

Chapter 5

Three weeks later on a Thursday morning, Rick was riding to the con in a van with Jim, Liz (Sheila Folf), and George (Cantaloupe Raccoon). He recognized the two fursona names from social media but had never met them before. They hit it off pretty good on the 3-hour drive to Snow Mountain Resort in north central Vermont.

“Well, as the prototype suit isn’t my Pistachio, I need to come-up with a different name for the weekend. This is also your chance, Jim, to pretend to be someone else just for the weekend. Once you show your ID at check-in, they’ll print whatever name you want to be called on your badge.”

“As a ‘normie,’” Jim paused a moment from the driver’s seat. “That’s the term, right?” The others nodded. “I just might go by my real name and confuse everyone. For me this is still work as I’ll be one of Rick’s...er...Pistachio’s, or whatever he chooses to call himself, handlers.”

“What species is your squirrel, again?” Liz asked from the backseat.

“Pistachio is a Eurasian red squirrel, but if you’re referring to the suit, it’s a Malabar giant squirrel. They’re found in forests in India,” Rick replied, calling up photos on his phone to show her. “Every few years, photos of them go viral on the net.”

“A real-life sparkle animal,” Liz stared in wonder. “They really are colorful. I can’t believe something in real life looks like it’s someone’s made-up fur color scheme.” She was quiet for a moment in thought. “How about something simple like, Mal or Mel?”

“Or perhaps, Maize,” George suggested as he gazed at the photos. “They’re as colorful as some varieties of Indian Maize.”

“What is it with you and food?” Liz teased back.

George did his best imitation of a raccoon giggling. “Well, I am a raccoon, right? I’m always thinking about food.”

Liz closed her eyes briefly. “Or tipping trash cans.”

Rick rolled both names around in his head. “I think I’ll go with ‘Mal’ or ‘Mel’ for now and see what others at this con think. Maybe it will be a temporary name and we can have other attendees come up with suggestions.”

Rick enjoyed the chatting on the drive up. He didn’t get down to southern New Hampshire to meets all that often due to a combination of the nature of his job with its unpredictable schedule. The local fur scene near Groton was mostly students and as the student group advisor, he didn’t feel he really fit in as well at their gatherings. ‘Mr. Stash’ was who they turned to when they had questions on college policy and how it related to whatever they had in mind to do as a group. The conversations so far on this trip felt better, more natural.

A few hours later at the resort, room check-in was quick. The four of them were sharing one room. Inside his head, Rick was a bit hesitant on this at first due to his conservative-side upbringing. It was something he had fought against inside his head for a long time. He relaxed a bit when he saw the two folded army-style cots as they were transferred from the back of the van to the heavy duty folding Universal-Cart™ he had borrowed from WMSU for the trip.

The ‘room’ turned-out to be a mini suite with a small kitchenette, dining, and seating area on one side and a separate bedroom with two queen beds on the other. The two rooms were connected by a short hallway with the bathroom off it between the two rooms. They could easily put a cot in each room, giving Liz some privacy. Rick opted for the other knock-off army cot indicating as a former camp counselor he was used to them.

Being early afternoon and pre-registration didn’t open until 7, they had several hours to kill. On the drive up, both Liz and George indicated they had assisted with some of Rick’s suit design, but neither had seen the finished product. Rick agreed to put it on to show them, especially after Jim suggested it would be good to run another set of quick tests and then make sure it was fully charged. Rick stepped into the bathroom to change into the union suit/onsie while Jim pulled the suit out of its case. Both Liz and George looked the suit over and were impressed. Rick came back out with his street clothes draped on his arm. He laid them on his claimed cot. He sat down and accepted the suit from Jim.

“So, what were your contributions to this?” Rick asked as he slipped into the suit and closed the seam.

“I worked on integrating the cooling system,” George stated proudly. “I was my suggestion that we use the tail for heat dissipation. But this is the first time I’ve gotten to see the completed suit.”

“And it has worked well so far,” Rick replied and then slid the head on, closing his eyes, and pushed the button, then slipped on the hand paws.

“I’m responsible for the computer interface,” Liz responded. “Like George, I hadn’t seen the completed suit before now.”

The suit quickly sealed itself, surprising both Liz and George. Rick opened his eyes to the forward-facing camera. He switched to squirrel vision and then switched forms from anthro-crouch to feral squat. “So, it’s you, George, I have to thank for the wagging tail.” The tail wigwagged up and down. “And you, Liz, for enabling me to have control over that and this.” Rick giggle-chittered and twitched his ears.

“Wait. I recognize that, but I haven’t heard it since I was a kid,” Jim cut in. “Is that the Almond Clusters™ cereal squirrel laugh?”

“Yup,” Rick responded. “I found a descent recording of it on the net. I’ve programmed in several other squirrel calls.” He played through some of them.

“What was that last one?” Liz asked. “It sounded something like a scared chitter mixed with a growl.”

“Basically, you got it. It was a recording of a squirrel cornered in someone’s shed. A very scared squirrel ready to fight as it was cornered and it wasn’t going to surrender easily.”

Liz/Sheila giggled. “Sort of like if my wolf/fox hybrid thought of you as dinner and tried to corner you.”

Rick slowly nodded as he eyed her warily. His ears shot straight up and his tail went up his back and then whipped about in a circle over his back as he slowly backed away from her. (CHITTERGROWL) “You won’t take me alive, folf!”

Liz/Sheila played along, getting down on all four and approaching Rick, who backed against a wall. “I’ve got the cunning of a fox and the appetite of a wolf, squirrel snack. But who said anything about taking you alive? I’m not into vore. I like to chew my meal.” She gently booped his nose.

