

Shady Impressions: With a Side of Snoot

By: RaddaRaem

“Do remind me, yet again, why you felt it necessary to summon me?” Eyes half-shut, the kitsune padded noiselessly through the aisles of the subterranean library. Four wispy tails dragged along the spines of the countless books lining the shelves. *“I see no demons, monsters, or riffraff currently threatening your well-being.”*

Trudging after him, Tyr kept his tongue sheathed. He had anticipated that Xis would be uncooperative, as per usual. Still, knowing that from the get go didn't make it any less irritating actually interacting with him.

“If your life is in no danger, then I fail to see why I am needed here.” Narrowing his gaze, the four legged fox's concentric eyes focused intently on his summoner.

Rolling his eyes, the orange fox grew impatient with the kitsune's spiel. “Every single time...” Flinching, Tyr was forced to take a few steps back when a pointed white and red muzzle forced its way into his face.

“I expect there to be a reasonable justification each and every time you drag me to your side on a whim. Now provide one.” Creasing back his black lips, the kitsune revealed an intimidating set of teeth. Even on all fours, Xis still had a couple inches on the fox.

“...I called you forth because I wanted to ask you a question,” Tyridia stated plainly. The guttural growl rumbling forth from the kitsune's throat subsided. A bared set of ethereal teeth still hovered in front of his nose.

“Go on.”

“You know that gargantuan tome Master put together that compiled all of her research on demons and dark magic?” A snort of hot air from the kitsune's snout forced him to blink and reel away in response.

“What of it?”

“Skimming through it, I found a lot of sections raised more questions than answers. Heck, the few pages devoted to the origin of demons was a prime example. It basically amounted to a super verbose ‘hell if we know’ and a shrug. Thing is, that got me doing some thinking of my own.” Tyr relaxed his posture and breathed a sigh of relief when Xis retracted his muzzle. “That uncertainty about the origin of demons made me ponder on the origin of spirits... and I found myself at just as much of a loss! I've always known spirits were there... and just kind of took that for granted.”

“Tch. Is that all? Did you not think to consult one of the myriad of texts Nadie has supplied you with?”

“Of course I did! None of them were as helpful as I had hoped though.” His white tipped tail having gone limp, Tyr rubbed a clawed hand along an arm. “Course I looked to a book first. Those things don’t mouth off at me,” he mused in frustration. “The explanations offered were all over the place. Spirits are just another kind of ghost. Spirits come about when there is a high enough concentration of life and magic in close proximity. Spirits are this, spirits are that.”

“Hmmp. So instead of divulging the truth through the sweat of your brow you come groveling to me?” Turning his back on Tyridia with a swish of his tails, Xis’ claws clacked against the stone floor as he departed.

“Figured you would be knowledgeable on the subject and could point me in the right direction was all.” Mumbling, Tyridia kicked at the floor soon after the kitsune had slunk out of sight. Meandering out into the aisle, he yelped when a set of teeth gently clamped around his wrist. Struggling to keep his balance, the fox hopped along while the kitsune dragged him forward. Coming to a stop at a set of tables situated in the center of the library, Tyr was pleasantly surprised to see rolls of paper, an ink pot, and a quill waiting for him.

“Since I can’t stand the thought of you possibly entertaining that garbage as anything remotely approximating the truth,” the kitsune dismissively turned his nose up at a pile of tomes splayed out upon the other tables, *“I suppose it falls on me to guide your inquiries.”* Easing the fox into a chair with some prodding from his tails, Xis looked over the timid little two-legger. *“Do keep in mind that the quality of the answers I provide is wholly dependent on the questions you put forth. Oh, and you would be wise to hinge on every syllable I utter. I am in no mood to repeat myself.”*

No surprise there. Clamping the quill between his furry thumb and index and middle fingers, Tyr dipped the point in the ink pot. Black droplets trailed towards the paper. “Now what’s the best way to approach this...” Getting answers from Xis would be akin to pulling teeth, even under the best of circumstances. Flicking his ears, Tyr stumbled upon an idea. Gonna have to take a roundabout approach to it though. “For starters... what are your thoughts on being a spirit? Anything you particularly like or dislike about it?”

“How does this serve to further your understanding on their origins?” Arching a brow, Xis sat on his rump with a look of incredulity plastered on his furry mug.

“It doesn’t. Have you noticed we’ve never really... I don’t know... chatted before?”

“Nonsense. We engage in conversation far enough as it is, what with your incessant need to summon me forth when even the most trivial of obstacles present themselves.”

“You usually just bicker at me until whatever it is goes away.”

“That would still be considered ‘conversing.’”

“Albeit incredibly one-sided,” Tyr moaned. “Aren’t I allowed to be the least bit curious about your thoughts on being ethereal and all? You’re not just my summon, you know. This whole back and forth between us doesn’t have to be just business. I wouldn’t mind thinking of you as a colleague or friend even...” Tyr trailed off.

