

Spellbound

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Sonic and friends escape from the circus and our favorite speedster and his pals become spellcasters at a magic school.

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0 - Rich Folks

The train had been making its way on the track for a few minutes.

"So now what?" Amy asked.

"We just sit back and see where this train takes us," said Sonic, reclining in a calm pose.

"We've had that attitude before we crash landed," said Knuckles, "and look where we ended up."

"At least we're away from Lerich and his circus," said Tails.

"If he even has one anymore," Cream pointed out.

The group was silent for a few seconds as a reaction to Cream's comment

"Let's just ditch these costumes," said Sonic, removing his helmet and cape, while the others took off their costumes, with Amy and Cream having worn their original dresses under theirs.

As soon as they were sure that the train had stopped, they jumped out of the cart and found that they were at a train station with a sign that said "Queens".

The station had red bricked floors. There were restaurants and shops inside, similar to a shopping mall.

In the cafe, a man was ordering from a café. After he paid and walked out, he spotted them and looked at them as if he hadn't seen creatures like them before.

"Good afternoon," he said, "what brings you around these parts?"

The gang was slightly stunned. They figured he probably wouldn't believe their story.

"We're from out of town," Amy said.

"We got on a train coming from the carnival," said Tails sprinkling some truth inside, "and we ended up here."

"Oh," the man said, "do you live nearby?"

"Actually," Sonic said, "we're a long way from home."

"And have no way back," Knuckles added.

"I'm sorry," the man said, "tell you what, as soon as my fiancée gets here, she and I can discuss what to do with you youngsters. By the way, the name's Motta. Taffy Motta."

In about a minute, the marquee that displayed all the trains arrival time announced the arrival of another train at the station.

"Hello, Irrika," Taffy said to a tan, petite woman with short, brown hair coming from the train's stop port. When she got closer, they could see she was wearing a sequin track suit. She and Taffy embraced each other in a hug.

"This is my fiancée, Irrika Vexus," he introduced her.

"Yes," the woman said, "here's my card." She pulled out one of her business cards from her jacket pocket and held it out for them to see. It read:

Irrika Elizabeth Vexus
Financial Advisor

Underneath was her address and phone number. Cream took it from her just to be polite.

"Does 'fiancée' mean you're married?" Cream asked.

"Almost." Irrika replied "We recently got engaged," she said as she showed off her engagement ring.

"Doesn't that strike you as a reminder of what you should be doing soon, Sonic?" Amy asked the blue hedgehog, "Get the hint?"

Sonic just rolled his eyes and looked away from her. He didn't have time for her talk of marriage, especially at a time like this.

"We could always take you back to our house and you can try to contact home there," Irrika offered.

"Do you have a radio telescope?" Tails asked.

"No," Taffy chuckled, finding what the fox said to be adorable, "but we can help you see what you can find."

They got into their car, which looked like it was an old model, but still shiny and new. With Irrika in the front seat, and the other 5 taking the back, which was roomy.

"What are your names, by the way," Taffy asked.

"Sonic the Hedgehog."

"I'm Miles Prower, but everyone calls me Tails, which is what I prefer."

"Knuckles. Knuckles the Echidna."

"I'm Amy Rose."

"And I'm Cream. I'm just a rabbit. And this is my chao, Cheese."

They left the station and drove down the street.

"You've heard what they say about getting into a car with strangers," Tails whispered.

"They never said anything about rich strangers," Cream whispered back.

When they arrived in a city much like Station Square, but with a more cultural aesthetic. It seemed that there were modern buildings, but keeping some of their old world style. The car parked into a garage of a square, stone building with steps leading up to the front door.

They followed them up the stairs. They looked around and saw the house was nicely furnished, with furniture and decorations that must have cost quite a fortune.

"Welcome to our humble abode," said Irrika.

"*'Humble'* sounds way off; alot of these things do look pretty pricey," Sonic said.

"You all must be thirsty," said Taffy, "Let me get you something to drink." Taffy walked out of the room and walked back in carrying a tray of glasses garnished with citrus fruits such as lemons, limes and oranges.

"I've noticed that you've given us water with fruit at the edge of the glasses," said Amy, "which was pretty nice of you, and I've read in magazines that it's actually a more healthy, natural way to flavor drinks instead of artificial flavors."

"While that may be true, Amy," Taffy said "but Irrika thinks plain, unflavored water is boring and 'uncool.'"

"So," Irrika asked the mammals, "where are you from, and what brought you out here?"

"We're from the Mobian Galaxy," Tails explained, "and we we're flying in our spacecraft and a wormhole sucked us in."

"Oh my," Irrika said, "you're a long way away from home!"

"That's for sure," Sonic added.

"And how old did you say you were?" Taffy asked.

They all stated their ages all at once.

"You're all just kids!" Irrika marveled, "so you must be a very long way from your school!"

"We never went-" Cream started.

"I'll enroll you in one," Irrika interrupted, "until you can find your way back home. And you'll be given your own rooms while you're staying with us. We have two rooms to spare, but boys and girls should sleep in separate rooms, no exceptions."

"Looks like we're rooming together, guys," Tails said to Sonic and Knuckles.

"I said 'no exceptions'," Irrika said firmly.

"But I'm a boy," Tails explained.

Later that night, when the boys and girls were in their separate rooms, they pondered the situation.

"I don't see why she decided to put us in school," Tails said, "I know as much as any professor and can drive."

"And everything you need to know you can learn on the streets, anyway," Sonic added.

"Maybe they just want us out of their hair during the day," Knuckles said.

At that moment, the doorbell rang and they all rushed downstairs.

"I wonder who that could be?" Irrika asked out loud.

"I'll get the door," said Taffy. He got up from his seat and opened the front door. Standing in front of it was a postman.

"I've got letters for the Vexus family."

The five mammals took a look at him.

"Thank you very much," Taffy said as he took the letters and waved to the postman as he waved back and got back on his truck.

They all gathered around Taffy in anticipation of their letters. Each of them read a bit of it out loud.

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Majoroka's School of Magicry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment. Term begins on 1 September. We await your owl by no later than 31 July.

*Yours sincerely,
Seth Penders
Deputy Headmaster*

"Although you're a bit of a late enrollment," Irrika said, "I was able to have you penciled in. And we'll be able to cover the expenses of your required materials."

"Magic, huh?" Tails questioned, "you know that's just a bunch of smoke and mirrors."

"But I'm sure you'll still have a fun time," Taffy said.

"But there's nothing science can't explain," Tails said.

"You're a critical thinker," said Taffy, "I'm sure the professors will like that."

1 - First Day

The next morning, Taffy woke up the youngsters bright and early. He first approached the boys' room and knocked on the door before letting himself in.

"Rise and shine," he said cheerfully, "don't want to be late in your first day of school!"

Everyone woke up, except for Sonic

"Sonic," Tails poked his friend, "wake up."

Sonic just made a whining noise and fanned Tails away with his hand.

"C'mon," Knuckles said, "we don't have time for this." And he pulled Sonic out of his bed, while the hedgehog grabbed onto his blankets, trying to cling with no success, and he dragged the blankets with him. Forced to the floor, Sonic sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Can't I stay home and help you bake cookies?"

"We've got to catch the train on time," Taffy said, "so let's get going, up and at 'em!"

He then went to the girls' room and knocked on their door.

"Rise and shine, girls! It's time for your first day of school!"

In a moment, a sleepy-looking Amy opened the door, and Cream followed her from behind holding her chao companion.

"Morning already?" Cream asked.

"Yes," Taffy said, keeping his cheerfulness, "now get ready, because I'm driving you to the station today. Don't worry about breakfast, I'll take you out for it on the way. Irrika isn't joining us because she has an important meeting this afternoon."

"Why do we have to take a train?" Tails asked "Isn't the school nearby?"

"It's in another town," Taffy explained, "another region, possibly, but this train is the best way to get there."

Taffy drove them to a nearby café, which was shaped like an igloo called Mable's Maple.

"For a place that looks like an igloo," said Cream, "it sure is warm in here."

"But Irrika said this was the coolest place to take you for breakfast."

"She definitely didn't mean it literally," Tails said.

"Let's see if there's anything you'd like on the menu," Taffy said, looking to lighten their spirits.

"Let's see," Amy said, reading the menu aloud, "Maple Bacon, Maple Toast Points. Maple, Maple, Eggs, and Maple... that sounds... disgusting, actually. Isn't there anything on this menu that isn't swimming in maple syrup?"

"I'm sure you'll find something you'll like," Taffy assured her, "anything you don't finish, I'll take it back with me."

After breakfast, Taffy drove the bunch to Queen's Cross Station, which is the station they had arrived at the other day.

"Now according to the brochure," he told them as he fanned it out for them to see, "you should wait at platform 9 ½ for your train. And that's right between platforms 9 and 10."

"Alright," said Tails.

"I hope you youngsters have a good time," Taffy said, "I'll miss you."

"But you've only known us for one day," said Sonic.

"I know," Taffy replied, "but still."

