

RISING ASH

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The following contains content of an adult nature, including, but not limited to, adult language and content and fantasy violence

If you have comments, send them to ashen.angelfox@gmail.com.

PART 3

ASH sat surrounded by the three wolves and their feline master. They continually badgered him about how he managed to get in and out of the tree. Cole wanted to know what Ash found inside the tree. Ash sat on his cushion at the table and nibbled at his rice for a little bit before speaking. He told them of the demon horse he had found within a large chamber. Ash left out the part where he healed himself from near death. Instead, he just told them of how he ran his sword through the demon's chest. The whole time he talked, Ash thought that Calleigh looked a little on edge. She seemed like there was something she wanted to say, but did not know how to say it. He waited until the others had gone to confront her.

“Calleigh? Is everything alright?” Ash asked.

“Of course it is. Why would you ask that?” she replied.

“No reason. You just seemed a tad fidgety back there. There something you want to tell me?”

“Well, actually, there is. When you were flying up the tree, it looked like the energy around you formed into a pair of wings. A large pair of wings.”

“Really? I didn't notice. Then again, I was more worried about getting struck by lightning.”

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Ash smiled as he spoke. Calleigh could not help but giggle at the look on Ash's muzzle. Calleigh moved closer and put her arms around Ash. She squeezed him gently, as he returned the embrace. Ash kissed her lovingly on the forehead.

"I love you." Calleigh whispered.

"I know," Ash said, "I know."

"Not exactly the response I was going for, but okay."

"I know. I know."

"Now, you're just looking for a butt-whoopin'."

"Yeah, maybe."

Calleigh pulled away and punched Ash playfully in the stomach.

"Ugh. Ow. That hurt."

"Hoped it would."

"Huh. I thought you said you loved me?"

"I do."

"I love you, too."

Ash and Calleigh moved in and embraced once more. This time, they shared a deep and passionate kiss. Cole came back to get them, but stopped at the door when he saw them.

"Hey, guys. You...ooh...I'll...uh...I'll come back, later."

Cole turned and walked out of the way. Ash and Calleigh started laughing at the embarrassed wolfboy.

"Cole!" Calleigh said.

Cole stuck his head back in the door, "Yes?"

"What is it?" Ash asked, grinning.

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“What? Oh, yeah! The Grand-Master is about to address the entire Order. Ya might wanna come.”

“Ya think?” Calleigh said.

Ash and Calleigh followed Cole to the main convocation area. The Grand-Master walked out and stood on a high pedestal before the gathered order. Ash thought that the Grand-Master seemed somehow older than when he last saw her. She looked around at all those gathered. There were members of all different species and cultures. Furs of all ages chatted amongst themselves as the Grand-Master surveyed their faces. The Grand-Master held up one of her aged paws. The chattering ceased, immediately. Every eye turned and settled on the wrinkle face of the otter.

“I come before you now with grave news. Out seers have foretold a massive invasion on this plane by the demons of Clothor. The signs show that the time for this invasion is upon us. There are yet two signs to be spotted before the demons rampage on this world. We must be prepared for the coming time of hardship. Masters, train your pupils well. Students, learn all that you can. We all must be ready for the battle to come. Go, now. Train hard and rest.”

As the crowd began to disperse, Ash kept his eyes on the Grand-Master as she walked away. Calleigh looked up into his eyes. She nudged him.

“What’s up?” Calleigh asked.

“She’s hiding something.” Ash said.

“Who is?” Cole said.

“The Grand-Master. There’s something she’s not telling us.”

“Well, what are you gonna do?” Cole said uncaringly.

“I’m going to go see her.” Ash said and walked off.

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“What just happened?” Cole asked his sister.

“Hell if I know.” she replied.

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ASH walked into the Grand-Master’s private chamber. He dropped to his knees and bowed before the wizened otter onna. She beckoned him closer. He rose and walked to her, kneeling again once he reached her. Ash bowed once more as was customary and waited. The Grand-Master leaned in and placed one paw on the top of Ash’s head and blessed him silently. When she was finished, the Grand-Master put her paw under Ash’s chin and raised his head. She was now looking right into his eyes.

“What is it, my child?” the Grand-Master asked.

“I wish to speak with you about your announcement earlier.” Ash said.

“What of it?”

“What did you leave out?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Believe me, I mean no offense. It’s just... I get the feeling that you know something you didn’t tell us. What is it?”

“My dear kit. What you believe I hid from the Order, I did so for a reason.”

“What reason?”

“It does not concern the entire Order. It concerns only yourself, Ash.”

“What?”

The Grand-Master told Ash what he had come to find out. When she was done, Ash begged forgiveness for how rude he must have sounded before. She told him not to worry. Ash

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left the Grand-Master's chambers and went to the mess hall. He saw Calleigh and Cole sitting at the far end of one of the long tables. The blond wolf was sitting across from them. Only now did Ash realize that he had never heard the wolf's name. Ash got his food then went and sat down beside the blond wolf. He looked across the table at Calleigh. She smiled at him. He returned the grin then looked at the blond wolf beside him. The wolf looked at Ash out of the corner of his eye then slowly began to turn his head.

"Can I help you?" the wolf said.

"Who are you?" Ash said, "I mean, we've trained together quite often and I still don't know your name."

"It's Zach. Zach Sommers."

"Sommers? As in these two Sommers?"

"I'm their brother. I'm four years older than them."

"So, you've been doing this a bit longer."

"Just a tad."

"Thanks for telling me, guys." Ash said sarcastically to Calleigh and Cole.

"You never asked!" the twins answered as one.

"I was being sarcastic."

"So were we." Calleigh said smiling.

The four canids sat at the table and ate and talked with one another for the next hour or so. Calleigh had asked once what the Grand-Master had told Ash. His only response was for her to ask him again sometime. If she had not been in such a good mood at the time she would have leaned across the table and flicked Ash on the nose. Calleigh simply shrugged and left it at that. Ash looked around the mess at all the other furs walking to and fro. A horsegirl and a woofboy

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appeared to be discussing varying styles of sword fighting. A panther and a cheetah were practicing chokeholds on each other. Ash thought about how well he seemed to fit in this place. Despite what the Grand-Master told him.

