

# 4

*A/N: Sorry this is a bit of a different format than previous chapters. Sort of a small anthology of different points of view and lore before he head into more action! I hope it's still an enjoyable read!*

Celine was *not* happy, not in the slightest.

“Thank you for your report, Brother Lucas,” her voice strained out, already seeing red, “you may return to your duty.”

“Roger that, Bishop,” Lucas’s irritating voice rang tinnily over the communicator, the fizzy hologram fading a moment later. Celine held still for a moment, then shouted in frustration and tossed the expensive holo-comm against the wall of her office. She stomped against the luxury carpet towards her desk before she slammed her hands against the surface of it.

“Dammit!” she seethed. The kit had been speaking with Tamashi himself! Before she could simply excuse the kit’s cursed nature as a matter of circumstance and he would die none the wiser to his malady. Now, Miles was actively conspiring with the demon, and she could no longer leave it to chance. Who knew when or how the demon would strike? Miles Prower was known worldwide for his high intellect. She had no idea what the greatest mind next to Dr. Eggman and the evil spirit could possibly be planning. Celine had no choice but to act first... Although she yearned to simply kill the treacherous child herself and ensure the world’s safety (and her status among the Order), as Bishop she answered to a higher power other than Alain himself.

“Celine?” a deep, motherly voice sang from behind Celine, causing her to turn around quickly in shock. As luck would have it, the alabaster sand fox mobian standing in the doorway was the very one she had wanted to speak with as soon as possible. Cardinal Minerva was taller than most foxes, with an ample frame that lent to her motherly aura that she exhibited to all members of the Order. Perhaps her comforting aura was assisted by her apparent age, as she wore wrinkles on her face that spoke of her wisdom. The robes of the Order draped over her form to just barely touch her paws. The Cardinal was the highest ranking official within the Order Hall stationed in the United Federation, and who Celine reported to.

“Cardinal... Alain must have sent you to ease my worries,” Celine sighed, relieved at the sight of her superior and friend. Minerva smiled warmly and made her way into the office, eyeing the damaged communicator at the edge of the room. She came so close to Celine that she could smell the vanilla and lotus flower perfume that Minerva wore.

“What troubles you, child?” she ran a paw over Celine’s shoulder in a comforting gesture.

“I have received terrible news from our agents observing Miles Prower, Cardinal,” she tensed up at the thought, “it is... worse than we feared. He has been communing with Tamashi, somehow. We don’t know how or when, but our agents overheard a conversation between his guardian and

himself confirming such.”

“And this worries you?” Minerva queried gently. Celine nodded with some hesitation, “fear is natural when we are faced with the darkness of the enemy, dearheart. It’s what keeps soldiers alive in the heat of battle, and protects us in times of strife. What’s important is that we do not let our fear guide our course.”

“I feel we should still contact Dr. Eggman, implore him to move the deed up his schedule,” Celine pressed, worry tugging at her features, “we don’t know what Miles and Tamashi are planning. Shouldn’t we prevent any hardship?” Minerva hummed thoughtfully, though she still looked at Celine as if she were looking through her very soul.

“Perhaps, but would that not be what the enemy expects of us?” she proposed, “Tamashi thrives off of darkness and negativity. It’s his realm to cloud and confuse, to scatter our numbers and let fear’s seed blossom. His evil is in all of us, and when he stokes the shadows it can make it hard to see the way to chart our path...”

“You suggest we wait...?”

“I suggest that we stay the course. I imagine Tamashi is aware of the information he has let slip through his pawn, and will be waiting for us to make an impulsive move to compensate for the knowledge we now bear,” Minerva spoke sagely, “do not let your fear drive your actions. We will wait to see the results of our alliance with the Doctor, and keep an ear to the ground.”

“Yes, of course. Thank you, Cardinal... Your wisdom humbles me,” Celine smiled with relief. Minerva just smiled sweetly and brushed away some stray hair from Celine’s face.

“Remember, there is nowhere we cannot go with the light of Alain in our hearts.”

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Awakening in the cold grey world was faster each time, Tails noticed.

At first it was suffocating to breathe the stale air, the black water felt heavy and his limbs refused to cooperate the longer he resided within the dream world. However, as he had returned each night for the past few weeks since his Summit, he found the world to be less and less oppressive on his spirit. Tamashi had said it was a matter of practice even with the choking miasma that permeated the realm, and that as he attuned himself with it he would find it easier to remain.

Tails had grown to look forward to his visits with Tamashi every night. While he was initially intimidated by the tall fox spirit, he found that despite his age Tamashi was actually interesting to speak with beyond matters of life and death. Tamashi spoke of the world long before, of legends that predated history that were lost with their speakers. Traditions that had been lost were found again between them, Tails eagerly learning all there was to know of his ancestors and the world before his time.

