

Dave's Big Break

“Reality warping: Fact or Fiction? For the last several weeks, reports of unusual happenings have flooded the island. Buildings and businesses shifting overnight into humble huts, and humble huts doing the opposite. Business moguls becoming tribesmen. Civilians turning to crime and criminals turning over new leaves in the blink of an eye! In lieu of these startling narratives, we've invited two experts in their fields to help explain the changes that have been sweeping over the island, and yet only a few seem to remember with each shift. Please welcome Doctor Eggman and ... am I reading this right? Knuckles the Echidna!”

The lights of the studio increased their intensity as the cameras focused on a tall buff red echidna garbed in a tool belt and goggles to complement his spiked gloves, and a tall fat mustachioed scientist that sat beside him.

“Thank you both for agreeing to come onto the set tonight,” a familiar eagle said in greeting.

Knuckles shrugged. “I had the time,” he said easily.

“After using a swath of my badnicks for one of your workouts,” Eggman growled.

“Not my fault your bots are so breakable.”

“What is this nincompoop even doing here?” Eggman demanded.

“Though I hate to use the name, I'm Twin Knuckles. You want information on destruction and deconstruction, I'm your guy, from mountains to molecules.”

“And your role as mad scientist speaks for itself, Eggman,” Silver said, smiling through his beak. “In your professional opinion, what's going on?”

“It's difficult to say. Based on my analysis, it appears that these alterations occur in a series of pockets or fields that center around a particular object or person. Anyone caught in the range of that field becomes effected to remember the effected object and other items it interacts with during its transition as normal.” He clicked a button, and a camera drone appeared to project a video feed. “This is just one example of the incidents in question. Watch closely.” Before their eyes, a small hut developed into a towering building marked with reflective glass. “And before anyone gets any ideas, no, this isn't a result of one of my experiments. These anomalies have been springing up all over the island. If it were me, everything would be sleek, modern, and technologically superior.”

“And you'd mark it all with your stupid mustache,” Knuckles said with a smirk.

“I'll have you know this mustache is iconic!”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” Silver soothed, “let's remember what we're here to discuss. You can save the fighting for *after* you leave the studio.” He turned to face the echidna. “Knuckles, can you think of anything that might explain this anomaly?”

“The ability to change something like that *and* alter the memories of people surrounding it?” He chuckled. “Not a chance. You’d need something that could alter the fabric the universe, literally deconstruct the constitution of anything in the field and then rearrange those particles instantaneously. Neural paths, cells, anything that could be considered matter or mass. Even then, you can only use so much. Changing a hut into a hotel? That’s a major no-go. That’s more than science. That’s magic.”

“And yet, there it stands. Mighty big words there, by the way, Knuckles,” Silver said.

Knuckles shrugged. “Like I said, breaking stuff up is kind of my thing. Putting together....” He wobbled a hand. “Eh, not so much.”

“The anomalies seem to be completely random,” Eggman continued. “There’s no sign of any form of common factor that I’ve been able to isolate. One minute, things are one way, the next, they become something else. It’s by far one of the most chaotic phenomena I’ve ever encountered. There must be a key, a control behind this, but I haven’t been able to isolate it yet. I would have considered time travel as the reason, but there’s no evidence of any travel of that sort recently. I would have detected the signs.”

“Well, well, a problem Eggman can’t solve.” Knuckles smirked. “Bet *that* must grind your gears.”

“About the same way a schematic would scramble that peabrain of yours,” Eggman shot back.

“O-kay, folks. That’s all the time we have for now. We’ll continue to keep you updated on the anomalies as we get more information. For now, here’s the weather report with Gale Nightingale. Gale?”

The cameras cut off in the studio as the lights died down and Silver the Eagle sighed in relief. A swift clenching of his fists wrapped both contenders in a psychokinetic aura. “All right, you two. I said it before, and I’ll say it again. If you want to fight, you’ll have to do it outside my studio. I am *not* about to let another claim get filed on our network’s insurance policy. If you want to fight, you can do it at Eggman’s base or somewhere on the beach.”

