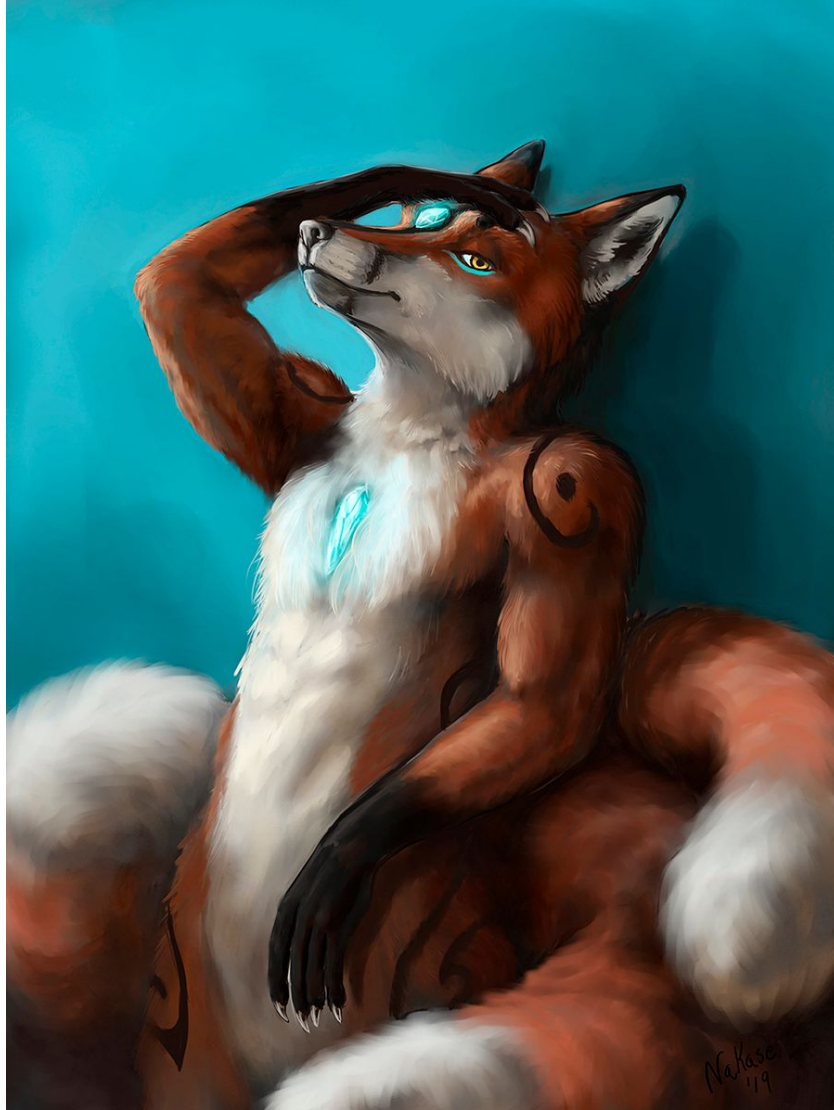


Shared Identity
Chapter 7: Reawakening
Written by [Draythix](#)
Artwork by [Nakase](#), Proofread by [Tayoh](#)



Now wild magic seemed like such an obvious explanation for how Kazu had become sapient. Sure, it wasn't the only cause of strange magical phenomenon, but now Keagan felt stupid for not taking the possibility more seriously. There were still other puzzles that needed to be solved, such as how the suit's mental link worked, but at least now he knew what he needed to do next to get his friend back.

After verifying one more time that Kazu's control core hadn't been physically damaged, Keagan inserted it back into the suit's forehead. However, he did not reconnect the living suit's

power magicite. In theory, he needed to wait until the neural link suit he was wearing had collected enough wild magic before he would be able to wake Kazu back up anyway.

Unfortunately, Keagan suspected that in order to properly jump start the living suit, he would need to gather a fair amount of wild mana. A half hour's worth at the very least.