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ASH looked around at the gathered warriors. Each and every member fit for combat was in the convocation area in full battle attire. Calleigh and Cole stood on Ash's right. Calleigh was fidgeting with the pommel of the sword at her hip. Cole continuously shifted his footing where he stood as a sign of the nervousness that was affecting everyfur. Zach stood to Ash's left, his huge sword strapped on his back. Zach adjusted the gloves on his paws. The Grand-Master stood on the platform above with the rest of the Council of Elders. The time had come for Clothor and his army of demons to make their move. The Order had been assembled to receive instructions for the coming battle. Ash was being sent to downtown Furrstown along with Victor, Zach and Calleigh and Cole. When the warriors were dismissed, Zach moved off to speak with Victor. Ash looked around at Calleigh and Cole.

"Well, here we are. Together again." Cole said.

"What are we? The Three Musketeers?" Ash said.

"All for one and one for all. That's us." Calleigh threw in.

"Here comes Zach and Victor. Well, I guess we're off." Ash said nodding.

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ASH stood on top of an eight-story office building. Calleigh and Cole were perched on top of a taller building. Zach was standing on top of a covered bridge that connected the two second-tallest buildings in Furrtown. Victor knelt on top of one of those two tall buildings. The five warriors looked in all directions for any signs of demonic activity. Everything was quiet. Furs went back and forth across the city carrying on as they would on any given day. Ash watched the furs below him moving about. A group of teens about his own age were gathered on a street corner laughing and playing together. Numerous couples with kits of varying ages walked down the sidewalks and across the busy street. Ash shook his head and let his ears droop.

“They have no idea what’s about to happen.” Ash muttered to himself, “And, I’m the one whose supposed to save each and every one of them. But, at what cost.”

Ash looked to the sky. It was a clear day, but a curious, grey cloud hung over the Atlas, Inc. corporate office building. Ash wondered if it were mere coincidence that the only cloud in the sky was hovering right over the tallest building in the world. *There’s no such thing as coincidence*, a strange yet calming voice said in the back of his head. Ash drew his sword and soared off towards the building. He started low, flying slowly. There was movement on top of the building. Somefur, or something, was jumping gracefully from tier to tier. Ash could have sworn that only a feline could pull off such graceful leaps. Ash began to pick up speed. Furs on the ground and in the buildings began to look in his direction.

Calleigh followed Ash with her eyes. She wondered what he was up to then noticed that he was purposefully flying towards the Atlas building. She looked towards the building. She nudged her twin and point towards the tiered top. There was a fur leaping from one tier to the next. Cole turned and signaled Zach and Victor to look at the building, as well. Victor immediately drew his sword and kicked off from his rooftop lookout station. Zach drew his

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sword as well. He made to fly off too, but he stopped and looked down towards the ground. Calleigh saw him look down and did so, as well. Something seemed different about the whole scene. The furs had stopped moving about and looked around in fear and confusion.

To Calleigh, it seemed as if the entire planet had gotten deathly silent. The sky rapidly filled with swirling black clouds. Cole's paw shot to Calleigh's shoulder. She turned and looked in the direction her twin was pointing. The focal point of the swirling clouds was the antenna on top of the building. Or, more accurately, it was the fur balanced on top of said antenna. A muscular, male bear stood on the end of the antenna. He wore clothes identical to Victor's except they were made from crimson leather. The bear wore a long red leather coat as well. In his left hand, there was a long sword with a straight blade, sharpened on both sides. At the end, the blade split off in two spikes perpendicular to the rest of the blade. Calleigh and Cole kicked off from their perch to soar closer to the fur to see his face clearer.

"Coach?!" Cole exclaimed when he saw the bear's face.

"Yes, Mr. Sommers. It's me. Your humble gym coach." he said disdainfully.

"Bryan, why?" Victor asked.

"Why, you ask Victor?" Bryan replied.

"You left the order. Left your furiends. And, for what?" Victor said, "You had everything going for you. You had the potential to become the next Grand-Master."

"Hmph! I made a better deal." Bryan chuckled.

"What deal?" Ash asked.

"With Clothor, of course," Bryan began, "And, let's not forget, with Kordak."

"With Kordak?!" Ash said.

"What did you do, Bryan?" Victor asked.

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“I spoke with the Lord Clothor. He told me that he was planning an invasion, but he had foreseen that one fur would stand in his way.” Bryan paused, “A fox. He gave me the knowledge I needed to summon and direct Kordak to destroy this fox. So, I did.”

“You put Kordak inside me!” Ash said angrily.

“Yes, but not intentionally.”

“What does that mean?” Zach asked.

“I meant for him to join with Jesse, not you, Ash.” Bryan sighed, “But, it doesn’t matter. Either way, your brother still would have died!”

Bryan kicked off from the antenna and flew towards Ash. Before he could counter, Victor was between them and fighting furiously. Numerous screams and cries for help drifted up from the streets below. Ash looked down. Mixed in with the populace of the city, there were now strange four legged creatures bounding from car to car. Some landed on furs and bared their fangs. These were the Hellhounds of Clothor. Ash sped towards a pack of five Hellhounds. Calleigh, Cole and Zach followed behind him. Ash landed hindpaws first on the back of one of the Hellhound’s head. He jumped again and brought his sword down through the hound’s neck. Red flames began to engulf the remains of the Hellhound.

Ash hit the ground where the hound had been. A frightened female lion sat on the ground holding her cub close to her chest. Ash knelt down and gave her a warm smile and told her everything would be fine. Her eye’s widened in fear. In flash, Ash rose from the ground and pivoted on the ball of his hindpaw. The world seemed to slow down. A massive Hellhound seemed to hover in midair. Ash brought his sword up and across the hound’s chest causing it to be consumed by red flames as well. Ash looked back at the pair of lions and smiled again. This time, they returned his smile.

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“Thank you.” the mother said.

Ash nodded and then went off to help other civilians.