They disembarked the car and Taffy waved to them as he drove off.

"Good luck!"

They passed by the platforms of other numbers and saw platform 9 and platform 10, but the one they were looking for was nowhere in sight.

"But Taffy said it was right here exactly," Cream said.

"Maybe the brochure had a typo in it," Sonic said as he leaned against the wall. But in a split second, he fell through the wall, as the wall was just an illusion set up to conceal the platform.

He looked up and saw the station and the train headed towards it. The others just walked right through now that they knew they could.

The sign above the shiny black and red train read "Majorka Express".

Despite their slight disbelief, they stepped on to the train.

As the train started to move, they decided to take this time to gather their thoughts before their stop.

"It's funny," Tails spoke up, "we've taken a train to civilization only to be sent away by the people we met there on another train."

"Do you think our luck will turn bad again?" Cream asked.

"I'm sure we'll be fine" Sonic said, as calm and confident as ever, "I'm sure any thing we get into, we can get out of it just as easily. Just like it's always been."

Everyone sat in silence as the train kept rolling along the track.

In about 30 or so minutes, the train stops at their destination. When the gang disembarks, the train moves on and looks as if it had literally disappeared into a tunnel.

"Welp, there goes our ride." Sonic says with a nervous laugh.

They got off the train and walked into the station. There were signs directing them to where the school was located, which was conveniently across the street from the station.

They then saw the campus to their North. It seemed to match the description on their cards, with the exception of a dark forest at the other end of the school.

Cream stumbled over what appeared to be a pit. "Whoa!"

The others stopped as they heard her. "Be careful," Cream told the others, "I almost fell in that deep hole."

"Chao!" Cheese insisted.

Everyone gathered around to look into the gaping hole in the ground. "How deep do you think it is?"

Tails asked. He picked up a pebble and chucked it in.

The pebble continued to fall until it disappeared into the darkness.

"I'd sure hate to find out any other way." Sonic said.

The campus was large, and had equally large grass fields and paved walking paths. Taken in by the scenery, they walked on to those paths.

"Hi," said a girl who was standing on the lawn. She had long blonde wavy hair, a large head, plump pink shiny lips, bold green-and-pink eyeshadow, a short torso with thin legs and big feet. She was wearing the school uniform, but she seemed to have altered it, by tying the bottom of her shirt so it exposed her midriff and hiked the skirt above her knees.

"You must be new here," she continued, "I'm Caterina Diff. And since I'm so *generous*, I'll show you what to do on your first day. Follow me!"

There was something off about this girl, as well as something off-putting, which may have been the patronizing tone she used with them, but they followed her.

They walk closer to the school and see group of kids playing keep away with glass orb while a boy is

trying to get it back from them.

"Hey, hey!" Sonic shouted at the kids who were picking on the boy.

"Just let him handle it on his own," Caterina said.

Sonic then turns into a whirlwind and swirls the kids into it. The orb falls and the boy it belonged to caught it.

They approached a flat, square stone with a sign that said "directory". Caterina poked the button, which looked like an eye, and an image that seemed holographic appeared from its flat top.

"Now, this is where the Deputy Headmaster's office is, where you'll need to go to get registered, if you aren't already," she told them. A girl walked by with her hair up in two pointy buns.

"Hey, I like your hair!" Caterina called out to her, "Who's your hairdresser?"

"Thanks," the girl said, "I got inspiration from a Japanese fashion magazine!"

"Ooh, exotic," cooed Caterina. But as soon as the girl walked out of sight, Caterina changed her tune.

"That is the stupidest hairstyle I've ever seen..." She then looked at Amy and said in a chipper tone, "I like your dress, where'd you get it."

Amy just stared at her.

"We're going to go to the Deputy Headmaster's office, now... thanks for the tutorial."

2 - Pensive Penders

The group had made their way up to the building, in which the office was all the way upstairs.

When they were just a few feet away from the door, they heard a strange sound.

"What is that awful noise?" Tails asked.

"It sounds like some sort of animal, and it's dying." said Amy.

"The poor creature," said Cream "it must really be in terrible pain."

The sound squawked, squeaked, and made lower pitched toots.

Upon closer inspection, when they got past the door, they saw that the dying animal was somebody playing the clarinet badly.

When they entered the room, they saw a man with long dark hair parted in the middle playing the clarinet. He didn't seem to notice them when they walked in. As soon as he was finished, he said "Give it up for the genius Deputy Headmaster Penders!"

They realized he was talking about himself when he took a bow. He took a look at the gang and said "What are you urchins doing here?"

"We came up here because we were sent by Taffy Motta and Irrika Vexus, who registered us in the school system," said Tails.

"Oh, well, *bravo for you*," said Headmaster Penders rather dryly.

"Yeah, and since we're here, we'd like to get some info about what we'll do in this school, now that we're suddenly students," said Sonic.

"At Majorka's School of Magicry," said Penders, "the students will learn an assortment of spells and other magic, from simple levitation spells

to more complicated spells. Students will be dwelling in dormitories during non-school hours, but since you don't have any background information or any documented family history, we can't immediately determine which house you'll be assigned to, nor whether you're magicfolk or mere tuzzles."

"But Irrika was the one who registered us," said Amy "I'm sure she could have given you the information."

"I wouldn't expect that the third richest woman in Meagerville would forget a few simple details, but then again you are the expert on these procedures," Penders said, once again giving attitude, which was met with Amy simply raising an eyebrow as if to say *what's his deal?*

"I'm very busy, and you'd better hurry up to the Grand Hall, where the selection hat will assign you to your house." Everybody walked out the door, with Cream having a visible worried expression when she looked back. They could all hear Penders laughing inside his office. Now, they knew that there were times that people couldn't help but laugh, like if someone was wearing a ridiculous hat, but this wasn't the case. They were five young creatures that had gotten into a complicated situation, and the deputy headmaster just laughed at them.

"What's *with* that guy?!" said Knuckles.

3 - Admissions

As soon as they entered the Grand Hall, they saw a man with a long beard at the end of the room with a strange looking hat, which was a sapphire blue/sea green that was a bit wrinkled, with a warped brim, and curved and twisted a bit at the top.

"Hello," a woman spoke up, "my name is Ms. Partridge! We're ready for you now,"

She lead everyone through two large doors and into the Great Hall, where there are four long tables with many students, as well as floating candles. The roof appears to be the sky.

"The ceiling isn't real," said Tails "It's just made to look like the night sky, probably through a projector. I read about those things."

"All right," said Ms. Partridge, "will you wait along here, please? Now, before we begin, Professor Flynn would like to say a few words."

The bearded man rises from the main table.

"I have a few starts of term notices I wish to announce," he began "The first years please note that the dark forest is strictly forbidden to all students. Also, our caretaker, Mr. Finch has asked me to remind you that the third floor corridor on the right hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a most painful death. Though ironically, he isn't here to acknowledge us tonight, as he had a mishap with its balcony, so we will find a replacement for him soon. Thank you."

"When I call your name," the woman told them, "you will come forth, I shall place the sorting hat on your head, and you will be sorted into your houses. First up, Caterina Diff."

Caterina rushes up proudly. The tattered hat nearly freaks before touching down on Caterina's head. "Demontail!" The hat bellowed.

"Finally!" said Caterina. "I look like such a dork wearing that ugly hat!"

"There isn't a witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Demontail," one student said.

-“Knuckles the Echidna!”

Knuckles made a beeline to the spot.

"Ah, right then..." the sorting hat said "hmm...right... Dragonthorn!"

The Grand Hall went wild with cheers and Knuckles jumps off with a triumphant smirk.

-“Epiphany Fieffer!”

A small girl with curly red hair goes up.

Tails looks around and spots an intimidating teacher, wearing a cloak and skull mask looking at him. He looks startled.

“What’s wrong, little bro?” Sonic asks his fox friend.

“Nothing...it's nothing,” Tails replied, “I'm fine.”

“Let's see...” the hat said, deciding the house Epiphany would go to. “I know...Snuffleupp!”

-“Sonic the Hedgehog!”

Sonic walks up. He sits down and the hat is put on.

“Ah! Let’s see,” the hat says, “I know just where to put you... Dragonthorn!”

More applause as Sonic zips off the stage.

-“Miles Prower!”

Everything goes silent. The fox one walks up and sits down.

“Hmm...difficult, very difficult,” the hat said, “Plenty of courage I see, not a bad mind, either. There's cleverness, oh yes, and a thirst to prove yourself. But where to put you?”

“Not Demontail. Not Demontail,” Tails whispers.

“Not Demontail, eh? Are you sure? You could be great, you know. It’s all here in your head. And Demontail will help you on your way to greatness! There's no doubt about that! No?” The hat asks him. He shakes his head.

“Well, if you’re sure...better be... Dragonthorn!”

There is an immense cheering and the gang goes to the Dragonthorn table.

“Your attention, please,” shouted Ms. Partridge as she tapped on a glass cup with a spoon.