Tails in turn regaled Tamashi with concepts and inventions that he couldn't begin to imagine, spoke of the world's cultures that had changed so much since his time and the adventures he'd gone on with Sonic and his friends. Tamashi did his best to understand more modern concepts, though Tails suspected he deeply struggled with the concept of microwaves. Tamashi did seem willing to learn *some* English, but much preferred Mobian in most cases when it came to complex topics and words.

What was the most fascinating topic between the two foxes were the changes that awaited Tails in the future, however. For all the talk of toasters and ancient flower festivals, Tails was an eager student for his own biology.

"Your first summit as I described before is just that, the first," Tamashi explained one evening, "the Spirits gift all kits who come of age only a taste of what awaits to prepare them. You have already experienced most of what comes; your senses are stronger, your coat is thicker, your claws can rend even Soleilan steel, and your instincts become powerful and difficult to control. You will likely develop tangible powers based off of the intensity of the instincts you've described to me, but they can develop any time following the first summit, and there's no telling how they will manifest.

"The second summit is easier compared to what you've gone through. It is experienced when one reaches the age of majority, around eighteen to twenty years. Along with your fourth tail, your powers thus far will reach their apex. You will feel strong, and most likely you will cease to age at that point in time. Some kitsune in my time aged to their third or fourth summit before their immortality found them, but most remained as young as their second summit for all time. This is also the stage kitsune would see one another as eligible mates," Tails wrinkled his nose at that, rousing a laugh from Tamashi, "worry not! Many kitsune never found their other half, or preferred not to trouble themselves with such things. It is unlikely you would find a vixen or reynard your age anyhow. I know of no others," Tamashi cleared his throat awkwardly, then continued, "many kitsunes did not survive beyond this summit, through recklessness or accidents. A spirit may very likely accompany a kitsune from this point forward throughout their lives to ensure their survival. The spirit abandons their place in the spiritual realm to accomplish this, so protecting them in turn is expected of young kitsune.

"The third summit is an important one. It is typically experienced by kitsune at some point between their thirty-fifth and forty-fifth years, where the Spirits call upon them to take a journey through their realm. The journey differs greatly between kitsune, but many who traversed the realm of Spirits awoke with greater power, and greater understanding of the world. Some were never the same, for better or for worse. Regardless of the journey, a kitsune always emerged from their slumber with a fifth tail. Many would obtain a secondary aspect of their power. For example, my primary power was always fire," Tamashi held out his paw, and a moment later a bright yellow flame flickered to life just above it. Tails watched in awe as it danced then faded away, "but on my third summit, a new aspect of my soul was unleashed. I found myself capable of controlling the wind itself to accompany my flame. The freedom the power bestowed upon me was incredible, and the knowledge I was given by the Spirits refreshed my vitality and widened my understanding of the world around me.

“The fourth summit is seen as the easiest of all summits, at least spiritually and physically. It typically occurs between fifty-five and sixty years. Along with one’s sixth tail, they would receive a message from the Spirits themselves. The contents of the message differ greatly. No kitsune ever received the same message for their fourth summit. Some described dire warnings, or final words from loved ones who passed on. It was always greatly personal for them, emotional and often humbling since few of us ever communed with the Spirits regularly.

“The fifth summit is perhaps the most difficult following the first. A kitsune is invited by the spirits at seventy years to bare their entire soul to them, in exchange for a tertiary power. If a kitsune fails this summit, or refuses to bare their soul, they will not receive a tertiary power. It hardly mattered if one failed, except for our greatest trainees who coveted the Spirits’ power to fight. All kitsunes would receive their seventh tail regardless of the result of their exchange. For me, I bared my entire self to the Spirits. It was a greatly emotional experience, and many things I tried to deny about myself were brought to the surface. In reward, I was capable of controlling a fraction of the sun’s power while it shined,” Tamashi eyed Tails’s awed expression, who was staring at him with wide and wonder-filled eyes, though the kit didn’t interrupt him with the plethora of questions doubtlessly flooding his mind.

Tamashi couldn’t blame Tails for his excitement; he had grown up without knowledge of his heritage, and had based his knowledge of the world on the ‘science’ he had spoken of at length when he visited. Tamashi certainly knew the world was always more than it seemed, before the word ‘science’ Tails had brought up was even coined. To him, ‘science’ was as unexplainable as the energy of the world was new and seemingly unexplainable for Tails. In time, if the Spirits were merciful to provide it, Tamashi hoped to learn as much from Tails as the young kit would learn from him. It had been many, many years since he had taken an apprentice, but he found himself increasingly fond of the inquisitive little fox. Perhaps it was from bitter loneliness, but Tamashi looked forward to their talks that always became lessons for the both of them.