* * *

VICTOR and Bryan clashed swords high above the city. More and more demons continued to pour out of a dimensional rift Bryan had opened. Winged monsters flew around the two fighting warriors. A large dragon came through the portal and flew high over the city. He let out a deep bellowing roar and a blast of flames. Victor turned to attack it. He did not get the chance. When his back was turned, Bryan came up behind him and ran his sword into Victor, puncturing his left lung. Blood collected in his throat as Victor gasped for air. Bryan let Victor fall towards the ground. The dragon dove and turned. It intended to come up underneath Victor and swallow him whole. Zach flew to Victor and took him to safety. Zach wanted to remain at his master's side, but Victor ordered him to save the city.

Zach rose and walked to the edge of the rooftop where he had landed. The dragon floated up and Zach saw that there was a demon horse in black armor riding the dragon. The rider stood up in the saddle and leapt to the rooftop. The dragon roared then flew away. The demon horse armed himself with two double-headed battle-axes. Zach ready his oversized sword. The demon paced back and forth swinging his axes occasionally. Zach stood his ground and waited for the demon horse to make the first move. The demon turned and vanished. Zach began twisting in every direction waiting for the strike that was sure to come. A deafening roar echoed through the concrete forest that was downtown Furrtown. The demon appeared behind Zach. However, Zach's heightened hearing picked up a slight creaking sound in the armor.

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Zach ducked and spun around. He slashed with his sword at the demon's head. The demon parried the blow with one axe and swung the other at Zach's legs. Zach pulled his sword away and jumped above the level of the swinging axe. The demon swung in and clubbed Zach in the head with the flat of the other axe. Zach tumbled through the air and crashed into an empty apartment across the way. Pushing aside a large painting that had fallen on top of him, Zach rose and looked out the whole. The dragon steed flew past heading towards the street. Just as the dragon cleared the opening its demon rider flew in and continued his assault on Zach.

On the ground below, Ash, Calleigh and Cole made ready to fight off the giant winged serpent headed their way. Nervousness began to get to them. Ash shifted his grip on his sword. Calleigh continually twirled her sai around her middle fingers. Cole kept reversing his hold in the sword in his left paw so that one moment the blade was pointing up and the next it was pointing down. The dragon landed on the street one block down from the waiting canids. The dragon put his chin close to the ground and breathed a huge column of flames at Ash and the others. Simultaneously, the three canids' left paws shot out and pointed straight at the oncoming flames.

The flames collided with a pulsating barrier made of intertwining wisps of blue, purple and white energy. However, the demonic properties of the flames caused a massive explosion leaving a crater in the middle of Main Street. Ash, Calleigh and Cole shielded their eyes from the brightness of the explosion. Ash looked up first. The dragon burst through the wall of smoke and dust and flew straight for them. The canids ducked out of the way and the dragon soared over them. Standing up, Ash looked skyward. The dragon was circling around for another pass when Ash caught sight of Zach fighting the demon rider. The gears in Ash's head started to turn. He had what he considered to be a radical idea.

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The dragon swooped down and headed back their way. Ash began to charge an energy blast in his left paw and waited. The dragon came closer. A white energy blast flew past Ash and almost hit the dragon. The dragon pulled upward, exposing his chest to Ash. Ash blasted the dragon with the energy surrounding his left paw. Chunks of charred, scaled flesh flew from the gapping wound. The wound was cauterized by the blast. The dragon twisted in pain and crashed into the ground. Ash's eyes shot to the demon rider in the sky. The demon lurched forward, one hand clutching at his chest. Zach floated away slightly confused at what was going on. Ash smirked then jumped down from the pile of cars he was on.

"The rider and the dragon are linked!" he informed the others, "You hurt one! You hurt the other!"

Calleigh and Cole glanced at each other then nodded in silent agreement. Calleigh ran over to help Ash with the dragon. Cole flew into the air to fight the rider alongside his brother. Calleigh came up beside Ash and put her sai away. Ash gave her a sidelong glance. She smiled as she drew the sword on her hip. Ash smiled back and then turned his attention back on the dragon. The giant serpent lifted itself up on its legs and leered at Ash and Calleigh. A deep, resounding growl escaped the dragon's gritted teeth. It lunged at the two canids. Calleigh rolled to one side. Ash somersaulted over the snapping jaws and on the dragon's back. The dragon started bucking, trying to throw Ash off.

"I'll keep the head busy!" Calleigh yelled up to him.

"Better you than me!" Ash called back.

Ash tried to steady himself on the dragon's back, but found it rather difficult. Calleigh jumped up on the dragon's snout and sliced off the two largest horns. High in the sky, the demon horse threw back his head and let out a pained neigh. Ash held his sword with the tip of

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the blade pointing downward. The rider saw this and started flying towards Ash. Calleigh flew to intercept the demon. The horse saw her and raised one axe above his head to attack with. Ash drove his sword downward and into the dragon's heart. At the same time, Calleigh thrust upwards with her sword and sliced through the demon's chest. The demon horse's arm continued forward, his dead hand releasing the battle-axe. The axe spun through the air.

Ash twisted the sword and pulled it out of the dragon. Ash stood up and looked around. The dragon gave one final jerk and lay completely still. Ash stretched his neck to the left when the lone axe lodged in his right shoulder blade. Before it had completely burned away, an evil, satisfied grin spread across the demon horse's face. Calleigh saw Ash fall forward from the blow. Cole and Zach looked down in horror at the axe sticking out of Ash's back. Bryan floated down and landed in front of Ash. Ash was now on the street since the dragon had burned away underneath him. Bryan walked forward and began taunting Ash.

“You know, I left the order because of your father.”

Ash grunted in pain, blood trickled from his mouth.

“I had discovered that our warriors could become stronger if demonic energies were fused into our rings, as well as the magics they were pouring into those rings. Your father turned me in. The Grand-Master threw me out, herself. When this is all done, she will get what's coming to her.”

Ash reached up and grabbed the axe handle with his left paw. With a grunt of pain, Ash pulled the axe out of his back and tossed it aside. Ash rose to his hindpaws.