“Let the feast...begin,” said Flynn.

Food magically appeared on all the tables, and the hall filled with awe and chatter.

“Wow,” said Tails.

They took a spot, but noticed it was parallel to Caterina Diff and a group of her Demontail friends.

“Don’t you even *think* about sitting around here!” One of them sneered.

“Uh, I’m sorry,” Cream began, “we didn’t mean to disturb you.”

Caterina then did something very obnoxious, she got her utensils and started tapping them rhythmically.

“Dragonthorn losers! Dragonthorn losers!” she began to chant.

The others joined in, happy to help Caterina antagonize others, mostly out of fear they’d get picked on too.

"Dragonthorn losers! Dragonthorn losers!"

The Demontails then used magic to make more utensils clank against more dishes.

Just then, someone swooped in to the rescue.

"Oh, leave the newbies alone, Caterina!" a boy with shaggy hair said, "*You're* the loser, and nobody would even dream of sitting around you. Come on, newcomers, we can sit in that spot over there."

"Oh, thank you kind sir," Cream said.

As they walked to the spot, they spotted Epiphany, who was sitting at her table. She waves to the boy.

"Hello, Cain."

"Hello, Epiphany. I'd like you to meet the other newbies to this academy."

"Hello, and welcome aboard," she said to them.

"I'm sorry to say that the girl who was harassing you was Caterina Diff, I'm sure you know she's in Demontail," Cain told them.

"She didn't seem very nice," Cream said.

"Oh, that's a massive understatement!" Epiphany said.

"What's *her* problem, anyway?" Amy asked.

"Well, usually the students in Demontail go bad, and she's already rotten to the core," Epiphany explained.

"She also used to pick on me and my friend Tani while he was still around," Cain added. "Say, Epiphany, why don't you tell them their riddle you wrote about Caterina?"

"It's not really my work, but I had fun incorporating her into it." Epiphany admitted.

"Well, let's hear it," Sonic said.

Epiphany leaned in closer, so the evil-minded blonde wouldn't hear her.

"How is Caterina Diff like a typhoon? Both are powerful, destructive and indiscriminately cruel. But the typhoon doesn't mean to be."

The group snickered.

"So, where is your friend and why isn't he here anymore?" Cream asked.

Cain's expression changed to a solemn one as well as Epiphany's when he looked at her.

"We're not sure where he went," he said. "We're sure that he was snatched up by a dark lord."

"Sorry to hear that," Amy said sympathetically.

"It's fine," Cain said, smiling at her, "we're sure he was strong enough to not go down without a fight," he put his hand on her shoulder.

"Well, we know what that's like," Sonic said, "even though some creep named Lerich has been following us around, there's no way we'll let him do us in."

"What? And when did this happen?" Epiphany asked them.

"About almost two weeks ago, when we crash landed in our plane, one I made," Tails said.

"Was the plane faulty?" asked Epiphany.

"No," Tails said, "It was sucked into a wormhole. And when we landed, someone named Mort found us, but he led us into a trap. We had to perform Lerich's circus, and when a freak accident caused the tent to go down, he wants to kill us."

"That's terrible!" Epiphany said, appalled.

"Well, then I really see you do have as strong a spirit as Tani did," Epiphany said to Knuckles, as her cheeks became visibly redder while she smiled slightly.

"Well, after this meal," Cain said, "We'll walk you to your classes and tell you about your professors."

4 - Magic Lessons

"And what about the guy in the skull mask?" Tails asked.

"That's professor Grimley," Cain said, "and not much, since neither of us have had him before."

While in the classroom, the students waited for the professor. After a moment, he finally arrived. He was the hooded man with the skull mask. He strode in, as if he were gliding across the floor with his long cloak barely grazing it.

The students were silent, anticipating what this somewhat scary professor would do.

He then approached his desk, in between the chalkboard and seat and removed his mask.

He appeared to be a man in his early twenties, with pale skin and medium-length dark hair.

"Good day, students," he said. "My name is Professor Grimley," a piece of chalk levitated and wrote his name on the board for him. "Let me know if you have any questions."

"I have one," Sonic spoke up. The rest of the room went silent.

"What is it?" said Professor Grimley.

"How old are you?"

"Two hundred and five," Professor Grimley replied proudly. "Anyone else?" he asked. Nobody else had any questions. "Alright then, let's get started. Here in this class, you will learn the subtle science and exact art of making potions. You may not see much wand-waving here, but I assure you, this is magic." Grimley went on with his speech as Caterina, who sat behind Amy, poked her with a wand whispering "mutant".

At three-thirty that afternoon, the Dragonthorns rushed down the front steps onto the grounds for their first flying lesson. They marched onto the springy grass down the sloping lawns toward a smooth, flat lawn on the other side of the grounds next to the forbidden forest.

The Demontails were already there, and so were at least twenty vacuum cleaners lying in neat lines on the ground.

"Vacuum cleaners?" Tails said, confused. "Those seem more for cleaning than flying. And I can fly just well with my own two tails if not a plane. I'm pretty sure a vacuum isn't suited for flying."

Their teacher, Ms. Partridge arrived. "I'm here to substitute for Finch," she announced. "Well, what are you all waiting for?" she barked. "Everyone get by a vacuum. Come on, chop, chop," she clapped her hands with the last two words.

The five mammals glanced down at their vacuums. Theirs were a bit old and the plastic head was a bit scratched and the main bag had dust on the outside.

“Stick out your right hand over the handle of your vacuum,” called Ms. Partridge, “and say ‘Up!’”

“UP!” everyone shouted.

Tails’ vacuum jumped into his hand at once, but it was one of the few that did. Epiphany’s had simply rolled over on the ground, and Knuckles’ hadn’t moved at all.

“They’re probably spooked,” Sonic joked.

Ms. Partridge then showed them how to mount their vacuums without sliding off the end, and walked up and down the rows to correct the students’ grips. The gang, as well as Epiphany and Cain, smirked with delight when they heard her tell Caterina she’d been doing it wrong for years.

“Now, when I blow my whistle, you will kick off from the ground, as hard as you can,” said Ms. Partridge. “Keep your vacuums steady, rise a few feet, and then come straight back down by leaning forward slightly. On my whistle — three — two —”

“I finally got it!” Knuckles said, but he suddenly pushed off hard before the whistle had touched Ms. Partridge’s lips.

“Hey! Come back here, boy!” she shouted, but he was rising straight up like a bottle rocket to twelve feet up to twenty feet. His friends saw his stupefied face look down at the ground falling away, saw him slip sideways off the vacuum and — THWACK! — A thud and a nasty crack and he lay face down on the grass in a heap. His vacuum was still rising higher and higher, and into the forest until it couldn’t be seen any longer.

Ms. Partridge was bending over him.

“Broken collarbone,” she muttered. “Come on, it’s all right, get up.”

She was about to turn to the rest of the class when Epiphany said “Chiro Cura,” and zapped her wand at Knuckles, which healed his collarbone.

“Huh? It’s not broken anymore,” he said as he felt the pain from the fracture stop.

“Great use of a healing a spell, Epiphany. Oh, I just remembered I am being summoned to the office today, they’ve found a new coach, stay here in the meantime.” Ms. Partridge walked off, leaving the students on the field.

No sooner was she out of earshot when Caterina burst into laughter. “Looks like someone left his glasses at home!”

The other Demontails joined in.

“Shut up, Caterina,” snapped Epiphany. “It couldn’t be helped!”

"Ooh, sticking up for the doofus?" said one of Caterina's bratty friends, "Never thought you'd go for blind idiots."

"I don't like him that in that way," Epiphany said.

Epiphany gave Caterina a fierce glare, and Caterina looked back at her friends and rolled her eyes with a pursed lip smirk.

"You foul, despicable little vermin!" Epiphany shouted as she pointed her wand at Caterina.

"Epiphany, just let it go!" Cain said.

Epiphany still had her wand pointed at Caterina's face. "I'll make you even *uglier* than you already are!" she threatened. Caterina winced at those words. After a few seconds, she retracted her wand and walked away. Caterina and her rotten friends immediately started laughing.

"*I knew you'd punk ou-*" Epiphany gave Caterina a swift punch in the lip.

The court fell silent. "Well," said Epiphany, "I feel good."

"That was awesome!" Amy said.

"Ugh!" Caterina said, "you ruined my perfectly pouty lips!"

"You're in trouble now..." said one of Caterina's friends. The band of bratty snobs gathered around.

"Hold my purse!" Caterina said to one of them, "while I deal with this freak." Epiphany looked amused, "I'm ready when you are."

The gang then gathered around, backing her up.

"You better not threaten to hit a friggen girl," one of Caterina's short friends with her dark hair in a ponytail and a hard face said to the male mammals.

Amy brought out her hammer.

"*She's cast a hammer spell!*"

"*First year's luck!*" members of Caterina's group clammered. One of Caterina's friends plucked the hammer out of Amy's hands from behind, but it immediately fell to the ground with its weight.