At first, he tried just sitting down on one of his workroom's stools and resting. It had been over two hours since Kazu had collapsed, and he was aching and tense from all of the stress and his long run home. However, doing nothing meant that his anxious thoughts were free to run rampant. Every time he glanced at Kazu's lifeless "body", Keagan couldn't help but worry that he was still missing something. He wasn't even completely sure about how the golem suit worked anymore, so there was no guarantee that Kazu would be the same as before.

He found himself running through a mental list of all the things that could go wrong. The wrong amount of mana could fry Kazu or cause unexpected alterations. The sudden loss of his wild mana could have caused Kazu to lose the sapience that made him special. It was even possible that it wouldn't be able to handle running the suit properly after adapting itself to the fox golem...

Keagan paused a moment as he realized that there was a way he could address that last problem at the very least. The adaptation rune-chips he was using had a "rollback" function that could be used to undo their last change. He had already used that several times in his early experiments with the kitsune suit when he wanted to try different variations. Feeling a bit upset that he hadn't thought of this earlier, Keagan walked over to the still-open fox golem and pulled the adaptation chip out. Then he replaced the kitsune suit's own adaptation chip with it.

With that issue addressed, Keagan decided to try distracting himself by cleaning up the workroom. The place was still littered with parts and tools from the months he had spent working on Kazu. As he picked things up and began trying to put them away to regain some semblance of order in the room, he tried to keep himself from worrying by telling himself that everything was going to be fine. Soon, Kazu would be awake again and everything would be back to the way it was. It would be even better, in fact, since they could move more freely now that James was in on their secret. However, he couldn't stop himself from worrying that his own creation was going to hate him after this latest near-disaster...

"There's pizza here!" James suddenly called, his voice barely audible through the room's soundproofing.

Keagan gave Kazu an anxious look before forcing himself to yell back a reply, "Thanks, I'll be out in a minute!" He felt glad to have the distraction, and silently thanked his housemate for knowing that food was the best way to cheer him up.

After pulling jeans and a t-shirt over his link suit, Keagan headed for the kitchen. There he found James laying a box of pizza out on the counter. “How are you doing?” his housemate asked while throwing him a concerned look.

“A lot better now,” Keagan said while trying his best to hide the lingering effects of his panic attack. Part of him still felt like he could break down at any moment, but at least he wasn’t freaking out. “I think I’ve figured a few things out, so I should be able to wake Kazu up soon. I think.”

“Oh, good,” James said with an uncertain look before grabbing a slice of pepperoni pizza. “You had me kind of worried before, since I wasn’t sure how you were going to take it if you hadn’t been able to fix that thing.” He quickly gulped down a mouthful of food before continuing. “Bah, the delivery guy was too slow; the pizza’s only lukewarm. I wish we had a teleport receiver...”

“I would never trust one of those things,” Keagan said dismissively, unable to stop himself from ranting a bit before he picked up a slice. “Anything but the best magitek teleporter would mess with the food’s taste, and a normal restaurant isn’t going to have one of those. Heck, I wouldn’t trust them to properly calibrate the thing so the food didn’t turn into toxic waste.”

“Bah, people like you are why magic isn’t magical anymore,” James replied jokingly, “Always replacing the wonder with technicalities. In any case, are you really going to eat pizza while wearing that thing?” James was obviously referring to the neural link suit that Keagan was wearing under his clothes, which had built in gloves that he couldn’t remove.

“Well, there’s a reason why I’m wearing it,” Keagan began hesitantly explaining. “I figured out why Kazu shut down, and I am pretty certain it has to do with this suit. It seems like it is... absorbing wild mana from me, and I suspect that Kazu has become reliant on it.”

James choked on his food as soon as he heard the words “wild mana”. After coughing for a moment, he gave Keagan a worried look and said, “Wait, seriously? Are you crazy? I’ve heard all sorts of horror stories about the things that wild magic has done to people...”

