

Shared Identity
Chapter 6: Wild
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“So, you’re saying that some additional modifications might be needed to get the control core to sync up with the new golem?”

“Yea definitely,” Nira replied through the phone, blissfully unaware that she wasn’t exactly talking to Keagan, “Sure, just like any other magical device, golem cores can adapt to the situation you put them in, but there are limits. It would be best to make things easier for it to adapt, especially since you’re switching it to a completely different body type.”

“I see, I’m glad I called to ask then,” Kazunari said while twitching his tails in annoyance. He had stretched the truth and told Nira that the ‘original golem’ was a biped. Switching from a living suit base to a fox would be a much more significant change. “I have a trick for modifying golem mana circuits, so I’ll make use of that.”

Kazumari was especially glad that he had decided to disregard his human self's worries and get a second opinion from Nira. While he had a lot of experience using exotic medical and nerve link technology, his knowledge of actual golems was fairly narrow. Luckily, the kitsune could mimic Keagan's voice so well that Nira had no idea of what she was really talking to.

"I have to say though, I'm really glad you decided to get back in touch with me!" Nira said suddenly, "You're one of the first people to sell neural link gear for costuming. Are you planning to get a table and sell your stuff at Anthro United? I'm going there and I've love to see how your golem comes out!"

"I've been looking into getting a last minute hotel room, but I don't have a table or any solid plans yet," Kazumari replied a bit uneasily, "I am thinking of showing off a... new creation of mine." The truth was that he wasn't completely sure that his human self would actually go to the convention, and the kitsune couldn't help but feel a bit frustrated at its lack of control over its own fate.

"A new creation?" Nira repeated, while sounding both puzzled and excited, "Does it have to do with the golem?"

"It sort of does," Kazumari said with a bemused tone. "I'm keeping it under wraps for now, but..." A moment of weakness and vertigo took the kitsune by surprise, and he grabbed the side of his workbench to keep himself from toppling over. "Sorry give me a moment... ugh!"

The kitsune doubled over as a splitting pain shot through its skull. His entire body trembled as he felt the link between Keagan and Kazu unexpectedly become undone. Keagan barely managed to avoid crying out as Kazu suddenly disconnected from him, leaving him disoriented as he tried to grapple with the unexpected change.

"Hello? Hello!" The phone had fallen onto the vinyl flooring with a loud thump that had apparently given Nira some idea that something was wrong.

"Keagan, I'm sorry..." Kazu whispered as Keagan searched for the phone. "I don't know what happened. I just suddenly feel so weak."

Keagan didn't reply as he focused on finding the phone while trying to ignore the splitting headache he was feeling. Being in a fox suit without any help from Kazu's nerve link made the task far more difficult than it would have been. When he finally found the phone, he brought it up to Kazu's mask and spoke loudly so that Nira would be able to hear him through it. "Sorry, Um, I just had something come up... can I call you back later?"

"Oh, okay..." Nira said while sounding a bit confused. "I hope everything's alright. Talk to you later!"

“Bye,” Keagan said quickly before hanging up, and then groaned as he suddenly became even more aware of the splitting headache he was having. “Any idea what happened that time Kazu?”

“I don’t know,” the living suit replied by speaking with the mask Keagan was still wearing, “This time I just feel weak as if I got low on power, but doesn’t make sense though, because I have plenty of power left.”

“And the last two times the link broke due to some sort of link instability,” Keagan added after sitting down on a stool. The costume’s normally lively tails hung limply behind him. “I think we need to avoid ‘becoming’ Kazunari until we figure out what is going wrong.”

“I... I understand,” Kazu replied while sounding dejected and a bit worried. The living suit readjusted itself around Keagan as if trying to hug him more tightly. Kazu had said in the past that the more it linked itself to Keagan the more complete it felt, so its disappointment wasn’t surprising. “Are you alright? I don’t detect any signs of damage, but that pain I felt from you was intense.”

“The headache is fading,” Keagan said as he tried to rub his head through Kazu’s fur. “It will be fine I think. In any case, I guess Kazunari was right to call Nira, she was able to give me the last few hints that I need to get your fox body ready.”