"*It's so heavy...*"

"Ooh, is that a potion in your coat?" asked a Demontail student, noticing a vial hanging out of Epiphany's coat.

Epiphany looked at her pocket, "I must have forgotten to take it out during class."

"Ooh, Grimley's gonna lay hard boiled eggs when he finds out," one of Caterina's friends said, smirking and obviously taking amusement in Epiphany's predicament.

"I plan to give it back, I swear," Epiphany begged.

"Here, allow me," said a chubby boy, swiping it. "Keepaway!"

"Oh boy! I love this game!" A girl said.

All the nasty little Demontail students flew around on their vacuums trying to play keepaway with the vial. The gang flew on their vacuums after them immediately, diving and ducking as the Demontails tried to keep the vial away from them too. Finally, Tails pulled off a maneuver that involved twists and spirals that baffled Caterina as he flew by, and Amy snatched the vial as she was distracted.

"Oh," Caterina panted, "you can have your vial back, since it's so important to you. You really are a freak."

"And you're just a scared little bully," Amy shot back, and the other students gasped. Caterina was ready to take out her wand, "Unpopularis Permane-"

When Professor Grimley, who was in hiding, took out his wand and turned Caterina into a rat.

Everyone gasped as she transformed.

"Well, I see who's the real filthy rat around here," Grimley said as he made her float around.

"Professor Grimley!" said Mrs. Partridge as she walked by, approaching him, "what are you doing?"

"I'm in the middle of a lesson," Grimley said.

"Is that rat a student?" Mrs. Partridge asked.

"It is currently a rat," Grimley replied.

"Eek!" One student shouted as Caterina crawled inside his pantsleg, "Get her out! Get her out!"

The Dragonthorns chuckled, as Mrs. Partridge transformed Caterina to her normal, terrible self.

Caterina stood on all fours, still scratching her head with her foot. She realized what she was doing and started to run away, giving Grimley a look of contempt as she ran off.

"That's right," Grimley said, "I hope you learned a valuable lesson."

"Professor Grimley!" Mrs. Partridge said sternly "we do not use transformation as a punishment, I'm sure you remember Flynn telling you that," she said, pointing a wand at his chin, and walked away.

Professor Grimely huffed in contempt as she walked away. "You youngsters come with me," he said to Sonic and Co.

"Ooooooh," the Demontails said.

5 - Another Surprise

“Never... in all my time at Majorka’s School of Magicry have I witnessed this kind of rough activity, cat-fighting and all,” Professor Grimley said.

The quintet caught sight of Caterina and her clique’s triumphant faces as they left, walking in Professor Grimley’s wake as he strode toward the building. They figured they would likely be expelled.

They didn’t even bother to say anything to defend themselves. Now where would they go? They were sure they’d be out in the open with Lerich waiting for them.

Up the front steps, Grimley stayed quiet. He opened doors and marched along corridors. Maybe he was taking them to Penders.

Professor Grimley stopped outside a classroom.

“Excuse me, Professor Flick, could I borrow Elijah for a moment?”

A burly boy came out of Flick’s class looking confused.

“Students, this is Elijah,” Professor Grimley said, then said to Elijah, “I’ve found you new team members.”

Elijah’s expression changed from puzzlement to delight.

“Are you serious, Professor?”

“Absolutely,” said Professor Grimly. “They’re naturals. I’ve never seen anything like it. Was that your first time on vacuums?”

“Well, yeah,” Tails said.

“There’s never really been a time where we used vacuums to fly before,” Amy added.

“Not a scratch on them”, Professor Grimley said, “Not even Coconut Ted could have pulled it off.”

Elijah was now looking as though all his dreams had come true, but the group he was happy to have just looked as if this was the weirdest dream they've had.

“Ever seen a game, newbies?” he excitedly asked them.

“A game of what?” asked Sonic.

“Of Fidditch, of course, it’s a well-loved sport in this academy,” Elijah told them.

"Elijah's captain of the Dragonthorn team," Professor Grimley explained.

"They don't look like much, but sounds to me they've got endurance and skills," said Elijah, now walking around circling them. "We'll have to get them decent vacuums, Professor Grimley, like a Smoover Two Thousand or a Dust Demon."

"I shall speak to Professor Flynn and see if we can't bend the first-year rule. We certainly know that we need a better team than last year. Clobbered in that last match by Demontail, I couldn't look Kenneth Penders in the face for weeks..." Professor Grimley remembered bitterly.

"So, you'll have to let us know you're training hard, or I might just change my mind about your enrollment status."

When they received their vacuums in the mailroom, it said:

DO NOT OPEN THE PARCEL AT THE TABLE.

It contains your new Smoover Two Thousand, but I don't want everybody knowing you've got a vacuum, or they'll all want one. Elijah will meet you tonight on the Fidditch field at seven o'clock for your first training session.

They left the hall quickly, wanting to show their unwrapped vacuums in private before their first class, but before they could get to their table, Tails' package was seized from him by Caterina's bratty friends.

"That's a vacuum cleaner," one said, throwing it back to the fox boy with a mixture of jealousy and spite on his face. "You'll be in for it this time, Prower, first years aren't allowed them."

"It's not any old vacuum," Tails said, "it's a Smoover Two Thousand."

Before Caterina could reply, Professor Flick appeared at Caterina's elbow.

"I hope there are no fights going on here," he squeaked.

"They've been sent a vacuum cleaner, Professor," Caterina was quick to say.

"Yes I can see that," said Professor Flick, beaming at the five mammals.

"Professor Partridge told me all about the special circumstances," Flick continued, "And what model is it?"

"They're Smoover Two Thousands," said Sonic, smugly looking at the horror on Caterina's face. "And it's really thanks to this young lady here that we've got them," he added, remarking about the fight with Caterina during their lesson.

As seven o'clock drew nearer, they all left the building and set off in the dusk toward the Fidditch field. They've never been inside the stadium before. Hundreds of seats were raised in stands around the field so that the spectators were high enough to see what was going on. At either end of the field were three golden poles with hoops on the end.

Elijah had arrived. He was carrying a large wooden crate under his arm.

"I see you've made it on time. I'm just going to teach you the rules this evening, and then you'll be joining team practice three times a week."

He opened the crate. Inside were four different-sized balls.

"Right," said Elijah. "Now, Fidditch is easy enough to understand, even if it's not too easy to play. There are seven players on each side. Three of them are called Chasers."

Elijah took out a bright red ball about the size of a soccer ball.

"This ball's called the Wiff," said Elijah.

"The Chasers throw the Wiff to each other and try and get it through one of the hoops to score a goal."

Ten points every time the Wiff goes through one of the hoops. Follow me?"

"The Chasers throw the Wiff and put it through the hoops to score," Tails relayed.

"So — that's sort of like basketball on vacuum cleaners, except with six hoops, isn't it?" Sonic asked.

"What's basketball?" said Elijah curiously.

"Never mind," said Sonic .

"Now, there's another player on each side who's called the Keeper — I'm Keeper for Dragonthorn. I have to fly around our hoops and stop the other team from scoring. Three Chasers, one Keeper, and they play with the Wiff."

"Okay, got it," Tails said "So what are they for?" He pointed at the three balls left inside the box.

"I'll show you now," said Elijah. "Take this."

He handed Tails a small club, a bit like a short baseball bat.

"I'm going to show you what the Bludgeoners do," Elijah said. "These two are the Bludgeoners."

He showed them two identical balls, jet black and slightly smaller than the red Wiff. They seemed to noticeably be straining to escape the straps holding them inside the box.

"Stand back," Elijah warned them.

He bent down and freed one of the Bludgeoners.

At once, the black ball rose high in the air and then pelted straight at the fox boy's face. Tails swung at it with the bat to stop it smacking his nose, and sent it zigzagging away into the air — it zoomed around their heads and then shot at Elijah, who dived on top of it and managed to pin it to the ground.

"See?" Elijah panted, forcing the struggling Bludgeoner back into the crate and strapping it down safely.

"The Bludgeoners rocket around, trying to knock players off their vacuums. That's why you have two Beaters on each team; it's their job to protect their side from the Bludgeoners and try and knock them toward the other team. So — think you've got all that?"

"Three Chasers try and score with the Wiff; the Keeper guards the goal posts; the Beaters keep the Bludgeoners away from their team, is that right?" reeled Tails.

"Very good," said Elijah.

"Have the Bludgeoners never actually killed anyone, have they?" asked, hoping he sounded offhand.

"Never at Majorca's School of Magicry. We've had a couple of broken jaws but nothing worse than that. Now, the last member of the team is the Seeker. That's you, fox. And you don't have to worry about the Wiff or the Bludgeoners —"

"— unless they crack my head open," Tails said, giving an aside glance.

Elijah reached into the crate and took out the fourth and last ball. Compared with the Wiff and the Bludgeoners, it was tiny, about the size of a large walnut. It was bright gold and had little fluttering silver wings.

