

A Bug of a Fox

By Sokz

"This is amazing!" Tails said to himself as he leaned closer to the purple chaos emerald spinning slowly in his machine. The rest of the room mirrored its electrical design. There were high tech gadgets along all of the walls, some of them completed and others still awaiting that final touch of inspiration from the two tailed fox. There were tables littered with papers and scribbled drawings, nuts, bolts, screwdrivers, pencils, and all other manners of random things that had been scattered after years of careful research into all manner of technological study.

But, today, Tails' focus was on his newest creation. After Sonic managed to find one of the chaos emeralds lying half buried in the sand on an afternoon run, Tails had been busy trying to figure out its exact properties. So far, the power of the chaos emeralds had been a mystery to them. It was clear that they were incredibly strong and able to do things no other material on the planet ever could, but he wanted to know more. He wanted to find out exactly how they functioned. If he could do that, then he could design machines to better use their strengths.

He didn't know what he hoped to find when he first plopped the emerald into the spinning machine, but the readings he was getting were beyond expectation. If he was understanding this correctly, which he was confident he was, then this emerald had abilities that correspond to space and dimension. If he could just figure out how to harness it, he could create impossible machines that could deform reality. He could use it to travel faster than light, or change the scale of objects, or if he could fine tune it enough, change one object into another.

It would be a long journey to those points though. A lot of careful, meticulous research combined with hours of practice and prototyping. But still, the idea that this was possible was too much to ignore. And, as he stared at the spinning emerald, too much to let slip into the wrong hands.

If Eggman ever realized the true power of these stones, the damage he could cause would be catastrophic! The realization sank like a stone in the fox's belly. "I can't just stand around," he whispered to himself, his eyes never leaving the purple stone. "I need to call Sonic. No, I need to call everyone! We need to find those emeralds!"

He jumped over to his communicator and punched in the commands. Soon the screen of his monitor flashed and staticked to life, the image of his best blue friend greeting him.

"Hey Tails," Sonic said. "What's up?"

"I just discovered something incredible," the fox said hastily. "Something about the emeralds."

"Wow, you seem flustered. Must be big."

"You have no idea," he said with a smile. "Get over to my lab as soon as you can. And radio Silver and Shadow too. We'll need everyone working for this."

“Don’t worry, fast is my middle name.” The hedgehog gave a wink and the transmission cut. Good, with those three hedgehogs on the case, they’d be able to track down the chaos emeralds in no time. Even if they were spread to the ends of the earth, it wouldn’t be more than a jog for Sonic.

His worries fading, Tails hopped down from the stool that rested at the lab table and walked back over to the emerald. There were still a few tests he wanted to run.

For the next ten minutes, Tails carefully typed metrics into his machine and watched as it tested the emerald. Lasers were shot into it, the wavelength of their refractions measured on the other side. He added energy to it in the form of electric fields. He tested how it reacted to the fake emeralds he had tried to produce in the past. Each experiment outputted new data that was as interesting as it was unexpected. Apparently, any agitation caused micro size fluctuations in the space time continuum. So far, all his tests had been small enough to only affect the space inside the crystal. Not very useful, but tantalizing.

Tails looked at the clock that hung over his workstation. Ten minutes had passed since he called Sonic. Knowing the blue blur, he’d be there soon. Even if he was on the other side of the continent, it would only take him a few minutes to make it all the way here.

Still, there was one last experiment Tails wanted to run. He needed to test the limits of the emerald. If its special effects were only reliable in short bursts, then its usefulness would be greatly limited.

The fox typed a few numbers into the machine, then pressed the large red button above the keyboard. A low hum came from the device as it began spinning, followed by a high pitched hum of the capacitor's charging.

Tails could feel the fur on his body stand up slightly, the energy in the room growing. He always liked the feeling, it kind of tickled. But there was no time to play around. With energies this high, he needed to keep careful watch of every metric just in case anything happened.

Refocusing himself, he turned his attention to the machine’s outputs. “Looks normal so far,” he said to himself. “Frequencies are low, power output is within range. Magnetic pulses are minimal and... wait, what’s that?” He leaned closer to the reading. Something seemed off. “Why are the gravitational values suddenly... oh no. No, no, no!” He watched as the values suddenly increased dramatically, much higher than the machine was ever designed for.