Kazu tensed up around Keagan as he reached for the living suit’s zipper. “Can you... wear me for a bit longer please?” Kazu asked suddenly while sounding oddly desperate.

“Huh, why?” Keagan replied. “I mean, I’m fine with it. However, since this isn’t the first time you’ve begged me to keep wearing you, I’m getting curious if there is a particular reason.”

“I... don’t know,” the living suit sounded surprisingly anxious as it spoke, “Sometimes I feel weak, but for some reason being worn makes me feel better.”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Keagan said quietly as he tried to make sense of Kazu’s statement, “The only thing you really should rely on is your power crystal. Are you sure it isn’t just in your head, er, I mean your mind?”

The living suit was quiet for a few moments before replying, “I don’t think so. I do like being connected to you since it makes me feel... more complete, but this seems different. This feels like something that I need, and it doesn’t even require that I be fully linked to you.”

Keagan sighed and didn’t reply right away as he considered this new information. There were so many things about how Kazu worked that he still did not understand. As much as he hated to admit it, the chances that wild magic had somehow been involved with the living suit’s creation was looking more and more likely. It was the only explanation for the number of weird

things that had happened, and there was no way he could make a 'wearable golem' for anyone else until he had explanations for every detail of how Kazu worked. The only question was where was the wild magic coming from?

"Alright, I'll wear you for a bit longer Kazu, but I'm going to run some diagnostics to see if I can figure out what's going on," Keagan finally stated, "I really should have made some use of that new scanner I bought before starting on the golem."

After searching for a few minutes, Keagan found the new tool he had purchased and began reading its instructions. The tool would supposedly help test Kazu's mana and help him properly map the suit's circuits. The latter feature would probably be important for modifying the suit's mana flow to be more suitable for Kazu as well. Once he felt that he had a rough understanding of how the scanner worked, he activated it and couldn't help but smile at the impressive holographic display that the device began projecting into the air. Illusionary magic just seemed to be getting more common and more useful every day.

After fiddling with the tool's settings for a few minutes he held it up to his still suited arm and pressed the scan button. Immediately, the scanner's display created a yellow 3d replica of the Kazu structure, and began tracing its circuits and runes in blue. Keagan was immediately surprised by how random and organic looking the living suit's structure was compared to his original template.

"Is that... me?" Kazu said with a mystified tone. "I didn't know I was so complicated!"

"Oh, you have no idea," Keagan replied as he moved the scanner around to help it cover a wider area. He had been well aware that when he decided to use adaptive alteration magic to "grow" the suit's mana circuits and faux muscle structure it might turn into something that he barely understood, but he hoped that with his new tool he would be able to figure out how his own creation worked again.

As he ran the scanner, Keagan noticed that several statistics involving the suit's mana supply were being generated in the lower left corner of the illusionary display.

.....
Warning: Wild Magic - 1%
Warning: Mana Bleed Detected
.....

Keagan stared for a moment at the indicators as he tried to make sense of them. The wild magic stat meant that there was at least some wild mana in Kazu's system, though the amount was so low he doubted it would actually be causing any problems. The real question was where the mana bleed was coming from. That was something that happened when two sources of mana mix with each other, but there was only one source of mana within Kazu.

After letting out a sigh, Keagan resigned himself to the realization that he still had a lot of work to do before he figured all of this out.

It was hard to tell if it took an instant or an eternity, but eventually Kazu felt itself waking up again. It instinctively tried to flex the various parts of its body to check that everything was working properly, but Kazu quickly sensed that nothing felt right. Its body different, and its range of movement was far more limited.

After taking a few moments to calm itself down, Kazu remembered that its maker had put its control crystal into a new body. Even though it had tried to mentally prepare itself for the switch, the sheer number of differences it found had sent its mind reeling. Fighting through the confusion it found itself in, Kazu slowly tried to familiarize itself with its new form.

While its original body was thin, empty, and flexible, this new golem body felt quite solid. The most startling realization was that this body's muscles were on the *inside* rather than lining the surface. It was similar to the way its tails had felt as a living suit, but now its entire body was built that way. Further adding to the new body's alien feel was the way its fur was wrapped around itself rather than being a direct part of its body. It felt incredibly strange, but since Kazu figured this was what a real fox's body was supposed to be like it did its best to cope with the changes.

