a worthy foe. An enemy worth Ivo's time, a nemesis that kept pushing his genius mind to greater heights. Through the hedgehog he had met other foes he'd consider minor rivals at most, but one he had a special attachment to had kept Ivo on his toes in a different manner than Sonic himself.

Miles "Tails" Prower, red fox mobian, with the unusual capacity to fly thanks to his twin tails. Age 13 as of yesterday, and likely celebrated the pitiful milestone with his friends late into the night. Ivo wrinkled his nose at the reminder that the little kit had made it yet another calendar year without blowing himself up, but Ivo knew better than to hope the only being who could rival his intellect on the entire planet would kill himself on one of his own inventions.

Well into his fifties, Dr. Robotnik's mind had only aged like a fine wine, and he knew the same would be true of little mister Prower. The fox was a growing threat as his brain matured, and he was fiercely loyal to the very hedgehog who had been the driving force behind the failure of the Doctor's ambitions to conquer the world. If Miles had not been raised by his nemesis, Ivo would have seriously considered making an ally of the fox in some capacity. He had tried before with various methods, but the fox simply refused to budge. The only instance Ivo had found himself able to cow his stalwart mind was by complete domination using the hyper-go-on energy of the Wisps many years ago, but it wasn't sustainable at the time and the fox had slipped his leash. Indeed, the only thing stronger than mister Prower's keen intellect was his inherited stubborn nature from the damned hedgehog.

Ivo sighed, sipping on a mug green tea as he stared blankly at his various holo-documents floating around his desk. Asides from noting the unfortunate anniversary of young Prower's existence, nothing much caught his eye as he skimmed along his automated updates for the day.

A shift in the air caused Ivo to freeze up. Someone was here. With a practiced swift movement, he brandished his laser pistol and aimed it directly at the one who had trespassed in his personal quarters.

The hooded mobian figure didn't even flinch.

"Dr. Ivo Robotnik, age fifty-seven, grandson of the late Dr. Gerald Robotnik. Known for his futuristic technological advancements in robotics. Internationally wanted for..." the figure grinned beneath their hood, "well, it would be pointless to list them all now, wouldn't it?"

Ivo said nothing, expression still as a stone.

The hooded mobian shrugged and slowly lifted a hand to pull back their hood. A red fox mobian possibly in her mid 40's stared Dr. Robotnik down with sharp green eyes, scanning him for any sign of movement. She wasn't bothered at all by his brandished weapon, as if it were no threat to her.

"I have information for you, Doctor, if you would hear it," she uttered smoothly, getting straight to the point. Ivo scowled.

"From who," his voice was dark, his tone indicating not a question but a demand. The vixen smiled pleasantly.

"The Order of Saint Alain, with the upmost courtesies. I am Bishop Celine."

Ivo froze. That was the holy order many mobian foxes followed, well, religiously. It was no secret the order looked upon Sonic and his friends with scorn, but especially Tails. The order often spoke out publicly against Sonic and company's actions, painting Sonic as an unruly delinquent that subverted proper justice, and a harbinger of demons and wielder of Chaos's relics. The order was not kind to outsiders, and often regarded as strict and even cruel with its tenets that had to be followed to the letter by their followers. Ivo thought it, and most religious orders, were hogwash and existed only to control the masses. He didn't much care either way, though, because the Order of Saint Alain hated Sonic almost as much as he did. Any public defamation against his nemesis, the better. This was the first time they'd actually bothered to contact Robotnik though, considering he was a wanted criminal in every civilized corner of the world. It wouldn't be a good look for their order to associate with a criminal of such abhorrence. If they had made a move to contact him personally, then they must've been getting desperate to make a move at all.

"Go on," he growled, lowering his pistol and reholstering it in a flash. The red fox smiled and nodded.

"The information concerns one Miles "Tails" Prower," she spoke the boy's name with a hint of disgust, "I believe this will be very shocking for you to hear, would you like to sit down, Doctor?"

"I'm not that old, spill it," Ivo gruffly remarked, becoming impatient from the vixen's niceties.

"Miles Prower is not what he seems," she began with an indignant sniff, "I imagine you're aware that he has accompanied Sonic The Hedgehog for some time?"

“What of it?” Dr. Robotnik raised a brow, “I know enough about the little rat; I’ve fought him off for years. Sonic picked him up off some dump island back in the day, been a thorn in my side ever since.”