As fast as he could manage, he slammed the emergency shutdown button. It clicked, but did nothing more. “Come on!” he shouted as he pressed it again and again, but the machine continued to buzz. The emerald was spinning even faster, a bright light shooting from it. Before Tails could try anything else, a huge flash engulfed him and the entire room.

“Gah!” he shouted as everything went white. He closed his eyes and tried to shield himself. Everything felt fuzzy, and then he was falling.

The two tailed fox hit the ground with an impact, his head spinning from the fall. He placed his hand on his head to try and stop the shaking, but it barely helped. Everything felt off, everything felt wrong, and he still had no idea what had happened.

Slowly, he regained his composure. The ringing in his ears faded to a high pitched hum, and the ground under him stopped moving. His stomach quelled, and his breathing returned to normal. "Uh... what was that?" he mumbled to himself as he pushed himself onto his hands and knees. Blurry eyes opened, and he saw the old gray tile of his laboratory floor. Only... it looked off. There were large pebbles sprinkled across the surface, and it looked rougher than normal. Strange, he always tried to keep things tidy.

When he looked up, things only grew more confusing. Instead of the normal laboratory he had come to call his home, he saw a giant space filled with glowing machines all taller than skyscrapers. There were desks and workbenches along the walls, each a plateau as tall as a mountain. Stools and chairs fit for giants rested close by, with windows thousands of feet high letting in bright sun rays.

It took Tails only a moment longer to realize what had happened. This was his lab... only probably was that he was the size of a bug. "I... I..." he stammered as he stood, his arms shaking from the realization. "I'm... tiny!"

As soon as he said it, he heard a loud bang behind him, one that pounded his chest and almost knocked him over. It was just the door. Someone was on the other side.

"Not good," said the fox as he backed up. He needed to get back to normal as soon as possible. If he was stuck on the ground when the hedgehogs came in, there were only a few ways that could end, and none of them were good. He needed to get back to the machine and the emerald.

He jumped in the air and tried to spin his tails, but the soupy atmosphere was far different than he was used to. Instead of taking off, he simply fell back to the dry tile of his lab. "Oh no," he whispered. "If I can't fly, how am I going to get back up there?" Sorrowfully, he eyed the emerald that still sparkled from the machine so many miles away.

Then his fur stood on end as a creaking sound filled the lab. "Hello?" came a voice deeper and more powerful than any he had heard before. It reminded the little fox of the giant turtles that sometimes moved around the beaches, or some of Eggman's giant robots built to break planets.

When he turned towards the door, all he saw was his friend Silver. Except, of course, he was taller than any living creature Tails had ever seen. He moved forward, lifting his feet above the ground and slamming his boots onto the tile, an earthquake emanating from every step.

Tails quickly ran the calculations in his head. If everything looked this big, and he knew the real size of Silver and the machines, "That means I must only be..." he thought for another moment, "An inch, no half an inch tall. Aw man, that's really small." His twin tails drooped at the realization.

“Hello?” Silver said again, making the fox flinch. The massive hedgehog was looking around the room, clearly confused at the lack of anyone else. When no reply came, he shrugged, then leaned against the wall, content to wait for the others to arrive.

Tails gulped. If he couldn't fly, he only had two choices. The first was to hide and wait for the others to leave, then slowly, painfully, agonizingly climb the thousand foot tall machine to reach the emerald. And then try to turn himself back. Somehow.

He shook his head. That could take days, and a million things could go wrong before then. His only other option was to try and get help, and that meant trying to get Silver's attention. Though the idea of walking any closer to something as utterly massive as Silver made Tails' heart quicken, he knew it was his only real option.

“It's just Silver,” Tails whispered to himself as he closed his eyes and started running towards the hedgehog. “He's your friend. He'd never hurt anyone. Not even a... bug.” He shook his head. “Don't mention bugs, don't mention bugs.”

Though the run only lasted a few minutes, it felt like hours to the little fox. Each step was added to by the anxiety of his situation and the myriad of ways this could work out badly his overactive brain continued to think of. Sometimes he'd look under one of the tables and see a shadowed spot and think how nice it would be to just hide and wait this all out, but his logical side would take over again. This was his only real option, and he couldn't let fear control him. Sonic wouldn't ever just hide under a bunch of boxes, so neither would he!