"This," said Elijah, "is the Golden Globe, and it's the most important ball of the lot. It's very hard to catch because it's so fast and difficult to see. It's the Seeker's job to catch it. You've got to weave in and out of the Chasers, Beaters, Bludgeoners, and Wiff to get it before the other team's Seeker, because whichever Seeker catches the Globe wins his team an extra hundred and fifty points, so they nearly always win. That's why Seekers get fouled so much. A game of Fidditch only ends when the Globe is caught, so it can go on for ages — I think the record is three months; they had to keep bringing on substitutes so the players could get some sleep. Well, that's it any questions?"

"I think we got everything," Amy said.

"We won't practice with the Globe yet," said Elijah, carefully shutting it back inside the crate, "it's too dark, we might lose it. Let's try you out with a few of these." He pulled a bag of ordinary golf balls out of his pocket and a few minutes later, he and the gang were up in the air, Elijah throwing the golf balls as hard as he could in every direction for Tails to catch.

"You've made the team?" Cain asked in disbelief as they were told the next day.

"He said we're naturals," Cream said.

"That's great!" Epiphany said. "I think you might want to borrow this to help you, don't want another mishap,"

"Uh, thanks," Knuckles said.

They all glanced at the book. "Lemme see," Tails said, "this books' a bit heavy."

"You'll only need to skim the most crucial parts," Epiphany said, "And you probably haven't mastered the levitation spell,"

"I'll carry it for now," Knuckles offered.

Later in the hall, when Knuckles was carrying the book.

"What's that you've got there, spiny anteater?" Penders caught up to him and asked.

He showed him the book Epiphany lent him, "This is just a book Epiphany Pfeiffer lent me,"

"Ah, a gift from your girlfriend?"

"She is not my girlfriend," Knuckles insisted.

"Library books are not to be taken outside the school," said Penders. "Give it to me. Five points from Dragonthorn."

"He probably just made that rule up," Knuckles muttered angrily as Penders limped away. "Wonder what's wrong with his leg?"

"Dunno, probably his extra weight catching up with him," wisecracked Sonic.

The Dragonthorn common room was very noisy that evening. The gang sat together with Epiphany next to a window. Epiphany was checking their homework on charms for them. "Sorry, you can't copy, you won't learn that way," she told them before.

"Maybe we can just ask for the book," Tails suggested. "he might have to give it back if the other teachers are listening."

"But who's going in there?" Amy asked, "We might risk losing points if we go into his office just to bug him."

"Let's see... who will we send?" Sonic pondered.

They all look at each other and their eyes land on Knuckles. "What are you all looking at me for?"

"You're the one who was holding the book when he swiped it from you," Cream pointed out.

He made his way down to the staff room and knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again. Nothing. Perhaps Penders had left the book in there? What's the worst that could happen? He nudged the door a bit and peered inside – and a horrible scene met his eyes. Penders and Finch were inside, alone. Penders was holding his robes above his hips. The back of his lower body was bloody and seemed to be slashed. Finch was wrapping bandages around him.

"Vile things," Penders was saying. "How are you supposed to keep your eyes on so many of those runts?"

Knuckles tried to shut the door quietly, but —

"YOU!" Penders' face was twisted with fury as he dropped his robes quickly to hide his body.

"I came here to ask if I can just have my book back," he asked, as politely as he could but still assertively.

"GET OUT! OUT!"

He left, before Penders could take any more points from Dragonthorn and briskly walked back downstairs.

"Did you get it?" Cain asked as Knuckles met up with them. "What's the matter?"

Knuckles had recapped to them what he'd just seen. "Penders' back was all shredded, as if he had lost a fight with a weed whacker."

"You know what this means?" Cain finished breathlessly. "He tried to get past hordes of little goblins last month! Possibly to peddle things to them, but they violently refused."

That night in the dorm, everyone was still awake.

"Hey, you asleep?" Tails asked.

"No," Sonic said.

"How could we if we are going to have our first match and we haven't forgotten about Lerich being after us," Amy said.

"Yeah, that's right," Tails said.

"Penders' encounter with goblins could mean something is up," said Sonic, "but what?"

6 - The Game

The next morning dawned very bright and cold. The Grand Hall was full of the delicious smell of breakfast foods cooking and everyone talking about the game that would happen that day.

"You've got to eat some breakfast," Epiphany said.

"No thanks," Tails said.

"Just eat something, just one bite," wheedled Epiphany.

"I don't have much of an appetite," he insisted. In fact, none of the five really did.

"But you need to keep up your strength," said Cain. "Especially you, Tails, as Seekers are always the ones who get clobbered by the other team."

"Big incentive," Sonic said flatly.

"Ok, thanks," Tails said.

By eleven o'clock the whole school seemed to be out in the stands around the pitch. Many students had binoculars. The seats might be raised high in the air, but it was still difficult to see what was going on sometimes. Epiphany and Cain made their way up in the top row. With the help of other Dragonthorns, they hung a banner, to cheer the team on.

The team members had changed into their orange robes (Demontail would be playing in grey). Elijah, the captain of the team cleared his throat for to quiet everyone down.

"Okay, men," he said.

"And women," said Leticia Johnson, one of the Chasers.

"And women," Elijah agreed. "This is it The big one, the one we've all been waiting for. This is the best team Dragonthorn's had in years. And I see we have five new members. We're going to win. I know it! Right. It's time. Good luck to all of you."

As Tails followed and out of the locker room, hoping his knees weren't going to give way, walked onto the field to loud cheering crowds.

Ms. Partridge was the referee. She stood in the middle of the field waiting for the two teams, her vacuum in her hand.

"Now I want a nice fair game, all of you," she said, once they were all gathered around her. They noticed that she seemed to be speaking particularly to the Demontail Captain, Michael Gin. The fluttering banner high above, flashing Dragonthorn Dream could be seen in the corner of one's eye over the crowd.

"Mount your vacuums, please." They all climbed onto their Smoover Two Thousands. Ms. Partridge gave a loud squeal on her whistle. Fifteen vacuums rose up, high, high into the air.

"And they're off. The Wiff is taken immediately by Leticia Jones of Dragonthorn!"

Lee Sampson was doing the commentary for the match, closely watched by Professor Grimley.

“And she’s really belting along up there, a neat pass to Sonic the Hedgehog, — back to Jones and — no, the Demontails have taken the Wiff, Slytherin Captain Michael Gin gains the Wiff and off he goes — Gin flying like an alert hawk up there — he’s going to sc— no, stopped by an excellent move by Dragonthorn Keeper Elijah and the Dragonthorns take the Wiff — that’s Chaser of Dragonthorn there, nice dive around Gin, off up the field and — OUCH — that must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a Bludgeoner — Wiff taken by the Demontails — that’s speeding off toward the goal posts, but he’s blocked by a second Bludgeoner — sent his way by Coconut Ted, can’t tell which — nice play by the Dragonthorn Beater, anyway, and Jones back in possession of the Wiff, a clear field ahead and off she goes — she’s really flying — dodges a speeding Bludgeoner — the goal posts are ahead —come on, now, — Keeper dives — misses — DRAGONTHORNS SCORE!” Dragonthorn cheers filled the cold air, with howls and moans from the Demontails.

“No sign of the Globe yet?” Epiphany asked still trying to watch. “Nope,” said Cain.

“Keep out of the way until you catch sight of the Globe,” Elijah had said to Tails. “We don’t want you attacked before you have to be.” When Cream had scored, Tails had done couple of loop-the-loops in celebration “Oh, yeah!”.

Now he was back to staring around for the Globe. Once he caught sight of a flash of gold, but it was just a reflection from Leticia’s bracelet, and once a Bludgeoner decided to come smack dab in his way, like a cannonball, but Tails dodged it and Amy came chasing after it.

“You all right there?” she had time to yell, as she beat the Bludgeoner furiously toward Michael Gin. “Demontail in possession,” Lee Sampson was saying, “Chaser Fleet ducks two Bludgeoners, two Dragonthorn Beaters and Chaser Jones, and speeds toward the — wait a moment — was that the Globe?”

A murmur ran through the crowd as Fleet dropped the Wiff, too busy looking over his shoulder at the flash of gold that had passed his left ear. Tails saw it and rushed to dive after it. Demontail Seeker Gin had seen it, too. Neck and neck they hurtled toward the Stitch — all the Chasers seemed to have forgotten what they were supposed to be doing as they hung in the air on sitting on their vacuums to watch. Tails was faster than Gin— he could see the little round ball, wings flouncing, darting up ahead — he put on an extra tinge of speed —WHAM! A roar of rage echoed from the Dragonthorns below — Michael Gin had blocked him on purpose, and Tails’ vacuum spun off course, holding on for dear life. “That’s a Foul!” screamed the Dragonthorns. Ms. Partridge spoke angrily to Gin and then ordered a free shot at the goal posts for Dragonthorn. But in all the confusion, of course, the small Globe had disappeared from sight again.

Down in the stands, a Dragonthorn named Bean was yelling, “Send him off, ref! Give him a red card!” “What are you talking about?” Cain said.