“Ah, but that isn’t all there is to the story,” Celine spoke sagely, “the child was born on West Side Island thirteen years ago to two unassuming foxes, Rosemary and Amadeus Prower. They were devout followers of Saint Alain, so it was such a shame that what should have been a beautiful birth of a son became a much darker affair... The kit had two tails, the mark of the devil we know as Tamashi.

“Tamashi, if you’re unaware Doctor, is the ancient dark spirit that has haunted foxes on Mobius for thousands of years. A trickster that has stolen kits from us from birth in hopes to sow discord through their bodies once they grow. It is typically for the good of the world we euthanize such kits born with abnormalities as Miles Prower, so that Tamashi does not possess their spirits and wreak havoc on the world again.

“However, Rosemary and Amadeus were overcome with love for their newborn and resolved to hide Miles from the order, perhaps charmed by the devil to protect his new vessel,” Celine explained, “the order caught them harboring the demon after a... couple of years. Our eyes are many, after all. Once we apprehended Rosemary and Amadeus, Miles escaped our grasp. We hunted for him for months, but could not find him, save a few children claiming to have spotted him on the island periodically after our searches were called off. One could not expect a young kit to survive in the elements for so long. It seemed our assumptions were incorrect, though. Miles was found in the presence of the young delinquent Sonic The Hedgehog some time later, and that is where your story continues as you know it.”

“What’s this got to do with me, then?” Ivo wrinkled his nose, unimpressed with the paranoia regarding what was a simple genetic defect even to his keen mind, “I don’t care about your religious hysteria, if you haven’t guessed by the lack of crosses in my domicile,” he gestured vaguely to his lair. Celine patiently smiled.

“But of course, Doctor. I assure you, our ‘hysteria’ holds importance to what I am about to tell you,” her expression became grave, “Miles has reached the approximate age that the curse placed upon him by Tamashi will fully develop and continue to sully his spirit and body alike, until Tamashi himself inevitably fully possesses him and the world is brought to ruin. Regardless of your *interpretation* of Tamashi’s mark, the power Miles has lived to grow into is undeniable regardless of religious belief. I suspect that once his third tail grows in that he will find it incredibly difficult to live a normal life as he has thus far for all that comes with it.”

“I still don’t see why I should care. So the runt grows some extra limbs, just makes a bigger target for me,” Ivo shrugged, picking at his teeth with his pinkie in boredom. It wasn’t exactly rare for unusual things to occur on Mobius, though the Doctor hesitated to use the word ‘magic’. He was a man who based himself in science; there had to be a scientific explanation for everything, even mysterious gemstones with untapped potential and ancient earth-splitting entities slumbering in the planet’s core. If Tails was to grow a mysterious third tail, it was likely rooted in science somehow.

“An extra limb is not all Miles will grow into, Doctor,” Celine shook her head, “he will grow into *devastating* powers, as I have said. Enough to rival artifacts such as the Chaos Emeralds, if he is allowed to fester. How the power within him will be expressed only Alain knows, but it will be terrible. Not to mention the psychological struggle of his developing malady. It is important that he is stopped before that point.”

“Alright, now you have my attention,” Ivo’s face almost wrinkled into a wicked grin. A power to allegedly rival the Chaos Emeralds? Within an enemy he’d been fighting all those years? It was tantalizing as it was vexing. What once seemed as a pointless religious lecture to suffer though was quickly growing into a new scheme in his head at the same time as he spoke with Celine, “so you want the runt dead, that it?”

“You put it very bluntly. Yes, it would be best if Miles was put out of his misery before any harm can come to the world, or further harm to himself,” Celine spoke sadly, though Ivo suspected she was not very saddened at all. Not that he cared for the feelings of the lady fox; he was far too focused on the potential of this development.

“Fine. I’ll put a little extra pressure on the fox in the next bout if it’ll make you sods happy, but I want a favor for it,” Dr. Robotnik sneered, “any favor for my claiming at any time in the future, in exchange for eliminating the kid.”

Celine seemed to frown slightly. Ivo’s expression hardened.

“What, didn’t expect a fair trade? You want me to change my plans, you and your organization get to pay up,” the Doctor hadn’t planned on killing the fox boy for quite some time, not really. He couldn’t help if a piece of shrapnel or other chance event occurred and took him out, but Ivo deeply hoped that he could see more of what the kid could do before the inevitable end. However, with the promise of the boy genius potentially possessing a power to rival his most coveted prize, Robotnik’s plans had already been tossed on their head. He would need to account for a bigger challenge certainly, but he would have it one way or another. Research was in order. Sure, on paper he’d be making a ‘deal’ with the religious psychotics, but he couldn’t just pass up the promise of an advantage over Sonic for something so fragile as ‘honesty’ with a bunch of loons. If that meant pissing off a few priests, he could risk it.