When he reached Silver's giant boots, he once again questioned that choice. It was startling to see the hedgehog when he was across the room. When he was close enough to touch, close enough to realize that Tails wasn't even as tall as the sole of his boots, all those fears and concerns multiplied. It would be so easy for Silver to smush him into nothing. Just a misplaced step, a shift of his weight, and then CRACK.

Tails shook out his head again. “He's just standing still,” the fox told himself. “Stop overthinking!” He ran forward before he could let his fears overcome him again. When he reached Silver's oversized boots, he jumped upwards and grabbed onto the slight lip where his sole connected to the heavy material that made up the main section of his shoe. After a heave, he pulled himself up.

“There,” the fox whispered as he leaned against the giant boot, feeling the uncomfortable heat of the fabric. “One inch down...” he looked skyward, “Like, a bunch more to go.”

He turned back to the shoe and felt around for a handhold. The leather wasn't the easiest to climb, thanks to its slick surface, but eventually he was able to find small cracks and imperfections that would be enough to support his virtually weightless body. Steadily, he pulled himself upwards, moving one hand at a time.

Tails tried not to think about what he must look like. A little half inch tall fox climbing up his friend's boot. It was embarrassing, both because of his situation and the fact that he was careless enough to put himself into it. Sonic would probably bring this up a thousand times before he let it go.

Those thoughts all came to a sudden end when he was about halfway up Silver's boot. If he could have climbed for a little longer he would have reached the point where it began to level off, and it would have been easy from there. Unfortunately, nothing was easy at the size of a flea.

Another knock came from the door.

"No, not now!" Tails shouted. "Silver, just stay where you... ah!" He screamed as the giant hedgehog pushed himself off of the wall, his feet flexing. Tails screamed and dug his claws into the boot as it swung forward, the momentum first pressing him against the cold leather as it went up, then nearly throwing him as it came down again. As it impacted the floor, he was slammed roughly into the top.

"Silver, please!" He called out, but the giant hedgehog's thunderous footsteps drowned out his pathetic squeaks.

His boot came up again in a second stomp, Tails' body slamming into the surface once more. Even something as simple as his friend walking was too much for him to handle. By the third stomp, one of his hands slipped loose. On the fourth, he was thrown completely.

Tails screamed as he tumbled through the air, then impacted the hard ground roughly. Before he could push himself up, Silver's huge boot slammed into the tile only a few inches away from his tiny body, almost crushing him with the simple movement. It was only by pure luck that he was still alive.

The boy's huge footsteps continued as he made his way over to the door, then opened it. Light from outside flooded into the dimly lit room and caused Tails to squint against the glare. Slowly, his eyes accustomed to the glow and he was able to see who stood outside.

"Hey Silver," Sonic said, his voice just as powerful and booming. "You got the memo too?"

"Yeah, luckily I was in the area," the gray hedgehog answered. "Came right over. Even beat you here."

"Only 'cause I was halfway on the other side of the continent." They both laughed, the pleasant sound so booming that Tails was forced to cover his ears. Before he had recovered, he felt the earth shaking again. Silver had turned and motioned for Sonic to come inside.

"S... Sonic," the little fox mumbled as he watched his best friend's feet slam into the cold tile. He took another step forward, his sneaker lifting into the air before crashing down. Mud that was stuck to his sole exploded out with each heavy impact, leaving faint footprints in his wake. Normally Tails would have insisted he wipe his sneakers outside, but today he had bigger issues.

Sonic was walking right towards him. The booming sound of his footsteps echoed off of the wall, making his ears ring. Tails tried to stand, but the earthshaking impacts made it difficult. He tried to call out for help, but his best buddy was in a different world.

A shadow fell over the two tailed fox as Sonic lifted his sneaker, the sole moving over his head. Tails looked up and saw the rubber sole, hardened after millions of footsteps, compacted into an unforgiving, merciless, bug crushing machine. Mud, dirt, and crushed plants were stuck to the bottom, wedged into his treads and crammed into the narrow gaps. Others were simply crushed against the flat part of his sole.

As it began to lower, Tails' brain went numb. There was no way he could escape it. He couldn't fly away or run fast enough, and there was nowhere to hide. He was going to be crushed by his best friend in the entire world.

The shadow grew darker, then Sonic's foot smashed down.

The impact was so extreme that Tails had no idea what happened. His ears rang and his stomach twisted. He felt like he was going to throw up, while simultaneously feeling pressure from all sides. But he wasn't dead.