“In soccer you get shown the red card and you’re out of the game!”

“But this isn’t soccer, Bean,” Cain reminded him. Grimley, however, was on Bean’s side.

“They oughta change the rules. Gin coulda knocked Prower outta the air.”

Lee Sampson was finding it difficult not to take sides. “So — after that obvious and filthy bought of cheating —”

“Sampson!” growled Ms. Partridge.

“I mean, after that open squalor of...”

“I’m warning you—”

“Fine. Gin nearly kills the Dragonthorn Seeker, which could happen to anyone, I’m sure, so a penalty to Dragonthorn, taken by the rabbit, which puts it away, no trouble, and we continue play, Dragonthorn still in possession.”

It was as Tails dodged another Bludgeoner, which went spinning dangerously past his head, that it happened. His vacuum gave a sudden, jarring heave. For a split second, he thought he was going to fall. He gripped the vacuum tightly with both his hands and knees. He’d never felt anything like that. It happened again. It was as though the vacuum was trying to buck him off. But vacuums did not suddenly decide to buck their riders off. Tails tried to turn back toward the Demontail goal-posts — he was about to ask Elijah to call time-out — and then he realized that his vacuum was completely out of his control. He couldn’t turn it. He couldn’t direct it at all. It was zigzagging through the air, and every now and then making violent swaying movements that almost unseated him. Even if he could just fly back up, it would probably disqualify him. Sampson was still commentating on these events.

“Demontail in possession — Gin with the Wiff — passes the rabbit —passes Rose — Demontails score — Ano...” The Demontails were cheering. No one seemed to have noticed that Tails’ vacuum was behaving strangely. It was carrying him slowly higher, away from the game, jerking and twitching as it went.

“What do you think he’s doing?” Cain asked.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say he’d lost control of his vacuum,” Epiphany said, “but he can’t have...”

Suddenly, people were pointing up at Tails all over the stands. His vacuum had started to rollover and over, with him only just managing to hold on.

Then the whole crowd gasped. Tails’ vacuum had given a sharp jerk and he swung off it. He was now dangling from it, holding on with only one hand.

“Did something happen to it when Gin blocked him?” Epiphany whispered.

“Can’t have,” said Cain, “nothing can interfere with a vacuum cleaner except powerful Dark magic — no kid could do that to a Smoover Two Thousand.”

At these words, Epiphany seized Cain’s binoculars, but instead of looking up at Tails, she started looking frantically around the crowd.

“What are you doing?” Cain asked.

“I knew it,” Epiphany gasped, “Look at Penders!” Cain grabbed the binoculars. Penders was in the middle of the stands opposite them. He had his eyes fixed on Tails and was muttering a whole string of words under his breath.

“He’s jinxing the vacuum,” said Epiphany. “What should we do?”

“Leave it to me.” Before Cain could say another word, Epiphany had disappeared. Cain turned the binoculars back on Tails.

His vacuum was shaking so hard, it was almost impossible for him to hang on much longer. The whole crowd was on its feet, watching, terrified, as Amy and Knuckles flew up to try and pull Tails safely onto one of their vacuums, but it did no good, as every time they got near him, the vacuum would jump higher still.

They dropped lower and circled beneath him, obviously hoping to catch him if he fell. Bricker seized the Wiff and scored five times without anyone noticing. Epiphany had fought her way across to the stand where Penders stood, and was now racing along the row behind him. Reaching Penders, she crouched down, pulled out her wand, and whispered a few, well-chosen words. Bright blue electric jolts shot from her wand onto the hood of Penders' robes. It took perhaps thirty-five seconds for Penders to realize that he was on fire. Several shrieks told her she had done the job right. She scrambled back along the row —Penders would never know who was responsible for his sudden ignition. It was enough. Up in the air, Tails was suddenly able to climb back on to his vacuum cleaner.

"Nigel, you can look!" Cain said. Nigel, a small boy who was in Dragonthorn, had been sobbing into Grimley's jacket for the last five minutes. Tails was speeding toward the ground.

He was about to grab the globe, but tumbled off of his vacuum cleaner as it crashed into the ground without him. He sat up for a while, seemingly not catching the thing.

Sonic floated to Tails' side. "Are you alright little buddy?" he asked.

"What?" Tails said.

"I said are you alright?"

"Did you say something?"

Everyone was in suspense. Tails tapped the right side of his head, tilting his head to the left, and with a few taps, the thing came out of his left ear.

"Miles Prower has earned 150 points for catching the Globe!" Epiphany and Cain, as well as the other students and staff of Dragonthorn cheered for the team.

"I wonder if anyone else managed to pull this off so well?" Tails asked himself.

Later, inside the dorm room of Dragonthorn house, the five had some visitors, who were none other than Epiphany and Cain.

"Congratulations on winning the game!"

"Well, he had no trouble playing by ear, didn't he?" Sonic said as he grabbed Tails by the head and gave him a friendly noogie.

"Speaking of trouble," said Epiphany, "I'm writing a riddle about that Lerich person you told us about, but don't have good enough description to come up with one."

"Maybe one day you can publish it," Tails suggested as encouragement, "maybe even write books to exploit how evil he is."

"That would require printing presses," Epiphany said.

"I think that shouldn't be too hard," Tails said, "Their designs are simplistic enough."

"We could start our own publication, Cain said, "We could call it Wizard Publishing!"

"I bet it took you a *long* time to come up with *that* name..." Penders' sneering voice was heard, "I'm sorry to interrupt your very important business meeting," he said, not sounding a bit sorry, "The new gym teacher who we recently hired was interested in meeting the seeker of the winning team,"

"I saw your performance in the game today and loved your skills," said an official looking man, appeared to be a coach.

"This is Coach Kahn," Penders introduced him "he has been hired as the replacement for Mr. Finch. What are you waiting for? Show some manners. Greet the new coach," he ordered. But something didn't seem right to the mammals, and they were right. The familiar eyes stared at them in the same predatory manner.

"Oh, certainly," he said. He was tall, thin and wearing sweats, sneakers a whistle hung around his neck and a sports cap. And also had a fu manchu.

"I liked that boy's hustle out there, and I am glad to see what other fine specimens are here as well."

"I'll have to inform you," Penders said to Kahn, "that Jones and Elijah reside in different dorms.

"These five members seemed to do most of the work," said Coach Kahn, "the other two members seemed to have just hung back. I see potential in these youngsters."

"Don't just sit there," Penders said, "get up and say hello to Coach Kahn."

"Good evening, Coach Kahn," Epiphany and Cain immediately said.

"Yes, good evening, sir!" Amy piped up, causing the others to look confused. Was she the only one not getting bad vibes from this coach?

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Coach Kahn smirked.

"So, do you really see potential in them?" Penders asked.

"Yes," Coach Kahn replied, "But nothing in the other two in the room."

"That's what I thought as well," Penders replied. "Now it's time for my performance," he continued, "I will be paying a piece I composed myself."

"What instrument do you play?" Coach Kahn asked.

"Why, a clarinet," Penders said, "and I must say that I am quite the talented musician."

"That's the quality that inspired me to work here," Coach Kahn said, "Talented staff to influence the students."

"I am glad to hear that," Penders said, "Not everyone can appreciate my genius."

"I understand your pain, " Coach Kahn said, "I am the finest gym teacher the world has to offer and I get no fanfare."

"What a shame," Penders said, frowning.

"Yech," whispered Sonic, "I don't know who's more full of hot air, the round one, or the skinny one!" And apparently the rest of them agreed with him, as they had similar facial expressions.

They arrived at the auditorium, and made sure to sit as far as possible from Caterina and her rotten friends.

Penders squawked away with his clarinet and the students talked amongst themselves, having no trouble, due to how loud the squawks were.

"Some composers are inspired by nature, some by the sounds of the city. Apparently, Penders was inspired by someone strangling a crane," said Knuckles.

"Our new gym teacher is creepy-looking," said Epiphany.

"No question," Cain agreed. "It's the look in his eye."

"That devious look," Amy said, "but I can't quite put my finger on it..."

"You seemed happy to greet him," said Knuckles.

"I was just trying to keep up appearances," Amy confessed, "so they wouldn't think we were suspicious and to give us time to figure him out."

"I'm sure you'll find out. Don't worry your pink head about it," Cain said, patting Amy's hand. And they said no more for the rest of the night.

7 - A Stroke of Bad Luck

The next morning, they noticed that Epiphany and Cain were absent from breakfast. They figured Penders gave them detention. But they arrived at the table soon enough.

"You're here!" Tails said.

"We were worried," Cream added.

"How'd it go?" Sonic asked.

"Not so good," Cain replied.

"We tried talking to him, but we walked in on him bandaging his mangled leg and he yelled at us to get out and subtracted points from our respected houses," Epiphany said.

"Bummer," said Sonic with a frown.

"And worse," Cain said, "Coach Kahn caught up with Penders first. We tried explaining to him about his real identity to Penders, but he just joked his way out of that one."

"Chao, chao!" Cheese exclaimed.

