

# An Icy Reception

By NaughtyKid

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*Sonic and the gang travel to a hotel where they are sure that a certain villain has traveled to with his new accomplice. To find out what's going on, they need to disguise themselves (and test their characters) in a way they never have before. But not without running into more trouble along the way.*

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# 1 - The Bridge

The gang were still worried about Epiphany and Cain as they each looked out one of the windows of the shuttle bus they rode to the hotel that Irrika and Lerich escaped to.

"What do you think Lerich is planning with Epiphany and Cain?" Amy whispered.

"Let's hope we find them alive," Knuckles whispered back, "or I might not consider leaving him in that condition."

"We need to keep calm," Tails said, "Lerich may be a brute, but he's shown he's actually a clever brute. I'm sure we'll find out his plan, though."

The mountain road had trees on both sides, which were all covered in snow.

"It was nice of you to give us these ponchos," said Amy.

"You're welcome," Taffy said, "at this time of year, it's going to be snowing in these mountains."

From one side, only more trees can be seen, on the other, was the view of the hotel.

They all looked out their windows at the building, they saw that the structure was about three stories tall and had traditional Japanese architecture and looked like it was placed in the middle of the mountains.

"This hotel was built in the year 705," Taffy informed them, "and it seems like not much has changed since then, except they had a renovation 16 years ago."

"How informative," Sonic said flatly. The only thing he was really concerned with was Epiphany and Cain's unknown level of safety.

When they reached the end of the bridge, they saw the front entrance of the building, where the shuttle dropped off its passengers.

"Welcome to the Tenpai Onsen!" The receptionist said.

As Taffy was checking them all in, the mammals sat in some chairs in the lobby. There was a person in a hood about to take the elevator. Even though their face was obscured, it seemed like they stared at the gang before going up.

"As long as we're here," Taffy said, "we might as well enjoy our stay as well. After we've finished unpacking in our room, let's go to the restaurant."

## 2 - An Unlikely Reunion

At the restaurant Taffy and the mammals sat at a table, waiting for their order.

"This is nice and all," said Knuckles, "but how will we find Epiphany and Cain from here?"

"If Lerich checked in," Taffy said, "once we find him, they shouldn't be far off."

"But we need to think of a plan," Tails said, "we somehow need to blend in without him noticing so we can have time to find him."

"If I were a wizard," Taffy said, "then I'd probably be able to help with that."

As their order arrived, they only paused the conversation momentarily.

"It barely helped us," Cream pointed out. At this moment, Knuckles was trying to use his chopsticks to pick up the noodles in his ramen, only to drop them in. Taffy then handed him a soup spoon.

"Though I must admit," Taffy said, "you're all very brave. Braver than I've ever been, in fact."

"We've been through several adventures," Sonic said, "so even though it's normal for us, we still know people see our bravery."

"I guess a life of risk isn't for everyone," Taffy said, "but sometimes I wish I could live that way for just a moment."

And at that moment, Tails tapped on Sonic's shoulder and directed his attention to a person at another table reading a newspaper with Lerich's picture on the front cover with theirs next to it. The other three picked up on this as well.

They all hunkered down, as if trying to seem invisible.

"We better get to bed," Tails said.

"But you hardly touched your food," Taffy said.

"We're more tired than hungry," Sonic added, "it's been a long day, and I'm sure there's a fridge in our room to save it in."

Later that night in the hotel room, only Taffy was able to sleep. The rest of them were still contemplating how they could get to their friends without drawing attention to themselves in the hotel. Because they knew that no one could exactly miss five short Mobian mammals walking around a predominantly human-filled hotel.

While Amy was sitting by the window, she noticed a figure moving outside. It peaked her curiosity as it

seemed to disappear.

Then, she heard something hit the window, like a pebble.

The sound was heard again but a few seconds after. Before it could happen again, Amy opened the glass balcony door and looked around.

"Hello?" she said in a hushed voice.

"Hello," the figure said back, in an equally hushed voice, sounding like a preteen boy's, "come down here and we'll talk."

By this time, the other mammals had followed her on to the balcony deck.

"Are you sure we should?" Knuckles asked.

"We'll just hear him out," Amy said, "he sounds harmless enough."

Sonic, Amy, Cream and Tails followed the hooded one, but Knuckles stayed behind, but only for a few seconds, before jumping down off the balcony with them as well.

"I'm glad you've arrived," he said to the mammals, "I've heard so much about you."

"You have?" Sonic asked skeptically, not quite understanding how. He was certain they've never met.

"You were involved with Majorka's School of Magicry, when you were falsely accused of murder," the young man continued, "I've been studying magic myself, but I'd never use them for bad, that's what the house named Demontail is likely to do."

"You've also been in Majorka's school of Magicry?" Tails asked.

"Yes," the hooded lad answered, "before I was separated from my two friends. But I think I might be able to help you find yours and do so effectively."

"Ok, let me get this straight," Knuckles said, "we followed you all the way out here without even knowing what your intentions are, let alone your name, so tell us, why we should let you get involved?"

The young man took off his hood and revealed his face. He had blue eyes, and scruffy hair that had a rat tail in back. "My name is Tani," he said to them, "I've been said to have been dead after I'd been abducted by Lerich Snomis some years back, but I escaped."

"Oh, we've heard of you from your two friends back at Majorika's Magicry School," Amy said.

"Epiphany and Cain? It's been a while since I've seen them," Tani said, a bit glad to hear of this, "how are they doing?"

"Last time we've seen them, they were captured by Lerich" Tails said.