As he opened his eyes, the darkness gave him his answer. By some miracle, he had managed to slip in between the thick treads of Sonic's sneaker.

Before he had a chance to be thankful for the terrible stroke of luck, Sonic leaned forward, continuing his stride. As he put more pressure on the sneaker, the treads collapsed further, spreading under his weight as they crushed into the ground. Tails felt his body squeezed by the rubber on either side, his face pressed into the ground by the dirt and mud above him. "S... Sonic..." he moaned as the pressure grew.

When it finally released, he took a much needed breath. Then the ground was pulled from his face as his body peeled off of the tile. His stomach turned again as he was dragged through the air, stuck to the bottom of Sonic's sneaker, crammed between his treads and glued in place by the muck.

"Wait!" he screamed, but it was too late. The hedgehog's foot came down again, the same pressure crushing his body.

Over and over, Sonic walked on top of him, squashing his best buddy deeper and deeper into his treads until Tails was completely encased in the muck. Then, he simply stood on him as he leaned against one of the tables.

"So..." Sonic said. "Any idea where Tails is?"

"Not really," Silver answered. "I haven't seen him."

If only they knew. Tails squirmed as Sonic leaned on him more, the pressure of the giant hedgehog's treads squashing him from all sides. He never wanted to understand a bug before, but now he really felt like an ant. A worthless little waste of life that someone as amazing as Sonic couldn't even be bothered to notice. Why should he have to watch where he stepped? After all, anything small enough to get squashed under his feet didn't matter.

Tails tried to shift into a less painful position, but the pressure all around him made it impossible. Above him, the mud and gunk that had been stomped into his treads pushed down on him, amplified by the weight they supported. His rubber treads expanded to his right and left, and the floor mercilessly pressed on his face from below. He could barely even breathe.

"Please Sonic..." he managed to mumble, a cry only audible to the bacteria crushed in the dirt. "Please get off of me..."

But Sonic didn't move. Above, Tails could hear the low words of his two friends talking, Sonic's voice rumbling through his body and his sneakers. Silver's was harder to hear, but no less intimidating. It was like he was in the presence of two thunderstorms talking to each other, of two gods that had descended into his world.

Tails had no idea how long he was crushed under Sonic's feet. Ten minutes, twenty, maybe longer. Time seemed to pass so slowly in that uncomfortable, claustrophobic prison. When a knock on the door came, and Sonic took a step forward, all Tails felt was relief.

Sonic's foot lifted, and the fox came with it, stuck to the sole. However, when Sonic kicked his foot forward, the momentum was enough to finally rip him free of the muck. He was thrown forward once more, his body landing on the ground in the same unforgiving fashion as when Silver nearly crushed him.

Echoing steps rang in his ears as Sonic walked to the door and opened it. Tails, on the ground, unmoving, was barely conscious of the fact that there was now a third voice booming. He felt too tired to stand. He just wanted to close his eyes and recover. Maybe, if he slept, he'd wake up and this would all be a bad dream. He'd tell Sonic about it, leaving out one or two details, and they laugh about how silly this whole thing was. Yeah, that's just how it would go.

A sudden stomp so powerful that it threw the fox into the air startled him out of his dream. His eyes shot open and he saw feet stomping on the ground around him. First Silver's boot fell only an inch away, nearly crushing his body. Then Sonic's sneaker hovered over his head, the heel slamming into the ground only a pace away.

Just when he thought he was safe, another pair of feet slammed down on either side of him, the impact as jarring as it was unexpected. When the pebbles settled and the hedgehogs stopped moving, Tails was able to see what happened.

They had simply walked over to him and were standing in a circle, talking about why they were called. Sonic stood to his left, Silver to his right... and Shadow stood over him. When Tails lifted his head, craning his neck to see straight above, he saw the black hedgehog's powerful legs on either side like spires of some ancient city. Then, beyond, he saw the crossed arms and annoyed scowl of the ultimate lifeform.

Tails felt intimidated by Shadow even when they were normal sized. Now that he was large enough to crush him without even a thought, the comparison was beyond words. Tails found his arms shaking and sweat forming on his forehead. He needed help, but he could barely move.

"What is the reason for this meeting?" Shadow asked, his voice deeper than the other's and more physical. "Why am I here?"