“My father did the right thing. You had it coming!”

“Why you little...?”

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Ash leapt at Bryan. Bryan, however, was the faster. He raised his paw and fired a red energy beam at Ash. The beam pushed Ash back a little. Ash righted himself and leapt again. Bryan fired again, this time Ash twisted away from the blast. Their swords clashed over and over. Ash's right arm burned from the shoulder down. He could feel blood running down his back, matting his fur to the shin underneath. Bryan swung his sword and planted one to the spikes in Ash's stomach. Pulling the spike out, Bryan brought the sword around and severed Ash's tail. Ash dropped his sword and fell forward on his knees. Bryan picked Ash up by his throat.

“Even though it was unintentional. Your father deserved what he got.”

Bryan threw Ash into a nearby storefront. Then, with a grin on his face, Bryan threw an energy ball in after Ash. The front of the building was engulfed in red flames and black smoke. To Ash, everything went white.

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ALL around was white. He could still see his friends and his enemy but they were like white shadows of themselves. There was only a single fur that appeared normal to Ash. A leopard. Ash gasped when he saw his face.

“Jake?” Ash breathed.

“Yeah, it's me.” Jake said, spreading his arms out.

“But, you're...”

“Dead? Right, I know.”

“Why are you people so cheery about this?”

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“Well, it can’t get any worse. Anyway. Look, you have to let go.”

“Of what?”

“You need to stop blaming yourself for all that Kordak’s done.”

“But...”

“No buts. I didn’t raise you that way.” a new voice added.

Ash spun his head around so fast he could have broken his neck. There, standing beside the shadowy version of Bryan, was Jesse Reynolds. Ash’s father. Jesse turned and looked hard at his former friend.

“We were friends for the longest time.” Jesse said offhandedly.

“Dad?” Ash asked.

“Yep, it’s me.” he said, “How’ve you been, Ash?”

“I’ve been better.” Ash replied looking down at his wounded body.

“Well, I hope you feel better.” Jesse offered.

“So, do I.” Jake added.

“Thanks.” Ash said.

“Now, get off your tail and get out there! Show’em what we foxes are made of!” a new, more childish voice said.

“I was wondering how long it’d take you to get here.” Ash said unsurprised.

“Well, I got held up. What can I say?” Micah said as he walked into existence.

“So, are you all here for the same reason?” Ash asked.

“Yessers,” Micah started, “You and I have already been through this. You really need to let go.”

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“Son, if you let go of your remorse over Kordak’s actions, you can be transformed into something greater,” Jesse began, “Something pure.”

“What do you mean?” Ash asked.

“You’ll figure it out. Just, do as I say, fox. And, don’t make me come back down here.”

“Yeah. If I have to leave my nice one-bedroom cloud to come down here and say all this over, somefur’s getting a butt-whoopin’.” Jake said grinning.

“Ignore them. Just, go out there and win one for me.” Micah said lovingly.

“Okay. I’ll give my best.” Ash offered.

“We expect nothing less.” Jesse said.

The three furs smiled at Ash. One by one they turned and vanished into the whiteness of the space around him. Ash smiled to himself then looked towards Bryan, his enemy. Ash closed his eyes. When he opened them, there was a faint, blue energy field pulsating in front of his eyes. Ash felt his strength return. He was ready.

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THE rubble that had fallen on top of Ash began to tremble. There was another small explosion. A shower of tiny pebbles poured from the opening that Bryan had made when he had blasted Ash. Ash walked out of the blasted out storefront. Blue flames rose from Ash’s fur and clothes. His had stopped bleeding. What was left of Ash’s tail swished about. To Calleigh, Ash seemed as if none of his wounds bothered him. He seemed completely at peace. Now that he was angry, Bryan threw another blast of red energy towards Ash. Ash raised his left paw and absorbed the energy blast. Redirecting the energy, Ash held out his right paw and threw the blast back at

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Bryan. The blast, however, had been converted by something within Ash. The bright blue energy wave flew through the air. Bryan flew into the air to dodge the blast. His eyes widened when he next saw Ash.

The massive wound to Ash's right shoulder was gone. Even the tear in his tunic was gone. The other wounds Ash had collected were absent, as well. Ash's tail had also grown back. And, it grew back with a vengeance. Instead of a single tail, there were nine tails whipping around behind Ash. Ash followed Bryan upwards with his eyes. He tilted his head back the higher Bryan went. Bryan perched on the roof of a twelve-story building. Bryan raised both paws above his head. A massive sphere of swirling red energy formed over his head. Bryan hurled the massive ball down towards Ash. Bryan watched the energy ball go. It got half way when it exploded in a flash of purple energy.

Ash flew out of the purple blossom of energy. Blue energy trailed from Ash, his nine tails flapping behind him as he soared through the air. Ash got level with Bryan and punched him square in the face. Bryan flew back against an air-conditioner on the roof. Ash landed on the edge of the roof. He began to walk towards Bryan. His blue aura subsided as he neared the bear on the ground. Bryan threw an energy blast high into the air above them all. The energy ball disappeared into the rift created by Bryan. The already grey sky darkened more. A black mist came out of the rift. An enormous pair of yellow eyes looked out from the mist. Clothor had come. Bolts of eerie green lightning began shooting from the sky. Wherever one of the bolts hit, there was an explosion of green flames. Debris rained down on the people below. One bolt of lightning hit Ash square in the chest.

Ash was sent flying off the rooftop. He almost collided with a building across the street, but he never touched it. A massive pair of wings spread from Ash's shoulder blades. The

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feathers were the same shade of deep orange that Ash's fur was. The wings started out small, but, as they flapped, they grew. They grew until Ash had a wingspan of fourteen feet. Ash looked up towards the yellow eyes in the clouds above. Ash's ears twitched as a voice began whispering in his ear.

Clothor cannot take a physical form in this realm at the moment. We cannot hope to defeat him. However, together, we can go into his realm and destroy him!