Eventually, Kazu's disorientation gave way to excitement, and it began testing its movements one by one. The tail was by far the easiest part to handle, since controlling a single tail was simpler than controlling three. Aside from that, it sensed four legs with multiple joints, a spine, neck, jaw... and eyelids. Kazu would have jumped in surprise when it suddenly found itself able to see, but it hadn't figured out enough about how its new body worked to do more than twitch its tail. It did somehow make a startled yelp, and it took the fox a moment to realize it was the one who had made that noise.

"How does it feel?" Said someone, and Kazu quickly realized that it must have been its maker. He sounded different, probably because of the new hardware, but there was no one else it could be. With some effort, Kazu managed to turn its neck in the direction of the sound and found Keagan looking down at it. The human seemed somewhat larger than before.

Kazu tried opening its mouth to speak, but an animalistic whine came out instead of the words it meant to say. For a moment the suit turned golem panicked as it tried to figure out what went wrong, until it finally realized it had said exactly what it meant to say. Its current speech chip had interpreted the words "this feels very strange" into a fox's "language", which was just a

series of yips, yelps, and whines. Even though it could understand Keagan, it couldn't speak back to him.

The change in languages was incredibly disorientating. Ever since Keagan had gifted it with speech, Kazu had begun thinking in a mix of English and Japanese. Now "Fox" was being added to the mix, and the sudden change was making it hard to think in the same way it used to. Strange thoughts that had never occurred to it before were flowing through Kazu's mind, and it wasn't entirely sure of how to handle this unexpected complication. The golem was just thankful that it could remember enough of the words it had learned from its old language chip to understand its own memories!

Keagan was starting to look concerned, and he knelt down to get a better look at Kazu. "You can understand me right? Just nod if everything is alright."

The fox nodded after hesitating for a moment. Things didn't quite feel alright, but it hoped that it just needed to get used to this new body.

"That's good," Keagan said with a sigh of relief, "Alright, Nira said that you'd have to learn how to use this body the hard way since you weren't pre-programmed for it like original control crystal. Take it slow, and don't forget to use your adaptation rune chip if necessary."

Kazu nodded again, and decided to activate the adaptation chip like Keagan suggested. Its presence felt oddly comforting, since it appeared to be the same chip from Kazu's original body that had allowed it to awaken in the first place. The warmth of the rune chip's magic spread through the golem's body and its mind, and it willed the runes to help it work its new body better. Slowly, mana circuits within the golem began shifting, and its body began making a little more sense to it. As the magic did its work, Kazu tried figuring out how to move its limbs properly.

After spending several minutes gaining an understanding of how its legs worked, Kazu tried standing up on all fours. The adaptation magic was helping, but memories of walking around as Kazunari eventually came to mind as well. With both of these tools the golem slowly found itself able to push itself up on two legs. After struggling for a bit, it figured out how to push up with the other two as well and finally found itself standing on all fours.

For a moment the fox stood there, shocked that it had been able to stand up on its own. For all of its short life it had been totally dependent on Keagan for mobility, but now it had no such limitations. The new sense of freedom that Kazu suddenly felt made it forget its previous caution and it tried taking its first steps, only to quickly fall over with a surprised yelp.

Keagan burst out laughing at the sight of the fox sprawled out on the ground. "Well, it seems like you're going to practice a bit." He stated as he walked over and helped Kazu stand up again. The artificial fox made an indigent yelp at first at the unexpected aid. It had just been

feeling so proud of its newfound independence, but it supposed it would learn to walk much faster with its maker's help.

As the golem took its first few steps, Keagan held it steady to keep it from falling over again. The aid from its maker made Kazu wag its tail excitedly without realizing it. For some reason, the way Keagan kept putting so much effort into helping it despite how unexpectedly it had come into his life truly made it feel happy.

After nearly ten minutes of practice, Kazu was finally able to walk around the room unaided. It was still a long way from the incredible mobility of the foxes it had seen in videos and Keagan's memories, but that didn't hold back Kazu's sheer excitement at this new level of freedom it had. This was leagues better than having to drag itself across the room!