"Don't know," Sonic answered with his casual charm. "We're just waiting for Tails."

"I better not wait long."

Tails gulped at the words. His eyes lowered from Shadow's massive body, down to the feet on either side of him. Unlike Sonic and Silver, his shoes were made with metal soles, and nozzles on the underside that spit fire when he ran. Suddenly, Tails was overcome with the mental image of a mountain of bugs, all burned to death as he ran.

But he needed his help, and he needed to get his attention. "I can do this," the fox whispered to himself. "I just need to..."

Shadow suddenly shifted his weight. It was a simple thing, the type of motion so minor most people wouldn't have even noticed. But for Tails, it was horrible. The hedgehog's giant foot shifted towards him, the metal sole rushing forward. Before Tails could run, it slammed into his body and pushed him over, the impact jarring and painful.

He rolled, came to a stop, heard the impact of Shadow's shoe coming down on the floor again, then felt pain shoot up from his back end. "Ah!" he shouted as the sharp sensation continued. Tails tried to run away from the huge sole, but when he did, he found himself suddenly yanked backward.

His tails were trapped under Shadow's shoe. "No, no, no!" the fox hastily shouted as he turned to see what had happened. The ends of both of his tails were trapped under the metal sole, held tightly by the millions of pounds of pressure above. He tried to tug on them again, but there was no way he'd be strong enough to free himself. "Shadow!" he called desperately. "Shadow, please move!"

"This is foolish," the black hedgehog said to the others. "I don't have time to wait around."

"Relax," Sonic said. "It's Tails. When has he ever steered us wrong before?"

"Hm," the other angrily hummed. "I suppose. Fine."

"Thanks, Shadow," Silver spoke. "I'm sure he'll appreciate your patience."

Sonic nodded, then glanced at the ground. If his eyes had been better, maybe he would have seen the orange fox desperately trying to free himself from Shadow's weight. He could have jumped to his aid and helped, freeing his little buddy. But instead, Sonic only saw the dirty footprints the trio had made on their way in. "Oh no," he whispered, turning to the others. "Tails hates it when I get sneaker tracks in his lab. Would you guys mind taking off your shoes?"

"Of course," Silver answered. "No problem." He leaned down to undo the clasps on his boots.

Shadow gave a labored sigh. "This better not be some trick. I can run faster than you with or without my rocket sneakers."

"Sure," Sonic smirked.

In front of him, Tails watched as Sonic slipped out of his sneakers, his heavy blue feet returning to the ground with a slight plap. He could practically see the droplets of sweat rolling off of the hedgehog's skin, coating the cold tile.

To his right, Silver did the same, his toes flexing once they touched the ground.

Then he felt movement above him. Shadow reached down and unclasped his shoes without looking, a mechanical strap releasing its hold on his foot. A great weight was released from the fox's twin tails as he lifted his huge foot into the air, then placed it on the ground out of sight.

"Finally," Tails breathed as he tugged his back end loose. He stumbled forward a bit, his limbs still throbbing, but otherwise intact. He breathed for a moment and let himself recover, then his resolve returned. This was a bad position for him to stand in, he needed to get as far away from these giants as he could!

He turned and ran, sprinting as fast as his little legs would take him. He chose to run away from the group, moving between Shadow's legs, then past his heel, dashing as quickly as he could manage towards the underside of one of his machines. If he could just make it, he'd be safe from their unaware stomps.

Behind him, he could hear their conversation continuing. Their voices rolled over him and echoed in his ears, but he ignored them as best as he could. He just needed to keep running. That's the only thing that mattered.

Above him, he saw the glimmer of the purple emerald. How ironic that he was running towards the machine that had shrunk him, hoping for safety. He laughed at the idea before one of the hedgehogs said something that made his blood run cold.

“Maybe,” Silver began, “It’s got something to do with that emerald?”

“Hey, that’s not a bad idea,” Sonic said. Though Tails didn’t look back, he felt the ground shake. Sonic had taken a step forward. He might not be wearing his sneakers, but his weight alone was enough to travel through the tile.

It came again, stronger this time, accompanied by the wet sound of his sweaty sole being peeled off of the tile as he lifted it up to take another step. Tails’ heart was racing and he felt those anxieties again. Sonic was walking closer, his eyes on the emerald and not the ground when he stepped. “Please, please...” Tails begged, but it wasn’t enough.