“I already know about all that,” Keagan interrupted. “I worked in the magitek section of the medical industry, remember? I had to study the stuff to get my licence. Wild mana is only truly dangerous in large amounts, which just means I need to make sure it doesn’t build up too much. It’ll be fine.”

“It’ll be fine until the thing has you permanently thinking you’re a fox,” James grumbled, “Alright, let’s say that you manage to make this suit safe enough for you to wear. Isn’t using wild mana illegal?”

“James, its fine,” Keagan said while starting to feel annoyed, “The anti-wild magic regulations are mostly to try and stop people from using those stupid supercharger magicites. Those have a lot more power than my body would be able to generate in a day. If those things only cause accidents rarely, what I’m doing is unlikely to drive me mad or mutata me.” Even though Keagan was saying this, he truthfully had misgivings about the situation. Sure, the level of wild magic was low, but people didn’t usually wear full body suits that were imbued with the stuff...

“Well, if the suit fuses to you or something, I’m definitely going to start calling you a furry,” James said, “Well, assuming your survive it, that is.”

Keagan snorted in amusement, but couldn’t help but cringe as he imagined what it would be like if that type of magical accident actually did happen. Magitek fusions happened when a high concentration of magic, especially wild magic, caused a magically infused object to merge with another object or creature. Uncontrolled fusions often resulted in death or deformity.

As he ate another slice of pizza, Keagan found himself mentally calculating the risks he was being exposed to. Even though it was unlikely anything bad would happen, it was true that he might suffer some side effects from wearing a suit imbued with wild magic. However, it was also true that many magical accidents resulted in beneficial side effects. There was one woman whose earbuds had fused into her ears, but afterwards she could mentally control them to connect to devices at will.

During his last job, he had even studied intentional fusions involving prosthetic arms, which would become a part of the user’s body as if he had been born with it. If he fused with Kazu, would he become a kitsune? Or would he just be a human painfully merged with a faux fur suit, unable to even eat or use the bathroom?

Realizing what he was pondering, Keagan shook his head and made himself block all thoughts of truly transforming into a kitsune out of his head. He was not going to risk his well being over a fantasy like some kind of furry!

“So, will you be powering up your furry friend soon?” James asked, breaking the silence.

“Yea, I’ll be trying to wake ‘Kazu’ up soon,” Keagan made a point of emphasizing the suit’s name. “I just figured it would be best if I let the magic build up in this suit for a while to properly jump start him.”

A confused look crossed James’ face for a moment, before he glanced at Keagan and finally understood what Keagan meant. “Oh, you’re talking about that link suit thing that you’re wearing, not the golem suit. You really need to come up with better names for these things.”

“The names are just fine,” Keagan said defensively. “I’ll just be more careful to say their full names.”

James groaned, “No, seriously. Those names are bad. You need to find some way to differentiate them better. Like, try calling it ‘Nerve Gear’ or something.”

“That name’s straight from an old anime, isn’t it?” Keagan pointed out as he tried to recall where the familiar name came from.

“Maybe...” James said evasively. “In any case, are you sure you’re doing alright? You were really freaking out a while ago.”

The reminder of his panic attack made Keagan shift uncomfortably. “I’m doing better now that I’ve figured out what is going on,” he said.

“That’s good then,” James replied while seeming a bit relieved. “I wish you had told me what was going on a bit sooner, but knowing the way you worry about what people think, I can see why you didn’t.”

Keagan couldn’t help but stare at James in surprise after realizing how casual he was being about all this. “Yea, I was convinced that you were going to think that I was some kind of... freak or something for going around wearing a living costume.”

“I’m not going to pretend that the idea you’ve been wearing something that can think and talk on its own isn’t weird,” James said, “But let’s be honest, it isn’t like it is a new idea. There are all sorts of stories and movies about living suits. Spider Man and Iron Man spring to mind for a start. You might just happen to be the first one who actually made one, even if it looks like a fursuit.”

Keagan groaned at the fursuit comparison, he still wasn’t entirely comfortable with the idea of being grouped with the furies, but he still felt relieved by James’ words. It was times like this that he liked having James as a friend; he was amazingly chill.