Ash nodded and flew off towards the dimensional rift. The rift began to close. Clothor had realized what Ash was trying to accomplish. Ash started going faster. Blue energy flowed from him as he soared higher and faster. The rift began closing faster. The opening was getting smaller. Ash put on another burst of speed. Ash felt himself changing as he flew. He glanced down at his arms. The fur on them had turned into the same blue energy that surrounded him. Ash looked forwards again. The opening was now impossibly small. Calleigh and her brothers watched from the rooftops. To them, Ash seemed to transform into pure blue energy. Ash had indeed become a small stream of energy. In this form, Ash flew into the tiny opening and out of this dimensional plain.

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ASH materialized inside the demon world. All around was fire and brimstone. The land was littered with rivers of lava and small volcanoes. Ash saw some sort of compound off in the distance. He flapped his massive wings once and was off. As he neared the compound, Ash noticed more dragon riders circling above the watchtowers. Ash slowed his pace and flew lower. None of the riders made a move to attack him. The dragons, however, glared at him and fired

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burst of flames after him as he passed. Ash ignored the flames and flew to the main building. He touched down on the steps leading to the entranceway. Demonic guards lined the staircase and were positioned on either side of the door. Standing in the doorway was Clothor, himself.

Clothor was a tall, muscular ram. He wore black armor and had a long curved sword tied at his waist. The ram also carried an oversized hammer in his hands. Ash walked up the steps towards Clothor. Ash spread his wings out to their full wingspan then folded them up tightly behind his back. He stopped half way up the stairs and glared at Clothor. The ram nodded his head once and the demons on the staircase leapt at Ash. The demons piled on top of Ash. Swords and knives stabbed downward, piercing Ash's flesh. The demons clawed at Ash's clothes and fur. Ash growled deep in his throat and rose to his hindpaws. In doing so, he threw all of the demons off of him. Ash looked skyward and howled at the blood red moon. The wounds Ash had accumulated disappeared entirely.

“What are you doing here, my little kitsune?” Clothor mused, “Have you come to destroy me?”

“Yes.” Ash said, his voice reverberating through the compound.

“How amusing?”

“You won't think so when I'm threw with you!”

Ash leapt at Clothor. Clothor swung the massive hammer and just barely missed hitting Ash in the head. He swung again, this time downwards at Ash's legs. His wings opened up and Ash lifted into the air. Ash touched down on the stairs and rushed at Clothor. Clothor raised the hammer high above his head and brought it down with a loud crash on the stairs. Clothor looked. Ash was not under the hammer as he had planned. There came the sound of knuckles on metal. Clothor turned and saw Ash standing there with a long, curved sword clutched in his

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paws. Clothor's yellow eyes widened. He looked down and saw that the scabbard on his belt was empty. Clothor's eyes shot back to Ash.

"Told you so." Ash said.

Ash raised the sword above his head. Clothor raise the hammer in defense of his own sword. The blade of the sword began to glow with blue energy. Ash brought the sword down. The blade split the head of the hammer in half. Clothor looked menacingly at Ash. Ash brought the sword around behind his head and swung. Clothor's head bounced down the stairs a little ways. Ash straightened up and tossed Clothor's sword aside. Ash had the distinct impression that that was too easy. Then it happened. The ground began to shake and the buildings to crumble. Clothor's body turned to dust and blew away with the breeze. His head, however, remained. It had landed facing Ash and now it spoke.

"You have now sealed your fate. This realm will now crumble without me. You will die here along with all the other demons and monsters. Ha ha ha!"

Ash opened his wings and soared into the air. He flew in the direction he had come. The muscles in his wings burned as Ash flapped harder and faster. Cinders and dust began to collect in his throat. Ash began to cough uncontrollably. He was suffocating. Dust got in his eyes. He could not see where he was going. There was a loud explosion and the sound of the ground cracking. Ash tried to flap harder, but his wings hurt too badly. Ash felt heat behind him. He glanced back and saw a wall of red-orange flames chasing him down. The wall of flames engulfed Ash and all went black...

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ASH sat up straight in his bed, his fox ears standing straight up. There was someone else in the room with him. Ash twisted around and came face to face with a foxboy younger than himself.

“Micah?” Ash breathed.

“You okay, Ash?” his brother asked.

Ash looked at the foxboy that looked remarkably like his brother. A brother he was sure had been killed. Ash stared in surprise and confusion for a few minutes. Micah blinked a couple times then straightened up.

“Anyway, you’d better get up and get ready. If not, we’ll be late for our first day of school.”

Micah turned and trotted out of the room. The foxboy turned and gave Ash an encouraging smile then closed the door. Ash heard the sound of hindpaws falling loudly on the staircase.

“First day of school? The hell...” Ash repeated quizzically.

Ash got out of bed and went into the bathroom to get ready. Ash glanced at the mirror as he closed the door behind him. There was no scar on his chest. He looked at his paw. There was still a mark burned into the padding, but it was not the same as he had remembered it. The entire symbol seemed to point the other direction from before. Ash looked into the mirror. He looked into the reflection of his eyes. There was a faint blue glow to them. As he looked at himself in the mirror, Ash saw his tail swishing about behind him. Something seemed wrong about the movements though. He watched more carefully. He noticed that it seemed strange because he could see the tips of more than one tail. He looked around and tried to count how many tails he had.

“Nine tails?” Ash gasped.

RISING ASH

Ash got his shower then got dressed and went downstairs. Micah was already sitting at the table. His mother was standing at the oven, watching over a frying pan of eggs. An adult, male fox sat at the head of the table with a cup of coffee and a folded up newspaper. Ash stopped at the bottom of the stairs and gasped. The fox lowered his newspaper and looked at Ash. Lilia turned around and smiled at Ash. Micah looked up from his plate, a piece of bacon clenched in his teeth. There was a faint golden shine to Micah's eyes.

“Ash? Are you alright?” the older fox asked.

“Uh? What?” Ash said after a time.

“Are you alright?” the fox repeated.

“Leave him alone, Jesse. Must be first day jitters at a new school.” Lilia offered, “Sit down, Ash. Eat some breakfast.”