Despite all of this, something didn't feel quite right. Kazu had this sensation that something was missing, that it was empty somehow. The fox paused, to consider this, and realized that this was the same sensation that it had as a suit whenever it went too long without linking to Keagan. It wasn't a suit anymore though, so Kazu couldn't understand why it was feeling this way.

"Alright Kazu, do you think you're ready for a walk outside?" Keagan said as he walked up to the workroom door to open it. "Just keep in mind that we're both going to have to pretend that you're a normal golem. Luckily, from what I have read animal golems are designed with a certain element of randomness to them, so it is unlikely that anyone will notice that you're acting weird unless you do something obvious. Just keep in mind that you're technically supposed to obey any commands that I give you, alright?"

Kazu's ears went flat at the mention of other golems obeying commands. It was a reminder that technically it was alone in the world. It was smarter than an animal and more sapient than a normal golem. The only equals it could talk to were humans, but Keagan had warned Kazu that other humans might think it was dangerous.

The fox shook these thoughts from its head and followed its maker through the open door. It was not going to waste time moping when it had just been handed unprecedented freedom. Plus, Kazu had faith that if it asked Keagan enough times that he would find some solution for this loneliness.

On their way outside, the two of them found James lying on a couch while watching something on one of those handheld computers the humans used. He looked up and gave Kazu a surprised look before turning to speak to Keagan. "It is done? That took longer than I thought it would."

"Man, you have no idea what I had to go through to get this working right," Keagan replied while sounding a bit flustered, "I named it Kazu by the way."

After deciding that it needed to do the best job of acting like a fox that it could, Kazu playfully walked up to James, licked the side of the human's face, and made some whining noises to greet him.

After hesitating for a moment, James smiled and began scratching the top of Kazu's head. "Well, even if its movements seem a bit stiff, 'Kazu' seems to be doing a surprisingly good job of acting like a fox. I expected it to be pretty robotic acting since you're using the control module from your suit."

The scratching that James was giving Kazu were sending signals to the golem's mind, but it didn't feel as good as expected. It appeared to Kazu's body was just giving him basic tactile information. The golem did its best to keep up its act in an effort to suppress its disappointment as it listened to the humans' conversation.

"Control Magicite," Keagan said to correct his housemate, "I gave it some references to work with so it would know how to act."

"Well, I guess if I find you begging for a head scratching then I'll know that your suit took you over," James said jokingly, "So, you were saying this was supposed to teach your suit something?"

"The suit is supposed to help me act like a kitsune," Keagan replied with a hint of anxiety in his voice, "It assists with things like walking digitigrade and controlling the tails. More realistic motions will help with the illusion."

"Right, but it seemed to be doing a good job of that already," James asked with a somewhat perplexed look, "How will this... hey!" He was suddenly interrupted when Kazu lightly nibbled on his hand to interrupt his questioning.

Keagan seemed surprised by Kazu's actions for a moment, but smiled when he realized what the fox was trying to do, "Well, I guess you need to do a better job of petting it next time. Come on Kazu, let's go for that walk."

The two of them quickly left Keagan's still confused friend to his own devices. "Thanks for distracting him," Keagan said quietly when they were far enough away, "I haven't figured out how to explain things to James yet, so I've just been slowly dropping hints I guess."

Keagan sighed, and then continued speaking as he led Kazu through the house, "Let's not worry about that for now. It is time for you to have some fun. Just, please just stay within sight of me, and don't cross any roads without me. I don't need you getting hit by a car."

Keagan lead Kazu through another doorway. As it walked through, Kazu froze as it suddenly realized they were outside. In one direction it could see about a dozen houses along a gray road, along with a few vehicles and people. In the other direction, a dense forest blocked the view. There were no walls or ceilings to block its vision anymore, and its mind whirled in shock at just how big the world was.

Despite having never seen any of these wondrous sights before, the golem found that it recognized many of them. Some combination of things Kazu had picked up from Keagan's memories and its language runes kept it from being totally lost in this new environment, but did little to diminish the joy of discovering these new things for the first time. As Keagan lead the way down the street, the fox looked in every direction to take in as much as it could. It was so distracted by the sights that it completely forgot to act like a fox like it had meant to, and instead followed closely behind Keagan.