After finishing his third slice of pizza, Keagan sighed happily and laid back in his chair. “Thanks for this. I didn’t realize how hungry I was.”

“No worries. It just seems to be the best way I know to soothe an anxious Keagan,” James grinned slyly.

Keagan rolled his eyes. “In any case, I think it is about time for me to try powering Kazu back on.”

“Well, I’m going to help you,” James suddenly said with a mouthful of pizza.

“That’s... you don’t need to do that,” Keagan said while trying to hide his trepidation.

“Like hell I don’t,” James stood up from the table with a slice of pizza in hand, “You said that you were worried that Kazu was damaged, so lord knows what will happen when you power it on. I kind of don’t want to have to deal with finding you unconscious on the floor again.”

In truth, James had a point. It would be a lot safer to have another person around. However, all Keagan could think about was how weirded out his housemate might be when he actually saw Kazu moving and talking on its own. “James, I’m in a fragile state,” he finally said while trying to keep his voice steady. “Can you please just let me do this on my own?”

A look of mortified comprehension flashed across James’ face. “Shoot, I thought you were better.”

“It isn’t that simple,” Keagan took a deep breath and absentmindedly tugged at the suit he was wearing. He hated being like this.

“I’ll... leave you be then, but before you go, there is one thing that I’ve been wondering about,” James said after a few moments. “I’m just surprised by how quickly you became such close friends with this ‘Kazu’ considering the suit has been alive for less than a month. No offense, but you usually can’t stand to talk to anyone for more than a few minutes before you get stressed out. Yet somehow, you’ve been in that room talking with your new friend for weeks on end?”

“Uh,” Keagan found himself at a loss for how to answer. It was true, he had a hard time talking with people because of his social anxiety, but he couldn’t remember having that problem with Kazu at all. The kitsune suit was different, but why?

After a few moments, Keagan finally gave a hesitant response. “Maybe it is because Kazu is a kitsune, or at least as close the closest thing to one I’ve ever seen. You know I tend to gravitate towards those sorts of things.”

James snorted, and a look in his eyes made it apparent he was sorely tempted to tease Keagan about being a closet furry again. Thankfully, James held himself back, possibly because of his housemate’s sensitive mental state. “I guess that makes sense. Well, I won’t delay you any longer. Good luck.”

Not having any desire to draw things out, Keagan thanked his housemate again and headed back to his workroom. After tightly shutting the door, he began stripping off his extra layer of clothes so that only the link-suit remained.

His phone showed that it was nearly 10pm. Normally he would be deactivating Kazu soon so the golem suit wouldn't be lonely or wear itself out while he slept. Well, he figured that tonight he would just have to stay up late, because he knew there was no way he was going to be able to get any sleep until he was sure that Kazu was fine.

Of course, if Kazu's golem core really had been damaged, then he had no idea what he was going to do. Somehow, having the living suit around just made him feel calmer. Kazu had become a friend that he could open up to without fear of being judged, and he didn't want to even think about going back to the way things were before.

After taking a deep breath to calm himself, Keagan inserted the power magicite back into Kazu's chest. There was a satisfying click, and once again the blue glow of the crystal's mana filled the suit's insides. Everything seemed like it was working, but the suit showed no signs of waking up. If Keagan's theory was correct, that wouldn't happen until it was exposed to the wild mana built up in the link-suit, and the fact that things were finally working the way he expected did a lot to steady his nerves.

Unable to think of anything else he could do to prepare for this, Keagan sat down on a stool and carefully slid his legs inside Kazu's zipper. Donning the costume without it coming to life and helping him along somehow felt strange. He had gotten quite used to the way the costume would crawl over him and fit itself to him. Now it felt annoyingly loose.

Hoping that more contact with the link-suit would speed things up, he pulled the kitsune costume up and slid his arms inside. He decided to leave the zipper open and the mask off just in case something really did go wrong though. Keagan glanced at the costume's insides and strained to try and see any signs that anything was changing. Was it his imagination, or were the runes and circuits glowing brighter?