"Does your little friend have a plan?" Epiphany asked.

"Well, no," Cream said, "I think he's saying Caterina Diff is coming this way."

And sure enough, Caterina came walking to their table with a big, smug smile on her face.

"Hiya, losers! I have a message from Coach Kahn", Caterina said, "He says you are to meet him after dinner tonight in Penders' office. Now that you've got your message, how's about you give me a tip? It's customary, you know."

"You'll get lumps, and not in oatmeal if you don't stop bothering us," Epiphany threatened.

"Ugh," Caterina scoffed, "you're just jealous that Coach Kahn prefers me over you."

"We actually couldn't care less about Coach Kahn," Cain said, "now if you'll kindly shove off."

"I wonder what he wants to talk to us about?" Cream asked.

"Let's have a word with old Coach Kahn about it now," Sonic said.

As they stood up to leave the table, a bowl magically appeared over Sonic's head and poured a red liquid on him. The Grand hall filled with laughs as they witnessed what happened.

Sonic then touched the top of his head with his fingers, inspected the red liquid, then tasted it. "Corn syrup," he said.

As the Demontails continued to laugh *at* him, he smiled and said "I know. Red really isn't my color," make it appear they were laughing with him.

Caterina smirked at the scene from a distance, signifying it was her who poured the red corn syrup over Sonic's head. Amy caught her smirking and gave her an angry look.

"What was that about?" Amy demanded.

"I'm keeping up the order here," Caterina said, approaching the pink hedgehog. She then whispered into Amy's ear, "and to do that, I have to subtract popularity points from other people so I remain most popular, the reason I'm telling you is because I think you might be a good addition to my group,"

"What?" Amy said.

"Ditch the other furry dopes and I might let you have a shot," Caterina continued, "and maybe you can transfer to Demontail and get a magical makeover."

"Never!" Amy was quick to decline.

"Fine," Caterina said, "enjoy being a freak for the rest of your life."

When the mean girl walked off in a fake huff, Cain decided to share an idea.

"Maybe we can just wait in front of the office just in case. Caterina's made me lose my appetite, anyway."

"We appreciate your efforts," said Amy, "but we don't want anything happening to you on account of us." "Think nothing of it," Cain reassured them, "we love helping friends in need, and you are in need right now."

"Even if we risk losing our house points, we've got your backs," Epiphany said.

"Wonder what he wants with us?" Amy wondered.

"Maybe he's discovered Coach Kahn's intentions on his own," Epiphany suggested.

They knew this wasn't likely, but they admired their friends' hope.

After handing their barely eaten lunches to the cafeteria ladies, they walked to the administrative office and trudged up the stairs to Penders' office.

"I thank you for taking some time out of your busy furry schedule to see me," Deputy Headmaster Penders said, pulling his door open before they had a chance to knock.

"Well, hurry it up. Each minute I spend talking to you is one I could spend practicing my clarinet and as a musical genius, I can't afford to waste any."

"We understand, sir," Amy said.

"Good!" said Penders, "There are two things I wanted to discuss with you. Do you know what they are?"

"No, sir," Amy replied.

"Well, that's a shock," Penders mocked, "a studious girl like you, not knowing? Lucky for you, I'm in the mood to explain. The first thing I'd like to discuss is your cheating at that game."

"Cheating?!"

"Yes, that's right," Penders continued, "since your friend here caught the wiff in his ear, our new coach here called foul play."

"But that's not fair!" Cream says.

"Besides, a coach can't call the shots, he's not a referee," Knuckles added.

"Who do you expect me to believe?" Penders asked in a condescending tone, "a small child or a sports official? Either way, Coach Kahn wants you to meet him in the quad tomorrow morning to quiz you on what you've been studying, and if you fail, you're expelled. And Coach Kahn says he has a homeschooling program designed for you. I expect you to come prepared tomorrow. *Arrivederci*." And after his use of gratuitous Italian, he turned around and closed the door behind him.

8 - A Test

"This is terrible!" Cain cried.

"You're telling me," Sonic said, "he basically disgraced the Italian language back there!"

"Not that," he said, "how can Penders just make a decision at the last minute like that?"

"You're forgetting it's Penders we're talking about," Epiphany reminded him, "he'd change the properties of potions if he had the power."

"I'm just worried that something might happen to them," Cain said.

"I understand. But maybe this might cheer you all up," Epiphany said, in her own attempt to use humor to lighten the tense atmosphere, "I wrote a new funny riddle about Coach Kahn:

What's the difference between an elephant and Coach Kahn? One is big and wrinkly, has a goofy nose, smells terrible, and the other is an elephant."

"That's so true!" Sonic couldn't help but chuckle.

"If only Penders can see that Coach Kahn is as obvious as an elephant in a room," Knuckles said.

"Yes, but we have to think harder to think of a plan," said Cain.

"You don't have to," Amy said, "we've gotten ourselves out of tight spots before."

"But in this case," Knuckles mentioned, "it might be even tighter. They won't take us as seriously here no matter what we do because of our ages."

"He has a point," Tails said.

"Who signed you up for this academy?" Epiphany asked.

"Irrika Vexus," Amy said, "the third richest woman in Queens."

"Then maybe you can call her and ask her to help you sort this out."

They all looked at each other.

"We don't really have a choice," Cream admitted.

"Fine," Tails said, "we'll call her, if just to help us tell Penders and Coach Kahn that they misunderstood the situation."

"If anything happens," Cain began, grabbing Amy's hand.

She turned around and looked into his eyes.

"Nothing's going to happen to us, so don't worry about it. We'll see you later."

And with that, they all walked out of the dorm to ask Penders if they can phone Irrika.

"Who'd have thought we'd be so helpless in a situation to actually need help from an adult?" Knuckles questioned.

"This must be another bizarre world," Sonic said, "like when we were on Earth."

"I know it's weird," Tails said, "but it's the only thing we can do to prove our innocence and find out what Coach Kahn is really up to."

Tails was the one to knock before the Deputy Headmaster opened his office door.

"I see you managed to go out of your way to speak to me again," Penders said, sounding unimpressed, "that's 25 points subtracted from Dragonthorn."

"Fair enough," Amy said, "we just want to know if we can call Irrika Vexus so you can talk to her about this and maybe she can be the equalizer to this situation."

Penders' eye twitched for a second.

"Very well, then," he said in a dull tone, "you may phone your guardian."

Tails took out the business card she gave them and picked up the phone and did not pay attention to the stare that he got from Penders.

"Hello?" said when Irrika picked up the phone.

"Yes," Irrika answered, "whom may I ask is calling?"

"It's, Tails" he said, "the deputy Headmaster is accusing us of cheating at a sports event because a new coach called foul play. But what happened was clearly an accident."

"Oh," Irrika said, "that's unfortunate."

"Yes," Tails said, "and we need you to help us clear our names, since we're not the cheating type and we can prove it."

"I may have known you for only a day," Irrika said, "but know that you know that cheating is not cool. I'll be there in a while. Ta-ta," and she hung up.

"Well," Penders said, "you can go ahead and meet the professors on the lawn and by that time, your guardian might be able to make it here. Only then can we decide if you're cheaters that deserve to be expelled."

Sonic, Knuckles, and Amy made annoyed expressions with their backs turned to Penders as they walked out.

"Yes, sir," Cream said, as to not draw negative attention.

As they made their way downstairs and out of the building out to the lawn, halfway through their trek, we're they surprised.

"Irrika!" Amy said, surprised.

"You sure got here fast," Sonic said.

"Since I understand how bad this situation is," she answered, "I knew I had to waste no time, and called in a few favors."

"The test is starting soon," Tails said, "so you should just follow us."

"Actually," Irrika said, "I was thinking that we should have a more private discussion. So you should follow me."

They followed her to the nearby forest, by the pit they had encountered on the first day.

"I'm sure nobody would think to come here," Irrika said.

"Even though they said this forest was off-limits," Cream said.

"Even so," Sonic said, "it doesn't matter what they say is 'off-limits', as long as they won't get in our business."

"I like that attitude," Irrika complimented, "it's very cool."

"No need to tell me," Sonic said.

"Ok," Irrika said, "we'll have to make extra sure nobody is listening. Let's see if anyone is in that pit."

"Nobody in their right mind would think to hide in there," said Amy.

"And it's too dark to see inside," Cream added.

"Let's just listen in, then," Irrika suggested, "you can never tell in a place like this."

They silently agreed and leaned in carefully to listen.

"Maybe a bit deeper," Irrika suggested.

Without warning, she gave a light roundhouse kick and they all fell into the pit.

On their way down, they could hear Irrika laughing wickedly and they were able to make out her saying:

"Lerich is a cool guy! And he taught me to be a great actress!"

9 - Double Trouble

The sight that they saw as they continued to fall down the pit was pure blackness. They braced themselves for impact, but found that they were caught in what felt like a net.

"So Coach Kahn is really Lerich," said Knuckles, "that explains alot."