Out of everything that Kazu saw during the walk, it found the various animals and golems the most interesting. Aside from a few wild squirrels, almost all the living animals were dogs of various shapes and sizes. The golems were even more varied than the animals, and many of them didn't even have faux fur or skin to hide their true nature.

In one case Kazu found that it wasn't sure if one especially large dog with short brown fur was a golem or not, so it walked closer to get a better look. It got its answer when the creature suddenly began barking furiously at Kazu, and had to be held back from attacking the golem by its owner's leash. Kazu stepped back a few steps in surprised confusion as it tried to make sense of the reaction.

"Kazu, come back here!" Keagan called out with a concerned voice, and the golem quickly came back to its senses and ducked behind its maker's legs.

"Sorry, Baxter doesn't like golems!" Said the dog's owner, a man with dark hair who seemed a lot older than Keagan. Eventually, the angry creature calmed down and walked away after giving Kazu another menacing glance before the man pulled it away.

"Kazu, you'll need to be careful around dogs since it can be hard to know what they'll do," Keagan told the still surprised golem when the other pair was out of earshot, "Even domesticated animals can be unpredictable."

"Just so you know, a telltale sign that a creature is an animal rather than a pet golem is when it is on a leash or behind a fence... usually," Keagan explained when he noticed Kazu looking intently at another dog behind a fence other side of the street. "Animals don't always listen to commands, so they need to be kept under control like you just saw. Of course, golems generally don't act or move as naturally as an animal does, but a lot of them come pretty close."

Kazu unconsciously tilted its ears back as it was reminded that it wasn't moving very naturally either. After all, wouldn't a real fox have run away faster when threatened like that? There were a few things that it found itself doing right, such as wagging its tail, but in many other cases it simply found itself freezing as it wondered what it was supposed to do. The golem found itself wondering where those few instincts it possessed had even come from, and how it could get more of them.

For the next few minutes of the walk, Kazu found itself recalling its earliest memories as it tried to figure out how to continue improving itself. Right when it had been gaining its first hints of awareness, Keagan had been attempting to act like a kitsune while wearing it. The golem's only mission at the time was to help its wearer, so it used Keagan's vague desire to become more kitsune-like to change itself with its adaptation functions. The question was whether Keagan's imagination somehow been able to create a few fox-like instincts for Kazu, or if there was something more to it. Keagan had mentioned several times that he was surprised by just how much Kazu had been able to change itself, so there was definitely something at work that neither of them understood.

In the end, there was only one way to be sure. Kazu reactivated its adaption runes, and willed them to make it more like a real fox. The rune's magic flowed through the golem's body again, though this time it could swear that it felt different. It felt... electric; almost like one of the sensations it felt when it merged with Keagan to become Kazunari.

It was hard to tell if the rune was having any effect, so Kazu simply kept walking with Keagan. However, within a few moments, the electrical feeling from the runes suddenly vanished and the fox golem was suddenly hit by a wave of vertigo. It tripped over only the sidewalk as it felt as if its thoughts were becoming disjointed. The sensation felt something like what had happened when the last Kazunari merge had failed. This time was far worse than before though, and Kazu was barely able to look up to see Keagan looking down at it in a panic before everything went black.

By the time Keagan jogged all the way back to the house with the inactive golem in his arms, he was exhausted and still no closer to figuring out what had happened. Every attempt he had made to "restart" Kazu had failed despite the golem showing every indication that it still had plenty of power remaining. After quickly opening the front door with his handprint, he rushed Kazu's body to his workshop without even attempting to come up with some excuse to his concerned housemate.

After setting the magitek fox down on his workbench, Keagan began pulling out his tools and he once again tried to think of what could have gone wrong. Event though he hadn't found any proof of it yet, Keagan felt certain that he had made another mistake, and that it had caused some sort of short circuit. He was beginning to fear that Kazu's control core might have been

damaged this time. That thought lead Keagan to begin worrying that Kazu was dead and that he wouldn't be able to fix it this time. Even if it wasn't the worst case scenario, he was afraid that Kazu was going to hate him if it turned out that he had messed up again.