A sudden pulse of movement went through the costume, making Keagan gasp in surprise. Kazu flexed around him and its tails thrashed as it came to life. Within moments, it pulled itself tightly around his body. Static-like sensations prickled his skin as neural connections began forming, though much more slowly and unevenly than usual.

"Kazu, can you hear me?" Keagan said as a mix of hope and worry welled up in him, "Are you alright?"

The living costume didn't respond, and simply kept pulling itself tighter around Keagan's body as if it was drawn to him. Was it simply trying to link with him, or was it instinctively trying to suck up the wild magic from the link-suit? The fact that Kazu wasn't trying to talk to him was concerning.

After considering his options, Keagan started thinking that he might have to try and use the neural connection to speak to Kazu. Unfortunately, that meant putting on the mask, which

was potentially dangerous when the living suit was in this state. He glanced at the door as fear of injury began to overcome his fear of embarrassment, but he decided against calling James in. His housemate didn't really know how Kazu worked, so it was quite possible that he would do more harm than good.

As soon he slid the mask over his head, it began tightening and adjusting to him. The costume's opening began pulling itself closed, or as closed as it could since it couldn't control the zipper, and soon he was almost completely engulfed. The built in visor that allowed him to see through Kazu's eyes flickered for a moment before flaring to life, giving Keagan a view of the room.

"Kazu, can you hear me?" Keagan said again, finding it a bit difficult to talk since the mask wasn't fully synced with his movements.

Instead of a response, a wave of vertigo unexpectedly hit Keagan as the suit linked with him. His senses pushed outwards, and he found that he was a kitsune again. He suddenly felt unsteady on his feet as he found himself standing on his toes, and he toppled over. Thankfully, instead of crashing face first into the floor, he managed to catch himself with his front paws.

Standing on all fours felt strangely comfortable. Far more comfortable than it should have. A wave of confusion briefly overwhelmed Keagan as strange instincts flooded his mind. He tried to call Kazu's name again, but let out a distinctly fox-like yip instead.

Keagan shook his head, trying to clear his muddled thoughts. It was just like the first time he had worn Kazu, but somehow worse. It felt like he would forget that he was human if he stayed like this for too long. Was this a side effect of putting Kazu in the fox golem, or was this a sign that the control core had been damaged?

Panic threatened to overwhelm him as he realized he was probably trapped inside the suit again. Even if the zipper wasn't unzipped, the suit wouldn't let him reach his back because it was trying to make him move like a fox, and foxes weren't that flexible. For a moment, the idea that he had a zipper suddenly seemed odd. After all, why would a fox have a zipper? Keagan shook his head again, trying to keep his thoughts clear.

Unable to think of any other options, Keagan closed his eyes and tried to think at the living suit. It had demonstrated several times that it had some ability to read his thoughts, so perhaps he could use that to get its attention. Over and over again, he thought Kazu's name as forcefully as he could. *Kazu, talk to me!*

At first, there didn't seem to be any reply. Several more waves of confusion threatened to overwhelm him and it became hard to remember what he was trying to do. A combination of fear and concern for Kazu managed to help him keep hold of himself, but he wasn't sure how long he'd be able to keep it up. *Kazu, talk to me. It's me, Keagan.*

Keagan? It was so faint that at first he thought it had been his imagination, but that one word stood out among the more feral thoughts and instincts that were pushing against Keagan's mind.

Snap out of it! You're not an animal!

The living suit shuddered, as if struggling against something. After a few seconds the neural link seemed to falter, and he began to feel like he was wearing a costume again. He carefully grabbed a chair and tried to stand himself up, though it was a struggle since Kazu didn't seem properly synced with him. "Kazu, tell me what's wrong," he said as soon as he realized he could talk again.

I... made mistake, the living suit thought, seemingly with difficulty. *Tried to make myself more fox like, then...* It stopped speaking and spasmed around Keagan's body, as if it could no longer function properly.