Celine’s sour expression softened slightly as Ivo stared her down, though she didn’t seem entirely pleased with the prospect of her church owing a notorious criminal a favor.

“Very well. This is acceptable to us,” Celine agreed finally, extending a hand for Ivo to shake. The Doctor took her hand in a firm hold.

“Deal’s a deal,” he let a predatory grin spread beneath his signature mustache. Though they had shaken on it, Ivo mentally crossed his fingers. He doubted Celine would uphold her end of the deal once he eventually double-crossed her, but a favor was still a tantalizing hold over the church in the meantime. Maybe he’d claim it before he stabbed them in the back, just for kicks. A temporary and tentative alliance had been formed though, just until he could get the intel he needed to claim the ‘latent power’ within his long-time enemy.

Ivo was indeed a betting man. A power promised to rival even the Chaos Emeralds? It seemed only logical to place his chips all in.

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Tails slowly awoke to a world of stiff muscles and pain, which was unfortunate, but less unbearable than the horrible itching he had woken up to last time he'd faded into consciousness. What happened to make him so sore? The last thing he'd recalled was his party, then... nothing. In a daze, he fluttered his eyelids open, only to squeeze them shut quickly with a quiet groan of discomfort at the sunlight streaming into his eyes.

"...Buddy?" Tails heard someone mutter softly nearby. He recognized that it was Sonic's voice, but he couldn't understand why Sonic had been in his room at all. Did something happen at the party? In a rush of worry Tails tried to push himself up, but soft gloved hands pressed him back down.

"Woah, slow down. You're okay," Sonic's tone was soft still, which was disconcerting. Sonic's tone was typically brash or sarcastic, maybe stern or serious on the rare occasion and always upbeat, but never quiet unless something seriously warranted it. Tails's instinct something was up festered in his gut as he huffed at being forced to remain against his pillow for the time being. He rubbed at his eyes to try and get the sleep and sensitivity out of them.

"You passed out at the party. I knew somethin' was up..." Sonic trailed off, clearly berating himself silently, which caused Tails's anxiety to lurch further. Ah right, the migraines, "why didn't you tell me, pal?"

"I just... I didn't want to ruin things," Tails croaked pathetically, "everyone was g'na come, and I didn't want to disappoint 'em..." he finally managed to crack his eyes open partially, and took in a glimpse of Sonic's concerned expression that only made him want to close them again. The last thing he wanted was Sonic to worry about him. There were so many other important things, weren't there?

With a heavy sigh that hunched his shoulders, Sonic looked away for a moment before glancing back with a small smile.

"Well, Vanilla took care of you afterwards... Everyone else went home. I told 'em you just had another all-nighter," he paused, looking morosely at Tails.

"Ah," Tails muttered. Sonic grimaced, as if there was more to tell. After a few moments of silence between the pair, Sonic spoke up again.

"I, ah... I don't know what happened, exactly. Don't freak out, but—" Sonic paused, wracking his brain for a way to explain. Tails shot upwards at that, anxiety sharply rising. It only rose further when he felt an odd sensation around his namesakes. Something was wrong. Sonic reached a hand out to Tails, "it's okay! Nothing *bad*, I think? It's just uh... your tails."

"What happened to my—" Tails choked, too scared to even look. Sonic stuttered and tripped over syllables, struggling to find the words, before he finally blurted it out plainly.

“There’s three.”

“...What...” Tails pronounced stiffly, turning himself slowly and staring at, surely enough, three fluffy tails rather than the two he’d always known. His blood ran cold. Why were there three? Why were there *three*? *Why were there **three**?* Suddenly, as he gazed at the very real and very much moving additional namesake responding to his crescendoing panic, the room felt way too small. Tails’s mind ran faster than Sonic on a caffeine high as his brain shorted repeatedly trying to come up with any possible explanation for this latest change. The feeling of his claws prickling and unsheathing out of his body’s desperate need to protect himself didn’t help matters. He barely noticed as he began to circle himself, dismay and further panic rising in his chest as he began to breathe faster and faster.