"But what I wish would be explained," said Tails, "is why he decided to follow us here?"

"That's something I'd like to know too."

They realized that voice was different than any of theirs; someone else was in the pit with them.

"Huh?" They puzzled.

"It's us," a girl's voice that was neither Cream nor Amy's said.

"Epiphany? Cain?" Knuckles asked. He peered down in the dark, as he was able to make them out much clearer than the others, as he had more experience exploring dark caverns and subterranean passages.

The others, though it was hard to tell if they could see, just listened in.

"Irrika Vexus and Lerich Snomis captured us and locked us in a cage and dumped us here," said Cain.

"We heard his plans of disguising himself as a coach to get his hands on you in the name of vengeance," Epiphany quickly added.

"Yes," said Cain in a tone that sounded annoyed, "I was just going to tell them that."

"Vengeance for what?" Amy asked.

"He said it was about his circus getting ruined," Epiphany said.

"You just had to beat me to it, didn't you?" Cain said, annoyed again.

"He's bent out of shape about that?" Sonic asked in flat disbelief, "can't he just whip up a new tent? He never payed his performers."

"We can't stay down here," Tails said, "we have a test to take so we don't get expelled!"

"But how are we all going to get out?" Amy asked, "you and Cream can't carry all of us, and it's too high up, so you'll get tired before reaching the top."

"I think I've got an idea," said Knuckles, "hold on."

He then started to climb a wall and dug a passageway that started out as horizontal then went vertical, repeating this pattern in a zig zag until reaching the top.

He then came back down.

"Going up?"

They all walked into the tunnel but not before Cream said,

"We'll come back for you!"

Tails lifted Sonic up the vertical parts while Cream did the same to Amy. They all ran through the horizontal part of the tunnel and kept alternating this until they reached the end at the top. From a distance, they saw Penders and their professors waiting on the field and rushed over.

"We're sorry we're late," Tails said between pants.

"I hope we're not too late," Amy added.

"I'm afraid so," Penders said, "that means we have to expel you."

"I admit I came late, too," Taffy said, "I rushed over here after Irrika left and wouldn't answer my calls. But I was able to drive here since she didn't take the car."

"And I'm sure they had a good reason for being slightly tardy," Professor Grimley said, "let them take the test."

"Very well, then," Penders said, sounding a bit irritated.

"The ingredients for Polyelixir, "Professor Grimley started to ask, "are laceback_mosquitoes, leeches, powdered tricorn horn, lobgrass, fluxseed, shredded boomlingo skin and what else?"

"A piece of something belonging to a specific person," said Amy, "such as the hair of the person you want to become."

"That's incorrect!" Penders said.

"Actually," Professor Grimley said, "she's correct."

"Bonus question," Grimley continued, "what kind of transformation won't work with this potion?"

"Trans-species," Cream answered, "if a human tries to turn into an animal, or vice-versa, it will only work halfway."

"Wrong!" Penders said.

"No," Grimley told him, "that's right."

"Who discovered the use of Fireball eggs and when?" Professor Flynn asked.

"Quon Pai and 16th century," Knuckles answered.

"You couldn't be more wrong," Penders sneered.

"Actually," Flynn said, "I'd say he couldn't be more in point."

"What speeds are a Lightning Bolt vacuum capable of?" Asked Professor Partridge.

"0-150 miles per hour acceleration in 10 seconds," Tails answered.

Penders imitated a 'wrong' buzzer.

"The boy is correct," Partridge told him.

"And up to how long can a time out be called in a game of Fiddich?"

"Two hours," Sonic answered, "if the game has gone on for 12 or more."

"That is incorrect," said Penders.

"Actually," Professor Partridge said, "it isn't."

"I think they're good students," Grimley said, "I'm sure they can stay."

"The student that deserves to be expelled is Caterina Diff," said Professor Partridge, "she never studies and is more concerned about her physical appearance over schoolwork, and she's just a dreadful person."

"The only reason these five urchins participated in Fiddich is because of a fight they got into," Penders stated,

"your records report participation in a school fight, and breaking one of the vacuums in one of your classes. Plus, two students are too young to attend," Penders continued, "we only accept students from ages 11-17, and we have no previous records of the two being advanced for their ages. And you're currently standing in front of the Dark Forest, which is off-limits. Now that they're expelled, it doesn't matter."

"We don't care, anyway!" Amy shouted.

"Besides," Tails added, "this magic stuff is a bunch of baloney."

"We just want to know where our friends are!" Cream cried.

"Since Epiphany and Cain are guilty by participation," Coach Kahn said, "I had them working with invisibility potions, until they simply vanish themselves."

Knuckles didn't believe him "Liar!"

"Insulting the coach," Penders said, shaking a fat finger, "that is grounds for double expulsion!"

"He's just as reasonable as Lerich Snomis," Sonic muttered.

"I've heard of him," said Coach Kahn, "I hear Lerich was the best Demontail wizard in the world who later went on to run his own circus, until some troublemaking members of it decided to ruin it for everyone."

"And you'd know all that since you're him in disguise!" Tails said accusingly.

"Don't be ridiculous-" Penders said.

"That's all that's being done here!" Amy stated.

"Never," hissed Penders, "interrupt the Deputy Headmaster! Triple expulsion!"

"Make him take off his disguise and we'll show you we're telling the truth!" Cream squealed.

"He's already said his facial hair doesn't come off!" Penders said, "You should be more tolerant of his culture."

"It's not about that," Amy said.

"We're sure that it's him," Tails added.

"Since that's the case," Knuckles said, "then it won't hurt to pull that beard off."

"Sorry," said the coach, "I can't. I need it.... to fly..."

He then levitated from his spot and gave the gang a very evil grin as he did so. He then began flying into the hall.

"That's preposterous!" Professor Flynn cried, "only very few wizards have mastered flight without a vacuum!"

"That won't stop us from catching him!" Sonic declared and dashed after him while everyone else followed from a distance behind, with Tails and Cream flying after the villain. Unfortunately, Lerich (and I'm glad to finally be able to call him that since his disguise has been uncovered) used a transportation spell, his body looking like it was being twisted into a vortex with a loud cracking sound.

"Only few wizards have mastered the transporting spell!" cried Professor Partridge.

The gang continued running, out to the front lawn, where Lerich was getting into his truck and Angelina was holding two young people in the passenger's seat; Epiphany and Cain!

"No!" Knuckles shouted as the rest of the gang skidded to a halt and fell to the ground, with the two young kids losing altitude.

Knuckles leapt into a glide to the truck's passenger door.

"Hang on!" he said, trying to reach for Epiphany. Angelina tried pushing him out before closing the door on him, but he simply tore the door off its hinges and tried again.

"Knuckles, just let go," Epiphany said.

"I'll have you out in no time, don't worry," he told her.

"But I must tell you something," said Epiphany.

"You can tell me later," he replied.

Angelina saw, as Knuckles tried to jerk Epiphany out of the truck, that his strength was overpowering, so she extended her claws and scratched him across the chest.

Lerich, now reaching the truck, let out a monstrous roar, and kicked Knuckles away from the truck, put the passenger door back on, got in the driver's seat and began to drive off.

"That clunker won't get too far against me," said Sonic and he began running after it. But a few feet into driving, it exploded into the trees, setting them on fire.

As Sonic skid to a halt, Knuckles was sitting in the same place when Lerich had kicked him. As the hedgehog ran back to his friends, they all sat quiet, exhausted physically and emotionally.

Knuckles kept staring into the spot Lerich detonated his truck, tears forming into his eyes, but he decided to fight them off with anger instead of letting them fall and pounded the ground with both fists and breathed heavily for a few seconds.

In the background, Penders could only say, "Now we've lost another coach thanks to those needless ne'er-do-wells! Get off my campus now before I call the authorities! There's no room for murderers here!" Sonic glared at Penders as he walked off, knowing well that none of them caused the explosion, but knew Penders was too full of himself to care.

After a few seconds have passed, everyone crawled in closer to each other to talk amongst themselves.

"That explosion had to be a trick," Tails said, "who knows where he really went with them?"

"What if he's a terrible person that won't let them live?" Cream said tearfully.

"We'll make sure to get to them," Amy reassured her, "but we have to get going soon if we want to."

Taffy approached the young mammals.

"I'm very sorry that this had to happen to you," he said, kneeling down towards them, putting his hand on Cream's shoulder.

"For what it's worth, I don't think you're murderers."

"Thanks," said Tails.

"But we can't just keep standing around!" Sonic said, with anger and determination, "We need to think up a plan to save Cain and Epiphany!"

"And my fiancée ran off with that wicked man," Taffy said, "but I did find this before she left our estate."

He pulled a piece of paper out of his coat pocket.

"It's a receipt for a ticket she must have bought. For a check in at one of the world's most oldest hotel."

"Do you know where it is?" Amy asked.

"As a matter of fact I do," Taffy said, "come on, get into my car."

And the five boarded his vehicle, and all looked out a window with one thing on their minds; to search for the two abductees any way they could.