"Wait, how?" Keagan asked, but then the answer came to him, "Did you use the adaptation chip?"

Yes, Kazu said, and then paused as it twitched and flexed uncontrollably again. *But shutdown before finished. Felt weak, out of power.*

Keagan cringed as he realized what Kazu was saying. The living suit had somehow tried using wild mana with the adaptation chip, but ran out of power before the process was finished. He wasn't sure if he should be happy the modification had failed or not. If it had been successful, the wild magic could have done nearly anything to Kazu, including turning its mind fully into a fox, or even partially transforming it into one. However, he wasn't completely sure that a half finished modification done with wild magic could be properly undone.

Thankfully he had moved the very runechip that had caused this into Kazu's main body, so in theory it would be able to revert the changes to the golem control magicite. The problem was that activating the rollback with his computer probably wouldn't work since wild magic was involved. That stuff played havoc with the laws of reality. That meant that everything was in Kazu's own crippled paws.

"Alright Kazu, Listen to me. If this was caused by your adaptation ability, then you need to use that rune-chip's 'rollback' function to return to normal."

The suit's tails flicked with agitation. *Don't know how. Can't focus.*

Thankfully, Keagan had half-expected Kazu to say that, and had already begun thinking of a work around. "Alright, then I need you to link more closely with me," Keagan said as he

realized there was only one option, even if it was a potentially risky one. “Even if we can’t fully become Kazunari, I might be able to help you access the chip.”

At first there was no response from the living suit, as if it were hesitant to do this in its current state. In order to make a point of how serious he was, Keagan reached behind his back and pulled Kazu’s zipper closed. “Do it quickly. The longer we wait, the less likely it is that the rollback will work properly,” he said before focusing on becoming the kitsune Kazunari again.

Kazu began tightening around Keagan again, or at least as the best it could while it twitched uncontrollably. It stung as the suit linked to him this time, but Keagan did his best to grit his teeth and ignore it. He became faintly aware of Kazu’s, no, their fur and tails as the unstable link strengthened. The golem suit’s conflicting thoughts and instincts flooded his mind, but he did his best to fight through them and try to focus on its components.

As the link strengthened their minds began to intertwine. It felt like an unstable and incomplete version of the Kazunari merge, but it was enough. Keagan grit their teeth, and tried to “feel” Kazu’s components through their link. It was quite different from what he usually tried to do when linked with the living suit, and Kazu’s sorry state certainly didn’t make things easier. Slowly, the illusion that he was a kitsune began to falter, and he became aware of the golem’s various parts. Overjoyed that his plan was actually working, Keagan went to work.

“Kazunari made it look so easy,” Keagan muttered to himself. Even though he was a magitek engineer, being actually aware of Kazu’s parts felt incredibly alien. Dozens of runes and components seemed to fill his head and spin in his vision. With some difficulty, he managed to focus his attention on one specific rune-chip. “It is that one Kazu. Remember, it is the ‘rollback’ function, and you want it to only affect your core since you are not in the same body.”

Through their link, Keagan felt Kazu struggle for a moment before finally managing to access the chip. He felt a strange sensation flow through the suit and into into the golem’s core. Almost immediately the neural link broke, and Keagan found himself gasping for air as he realized he had been holding his breath.

As if its strings had been cut, the costume suddenly relaxed around Keagan’s body and began hanging limply. For a moment he worried that he had made another costly mistake that had harmed Kazu further. A sudden flick from the tails and a gentle squeeze around his chest made him realize that Kazu was still alive.

“I’m alright,” Kazu softly said out loud. “Thank you for fixing me again.”

It felt as if a weight had been lifted off Keagan’s shoulders. For hours, he had been worried that he was going to lose Kazu. Now that the golem suit was back and sounding the same as before, he felt tears welling up in his eyes.

“What’s happening?” Kazu asked with a worried tone. “Are you hurt?”

“No, everything is fine now,” Keagan said before crossing his arms to give Kazu a hug.