“Woah, woah, hey, Tails-” Sonic tried to intervene with a comforting gesture, but Tails dodged his hand and looked at Sonic uncomprehendingly, his panic overriding any sort of logical determinations he could’ve made in the throes of his anxiety that had escalated into an attack of some kind. Tails’s fearful gasps had been stitched together with primal yips and whines akin to his non-mobian counterpart as he puffed up and cornered himself against his desk. Blue eyes usually full of calculation and thoughtfulness had been replaced with unfocused eyes full of sharp fear, “Tails...” Sonic tried again, not moving to look any bigger or further corner his panicked brother. He noticed how Tails’s claws had fully unsheathed, and wondered if they’d always looked that sharp and dangerous before. It had been nearly eight years since Tails’s last episode that had progressed to such a point he reverted to instinctual reactivity, but Sonic fell into his practiced routine as if it were yesterday, “okay, okay. You’re alright, bud,” Sonic held his hands in a placating gesture, speaking in a slow and low pitch. That seemed to catch Tails’s attention, at least. With a hopeful smile, Sonic dipped into an even lower frequency to produce a low purr that had always calmed Tails in those late nights where thunder boomed and rains poured. He never, ever let anyone else hear it, of course. Sonic had a reputation to maintain. If he had done a few reluctant favors over the years to have blackmail recordings of the sound destroyed, that was his business.

Tails, lost in his terror, latched greedily onto the one grounding stimuli that he could find in the storm of his emotions. His rapid and shallow breaths slowed as minutes passed of Sonic just sitting next to him and purring, patiently moving to physical grounding techniques as Tails regained his senses and faculties.

Mobians of all kinds had the same vestigial instincts that stuck with them. They were expressed differently and in different aspects of life, but panic and fear had been emotions that were typically accompanied by the strongest of those dormant instincts kicking in. Hedgehogs like Sonic or Shadow would prickle their spines and roll up, and in extreme cases even self-mutilate as their non-humanoid counterparts did. Felines would arch their tails and fluff up as much as they could, while canines would raise their hackles, nip and whine. It was humiliating for most who had tried to detach themselves from their species’ feral origins, especially around humans. The presence of those instincts only ever served to undermine the mobians’ efforts to be equal to humanity. Only other mobians were familiar and understanding of these things, and there was a stigma around humans seeing one in such a vulnerable state. Sonic had of course turned the urge to roll into a defensive ball into an offense, either out of practicality or his stubborn nature rejecting fear entirely in favor of effectiveness in battle.

For Tails, he never let himself get to such a point that he would fall back on his innate impulses even in front of his friends, to the point he suppressed it so severely he was certain it would *never* happen again. He would *not* be made a burden by his own mind and body. Yet, as he sat there against his desk doing breathing exercises with Sonic, he realized his efforts had been in vain after all.

“Feelin’ better?” Sonic’s voice faded from its low purr, though his pitch was still low and soft. Tails nodded slowly, though his concern was more on his mysterious extra limb. He had curled it up alongside his left namesake in his panic, and was staring at it in trepidation as well as curiosity. It seemed to respond as his others did, and didn’t feel sore like the rest of his body had. He tested it with a small flick, and found the new sensation odd as well as... right? It didn’t feel foreign as it theoretically should have, as if his brain had already adjusted to its presence without issue, like it was always there somehow.

“This is so weird,” Tails’s voice was rough and worn as he spoke, making him feel even more useless in that moment. Pathetic. He hugged himself tightly and refused to let any more tears fall. In a million years, of all possible scenarios, Tails would not have once guessed he would mysteriously grow an extra limb from nothing. How was he going to fly Sonic out of danger when Dr. Eggman next reared his ugly head? Would his third tail adapt to the propeller motion that he’d taught himself? Could he even bear to be in a combat scenario with his newly overwhelmed senses? Tails gazed forlornly at his semi-sheathed claws in resigned misery, noting their significant hardening and sharpening since he’d last seen them. What else would change? Would he even be the same person when- or if- his changes ceased?

Tails had always prided himself on logic, practicality, probabilities... He denied his innate instinct and became more than the scared kit he had started as. So why was this happening to him? Why was he changing like this? What was he becoming?

“What am I gonna do...” Tails mumbled, retreating further into himself.

Sonic smiled sympathetically, rubbing his hand on Tails’s shoulder, “I know it’s gonna be a change, but we’ll adapt, alright? We’ll keep an eye on you in case anything else happens. Vanilla already offered to contact some of her colleagues at the hospital if you have any more symptoms, and said she’d come by right away when we needed her.”