Both guests screamed as they were flung from the studio by Silver’s power to land safely, relatively speaking, on the beach. Silver groaned as he settled into his chair. That was feeling all too natural now. He never would have done such a thing before, but everything in this world seemed so much more resilient. Not nearly so fragile. “Makeup,” he called.

The veritable cloud of cosmetic artists moved at a speed that almost rivaled Sonic as they worked to fix Silver up for his next segment. Living this new life was ... nice, if a little unusual. He could still recall his life from before if he tried, but living as Silver the Eagle felt more natural now. Yes, more natural, perhaps, but did he have the right? One passing phrase was enough to set things off in this dimension. Had the travels through space and time with the chaos emeralds somehow augmented his powers to cause this?

He'd already deleted Tails, or rather, Tails had been incorporated into Knuckles' desires. He wasn't an exact replica of Knuckles, but he was close enough for them to be brothers in every sense of the word. One stray murmur about the skyscrapers from back home, and suddenly there was one. How much longer would he be able to live like this before he was caught? How much longer until these alterations became a danger? And most importantly, *how* had he reached this point? All he knew was that Dave had helped him when he was in need. He was the one who was there when everything happened. If anyone might be able to explain or at the very least be immune to the changes going on in the world, it had to be him.

It had to be.

"I don't want to be another Iblis," he murmured.

"What was that, Sir?" one of the makeup artists asked.

Silver shook his head. "Nothing. Nothing," he assured her. "Though ... could you get April for me? There's something I'd like to schedule...."

"You're going, and that's final." Dave's mother glowered at him as she waved her spatula threateningly.

"Ma, it's not that simple."

"Yes, it is. I'm not going to let my boy be caught in some two-bit fry job for the rest of his life! If you're going to be evil, then you need the money to fund it. You go to that interview and you get that job, or so help me, I'll show you what *real* evil looks like!"

"Ma—"

"Not. Another. Word." A pancake flung into Dave's face and slid slowly onto the plate in front of him. "Now eat up, then call that nice bird up. Sweet talk him, manipulate him, use him, and then when you make it big, discard him. Nice boys don't get anywhere. You lie, you cheat, you steal, and do whatever else it takes until you achieve your goal. Honestly, the fact you can't even exceed Eggman is an embarrassment."

Dave rolled his eyes. The Nutria knew better than to argue with his mother when she was in one of her moods. Some days, it was so tempting to just take a knife and hold it to her throat, just to see how she'd like being on the receiving end for once. But somehow, he doubted that would go so well. His hand trembled at the very thought of it.

Dave shoved his chair back and strode toward his room.

"And where do you think you're going, young man?"

"I'm not hungry," Dave said as he strode toward the stairs.

“You get back here this minute, Dave!”

Dave grit his teeth and rounded on her. “Do you want me to try this stupid job or not?” he snarled.

“Don’t you take that tone with me, young man.”

“You’re the one who’s always telling me to be evil. Do evil people care what others think about what they have to say?”

The creak of his mother’s foot on the bottom stair sent warning prickles over his fur. “David Stodamyer Bridgewater—!”

Dave didn’t give her the chance to finish the tirade. As Eggman had taught him in their short partnership, a good villain knows when to retreat. He dashed into his room and slammed the door shut, then quickly barred it with a dresser and his desk for extra measure. Teen desperation and angst gave him the strength and speed to finish just in the nick of time as angry thumps smashed on his door mingled with the shrieking edicts of a mother roused.

The more the woman shrieked, the angrier he felt. He had done everything to please her. He’d created a villainous society, formed alliances, even gone so far as to rip open the barriers of time and space! He’d snuck into a mad scientist’s lair and stolen his tech for his own!

...

Though speaking of that....

He snuck to his closet and burrowed in the piles of unfolded laundry there until he finally unearthed the device. “I don’t know why I didn’t think to use you sooner,” he said as he kissed the ray gun. It took him a little longer to get the blockade out of the way, but the effort was worth it when he watched the storm of his mother’s wrath fade into dimwitted slackness of one whose memories were being erased. Dave quickly loaded the gun into a bag and hefted it over his shoulders.