Ash sat down in front of the plate of eggs and bacon. He ate slowly, occasionally glancing at this fox that supposedly was his father. When he was finished, his mother shuffled him and Micah out the door with their bookbags. Ash and Micah walked down the street in silence. The smile never left Micah's muzzle. Ash looked up and saw the school in the distance. He stopped. Micah walked a few feet ahead before realizing what had happened. Micah trotted back to where Ash had stopped and looked up at him.

“You okay?” Micah asked.

“This has already happened.” Ash said.

“You mean like déjà vu?”

“No, I mean like it happened a year ago and now I'm doing it again!”

“Jeez, alright. You don't have to yell.”

“Sorry.”

RISING ASH

“Anything I should know?”

“You weren’t here before.”

“Why? Was I sick?”

“No! You had died five years earlier.”

“Sucks to be me. How’d I go?”

“What?!”

“How did I die?”

“I killed you.”

“Ooh! Why?”

“I was possessed by a demon.”

“Like the one’s you and Dad hunt, occasionally.”

“Wait! What?”

“You and Dad. You’re demon hunters. Part of some ancient society. The Order of Chowa. Or, something like that.”

“Oh my God.”

“Oh boy. Listen. If you’ve done this before, what happens?”

“Well, let’s see. Today, I meet two wolves. Twins. A boy and a girl. Cole and Calleigh Sommers.”

“Sweet. Well, let’s go. I wouldn’t want to make you late for your second first meeting with your girlfuriend.”

“She’s not my girlfuriend.”

“Right.”

“She’s not! Besides, she probably won’t even look at me.”

RISING ASH

“Why not?”

“Dude, I have nine tails! How do you miss that?”

“Ash. The nine tails are a sign of power and wisdom. If anything, you’ll have more girlfurs fawning over you. Your girlfuriend might even get jealous.”

“She is not my girlfuriend!”

“Whatever! Let’s go.”

* * *

ASH and Micah split up once they reached the main doors. Micah went off with a couple furs his own age. One of them, a cute catgirl, a panther, looked back and said something. He noticed a pair of matching sterling silver bands on her wrists. Ash caught her eye and she looked away quickly. A smirk appeared on Ash’s muzzle. He took a few steps forward and almost ran right into another girlfur. She dropped the books she had had in her paws. Ash bent down to help her clean up the mess he had made. The whole time he apologized.

“I am so sorry. I wasn’t watching where I was going. Here you go.” Ash said looking up.

“Thanks.” a familiar voice said, “And, don’t worry about it. Happens all the time.”

“Calleigh! You coming? We’re gonna be late for Calc class.” a wolfboy down the hall called out.

“Well, I gotta go. Maybe I’ll see you around.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

RISING ASH

Ash watched as the wolfgirl turned and trotted after the boy. *Calleigh*, he thought. Ash shook his head and followed after her. He got to the calculus class shortly after the two wolves. They took the same seats in the back of the room as they had before. Ash sat down in a familiar chair in the middle of the room. Ash had attracted stares as he walked through the halls to his class. Much to Ash's surprise, they were stares of envy and admiration. So far, Micah had been right about the tails. Ash glanced back over his shoulder towards the back row. The two wolves were chatting with each other. The wolfboy tapped the other on the arm and pointed towards Ash. She looked at him. Ash smiled at her then turned back towards the front of the room. Ash waited outside the room at the end of class.

"Excuse me." he said when the two wolves got to the door, "Can we talk?"

"We're gonna be late for our next class." the wolfboy protested.

"No, you won't." Ash said.

"How can you be so sure?" the wolfgirl asked.

"Because I believe we have the same class. We can talk on the way."

"What do you have next?" the boy asked skeptically.

"History."

"Whoa! He's good." the wolfboy said.

"Okay. We'll walk and talk." the wolfgirl said, "I'm Calleigh."

"Cole."

"Let me guess. Twins."

"How could you tell?" Cole replied snidely.

"Lucky guess," Ash said then unsure, "Look, do I seem at all familiar to either of you?"

"Well, you almost knocked Calleigh over in the hall earlier." Cole joked.

RISING ASH

“No, I mean beyond that.” Ash said rolling his eyes.

“Nope, sorry.” he turned to his sister, “How ‘bout you, Calleigh?”

“Well, now that you mention it,” she began, “I do get the distinct feeling that we’ve met before.”

“What’d you say your name was?” Cole asked.

“Oh, I haven’t. It’s...” Ash began.

“Ash.” Calleigh breathed.

“Yeah.” said Ash.

“How did you know that?” Cole asked a little concerned.

“I do not know, but this is starting to freak me out.” Calleigh said.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to...” Ash began then fell silent.

“No, it’s okay. I just...” Calleigh started.

“No, I understand. You need time to let it sink in. I get it.” Ash soothed.

“Yeah.” Calleigh said and walked off.

“Well, I guess we’ll see you around.” Cole said.

“You can count on it.” Ash said.

Ash and the wolf twins went into the classroom. Ash refrained from looking at Calleigh throughout the next two classes. He did not want it to seem like he was pushing her. Ash met up with Micah before lunch and together they went into the cafeteria.

* * *

RISING ASH

ASH and Micah sat beside each other and ate their food. Micah told Ash about what had happened so far. He explained what the catgirl had asked him that morning. She had wanted to know if Ash had had a girlfriend.

“What did you tell her?” Ash asked.

“I told her you did.” Micah said.

“You what?!” Ash gasped.

“I told her you were seeing a beautiful wolfgirl named Calleigh.”

“I’m gonna hurt you when we get home.”

“Well, don’t look now, but here she comes and she’s bringing some muscle. Tell you what, I’ll take the girl and you lay the beat down on the guyfur.”

“Micah.”

“What? Bad idea? Okay, I’ll beat up the guy and you can run off with the girl. Better?”

“Shut up.”

“Hello, again.” Cole said as the twins walked up to the table, “Mind if we join you?”

“No, go ahead. This is my brother, Micah.”

“How’s everything?” Cole asked.

“Mm, can’t complain.” Micah responded.

“I’m Cole. This is my sister, Calleigh.”