The fact Tails hated hospitals wasn’t a secret by any means. He despised the sterile scents, buzzing fluorescent lights and cold prickly atmosphere. It wasn’t logical by any means, but if he could avoid a trip to the ER he would, which led to numerous instances in the past of Sonic finding Tails hiding an injury he’d sustained on missions just to prevent a visit to the hospital. Obviously he wasn’t always successful; even if Sonic called Amy or Vanilla to administer first-aid, some injuries absolutely required the vastly more advanced resources of a hospital.

However, Tails doubted that spontaneous growth of new limbs, sudden drastic shedding, and significant heightening of sensory sensitivity could be explained by any doctor, specialist or not. Still he appreciated the gesture, and the part of himself that was still a scared kid latched onto the little comfort it brought in that moment.

“Okay...” Tails nodded slowly. Sonic’s smile became just a little more genuine at that.

“In the meantime, I know you haven’t eaten in over twenty-four hours. Can you try and hold somethin’ down this morning?” Sonic asked, standing up and holding a hand out to the fox, “I’ll bet growin’ a new tail probably took a lot of energy, huh?”

Tails prepared to decline, still feeling sore and sick despite the majority of yesterday’s nausea being absent. However, as he took Sonic’s hand and stood, he felt a wave of dizziness sweep over his senses and he nearly lost his balance. Sonic caught him quickly, supporting his weight easily. Tails felt a twist of guilt inside of him as he caught Sonic’s concerned expression, and realized he really probably should have eaten something if only to stay further concern regarding his wellbeing. His body went through quite a shock growing his new namesake and he needed to replenish himself.

“Y-Yeah, food sounds good,” he muttered, stabilizing himself once his dizziness faded.

As it turns out, bacon never tasted so amazing in his whole life.

Though Tails hesitated, the strong scent overcoming his nose making his stomach churn, he forced himself to take a small bite. From then he was a goner, his memory a blur as he zeroed in on the food in front of him.

Sonic was slightly less enthusiastic as he saw his brother’s eyes glaze over as he chowed down on the plate of bacon and eggs like a starving wild animal. Tails typically ate as politely as possible, but the sight of the kid’s fangs (did those things get a lot bigger or was that just him?) bared as he loudly tore apart his lovingly cooked breakfast with them. The kid didn’t even bother using his fork... Sonic felt a small twist in his heart. He tried to remind himself the kid hadn’t eaten for over a day, and just went through a traumatic change. It was fine! Tails’s body just needed nutrients desperately, that was why he seemed so desperate to eat. Sonic just couldn’t shake the feeling that something was going on, and he had the feeling that neither of them knew the answers.

Sonic reached a hand to grab the plate after Tails had finished licking off the grease. In a flash of shock and reflexes, he pulled his hand away as Tails snarled angrily and snapped his teeth at Sonic territorially, hackles puffed up and claws unsheathed. Sonic didn’t think he’d ever forget the flash of angry slitted blue eyes that didn’t recognize him at all in that moment. What was happening to his kid?

Shocked, Tails blinked and flinched away from Sonic and his plate, his pupils widening from the needlepoints they had been a second ago. Tears shimmered in his eyes as he desperately looked at Sonic, realizing what he’d just done with horror.

“I’m sorry... I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to!”

Sonic recovered from his startle at the sight of Tails beginning to cry, which tugged at his heartstrings harder than the fact Tails just tried to *bite him*.

“Hey, it’s fine, bud! I guess you were hungrier than I thought. It’s alright!” Sonic quickly plastered a smile on his muzzle, patting Tails on the head to ease any guilt.

But Tails did feel guilty, even after Sonic smiled at him like it hadn’t shocked them both to their core. Tails didn’t know what was wrong with him, but the sinking feeling in his gut remained throughout the whole day.

Sonic insisted that Tails rest off the last of his sickness, but the fox hadn’t wanted to sleep anymore; he needed answers more than he needed shut-eye. His brother didn’t make a move to stop him when he locked himself in his workshop for the majority of the late morning and afternoon, only taking a small break to have some lunch meat from the fridge at lunch time when his stomach complained. Sonic hadn’t really spoken up for the rest of the day, which was extremely weird considering it was Sonic, AKA his loud and endearingly smug and annoying brother who wouldn’t let Tails just mope around all day... Unless something was seriously wrong. His friends hadn’t sent him any messages either; probably told off by Sonic so he wouldn’t have to worry about explaining himself.