“Ma, I’m going to an interview. Don’t wait up for me, okay?”

His mother blinked in shock and surprise as she came out of trance. “Wh-what...?”

To add insult to injury, Dave took a sniff at the air. “By the way, does something smell like it’s burning?”

His mother gasped. “My pancakes!” As she raced down the stairs two at a time to reach the kitchen, Dave followed behind and flew out the door instead. When he’d gotten a few blocks worth of distance away from their house, he sighed in relief.

“Well, that worked,” Dave mused, then sighed again. Silver wanted to see him. The question was, did this Silver remember the ‘help’ Dave had given him on his arrival or had he been swept up in these shifts as well? It was definitely not the finest outcome to his plans, even if it *did* succeed in causing chaos on the island.

He gulped. "I just hope it doesn't destroy the world while it's at it," he murmured fervently. Then he began the long walk to the broadcasting station.

The television station was located at the edge of town, with closer proximity to the relay station on the mountain, the Aerie, as Silver had come to call it. Increasingly, the high altitude and thermals had become his sanctuary. It felt ... right to be that high for some reason. The thrill of flight probably had something to do with it. Besides, it paid to be able to play lookout when he wasn't on the air. Spying trouble was an eagle's specialty, after all, after spotting prey. Silver was just finishing running a comb through his hair when his dressing room door opened, and the receptionist entered.

"Mister Eagle, you have a visitor at the entrance. He said you were expecting him?"

"Small gawky teenager? Blue fur? Buck teeth with braces?"

"Yes, Sir."

Silver nodded. "Send him to the studio."

"Sir?"

"The studio, Barbara. Let's make it Set C. What better place for an interview than a talk show?"

"But Sir, that's—"

"I'll take *full* responsibility. Just put him in there, make sure he's comfortable, and leave him to me. I'll be down to meet him shortly."

"But—"

"*Now*, Barbara."

A small squeal heralded the receptionist's hasty departure. Silver stared at his reflection in the mirror and sighed as he let his shoulders slump. He sighed. "Some things are just universal, I guess..." Regret burned like a hot iron poker in his chest. It was the same whenever he'd ordered people away from danger. He didn't like using that tone, but it always seemed to jump out of him. And as Silver the Eagle, that only seemed to make it worse. Were television stars always this pushy? Or was it just his anxiety over the meeting?

The chair scraped back as he took one last look at his appearance in the mirror to ensure he was at his best. A final sweep of a gloved hand through his crest left him looking as stunning an avian as his eagle memories' ego always believed. "... I really do have a self-confidence problem, don't I?" he murmured. Then he sighed and turned to the door. "First things first. I have an interview to perform, and some questions that need answering."

Dave fidgeted nervously as he gazed at the rest of the set. Stage lights loomed darkly overhead like a predator waiting to drop on its prey. One signal, and those lamps would blind him to everything but the set. In a very real way, it would be like cordoning himself off from the real world to exist, at least for a short time, in a fantasy. Wouldn't that be an interesting thing?

"It's a lot to take in at first, but you get used to it," the receptionist comforted. "Mister Eagle said he'll be down shortly to meet with you. Is there something I could get for you while you wait?"

Dave swallowed, and his throat stuck together. "Maybe ... something to drink?"

The receptionist smiled a little more sincerely than when he'd first arrived at the desk. Perhaps because Silver had confirmed sending for him?

"One smoothie coming up."

"Can I...?" he motioned weakly toward the set and its furniture. "It was ... sort of a long walk here."

"Silver asked you to be brought here. Whatever he wants to ask you, he plans to interview you in there, so go ahead. Just don't touch anything," she warned. "I'll be back with your drink in a moment."

Dave approached the set and took a seat on one of the chairs next to a low coffee table. To his left, a great desk sat where the host would be able to put notes, papers, mugs, anything he or she might desire, depending on the segment. If this was Silver's domain, then the hedgehog had done well for himself since their last encounter. The fact he was a bird and still acting normal left Dave with more than a few questions, but he didn't know for sure how many he would be able to voice.