Keagan started having trouble focusing on finding the tools he needed as more and more worst case scenarios ran through his head. All he could think of was that he had messed up again, ruined everything, and that Kazu was either dead or going to hate him. Soon, he could feel his heart racing, and he began having trouble breathing.

"No... not now," Keagan said to himself as he braced himself against the table and tried to calm down. No matter what he tried though, his worries about his failure and what Kazu was going to think played through his mind over and over again. Soon, Keagan began gasping for air and feeling faint as his anxiety began exploding.

"Keagan... are you alright?" James was standing in the door that Keagan had left open in his rush to fix Kazu, and he looked even more concerned than before. "You're having an attack, aren't you?"

"I... ", Keagan began to try to come up with some sort of excuse, but couldn't even form words. He glanced at Kazu's motionless body and suddenly felt tears begin to well up in his eyes.

"Focus on breathing," James reminded him as he walked closer and put a hand on Keagan's back, "I think you mentioned breathing helps?"

Realizing that he was going to be of no help to Kazu in his current state, Keagan forced himself to sit down, closed his eyes, and tried to focus on breathing. It felt like the worst panic attack he had dealt with since the one that had led him to quit his old job.

James sat down on the other side of the room, watching to make sure Keagan was alright. "Would it help if you told me what is going on?" James said cautiously as his housemate slowly started to regain his composure, "This seems like a bit much for a malfunctioning golem."

Keagan felt his chest tighten again as he suddenly began worrying about what James would think of him if he knew the truth, but after a moment of indecision he decided he wasn't in the mood to deal with all the secrecy anymore. James was being a great friend by trying to help him, and he didn't feel like misleading him anymore. "The golem..." Keagan began as he tried to put his thoughts in order, "I accidently created a sapient golem suit."

"Sapient... you mean like it is alive?" James said as he tried to understand what Keagan meant, before sending a wide eyed glance over at Kazu's original fursuit body which was lying on another table.

“Yes, the golem core that was running that costume over there woke up and turned the suit into a sort of living thing,” Keagan explained in between gasps for air while doing his best to not freak out about what James was going to think. “It had emotions, and it could talk. I don’t know how it happened... and now I might have messed up and killed it.”

Keagan spent the next half hour explaining everything to James. He told his housemate about how he knew that Kazu was alive even as far back as when it malfunctioned and knocked him unconscious, and about how he had been afraid of what James would think. After that, he talked about how Kazu had developed over time, and even how they had been able to link their minds together.

“Wait, you’re saying now only did you accidentally create a living suit, but it can hook up to your brain and make you think you’re a two legged fox?” James said with a wide-eyed expression as Keagan told him about Kazunari, “I don’t know if you created something incredible, dangerous, or both.”

“Kazu isn’t dangerous,” Keagan replied before glancing at the golem, which was still lying on the table. Talking things over with James had calmed him down a lot, but he was still having to force himself to breathe slowly.

James was quiet for a few moments, as he seemed to be trying to think of the best way to address the situation without sending Keagan into another panic attack. “The way you talked about that thing, you made it sound like you thought of it as a friend.”

“I... I do,” Keagan replied, unable to help but stutter as he worried again about whether he would even be able to fix the golem, not to mention how ridiculous he probably looked to James

“Well, I’m normally wary of crazy magical stuff,” James replied, before his usual grin started to reappear, “After all, stuff like this is just going to make my job as a programmer even more obsolete. However, I have been saying that you should get a pet to help with your anxiety issues anyway. A talking golem suit isn’t quite what I had in mind, but if that’s what it takes...”

Keagan tried to object, but couldn’t help but laugh for a moment. “Well, unfortunately it doesn’t seem to be lower maintenance than a pet,” Keagan said before looking over his tools. “Well, I’d better get started on this. I... I need to make sure I figure out exactly what happened.”

“Are you sure you’re up for that?” James shot Keagan a worried look.

“There’s no way I can relax until I at least make sure I can fix Kazu,” Keagan replied while trying to work up his determination. He had not fully calmed down, but he couldn’t stand the idea of just leaving Kazu lying there while he had a mental breakdown.