“Hello.” Calleigh said.

The twins sat down and started to eat. Micah continually threw accusing glances at Ash. Ash poked him in the side with one claw and glared at him. Micah held up one paw in apology and rubbed his side with the other. When Cole and Calleigh were finished eating, the four furs sat and talked the rest of the time. They listened to Micah tell of the misfortunes of his

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Geometry teacher. Apparently, somefur in the class had hid all of the chalk before she had arrived. She spent the first twenty minutes of class searching for a piece of chalk so she could teach. Micah looked down at his wrist. There was no watch there, but he pretended like there was.

“Ooh, look at the time. I’d better be off. It was nice meeting the two of you.”

“Likewise, my furry little furiend.” Cole said.

“Bye.” Calleigh added.

“I’ll see you after school.” Ash told his brother.

“Cool. See’ya!” Micah called behind him.

The three furs watched the little foxboy disappear into the crowd. Ash smiled to himself then looked at Calleigh and Cole. Calleigh smiled at him. Ash returned the smile then looked up at the clock on the wall. He knew it was getting closer to time for the twins to leave. Ash just did not want it to end. He had not heard of many furs getting a second chance at a first meeting. After a couple minutes, Cole informed the trio that it was time for them to split up. Cole and Calleigh left for their next class. Ash sat at the lunch table for another few minutes then went for a walk around the building. Ash looked down the wall towards the corner of the building. Before, he had gotten attacked when he rounded the corner. He shrugged his shoulders and walked ahead.

Ash rounded the corner and encountered Jake O’Connell and the other players that had beaten him before. Jake turned when he saw him. Ash looked at him blankly. A large grin appeared on Jake’s muzzle. Ash looked at the leopard in surprise then smiled back at him. The leopard walked closer and extended his right arm.

“I’m Jake,” he said.

RISING ASH

“Ash,” Ash said taking the paw.

“You lost, or something?” Jake asked.

“No, I was just out for a walk. I don’t have a class this period.” Ash admitted.

“Ever think of trying out for the football team?” Jake asked.

“Are you kidding? Me on the football team?” Ash laughed, “Are you sure you haven’t been tackled one too many times?”

Jake stared back at Ash. Ash’s eyes widened.

“You’re serious, aren’t you?” Ash said.

“Very,” was all Jake said.

“Why don’t you give it a shot?” one large horseboy said.

“No, really, I wouldn’t be any good. Thanks anyway.” Ash said.

“Alright. Well, we’d better go. Let me know if you change your mind.” Jake said, “See you around?”

“Probably. See’ya.” Ash called as he walked away.

* * *

ASH arrived at English on time, unlike before. He sat through the entire class. The teacher paced back and forth across the front of the classroom. The teacher went through the paperwork he had handed out. There were forms that needed to be signed and returned the next day and some that could wait a few days. The teacher let them go a few minutes early as she had nothing left to say. Ash walked down the hall with Calleigh and Cole. They walked into their last class.

RISING ASH

Physics. The teacher, a young lion, sat in the front row staring at the board. He introduced himself as Dr. Todd Hunter. Ash and the twins introduced themselves.

Dr. Hunter rose from the desk he was at and walked to his desk. The three canids took their seats. Ash noted that the seats were the same ones the three had sat in during the first go around. The rest of the students filed into the class one by one, sometimes in small packs. Jake walked in and nodded towards Ash. Ash returned the nod then looked back at the board. A wry grin appeared on Dr. Hunter's muzzle. It bothered Ash for a moment, but only for a moment. Once everyfur was settled in, Dr. Hunter got up in front of the room and went over the syllabus and passed out papers. The papers had to be signed and brought back. Dr. Hunter sat down on his stool and began flipping through the papers in his folder. After a couple minutes, he closed the folder and tossed it onto the desk. He looked around the classroom and smiled a large, toothy grin.

"You guys can go." Dr. Hunter said.

The students stared back at him in disbelief. No fur spoke.

"What are you furs still doing here? Scram! Get out of my classroom."

Slowly, the students packed their bags and began to file out of the classroom. Dr. Hunter looked around the room as the young furs stood and left.

"Ash?" said Dr. Hunter.

"Yes, sir?" Ash asked.

"Would you mind staying after a few minutes?"

"Sure."

"We'll go wait with your brother." Calleigh offered.

"Thanks."

RISING ASH

Ash leaned on his desk. Calleigh turned and smiled back at Ash before she left. Dr. Hunter rose from his stool and went to close the door. Before turning around, Dr. Hunter locked the door. Ash's right ear flopped over in confusion.

"Dr. Hunter? What's going on?" Ash asked.

"Call me Todd." the lion replied.

"Why did you want me to stay?"

"I just wanted to talk."

"Okay? About what?"

"How's your day been?"

"What?"

"Have you liked it so far?"

"Well, yeah. It's been pretty weird. And, it just got a little weirder, though."

"Mm. Has it been better this time around?"

"What?!"

Ash straightened up. The expression on his face changed from confusion to fear and concern. Ash clenched his fists at his sides. He was prepared to fight Dr. Hunter if he had to. Dr. Hunter furrowed his brow.

"Ash, what are you doing?"

"Who are you?"

"I'm Dr. Todd Hunter. I'm your Physics teacher. And, I'm an the one who allowed you to relive this day."

"How?"

RISING ASH

“I was born with certain powers. Powers I can’t really explain. One of my powers in the ability to reset certain events in the timeline. That’s what I did, and here we are.”

“What did you change?”

“I actually changed very little. I only altered one tiny thing.”

“What?”

“The spell Bryan used to bond you with Kordak. Instead, he used a spell that bonded you with his brother...”

“Un.”

“Right. Well, that’s all I changed. That led to you being given great powers instead of grief. The bonding even cured a disease you had had.”

“What disease?”

“I don’t think your parents even knew you had a fatal disease that would have killed you by the time you were twelve. Anyway, other things about you began to change. The day you turned thirteen, you woke up with two extra tails. On your fifteenth birthday, you grew another two tails giving you five. Two weeks ago, you turned eighteen and...”