“The sixth summit is when a kitsune earns their eighth tail, and a task is given by the Spirits on their ninetieth year. This task can be nearly anything. My master’s lesson was to locate the new Tamashi, which was an elusive and long-fought journey for her. It was many years before I was born that she began her search. A kitsune’s task will last as long as they live until they complete it to the Spirits’ satisfaction.”

“What was yours?” Tails asked curiously. Tamashi smiled wistfully in recollection.

“I was to spend my days teaching the next generations of kitsune throughout our lands and protecting the fox tribes without the Spirits’ power. It was through this task I eventually became the Tamashi of my people... Of course, when my people had perished, I assumed my task would never again be satisfied for the Spirits,” Tamashi appeared deeply saddened for a moment, then returned to the present moment with a smile in Tails’s direction, “it seems though our teaching grounds are long overgrown and our scrolls turned to dust, my mission persists in the limbo I’ve found myself in.”

Tails smiled in turn at that.

"I can't promise I understand everything yet, but I *can* promise I'll hear you out," he offered kindly. Tamashi nodded once in gratefulness.

"Ah, but it seems we've gotten off track. Let me tell you about the final summit, and the most dangerous... On a kitsune's hundredth year, they earn their ninth and final tail, and they will be called upon by the Spirits for a final time to complete their last test. The Spirits thus far would have given all of their gifts to a kitsune, and the culmination of their training and knowledge would be tested by defeating a great foe within the Spirits' realm. Every foe will be different, with a different manner of defeating it depending on the capabilities of a kitsune. Mine was an Ettin, one of many beasts that roam the veil of our world. I succeeded in defeating my foe, but some kitsunes do not succeed. This was seen as spurning the Spirits' gifts, and they would be forever marked by their failure and exiled from their tribe."

"That seems harsh," Tails commented sadly, "what if something out of their control happened? It seems like a lot of pressure for one person..."

"It was simply our way. I recognize that such a concept may be alien to you in the modern world, but the gifts given to us by the Spirits were precious to us, and to fail such an important task despite them was seen in a poor light," Tamashi reasoned, "but our ways are all but memory, now. Perhaps when you find the next kitsunes, it will be in your interest to forego such practice in the new world. I would not fault you for that."

"If I find any, I think I'd like that..."

Tamashi nodded, then smirked,

"Now, let me tell you a little bit about the time my master and I visited a small mortal fox village for a coming-of-age ceremony... My master had just left me alone to watch a flock of sheep that the chieftain's daughter typically guarded, but some kits were running around the pen with ceremonial dyes..."

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*"Miles 'Tails' Prower Kitsune Log number... two. I traveled to that strange place again. I can confirm that it was not a drug trip as my blood sample was entirely clean. I double checked. The details of the dreams I've had line up too consistently, to boot. Tamashi seemed happy to see me, even though we barely know one another. If his story is true, then he's been alone for thousands of years. I think I'd be happy to see someone after that long, too. I was cold again in that realm, but he did that thing with his tails again to keep me warm. His are super long... will mine get that long? A-Anyways, I noticed the discrepancies between the journals kept by Gabriel Durand, among others preserved by the order, and Tamashi himself. The most glaring difference is the nigh-biblical depiction of the devil Tamashi versus the kitsune Tamashi's own accounts of events. At this point in a personal sense, I am somewhat inclined to trust Tamashi's accounts over those of a religious organization already known for their hysterical exaggerations of world events, such as the awakening of the Gaias. Scientifically, the odds of any of this happening are already far outside of my purview and I don't know what to think anymore."*

[Silence crackles over the tape for a moment.]

*"I tried to ask Tamashi about my changes again, and he assured me it was normal... I don't feel normal. I'd be fascinated by the changes if it weren't so terrifying. I feel no adverse effects from my enamel growing and changing shape as it did, and there's no spinal trauma or muscular damage to be seen from the growth of my... additional appendage. It's like- I won't use the word magic. Tamashi used the Mobian term for it once in our talk last night, but I can't. There has to be some scientific explanation for this. Tamashi seemed confused when I used that word, science, like he had no concept. He asked me what it meant, if it was a part of the 'strange human tongue' I described to him. I questioned him on if his culture had some sort of process for confirming objective information, like the scientific method. He looked at me like I was crazy and said he just knew things about the world in his gut, like instinct. I can confirm that the civilization of ancient kitsunes was not technologically advanced in the slightest."*