"Here you go. Just be careful not to spill. The janitors really don't like having to deep clean the sets."

Dave's voice cracked as he seized hold of the cup. "I'll keep that in mind."

The receptionist giggled, then pulled back as Dave blushed. "Good luck." And then she was gone.

Dave took several greedy gulps to try to cool his burning cheeks. A whistle disturbed him, followed by a low and silky voice as the teal avian stepped into the light.

Silver smiled knowingly as he looked back to the retreating form of the receptionist, then at Dave again. "Go get 'em, tiger."

Dave couldn't help it. Smoothie spewed out his mouth and nose like a geyser. Fortunately for him, Silver was still fast on his reflexes.

“Easy there, Casanova. You don’t want to go killing yourself before we’ve even had the chance to talk.” Silver’s eyes glowed as he held the liquid in suspension with the help of his psychokinesis. “I’m ... going to guess you don’t want this.”

Dave blushed, even as he worked to get his breathing under control again. “Probably not....”

Silver easily levitated the fluid into a trash can, then took a seat behind the desk and laid his elbows on the surface. “I suggest you put down that shake and make sure you’ve swallowed before we continue.”

Dave nodded and did as instructed. “About that. Why *did* you call me here?”

“A few things. Curiosity, fear, and I suppose a certain amount of benevolence.” He allowed a brief smirk to play over his beak before he dropped it again. “But mostly fear,” he admitted.

“Oh? Of what?” Dave asked idly as he fingered the gun at his side.

“I think you know what. If anyone might, it’s you.” Silver sighed. “And please don’t try reaching for that weapon. You’re talking to someone who grew up in a supernatural warzone every day of his life.”

Dave gulped and his hand froze.

“I brought you here because I want you to be honest with me. Do you remember when we first met?”

Dave looked away. “When I dropped off your order from Meh Burger?”

“Dave, this is important. I want the truth. I *need* it. What is your first memory of me, not as Silver the Eagle, but Silver the Hedgehog?”

Dave swallowed. He knew. He remembered. The question was how much? “I picked you up from Eggman’s island and brought you to my house.”

“You remember, then.”

Dave nodded.

“And the other changes in the town?”

“I’m not the one causing them,” Dave insisted.

Silver shook his head. “I never said you were. But that does at least prove one theory.”

“Oh?”

“We’re both immune to the effects of whatever is going on. That is to say, we both remember everything as it was before my arrival on the island.”

Dave pulled at the collar of his shirt. “Uh, yeah, I **guess** so,” he cracked.

“Dave, I think I’m the epicenter of whatever is causing these changes. I make one stray comment, and all of a sudden, everything changes.”

Dave took a heavy sip from his drink, then folded his arms. “Even if I did believe you, what does that have to do with me?”

“If you’re not effected, then that means that whatever happened to cause this probably has to do with whatever accident brought me here in the first place.”

“There *is* no more accident, though,” Dave pointed out. “Once you became a studio star, everything changed. There’s nothing to go back to, no readings to take, even if I *knew* what to look for in the first place.”

“There must be *something* we can do.”

“I don’t think there *mmph* is.” Dave pulled at the collar of his shirt. “It’s not like the changes have been *bad*, just ... **confusing**.” He coughed and cleared his throat. “If *I* had the power to control reality, I know I’d want to make things better for me. No more teasing or putdowns. People would take me *seriously*. I’d show them the same consideration they showed me.” His voice cracked again as a puff of white fur burst over his collar. Seconds later, the top button popped off. “Aw, man, that was a company shirt.” He growled and grit his teeth, baring sharpening canines.

“You’re saying people don’t appreciate you here?” Silver frowned.

“I live with my mother and work at a fast food stand. Of *course* I’m not appreciated.”

“It’s ... not always a good thing being noticed, Dave. Where I come from, getting noticed got you killed unless you were very lucky.”