“I do so wish I hadn’t been paired with such a pathetic summoner. ...Makes me liable to pity you from time to time.” With a huff and swish of his tails, Xis poked his muzzle beneath Tyr’s and forced his chin up. *“That’s no way to conduct yourself.”* Letting out a frustrated sigh, the kitsune’s four tails twitched in irritation. *“Undoing any misconceptions imparted upon you by that drivel you rattled off earlier should be our first priority.”*

“What exactly was wrong with it?” Keeping his eyes on his summon, the quill gripped firmly in the fox’s hand began scribbling at the parchment.

“Everything,” Xis stated in disgust. *“Tch, there once was a time when being designated a spirit was a proud distinction. You ignorant and lazy fools had to go and dilute that by classifying nearly every magical being you bumped across a spirit. Honestly, the gall of you mortals.”*

“Okay, I can start from there. What kind of creatures explicitly aren’t spirits?” The feather atop the quill rustled as Tyr tapped it against the table.

“Hmph. What spirits most certainly are not are ghosts, elementals, nor liches.”

“I always thought elementals were just sort of lesser spirits? Nowhere near as smart or strong as say summons such as yourself.”

Narrowing his concentric eyes and clenching his teeth, Xis shuddered. *“The very thought of comparing those barely sentient wisps to a true spirit is insulting.”*

Nodding, Tyr hastily scribbled out a definition for elementals while his summon droned on and on about the indemnity of such a baseless comparison.

Elementals: Oftentimes erroneously thought of as a weaker type of spirit, these magical creatures belong to a class of their very own. When enough life, be it plant or animal, and magic is concentrated in a given area, these wisps come into being. Serving as another method for which life can manifest itself, elementals typically appear as barely sentient orbs attuned to a very specific type of magic. The most common varieties are fire and ice followed up by wind and electricity. Fire elementals appear as balls of flame that move about of their own volition, frost elementals as balls of frost, electric elementals as

crackling orbs of thunder, and so on. Every now and then it's possible to find some that embody light or dark magic, though sightings of them have been uncommon at best.

"I already know ghosts are just mortals whose souls haven't passed on..." Tyr noted aloud while the quill traveled from the left to the right side of the parchment. He winced when he felt his furry hand start to cramp up.

"I will concede that similarities exist between ghosts and spirits, however scarce they may be."

"And what might those be?" Turning his head, Tyr's eyes followed the kitsune circling around the table.

"Much like your common ghost, every spirit was once comprised of flesh and blood. Where ghosts differ though is that their memories of their past life remain with them. The same can't be said for spirits."

"Wait. You used to be alive? As in living and breathing and walking around and you know what I'm getting at." Eyes wide and ears perked up, it was weird thinking of Xis as having been anything other than a snooty kitsune!

Snorting in Tyr's face, a warm blast of air blew back the fur along the fox's cheeks. The kitsune smirked in response to the little fox blinking his eyes.

"No need to be so rude about it, I was just wondering."

"As satisfying as it would be to purposefully deny your curiosity on the subject, I recall scant details of that time. Several decades ago I simply awoke from a deep slumber to find myself as you see me now. My time as a mortal felt like a dream... nebulous and hazy memories that I can't quite grasp are all that remain." Draping down to the floor, Xis' tails went slack as the kitsune fell silent.

"Do you wish that wasn't the case?" Biting his tongue, Tyr immediately regretted uttering that interrogative. "Y-you don't have to answer if I'm stepping on your toes or anything or bluh... nevermind."

"Tactless and foolish as always," Xis grumbled to himself. Loathe as he was to admit it, the little fox's concern was... appreciated. *"Tempting as it is, I would prefer not to know. Whoever I once walked this world as has long since passed. He and I may be connected, but this new life, if you can even refer to this state of existence as such, is mine and mine alone. I would prefer to shape it myself, as opposed to his memories posthumously molding it for me."*

Jaw clamped tight, the orange fox's initial response was to blink. "You've thought about this a lot, haven't you?" That's what he wanted to say, but thought better of it.

Breathing in deeply, Xis flared his nostrils upon exhaling. It had been ages since he had given any thought to that time. Grinding his teeth, a familiar ambivalence gripped at his fluffy chest. Damn it all, why was it only that the memories of his past life eluded him? The sensations, both painful and pleasant, that can only be experienced by those comprised of sinew and marrow still lingered. Why could he still recall those? Why would he want to? They meant nothing to him now in this ethereal form. Yet...

"Xis? You okay?"