"And," said Tani, "they recently said he was dead."

"That was just some story published to give us a bad rep," Sonic said.

"Yes, I am aware," Tani said, "they like to twist up the stories, probably to juice things up, but that just ends up giving everyone the wrong idea. But I can help you clear your names and find Epiphany and Cain. And with such ease, you'd blend in so well, you might as well be invisible."

"You have an invisibility potion with you?" Amy asked.

"No, but I have something even better," Tani said, "after all, you'll need them to talk to you and reveal some secrets."

He then reached into his robe pockets and took out five small bottles with corks in them.

"A friend of mine recommended these," he told them, "they'll change your form to disguise you."

"But those type of potions only work for humans," Cream said.

"This is different," Tani told her, "this isn't a potion, they're jars of essence. They work spiritually. Tomorrow morning, go down to the manager's office and tell him Tani sent you down. If he's the right guy, he'll know that to do and put you to work right away."

"The right guy?" Amy asked.

"He has a brother. One always tells the truth, the other one always lies. You have to be sharp and on your toes to find the right one."

### 3 - The Job

When the sun had risen the next morning, the five mammals got out of bed and exited the room quietly as to not disturb Taffy.

They made their way to the first floor via the elevator to the check-in desk to see who had will assign them their missions.

Tails was the one that made a flying leap up to ring the bell on the desk.

"Hello," he asked, "Can we speak to the manager?"

In a second, a man with a shaved head and dark skin appeared at the desk. He looked straight ahead, then down.

"You're lucky," he said, "that I happened to be close to this desk. What it is it that you need help with?"

"Some guy named Tani told us to meet up with you here," Sonic told him.

There was a flicker in the man's eye.

"Ah, yes! I understand now. Wait here for a moment."

He went to the back of the desk and into the room. He then came out holding some folded clothes.

"Here you are," he said handing them the clothes.

When they unfolded them, they were revealed to be uniforms of some sort. The shirt was Japanese style and looked like the top half of a robe. The males being given blue ones and the females given pink ones with shorter pants. There was only one problem with them.

"They seem a bit big," Cream pointed out.

"There's no way these would fit us," Knuckles added.

"Not in your current forms," the man said, "now you go to your respective restrooms and open those bottles, then put on your uniforms and report back here for the mission.

"Tani didn't exactly explain what these will do to us," Knuckles said from the stall he was in, "so how do we know if it will work?"

"He said they work spiritually," Tails said, "so maybe they'll work on the other people's perception of us?"

"Hopefully," Sonic said, "especially since we've been given goofy uniforms."

"Let's just open the bottles all together," Tails said, lifting the bottle up at chest level, "ready?"

—"Yeah."

—"Sure."

And as they uncorked their bottles, nothing seemed to change at first, but then a white fog engulfed the room, then when it cleared up, the room seemed alot smaller.

"The room seems smaller now," Knuckles said.

"I'm getting that vibe, too," Sonic said, until he looked at his hand, which looked like it had a longer arm attached to it. And his glove fit big.

"Wha-?! Well, at least we're taller now and can fit into these weird clothes." He then put them on, and the other two, presumably did too.

When they all exited, they saw something else they didn't expect to see.

Their reflections weren't the usual forms they would see.

- "Ack!"

- "Huh?!"

- "We're... we're human!"

They all looked at each other, still in disbelief.

Knuckles looked at his hand, which no longer fit his glove, and looked at the other one. He then wiggled his fingers, and looked at them in slight horror.

"I wonder if the girls are as freaked out we are?" Tails asked, just before they left the restroom.

And sure enough, they met with them, coming from the adjacent bathroom. At that moment, they looked shocked seeing one another's human form.

"Sonic!" Amy cried out, "you're... just as cute as ever! For a human."

Sonic rolled his eyes at her comment.

"My, my," the man said in a jovial way, clasping his hands together, "you sure have grown."

## 4 - Onsen Overhearing

When Amy made her way to the hot springs, she was tasked with handing out towels to guests who needed them. She immediately spotted Irrika. Irrika was sitting in the hot springs with another woman. "I'm leading those scouts tomorrow," the woman told her.

"I'm sure you're a brilliant leader," Irrika said, "I can always tell when someone is."

"My niece Caterina always wants to lead someone," the woman said, "she's eager to be the queen of this year's Snow Ball I'm hosting."

"She sounds very inspired," Irrika said.

"Well," the woman said, "you could say that, but she just seems to insist without giving reasons, simply just saying she's the best for it."

"Lots of confidence," Irrika said, "gotta admire that. It's certainly more attractive than having low self-esteem like my ex. Yet he at least knew his place, which was out of my business, which I also liked about him."

"Well," the woman said, "I'm ready to get out."

"Me too," said Irrika, "you, towel girl! Two towels, please!"

Amy just walked over to them not saying anything, trying to be inconspicuous, with the folded towels covering her face. She gave them their towels, which they used to wrap around their bodies.

"Good luck with the Yuki scouts, Robbie," Irrika said to the woman.

"Thank you," Robbie replied, "although we strive for hard work over luck."

As Robbie walked in Amy's opposite direction, Irrika walked towards her.

"And may I make a request?"

"What is it?" Amy asked.

"I'd like a harpoon gun, if it's not too much trouble."

"Right away ma'am," Amy said, not wanting to blow her cover.

"By the way," Irrika said, "I wasn't sure whether it went against the employment policy to dye your hair. But only the coolest have the courage to go against rules. As long as they're uncool rules."

And with that, she walked back to the hotel.