He saw the shadow again. He felt the heat radiating off of his friend’s foot, and knew what was about to happen even before he turned to look. Sonic had swung his giant foot forward as he took a step, and it was about to come down.

“Wait!” Tails screamed, but his voice was muffled by the tones of flesh above him. Sonic’s foot came down, the firm side of his sole pressing into the little fox. In an instant, Tails felt his world enveloped by hot flesh. Sweat droplets too small to normally be seen rolled over his face and body. The scent of his best friend’s toes rolled around him and smothered him.

Then the pressure came. It was worse than when he was trapped between his treads, the pressure of Sonic’s entire body leaning on him. He tried to shout out in pain, but nothing escaped his compressed lungs. The pressure grew and grew until he was sure that he was going to pop, before suddenly lifting completely.

Light poured back onto his tired body as he was left lying in a thin pool of Sonic’s foot sweat, the hedgehog walking off of him.

He breathed desperate gulps of air, but it wouldn’t last. His humiliation was not over. A bug can never go long without finding itself underfoot.

A shadow loomed over him again, and when he looked up, he saw light colored fur. “Silver...” he mumbled before the hedgehog’s foot slammed down. Once more, Tails felt his body compress as the huge creature leaned on him, pressing him into the forgiving ball of his foot and enveloping him completely. Though it was less cruel than Sonic’s, slightly less painful and brutal, the humiliation was somehow worse. He looked up to Sonic and Shadow and recognized them as true heroes of the world, but Silver was closer to him. An airhead that made mistakes, someone that loved to have fun. They were on the same level, but now... now Tails was nothing more than another part of the floor.

The pressure grew as Silver continued his step, crushing Tails, rubbing his sweat onto his body and crushing the air out of his lungs. His eyes teared up as he felt his limbs bending, then the pressure released. This time he stuck slightly to the underside and was dragged forward before being thrown onto the ground.

Everything felt fuzzy as the ground vibrated around him. He couldn't see straight, and every breath was tainted by the murky taste of their foot sweat. Tails tried to push himself onto his hands and knees, but his body felt too weak. All he managed to do was roll over onto his back.

And then he saw Shadow. The giant hedgehog, the ultimate lifeform, a god to everything that lived in Tails' new world of insects and bacteria. He loomed overhead, his fur moving with his steps, his huge quills intimidating and powerful in every way.

He shifted forward, his bare foot lifting up and moving over the tiny fox. It eclipsed the giant hedgehog's face, shrouding Tails in a dark aura that was as overpowering as it was threatening. The little fox didn't even try to move, he knew there would be no point to it. He was nothing compared to Shadow. If he wanted to step on the tiny fox, that was what was going to happen, even if he didn't even know it.

As the foot came down, racing towards the earth with a million pounds of mass behind it, Tails was given a brief instant to see the details of his future. Deep lines traced the hedgehog's paw, the grooves of his skin that were practically too small to see at normal size, but now looked like heavy ridges. Tails saw the dirt trapped near his toes, the beads of sweat that had pooled together on the bottom of his sole, and the few specks of lint that came from the white lining of the inside of his shoes. Soon, he would be just another speck on that foot, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Tails closed his eyes and tried to brace himself, but there was no action in the universe that could prepare him for what was about to happen. Shadow's huge foot crashed onto the tiny fox, completely smothering him under the fleshy part of his sole. In an instant, the fox was trapped under the huge foot, completely cut off from the rest of the world as his thick, unforgiving skin molded around the tiny body. All light was shut out and he was left in darkness, Shadow's foot squashing him from all sides.

He tried to scream again, but his face was muffled by the hot, sweaty mountain of flesh on top of him. He tried to squirm, but his arms and legs were pressed firmly into the ground without a chance of moving. Then the hedgehog continued his walk and leaned on the little fox more, the pressure growing.

Tails felt the giant's weight pressing down on his face, forcing his jaw open. His tongue was pressed against the salty skin against his will, his taste buds alight with the overwhelming flavor of the domineering god. Bubbles of sweat moved onto his tongue, then flowed down his throat.

By the time Shadow completed his step, an action that took less than a second, Tails felt completely defeated. Dominated. Humiliated under the feet of a larger male that was his better in every single way.