“Scree!” Rick dropped to his side and played like he was dying, body and tail occasionally twitching.

Everyone laughed including Jim as Rick sat back up.

“You’re good at this.” George praised. “You ever suit before?”

Rick scuffed a foot paw and looked down. “Well, no. Not prior to testing this suit, unless you count Halloween costumes when I was a kid. My Mémère,” he paused at their expression. “That’s French for Grandmother. She made me a squirrel costume back when I was seven. It was the closest thing I’ve ever had to a fursuit. I loved that costume. I hesitated to get a suit for years, partially, ‘cause of that costume. I wanted something that would outdo my childhood memories in some ways. Also, well, look at me. My fursona is a feral squirrel. I didn’t want an anthro suit that just looked like a squirrel. I wanted to be able to pretend to be one right down to the wigwagging tail. I had considered trying my own hand at it, but I had no clue how to make the tail work, even if it only moved as I moved. All the video tutorials I could find on the net are for canine-type tails that droop downward. A squirrel tail goes every which way.” He made his tail twitch about for emphasis.

“Nothing would have done that justice without the robotics your team built into this.” He briefly put his hand paws on his tawny brown chest in emphasis. “I’ve had fun during the testing phase. More fun than I thought I’d have. I can’t thank you three or the rest of your team enough. I’m really looking forward to Mal’s debut this weekend.” He chittered. The tail flicked up and down once. “And unless others don’t like the name, that’s what I think I’ll go with for this suit, ‘Mal.’”

Jim had his tablet out. “Why don’t you show them how close you can mimic the real thing, ‘Mal.’ Scamper into the kitchen area and back.”

“Gladly. It’ll help me stretch a bit.” Mal did so with his tail flicking slightly up and down with each four-paw hop. When he paused to turn around, it flicked sideways. He returned back into the bedroom. He then proceeded to pretend to wash his face acting like he was licking his paws and then brushing them against his head. He then held his hand paws up in front of him much like a dog begging. “Chitter, chitter, scree...Can I haz a nut pweaze?” The tail wigwagged up and down once.

Liz and George started to giggle again.

“You’re a natural.” George praised. “I see why the boss brought you on board.”

“We’ve got suits too,” Liz added pointing to George and herself. “As we mentioned on the drive up. I’ve had mine for years. It’s not high tech like yours, though the eyes do glow.”

“Ditto, except no glowing eyes,” George added. “Maybe I’ll have a programmable tail in version 2. I love how yours wigwags.”

“Well, you’re the one who came up with the idea, George” Jim piped in. “You could propose to Nate about getting your suit retrofitted with an animated tail.” He tapped an icon on his tablet. “It looks like everything is running smoothly. You should probably take it off and plug it in.”

George’s eyes lit up with excitement. “You know, that’s a brilliant idea, Jim! I wonder if he’s even thought about that angle. Someone might not be able to afford the cost of a full suit like this. However, they might be willing pay for an animated tail.”

Rick went through the steps and pulled the head-off. He slipped out of the suit and plugged it in as he had learned how to do.

“I never saw the finished head and suit before today,” Liz stated. “May I look at my handiwork?”

Rick turned the head over for her to examine.

“Could I give this a try?”

Rick glanced towards Jim. “I have no issues with them trying it, Jim. As you’re in charge, I’m turning to you for permission. They’re part of your team. It would be easier for them to sales pitch if they have experienced it, right?”

Jim nodded. “That makes perfect sense. Go ahead. But keep in mind it was fitted for ‘Mal’, so it may not fit either of you as comfortably.”

Rick showed her where the button was and warned her of the earbuds. Liz pulled an alcohol wipe out of a first aid kit in her suitcase. She sat and swabbed down the edges of the goggles and earbuds. “Pardon my caution. I’ve been good at avoiding con crud over the years as a result.” She waited a moment for the alcohol to evaporate, and then tried the head on. After a moment,

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

she accessed the menu. “Wow, the retina display works better than I thought it would.” She expanded the vision and nearly fell out of her chair. “Holy shit!” she exclaimed as she slowly turned her head about. “This is really weird. How do you handle this? I need to switch this back to normal.” She paused a moment, “that’s better. I was quickly developing a headache from that wide-angle view.”

“To be honest, I’m not sure how I handle it. I just do.” Rick shrugged.

The fursuit tail wigwagged. Jim glanced at it and jotted some notes on his tablet. “Apparently, the wifi between the suit and head is turned up higher than necessary. Would you mind activating a tail command again, Liz...er...Sheila? I’m going to have a hard time with switching our names this weekend.”

“Don’t worry about it, Jim,” George cut in. “You know we’ll respond to you if you use our ‘normie’ names.”

The suit’s tail wigwagged sideways again.

“That’s enough for me,” Liz stated and she reached-up to power off the head. After a moment she pulled it off. She again swabbed down the edges of the goggles and the earbuds. “Care to try?” she asked holding it out to George.

“Sure.” He gave it a shot and agreed that the squirrel vision was difficult to get used to. He, too, was able to make the detached suit’s tail wigwag while sitting several feet away from it.

“I might need to reduce the strength of that signal,” Jim muttered. “We wouldn’t want someone to think it’s a router and try to log into the suit. Or once there’s a bunch of our suits out there, we wouldn’t want someone to cause everyone’s tail to wigwag in unison.”

“That would make quite the gag scene for a video,” Rick chuckled.

“This’ll just take a moment. Please keep the head on, George.” Jim tapped an icon on his tablet and slid his finger downward. “Try to make the tail wigwag again.”

Nothing happened. George moved closer. Still nothing. He basically had to pick-up the suit for the tail to respond.

“Better. I don’t know about the rest of you, but I’m thinking it’s time to find something to eat.” They agreed.