Even though Sonic’s unusual care and the silence from his friends on his communicator told him nothing would be the same again, he forced himself into his research routine to get to the bottom of his changes. Tails needed to prioritize the newest mystery in his life, not worry over if his friends hated him for ruining his party.

So, he buried himself in his work. Superficial Google searches told him that none of his symptoms lined up with any diseases or disorders or even puberty, though the one hour period where Tails clicked links to various cancer articles on WebMD in a panic was an interesting stretch of time. After medical science couldn’t explain away his changes, he got a little more receptive to the neopaganism websites and suggestions of magic. After all, if the Chaos Emeralds and Twin Gaias among others were real then other mystical things could indeed occur in the world. None of the websites explained anything, though. Many articles said a lot of fancy words for a whole lot of conjecture based entirely off of belief and not hard evidence and empirical data, which soured Tails’s mood until he came across one website in particular after a desperate Google search of ‘two tails’.

‘The Order of Saint Alain.’

Tails’s frown deepened. He knew that name. It was the name of the religious order that many foxes, including the ones on West Side island, followed. A religion that worshiped an ancient fox warrior by the name of Alain who saved their people by banishing a great darkness, or so they said. He was posthumously ascended to the title of Saint and became a figurehead of the religion that originated after his death. Most stories like that were relegated to myths, and were likely heavily sanitized and twisted with translations over so many years. Even so, the Order was strong in their belief. Tails knew the stories well, because he was partially raised with them echoing as taunts and curses in his ears so long ago.

Flinching as memories of abuse and fear bubbled in his head, Tails turned away from his screen to take a quick gulp of water from his bottle next to his computer setup. After taking a swig, then

another, he sighed and resumed scrolling. Tails figured he was really desperate for answers if he was bothering with reading through the psychotic order's website, but pressed on. He rolled his eyes as he skimmed over the various introductions of ministers and bishops, and flat out ignored the listed tenets of the religion in favor of reading over their archive of digitized texts in PDF form.

The Order didn't have any sort of unified holy text, but rather numerous journals written by long-dead priests kept over centuries and scanned once the world became digitally driven. Most things within the scans were uninteresting, just life stories of old dead guys chronicled for all to see, usually taken as lessons of the past. However, one journal caught his eye.

The journal of Gabriel Durand, disciple of Saint Alain himself. The scan was pretty bad; the parchment that had been recorded digitally had likely been in terrible shape when it was finally uploaded based off of the old wrinkles, stains and faded ink upon each page. It was legible enough though, Tails decided. A couple of clicks later and the PDF was downloaded and ready to be zoomed into. Setting up the first page, he hummed as he scanned the first line.

*'9th of Summer's Wake of Year 198 of DE'*

Tails raised his brows. That was at least two-thousand five-hundred years ago, based off of his rough estimation. The entry also used the old mobian calendar system, which was abolished nearly one hundred and sixty years ago in favor of using the humans' own calendar in any official capacity. As Tails looked further into the entry, he noticed that it was entirely written in Mobian, as opposed to English, further dating the journal. While Tails far preferred English that Sonic had taught him as opposed to the ancestral tongue of mobians, he still kept himself up to date on his native tongue so that he could communicate with people who still preferred it in every day life or mobian tribes who refused to adapt to human languages. With resolve, Tails translated the ancient text in his mind as he read.

*'It has been five months since our last trek across the ice fields in Northern Apotos. Those remaining there who were loyal to Tamashi were struck down, as they should have been. We cannot allow his influence to further taint the world, not when we have just begun to rebuild. Still, I find myself haunted by the screams of innocent children my comrades as they fell to the demons' spears. They were rabid even as they fell, less than mobian. I felt no remorse as I silenced the beasts with my sword.'*

*'I am not guilty. I cannot be. I am home with my Fleur, now. It is time to put the past behind us and look forward to a brighter future without the demonic presence that once infested our people.'*

Tails hummed with confusion. Tamashi was a name he had heard plenty when he was a toddling kit, typically when he fled from the children of his village. They'd cry out curses, calling him all manner of names and spouting cruel jabs including that very name. Tails didn't really put any effort researching the name, far too busy with other things to focus on past traumas. Yet fate had brought the name to him once again, so it was probably worth researching. Who was Tamashi? Tails scrolled to another entry hoping for answers.