But this time, when the giant went to take a step, as his sweaty sole peeled off of the cold tile, Tails came with him. The slight sheen of sweat coating his foot was enough to adhere the fox to his skin, the bond unbreakable as he swung his paw forward and slammed it into the ground again.

Tails tried to beg for it to end. He whimpered and pleaded with Shadow, cried out for help and hoped that someone would listen, but it was pointless. He was only a bug, and a bug is meant to be trampled under a god's foot.

“What is this thing?” Shadow asked, unamused, when they came to the purple emerald and the machine housing it. He stood in place, unaware of the continuous pressure he was applying to the bug under his right sole.

“Don’t know,” Sonic said, rubbing his chin as he looked closer. “One of Tail’s inventions.”

“But what does it do?” Silver asked.

Sonic shrugged. “Your guess is as good as mine.”

“Tch,” Shadow turned his head away. “There’s no point guessing. If that fox has something to tell us, he shouldn’t keep us waiting.”

“Aw, relax Shadow,” Silver tried to say. “It’s a nice day. We can wait around a little longer. Pull up a chair, get comfy.” The hedgehog lifted his hand and concentrated his psionic powers, pulling three of the chairs towards them. He took a seat in the one closest to him, leaning back comfortably. Sonic did the same.

After a few seconds, Shadow rolled his eyes and sat in his chair, his arms still crossed and a perpetual look of annoyance still on his face.

What he didn’t realize was how much the movement meant for the tiny fox under his sole. The pressure on him was smothering, crushing, and painful in the worst possible way. Tails was sure he was going to die as Shadow simply stood on him, but as the hedgehog sat, the pressure became bearable. A tiny river of clean air made its way through the giant’s toes, and he was able to breathe again. It was salty breaths, tainted with Shadow’s sweat, but at least it was air.

“So,” Sonic began. “Either of you seen Eggman’s robots in the South?”

“Yes,” Shadow answered. “My team has been keeping an eye on them. We believe he has a mine in that region.”

“A mine, huh? Know what he’s digging for?”

As the conversation continued, Tails listened with quiet longing. Though the words were muffled by the foot resting on top of him, he could still make out Sonic’s voice. Silently, he hoped that his best friend would somehow find him, and that he could rescue him from this horror like he had done so many times before. Tails could always count on Sonic, but this time it felt different. It felt like he might really end up crushed.

And on the bottom of Shadow’s foot, no less.

He almost didn't want to be found anymore. How could he ever explain this to anyone? He had gotten himself shrunk because of his own carelessness, then was stepped on by the others. Silver, Shadow, even Sonic had unknowingly trampled him under their massive soles. Would he ever get the stink of their foot sweat out of his fur?

The idea made him want to run away and hide. He'd never be able to tell Sonic what happened. If he did, he'd never be able to look at him the same again. Already it was starting to feel like they were different creatures entirely. Maybe it would be better if no one found him, and he managed to crawl off of Shadow's foot and eventually turn back to normal himself. Then he could spend a week cleaning his fur and pretend that he was captured, or ran away for a while. Anything would work as long as he didn't have to admit what happened.

His thoughts were interrupted as Shadow shifted in his seat. His foot was lifted as he crossed his legs, the tiny fox suddenly exposed to the air, still stuck on the now horizontal paw of the ultimate lifeform.

"W... wha?" Tails tried to say as the light hit him. It took a few minutes to fully realize where he was, and what happened. Above him, sweat rolled down Shadow's heavy foot, pooling on his face and body. At least he wasn't being stepped on anymore, and he could breathe fresh air again.

The giant's voices were even louder. He could hear them all around him now, unmuffled by Shadow's foot. For a second, it almost felt like he was back in the real world again, surrounded by his friends. Then a glob of sweat dripped into his eyes and face, and he was reminded of the bug he was.

After a few minutes, he felt like he had the strength to peel himself off. Or, at least try. The tiny fox struggled against the sticky grasp of Shadow's sole, but he found the surface tension of the sweat nearly impossible to break. He pulled at his arms and legs, trying to yank one of them free. He pressed his waist into Shadow's foot to pop out his chest, but nothing he did worked. No matter how much he struggled, he couldn't get as much as a single finger free from the giant's sole.

Then he felt a sinking feeling in his belly, like someone was watching him. Painfully, Tails lifted his head and looked out into the world, only to see Silver's eyes staring down at his tiny body from across the distance.