“Yeah, but this isn’t where you come from, is it?” Dave snapped, and with that snapping came the simultaneous shredding of the fingers on his gloves. Sharp claws bared themselves to the world, surrounded by tiny rings of orange that slowly seeped into the normal blue of his fur. “**What the...?**” Before his eyes, the color seeped up his hands to his arms, where his flexors swelled into prominence. Brown streaks appeared like the sudden stroke of a paintbrush while his hair began to tingle and stand on end. His pupils shifted to feline slits as his chest inflated before his eyes.

Silver swore. “Whatever you do, Dave, don’t forget who you are.”

Button after button popped off Dave’s shirt as his frame continued to expand. His shoulders broadened as carefully toned and built muscle roiled and swelled beneath the spreading fur. “**Please, you think I’d forget my scars that easily?**” The seams on his shirt burst with the soles of his shoes as his body continued to gain in size and mass. His feet shredded through his socks and dangled messily over the faux floor of the set. The rest of the buttons on his shirt flew off in a shower as his back cracked and he stretched skyward, then groaned in a deep rumbling purr that surged his Adam’s apple into prominence with his swelling neck. A great white patch of fur had replaced the uniformity of blue he once had to form a new

underbelly. Meanwhile, the fur at the top of his head receded until an equal layer of short and bristly hairs covered the swelling mass.

Silver couldn't help but whistle as his Eagle persona got the better of him. "With a build like that, you should be in the movies."

A long striped tail with a great white tuft snaked its way out of Dave's rear as his nose shifted into a distinctly triangular shape, followed by a set of whiskers that sprouted on either side. The vivid green in his eyes seemed to fade, as if sucked up by the crevices his slit pupils had made. In their stead, a strange blend of faint green melded with silver to create the piercing gaze of a predator mingled with the striking mystique of a super model. **"If those papers appearing on your desk are any indication, I think I might be soon."**

Fliers, posters, and other memorabilia had appeared suddenly with the dashing smile of the rapidly growing predator.

"You're still you, though?" Silver pressed.

The tiger shrugged as the last surges of growth settled over him and his ears perked and shifted to match the rest of his feline appearance. A few small tatters of his shirt remained behind, but other than that, he was nearly naked. **"Seems like it. I ... think it's over?"** Then he winced. **"Nope. Here comes the mother of all headaches."** He groaned and squinted his eyes shut. A low feral growl rumbled from his chest. Then it passed, he sighed, and he opened his eyes to reveal flashing irises. **"That's better."**

"Dave?" Silver asked.

"I ... think I'm called Tommy now. Tommy Thunder. At least, that's my movie persona. My other name's Irwin now, I guess. Irwin Fertelmeister."

"And you're okay?"

"Other than dealing with a whole new set of memories, yeah, I think I'm all right."

Silver sighed and smacked his head against his desk. "At this rate, maybe it'd be better if I just made myself a hermit on the mountains."

"Hold up. Do you have any idea how much better you just made my life by doing this?" Dave laughed. **"Before this, my life was absolute garbage. My mom always put me down, nothing ever went my way, and my friends and I were pretty much abject failures. Now..."** He shrugged. **"Now I'm free to do what I want, so long as it doesn't hurt my public image. I can get away with pretty much anything I want to now, and people will still adore me for it."** He laughed again. **"Keep using this power, Silver. Learn to control it. Do that, and you can do some incredible things for this town, and for the world at large."**

Silver couldn't help but smile at the tiger's enthusiasm. "Looks like someone got a boost in charisma, too."

"Tommy Thunder is full to bursting with it!" Tommy flexed his biceps and grinned.

Silver couldn't help but laugh. "All right, you. Let's see about finding a proper change of clothes, then. It looks like reality isn't going to help you with how much you just destroyed."

"I'm certain my costume will arrive in pristine condition. At least it had better if someone wants to keep their job. But in the meantime, how about you and I talk a little more about this new gift of yours." He strode over and wrapped an arm around Silver's back as he grinned and stretched out a hand before them. **"I see great things in your future, Silver the Eagle. Great things...."**