*'14th of Summer's Apex of Year 198 of DE'*

*'I find myself questioning Alain more and more these days. I know it is not my place to, yet I find my heart conflicted. Though he says what we have done is righteous and for the good of the world, and I know it must be, the path has been paved with blood at every turn. I am a warrior to my people first, and it has always been my duty to serve without doubt in my heart.'*

*'I should not be disturbed by silencing the cries of babes who were unlucky enough to be tainted with Tamashi's influence. It is not my fault that those who only just grew to their first summit at tender ages became their last lines of defense, merely kits at the tip of a sword. Yet they are cursed, merely pawns of the devil. It is he who sends children to their deaths and taints the souls of our people, not I. To give in would be heresy, and I would be no better than those Tamashi sullies with his wicked sorcery. I am not a monster.'*

*'26th of Autumn's Drift of Year 198 of DE'*

*'The Spring months were joyous following last year's crusade against the demon's forces. Spry young reynards had returned from our mission across Northern Apotos to their wives and many spent nights alone in earnest. I myself admit I had a wonderful few evenings with my beloved Fleur. It was not long before the morning sickness kicked in for her, and I have cared for her for many months in anticipation for the arrival of our child. With the demon's spawn decimated and he himself vanquished, the birth of our kit will be a blessing to accompany the new dawn.'*

*'19th of Winter's Depth of Year 198 of DE'*

*'The birth of our child was long and arduous. I nearly lost my Fleur, but she has begun recovering. The bleeding was almost too much for her... Yet it is with stones in my heart that I hide the grave news from her.'*

*'Our daughter bears the curse. I could not believe my eyes, and my heart shattered at the sight of the twin tails upon her hind. She is so small, so fragile. Her cries upon entering this world were undoubtedly pure, yet the darkness resides within her to be awoken at the whim of Tamashi. Damn him. For months we prepared to love this child, for months we did, and now the product of our love is a monster.'*

*'We cannot hide this from Alain. The fact that another child has been born with the curse following Tamashi's death bodes ill. It's likely he will want my child killed after examination. I lost a part of myself this day... Damn it all.'*

Tails was stiff with dread as he read on, namesakes quivering tensely. Gabriel's journal was grim, far more grim than he expected any sort of holy scripture to be. The implications that a newborn baby as well as entire tribes of innocent people had been killed for their circumstances made him sick enough to need a break. With a bitter grimace he minimized the PDF window and scrubbed his face with his paws to relieve some of his tension.

The implications were huge for Tails; he wasn't the only one! It sounded like there used to be others like him. The fact they'd all been killed off, or at least most of them, soured the discovery. Tails didn't know much about the practices of the Order in modern times, if they killed kits from birth, but the fact they actively spoke out against his existence on as many news channels as

would listen he figured that they at least didn't approve of his being born. He never really asked for details, preferring to avoid the entire issue of his existence being seen as 'wrong' or 'unnatural' and focus on his adventures.

Yet the texts he'd skimmed through and Gabriel's journal indicated that some sort of curse permeated those born with twin tails. Tails felt fine, though... Well, that'd be a bit of a lie, actually. He felt terrible, but he wasn't about to subject himself to believing religious propaganda over some moodiness. He wouldn't ever let himself feel like he was wrong to have been born again. Never again would he hear those taunts and believe them.

A seed had been planted in his mind, but he refused to let it grow and fester. Tails stamped down his insecurities and growled softly in determination. He released his tension a moment later and sighed. Flopping back in his chair, he resigned himself to glare into the light of his screens, mulling over what he'd been able to stand reading.

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In the heavy rain, three figures stood vigil near the den of their ward. They had watched for many years, never straying from their duty to protect the world and serve their Order.

In the heavy rain, three robed foxes watched through illuminated windows in the night. The tallest bore eyes of crimson and dark purple fur, expression hard as stone as he scanned the property. The second fox was the smallest, her figure not nearly as dense as her companions. Her icy grey eyes pierced the dark as she watched their ward within his workshop, ignoring how the rain drenched through her robes and darkened her pale white fur. The third was average in build, but his bright pink fur laced with notes of maroon stood out even under his dark robes. He was the youngest, and it showed in how his acidic green eyes kept darting between windows and movements beyond the property.

"Sister Esme," the tallest rumbled lowly to the shortest, age apparent in the gravelly texture of his voice.