"Cease squandering my time, you asinine vulpine!" Xis snarled with barely contained hostility. *"Steer your inquiries back onto the topic at hand immediately, lest I reconsider abetting your efforts to expand your knowledge."*

"...You were saying about liches?" His tone significantly subdued, Tyr broke off eye contact with his summon and kept his sight glued to the parchment filling up with text.

"Hmph. As should be glaringly obvious, those festering monstrosities share little with spirits aside from a penchant for magic. The sole reason I even bring up those wretched creatures is due to... worryingly similar means by which liches and spirits are initially created."

Keeping his head facing down, Tyr's response was to arch his brows while trying to shake out a debilitating cramp in his wrist.

Thrown off by the lack of an audible reaction or perceived interest, Xis continued after an awkward pause. *"...You are no doubt wondering how spirits come to be in the first place. From what I've gleaned conversing with my brethren, the common thread amongst us... well, those of us who can remember, is that in our past lives we were nigh inseparable from our magic. The practice of magic, be it for good or for ill, defined us. So steeped in magical energies we were, that upon our deaths our souls opted to meld with the magics we wielded, as opposed to passing on. Eventually our souls were to become an anchor of sorts, drawing magical energies to themselves with the intent of creating a new body to inhabit."*

His growing curiosity tempered by welling frustration, the orange furred summoner grunted softly in response. Darnit, he'd just smudged an entire line of ink with a careless brush of his hand. Rubbing at his blackened fur, the fox was understandably miffed. Looking over the bunched up text filling up the parchment, Tyr let out a sigh of relief. Phew, at least it was still legible. "And liches are different how?" Not even bothering to look to the kitsune, Tyridia rattled off his next question.

Wagging his tails, Xis couldn't help but be perturbed. He very well may have instructed Tyridia to cut the crap and stop wasting his time, but the very least the little two-legger could do

was pretend to be interested! This was fascinating stuff after all. *“Harrumph. Well. Liches originate from individuals just as steeped in and consumed by magic as spirits do. The divide separating us is, lamentably, tenuous at best. Something as innocuous as our state of mind when we meet our end is all it takes to sway what path our next life takes. Regardless of one’s morality during their life, should they approach their end with even the most trifling amount of dignity or poise, it can be expected they shall go on to become a spirit. Should they allow themselves to be ensnared by any number of base emotions, their outcome is no longer so certain. Murderous hatred, bitter regret, whatever it may be it has to be something powerful enough that would motivate a willful fool from preventing something as trivial as death stop whatever it is they are trying to accomplish. That synthesis of will and magic forcibly binds their soul to their expired form, blocking its exit upon death. While recollections of who they once were remains, those overwhelming emotions are soon all they are capable of, and come to dominate and dictate what remnants of their personality linger.”*

“So it’s basically just a matter of time before they’re nothing more than warped mockeries of who they once were?” Ears dipping against the side of his head, Tyr found it to be a pitiable fate.

“Coincidentally, the decay of their physical form provides an accurate gauge of how far removed from their initial state of mind they have drifted.”

His penmanship now barely legible, Tyr’s aching wrist hammered out one last blurb of text. “I think that’s good for now,” the fox mumbled wearily while he scanned over the plethora of notes.

“That’s it?”

Arching his brows, Tyridia could have sworn he detected the faintest traces of disappointment in the kitsune’s voice. Took a while to get there, but he knew if he poked at something that would elicit feelings of pride from the four legged-fox, the darn kitsune just wouldn’t shut up. “You’ve already given me more than plenty to work with. Thank you, Xis.” Sliding his chair out from the table, he rolled his shoulders. “Besides, I would have thought you’d be sick and tired of me asking questions by now.”

Jerking his head to the side, Xis’ concentric red eyes darted about in his skull. *“It’s entirely possible. Perhaps I already am.”*

Stifling a snrrk, Tyridia struggled to keep a goofy smile from creasing upon his muzzle. “Well... if there’s more you have to say, I wouldn’t mind offering you an ear.”

Squinting at the fox, Xis gauged the sincerity present in his summoner’s voice. *“...Fortunately for you, I happen to be feeling unusually garrulous.”* Gently swaying to and fro, the kitsune’s tails betrayed their owner’s intent. *“I suppose I could stand to parley with you the*

finer points of what would prompt a spirit to agree to a contract with a summoner in the first place. Given that you admitted to being painfully ignorant regarding the origins of spirits, I feel it is safe to posit that you are just as uninformed when it comes to your own profession's history."

Pulling back up to the table, Tyr folded his arms and rested his chin on an elbow. "Huh. So are there any instances where people just... die and stay dead and gone forever? Seems like there's a million different ways for people to come back," he wryly thought. Swiveling his ears this way and that, a gentle smile curled up on his fuzzy mug as Xis' conjecture droned on. He couldn't help but notice the kitsune lacing his conjecture with fewer and fewer verbal barbs.