“I woke up with nine tails.”

“Yeah.”

“So, will I have to stop Clothor again, or what?”

“Actually, that’s the best part.”

“How?!”

“When I reset the timeline, your defeat of Clothor stuck. He’s gone forever. Of course, that’s not to say that some other menace won’t pop up that you’d have to deal with.”

“And, what happens then?”

RISING ASH

“Apparently, lots of bad things are supposed to happen close enough to each other, that you won’t be able to stop them all.”

“And, that’s where you come in, right?”

“Right. You defeat one threat just as another one claims the lives of who knows how many. Then I come along and reset everything so you can take care of that threat. Sound’s like fun, doesn’t it?”

“A little, but it sounds like I’ll be reliving this day over and over.”

“Not really, since there will be enough time between attacks that you can get on with your life.”

“But, not enough time so that somefur like you becomes unnecessary.”

“Sucks, doesn’t it?”

“A bit, yeah.”

“Well, I won’t keep you any longer. Besides, you’ve got a good while before the next big threat that requires your attention. So, use this time to catch up with you father and brother.”

“Doc... Todd?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks for telling me this. I thought I was losing my mind.”

“Sure thing. Now, go meet your brother and go home. Have a good life.”

“You, too. Oh! Whatever happened to the coach?”

“Bryan? Well, when he tried to summon Kordak and bond him with you, the council of Chowa found out what he had done and they locked him up. Unfortunately, Bryan escaped and used the right spell. So, Bryan and Kordak are now one.”

“That’s not good.”

RISING ASH

“Yeah. Well, he’s gone into hiding. So, keep your eyes opened.”

“I will. Thanks for everything.”

Ash unlocked the door and walked out. The door closed behind him as he left. Ash walked down the empty hall. He smiled to himself as he imagined all the things he could do with his father and brother. He turned the corner and trotted down the staircase and outside into the sunlight. Ash took a deep breath. He looked around and saw Micah talking with Calleigh and Cole. Micah was very animated as he spoke. He threw his arms about and jumped up and down a couple times. Ash watched for a few minutes. Calleigh and Cole were smiling as they listened to every word that came out of the kit’s muzzle. Calleigh turned her head slightly and saw Ash.

Ash smiled at her and started heading towards them. He walked up behind Micah and put his paws on the young kit’s shoulders. Micah looked up and smiled at Ash. Ash smiled back then tousled his headfur. Micah’s paws shot to his head to straighten out the ruffled fur. Ash looked up into Calleigh’s eyes. He smiled at her again. Calleigh blushed and gave him a sheepish grin. The four canids began walking towards Ash and Micah’s house. Along the way, the furs met a wolf with grey-brown fur and spiky blond hair. Cole introduced him as Zach. Zach was the older brother of the twins. Ash shook his paw and introduced himself and Micah. The furs got to Ash’s house and prepared to go their separate ways. Calleigh grabbed Ash by the arm and turned him around.

“What’s the matter? You’ve been awfully quiet.” Calleigh prodded.

“Ask me again sometime. Okay?” Ash said.

“Okay. Why?”

RISING ASH

“It’s just something I want to mull over before talking about it, that’s all. I want to make sure I’m alright with it before I worry anyfur else.”

“Okay. I can respect that. Well, see you two tomorrow, I guess.”

“It was nice meeting you, Calleigh,” Micah called, “Talk to you later, Cole!”

“See you ‘round, squirt!” Cole called back.

“It was a pleasure to meet you, Zach.” Ash said extending his paw, “I hope we can become good furiends in the future.”

“I do to, Ash.” Zach said shaking the outstretched paw.

“Bye!” Ash called as he walked away.

Ash followed Micah up the patio to the porch. Micah pulled out his house key and unlocked the door. Micah went into the house and on into the kitchen. Ash turned and looked up into the sky. Ash walked into the house and found Micah in the kitchen eating a cookie. Ash dropped his bag on the floor and sat down at the table. Micah tossed the rest of the cookie in his open mouth and looked at Ash. Micah began stretching his arms and legs. It looked as if he was warming up for a marathon. Ash looked at his in confusion.

“What are you doing?” Ash asked.

“You wanna go have some fun?” Micah asked slyly.

“What kind of fun?” Ash asked slowly.

“You’ll see,” the sly kit said as he walked towards the backdoor.

“Micah! Get back here!” Ash called out as he stood up.

Ash followed his brother out the backdoor and into the backyard. Micah turned and smiled at his brother. Ash closed the door behind him and stepped out onto the back porch. Micah turned and ran towards the table in the middle of the yard. Ash watched in utter

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confusion. Micah stepped up onto the bench then onto the table itself. Kicking off from the table, Micah leapt into the air. Golden energy enveloped his body and Micah soared high into the sky. Ash stared after him in disbelief. *Well, he could have said something*, Ash thought to himself. Blue energy formed around Ash. Ash kicked off from the ground and flew up after his brother. Ash felt as if he was flying faster than he ever had. Even faster than when he had sprouted wings.

Ash caught up with Micah high in the clouds over Furrstown. The two foxes flew circles around each other. Micah suggested that they play like they used to. Ash agreed and started chasing his little brother all over the sky. Ash put on a burst of speed and caught up to his brother and tapped him on the head. Micah spun around and tried to swipe at Ash. Ash flew backwards, grinning broadly at the floundering kit. Micah grimaced and gave chase. Ash turned and flew away from Micah. Micah flew after him calling out for him to slow down. Ash could not hear him for the wind blowing past his ears. He might not have heard him anyway, for he had gotten lost in the exhilaration of flying through the air once more.

Micah slowed and stopped. He smiled after his brother as he soared higher and higher. Ash grinned broadly as he realized just how much he could accomplish with his powers and Dr. Todd Hunter's abilities. Ash stopped and looked back at his brother. Micah smiled and waved to him. *Oh yeah*, Ash thought, *I am definitely gonna like this timeline better than the last one*. Ash waved back and flew down to meet his brother and to go home to his mother and his very-much-alive father.

THE END