"Brother Cedric," the snow white vixen rang, voice as light as glimmering glass chimes in a gentle breeze. The tallest grunted.

"Is there any word from the Bishop?" he asked after a moment. If Cedric was annoyed or impatient, he didn't hint at it.

"No," Esme shook her head slightly, eyes still focused on her target.

"It wouldn't take that long, would it?" the youngest chimed in, his nasally voice grating against the sound of the rain, "do you think she got caught?"

"It will take as long as it takes, Brother Lucas," Cedric droned stoically, "Bishop Celine is representing our entire Order with this contact. I would be surprised if it didn't take time to make a deal."

"It's been, like, a day," Lucas wrinkled his nose after a droplet of rain almost nicked it, "I'm cold..."

"We're only meant to be watching one annoying kit, I'm afraid. If you want to complain, go back to the temple," Esme's voice chilled considerably, her gaze finally breaking from within the workshop to glare daggers at Lucas. The youngest fox swallowed roughly and averted his gaze.

"Well, whatever. We'll have to kill him soon anyways," he grumbled dismissively.

"I believe there will be no need, at least for now," a new voice rang from the treeline behind them. All three of the foxes turned to acknowledge a new one.

"Bishop!" Cedric purred, "how did the meeting go?"

"Well enough. I believe we have the good Doctor on our team, for now at least. I accepted his terms of a favor in exchange for his services," Celine purred back, shaking some of the rain from her hood, "I don't doubt he's already scheming on what to ask for a favor, but as long as he fulfills his end of the bargain then I'm sure the Order can satisfy whatever insane request he'll come up with."

"So we're leaving the job of killing the kid to the guy who's failed at doing it for years?" Lucas questioned with a disbelieving tone. Celine nodded.

"I know you aren't well-read on the topic, so I'll excuse your *incompetence*. Dr. Robotnik is a game player, Brother Lucas," Celine explained sharply, "he could easily overwhelm Sonic himself if he played dirty, that is no secret. But he wants to eliminate him in an even tilt, without cheating at his game. He is intent on playing cat and mouse with him for as long as he is entertained by the challenge. However, he wasn't opposed to eliminating Miles Prower in the slightest when we discussed the topic of my visit. I trust that the Doctor will apply himself to the task properly and not jump around hoops for fun."

Thoroughly chastised, Lucas lowered his ears in quiet submission to Celine.

"So we wait for the Doctor to strike?" Esme asked. Celine confirmed with a stiff nod, getting a small growl out of Esme, "boo... I was hoping to send that abomination back to Tamashi in pieces myself."

"It can't be helped," Cedric hummed, "are we to remain stationed with Miles until the task is complete?"

Another nod from Celine had Lucas groan quietly. The Bishop's pupils narrowed in indignance, but she was too wet, cold and tired to waste her time giving the insufferable whelp a thrashing, so she pointedly ignored him.

"Once the demon is dispatched you three are to report as soon as possible and return to the temple quickly. I don't want the Order to be connected to the deed if we can help it."

“Very well. We will remain in vigil by your leave, Bishop,” Cedric bowed to Celine, followed by Esme and, reluctantly, Lucas.

“Return to your duty,” Celine dismissed, “I will return to the temple. Contact me via our usual methods if you have anything to report.”

With a flutter of silken fabric, Celine departed quickly as if she’d never been there, leaving the trio of holy agents to turn their eyes and ears back to the house before them. Movement in the living room windows signaled that it had been late enough for Sonic to rouse from the couch and drag Tails to his bed, giving the agents a rough estimate on the late hour.

“Ugh... The hedgehog’s trying to get the brat to go to sleep again,” Lucas drawled in disgust. Cedric sighed softly and rolled his eyes; they didn’t need commentary on what they could all very clearly see themselves.

“Do you think he ever exhausts of that routine?” Esme wondered aloud.

“I doubt it. If he has been charmed by Tamashi’s will, he would do anything to ensure the wellbeing of his vessel. Especially now that the whelp has reached his first summit,” Cedric explained with a grumble, “once the kit has been returned to his maker, I’m certain any sorcery cast will dispel.”

Silence fell on the trio before long, resigned to their duty to watch over the demon spawn. The agents observed with stalwart faith, anxiously awaiting the end of their duty at the hands of the Doctor... Or anything worth reporting whatsoever.

Watching the same kit for years on end as penance had made them eager to see the end of it, after all.

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