"S... Silver," Tails whispered, feeling dread in his stomach. Half of him wanted to be found and rescued, but the other half knew what this must look like. A simple bug squirmed on a giant's foot. The type of thing that should be wiped out and exterminated. He wanted Silver to just look away and forget about him, but the world doesn't care what a bug wants.

Silver had spotted the small yellow object when he glanced at Shadow's foot. At first, he didn't think much of it, assuming it was a piece of trash or a bit of debris. But then it started to move, and he realized it was alive. Silver didn't know when Shadow had stomped on the insect, and he had no idea how it was still alive, but the entire situation was oddly funny.

He chuckled as he glanced at Sonic's sneakers, resting nearby, an idea coming to him. Silver wasn't usually one for pranks, but they had some time to kill while waiting for their host to return. He casually lifted his fingers and concentrated on the bug, his psychokinetic powers wrapping around the fox.

With a slow, painful pull, Tails was peeled off of the sticky sole of his god. Sweat still clinging to his body, Silver then moved the tiny fox across the ground, just out of sight of the others, then hovered him over the entrance to Sonic's sneakers.

Tails feebly struggled when he realized what was about to happen. He saw the dark pit of Sonic's sneakers below, and though he didn't realize what Silver was thinking, he tried everything to stop it. "Please!" he begged. "Silver, it's me! I'm not a bug, don't drop me in there!"

He frantically fought to escape the psychokinetic fingers gripping him, but they held him fast. Silver's abilities were enough to manhandle and dominate him even with just a little bit of concentration. He spun his tails and kicked his legs, but it was pointless.

He could practically hear the hedgehog telling him, "It's no use."

Then, without warning or hesitation, the psychokinetic fingers released him. Tails tried to fly, spinning his twin tails as fast as he could, but the air refused to give him any lift. He fell past the fabric lining of Sonic's sneakers, traveled into the darkness of the shoes, then impacted hard against the soft sole.

His body bounced and rolled along the path crushed into the rubber after millions of steps, stopping only when he reached the lowest point of his heel. There, Tails pushed himself onto his hands and knees and looked out from the opening so far above, the light of the world turned a slight tint of green by the fumes.

"S... Sonic," he whimpered. "Please help me. Please..."

Above, back in the normal world, a few more minutes passed. The hedgehogs continued to discuss the world and Eggman's movements until there was nothing left to talk about. As the clock ticked on, they sat and waited in silence.

Sonic was never good at waiting. He fidgeted in his seat, looked around the room, tapped his foot, then finally stood up. "Alright, that's it," he said as he stepped over to his sneakers. "I'm going for a run. If Tails gets back, call me."

"Wait, Sonic," Silver tried to say. "What if it's important?"

"For once," said Shadow as he stood, "I agree with Sonic. I don't have time to sit around. If it was important, he would have met us by now."

"Well... I guess that makes sense." Silver shrugged. "Guess I can stick around for a bit more. Call you if he shows up."

“Sounds good,” Sonic answered as he slipped one foot into his sneaker, then went to put on the other. He didn’t bother looking down. If he did, he might have seen the tiny form of his friend, terrified and begging him to stop.

Tails starred out from within Sonic’s sneaker with complete terror. He watched as his best friend pressed his toes into the opening and wiggled them menacingly, the fabric of his sneaker bending and flexing under the sudden pressure. Soon he gave up on shouting, the shadow falling over him locking his fate. The fox jumped up and ran, but there wasn’t any point in it.

Sonic’s foot moved over his head, then rolled over him as his impossibly heavy foot slid into his sneaker. When his heel hit the ground, Tails found himself crushed under the squishy section of Sonic’s paw, near his toes and completely trapped once more. The pressure grew as he fastened them tightly, then kicked his toes to make sure they were on securely.

“Alright, see you two later,” Sonic said as he took his first steps to the door, unaware of the tiny pebble pressing into the underside of his sweat-soaked foot.

For the next few hours Tails would be trapped in the oven that was Sonic’s shoe. Pressed on by his foot, trapped within the confines of the quickly worsening fabric. Every breath was polluted by his sweat and burned from the heat. He squirmed, he begged, he did everything he could just for Sonic to feel him under his crushing steps, but he was just too little to notice.

As the hours dragged on, Tails could only think of one thing. He wished, more than anything, that he had never meddled with that purple chaos emerald.