“Alright... just let me know if you need anything,” James replied with some hesitation as he got up to leave the room, “Maybe it would be best if I was around the next time you... wear that thing? Just in case it malfunctions again.”

A bit of panic built up again in Keagan’s chest again as he couldn’t help but think about what James was going to be thinking the next time he wore Kazu, but he did his best to suppress it as he answered, “I’ll... keep that in mind.”

After James left him alone, Keagan took a few more deep breaths to keep himself calm and began planning out the best way to proceed. He had already disconnected the golem’s mana supply, so in theory there wasn’t any rush to prevent a short circuit. That was assuming that was what happened at least.

Eventually, Keagan decided that his best option was to use his magitek scanner to check the golem for damage. He also pulled out the hand written notes he had taken about the various readings he had taken on both of Kazu’s ‘bodies’ and its control core in hopes that he’d find some sort of discrepancy. After pausing for a moment to suppress his worries about what he might find, he activated the scanner and began using it to map out the golem’s circuits.

The scanning process took several minutes, but Keagan was relieved to find that it didn’t detect any signs of actual damage within the golem. Kazu’s control core also seemed to be intact, though as usual the scanner was having trouble making sense of the crystal’s magically altered structure. Seeing that there was no damage, Keagan began comparing the scanner’s other readings with what he had in his notes.

In the end, all the other readings seemed perfectly normal as well. Keagan became more than a bit frustrated when he noted that the fox golem technically had better readings than before since it had absolutely no wild magic within it this time. After suppressing another wave of anxiety caused by the lack of a good clues, he found himself getting more curious about the wild magic reading. Every single scan he had taken of Kazu up to that point had detected at least some wild magic, so why wasn’t there any now?

Keagan opened up the fox golem and carefully pulled out Kazu’s control core. After holding the blue diamond shaped magicite up to his scanner for a more direct reading, once again absolutely no wild magic was detected.

After carefully placing Kazu’s crystal into a holder, Keagan began forming the start of a theory. As far as he could tell, there were only two things that could have happened to the wild magic, and he needed to figure out which one it was. He walked over to Kazu’s original fursuit, which was still laying on his other workbench. Upon turning on the suit’s basic systems and starting a scan, a wild magic warning immediately appeared on the illusory display. Within moments, it had detected more than double the amount of wild magic that his last scan from only a few hours ago had detected.

“That doesn’t make any sense!” Keagan said out loud in both excitement and frustration. At this point he was so engrossed with the problem that he was solving that he had almost completely forgotten about the panic attack from earlier. He was beginning to suspect that Kazu’s control core somehow required wild magic to function, which would be both amazing and terrifying if it was true. That meant Kazu had probably brought a small amount of wild magic “fuel” with it when it was transferred into the golem, then shut down when the fuel was used up. The only remaining question then was where the stuff was coming from.

Keagan checked the readout on the scanner again, and noticed another discrepancy: it no longer detected any external magic bleeding into the suit’s systems. That made no sense to him however, since the main difference between the current scan and his previous scan was that Kazu wasn’t plugged into the suit anymore. If Kazu was the source of the wild magic, then he would not have run out. The only other difference was that... he wasn’t currently wearing the costume.

Curiosity overcame Keagan as he began to wonder if the suit was somehow absorbing wild magic from his own body. It was true that life and magic were related to each other, and living things constantly gave off small amounts of wild, unprocessed, mana. However, special devices were usually needed in order to pull mana out of the air and store it within magicite crystals. Usually the amount of mana that a device absorbed from a person was minuscule. Then again, how common were magitek devices which covered a person’s entire body?

Realizing there was a way to test his theory, Keagan pulled out the neural link suit he had worn earlier in the day, and put it under the scanner. As expected, it had a wild magic rating just as high as the golem suit. After noting the number, he quickly traded his clothes for the link suit, and powered it on. Then he sat down with his scanner and waited.

It only took about a minute before the wild magic rating of the neural link suit increased by a point. Keagan found that he was unsure if he should be overjoyed or upset that his theory had been confirmed, since it meant that he had somehow created a device which captured a human’s wild mana. On one hand it had almost certainly lead to Kazu’s awakening... but on the other hand it meant that his entire design for the wearable golems was potentially unsafe.