*"Sonic seems worried still, but I've been trying to act like everything's fine. It really isn't. I can't believe I broke down like I did... I never cry. Never. I'm not just some kid... But I also never snapped at him like I did the other day. Gaia, what was wrong with me? Tamashi said it was normal, again- none of this in any way normal. Maybe for him, but not for me. I'm well aware of mobian latent instincts in various species, such as Sonic flexing his spines under stress or my winter nesting urges, but what I experienced was way stronger than any sort of instinct I've felt before. It felt like I lost myself for a moment... Like I almost wasn't even there. What if something else happens, and I don't stop myself in time? I'm not dangerous... I won't let myself be a danger to the people around me. There's got to be a way to dampen these feelings somehow..."*

*"Th-That's the extent of my findings so far. Miles 'Tails' Prower Kitsune Log Two, end."*

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Sonic never thought about his family. After all, there was nothing to think about. He had been alone his whole life, running as long as he could remember. His earliest memories were of a mudslide and a broken house, but no faces came to him no matter how long and hard he recalled. No warm embrace of a loving mother, no protective essence of father. Not even the squabbling and snuggling of other young hoglets came to his memory. There was a heavy rain, a great crash, and from then on all he could do was run.

It was only around his tenth year he first started sparring with the upstart villain Eggman, and a year later that he'd found Tails and decided to give the kid a friend to count on. Sonic hardly expected to keep the fox around for as long as he did, and nothing could have prepared him for the role he'd stepped into once he realized he was attached at the hip with him. His other friends had never seen them apart long back then. Knuckles noticed that Sonic had been a caretaker to Tails, and teased him relentlessly for raising a kid even though he was still a kid himself. Sonic shut that down every time; Knuckles was barely a teen then, and still guarded the Master Emerald.

Amy was always supportive, and watched Tails when Sonic needed time to himself or if a mission was too dangerous. She probably loved Tails as much as Sonic himself did, if her spoiling him rotten every time she babysat was any indicator. When Cream, only three or four at the time had

begun spending time with Amy, she was fast friends with a younger Tails. She didn't quite understand all of Tails's mechanical jargon, but it was a relief that Tails had a friend more his age.

Sonic had met Vanilla shortly after Tails had become terribly ill with a flu. The kid was horribly feverish, so Sonic had stayed with him around the clock. Cream had noticed Tails's absence... That was when they met Vanilla. The fact Vanilla was already a medical professional and first responder helped them both when they came down with diseases, and when they got into scary scrapes on missions. She helped out when she could with Tails, but she had her own child to care for with Cream. Sonic often discreetly approached the adult rabbit about advice in raising Tails, but as Tails matured he found himself less concerned.

Until Tails passed out on his thirteenth birthday.

Sonic had tried to keep as cool as he could, but the fact Vanilla had no clue what was happening only amped up his stress. Even after Vanilla cleared Tails following the sprouting of an entirely new tail, Sonic refused to sleep in his own bed that night. After he sent everyone home with assurances he'd update them, he watched over Tails the whole night. He tried to get some winks of sleep, but Tails's desk chair was terribly lumpy, and his heart heavy.

In the morning he did his best to drop the news to Tails, but the kid ended up having a panic attack regardless of his pathetic attempt at dropping the bombshell easily. Sonic was never particularly good at feelings, so he just did what always worked. Still, Tails was distant following that, and the kid had been acting... odd. But what was Sonic to do? He was in way over his head, he always had been, and he didn't know where to start.

Sonic was only twenty; mobians his age were in college or working jobs, but he was hardly a 'normal' example of a young adult who grew up with parents and a steady education. Sonic taught *himself* about the world, he taught *himself* how to survive, he taught *himself* how to scrape by- and when Tails came along, he made sure that kid never had to rely on only himself to survive. Amy would probably say that makes Sonic more than qualified, but...

Sonic would look at families as he passed by on the street. 'Real' families. Families with two parents, a kid or more, hand-in-hand walking down the sidewalk to a park or a store. He always felt a hollow emptiness in his gut, knowing the children would never want for anything and grow up in a stable environment. Sonic tried, he really did. He bought a property in Emerald Hill, he stocked the fridge, he gave Tails his own workshop and as many books as his ravenous mind could read. All things considered, Tails was definitely more educated than Sonic ever was.

Yet, he felt guilt.

Because he couldn't provide as much support as he felt he needed to.

Because Tails was hurting and he couldn't do anything about it.

Because Tails was suddenly involved in something he couldn't understand, and that scared the *shit* out of him.

Because he was always caught between being a brother, a friend and a father and he didn't know which he needed to be for Tails.

One thing was for absolute damn sure, though. No matter how many evil schemes or world-ending disasters struck, where Tails went, he would go.

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