

The First Unexpected Enemy

Artemis carried Zen to her house the next morning. They reached her apartment and Artemis took in the quiet surroundings of her home. She laid Zen on the couch but at that moment felt herself lose energy. Too tired to walk to her bed, she unconsciously lied on top of Zen. Around 10am, three hours later, Artemis awoke fully rested. She wiped the sand from her eyes but felt some strange fur under her. When she was able to focus, she looked down and saw a sleeping fox beginning to wake up.

Artemis blushed and jumped off Zen. "Oh my God, Zen I'm so sorry," she said panicked. "I didn't know, I was tired and all and-"

Zen paid her no mind nor did he freak out himself. "*Morning, are you better?*" He said through his thoughts, casually as if nothing happened.

Artemis composed herself and the red on her face vanished. "I'm fine Zen, just fine."

Artemis heard Zen's stomach growl but Zen seemed not to mind that. "Well it looks like somebody's hungry. Zen, what would you like to eat?"

Zen stared at her blankly, head tilted a bit.

"I'll prepare you something," she said seeing she wasn't going to get an answer. "I'll make you some eggs then. Do you want to watch so you can learn how to make them yourself?"

Zen nods. "*Yes.*"

Artemis directed Zen to the kitchen. "Okay first you go to the refrigerator where the eggs are." She pulls out an egg and shows him. "These are eggs Zen; do you know what's in them?"

"*Chicken,*" Zen said, happy he remembered.

“Ah no, these are the eggs we eat, not the eggs that have baby chicks in them.”

“Ohhhhhhh, the other type of egg,” Zen said realizing his mistake.

“Okay so watch me.”

Artemis demonstrated the procedures to making an omelet: cracking the egg on the side of the skillet while the stove was hot, letting it cook, and folding it once it got big enough.

“And that’s how you make an Omelet; do you think you can make one on your own now?”

“Yeah, I can try,” Zen said eager to get started.

“Now I’m not expecting you to make it great, I can barely cook for myself, but let’s see what you got,” Artemis encouraged as she stepped back and watched.

As Zen started getting his equipment out they both heard a knock at the door. “Oh, I’ll get it Zen; you keep on making your egg.”

Artemis opened the door only to a crack. Her eyes were drawn to a black feather that slowly fell to the ground. She saw a tall man in a brown coat but couldn’t make out his face.

“Umm, can I help you?” she asked, looking up at him.

“Yes,” he replied in an old man voice. “Good morning, is a Ms. Artemis available?” The sound of his voice was humble and soft, like a grandfather speaking to his kids.

“You’re speaking to her.”

“Yes, I’m one of the higher officials from the company you use to work for. I wanted to talk with you if you have a moment.” Artemis hesitated and he caught her expression. “I wanted to ask you a few questions about the project you were working on before you left. The project, Vulpisdeum or fox favored by the gods.”

“I’ve never seen you before; can you give me your name?”

He took off his hat and his hawk face was shown. “My name is Richter Pathwave,” he explained as he pulled out a badge.

“Oh, okay come in,” she closed the door for a moment and began to unlock the chain attached to it. “You should know,” she said on the other side, “my experiment with that failed. Oh wait a minute,” she realized before twisting the handle, slamming the door. “Stay right there for a second, I’ll be right back.”

Artemis rushed into the kitchen and explained to Zen that he needed to hide in her room for a little while, she was about to invite someone in. Artemis did not trust the man and felt a sense of danger for Zen. Zen turned around and showed her his egg, an exact duplicate of her omelet.

“Zen you’ve got to hide. There’s this guy coming in and- wait, is that a perfect egg?” She said losing track of her serious motive.

“You showed me so I made it,” Zen replied mentally.

“Ah... okay,” Artemis said baffled. “You will never cease to amaze me. Oh what am I saying, Zen hide now.” She pushed Zen to her room trying to hurry him up so she could handle the visitor. She shut her room door and ran back to the entrance door, opened and greeted the hawk man.

“Please come in,” she insisted.

He looks around the apartment. “My, you like to keep your things organized. A lot better than Mr. Hord,” he complimented.”

“Oh, I try my best, I try my best.”

“I see; would you mind if I sit on the couch?”

“No, I don’t mind go ahead.”

Richter sat down on the couch and removed his coat and hat. He placed several documents on the table in front of him. “Please accept my apologies for coming early this morning. I had to stop by the lab and speak to a few people before they retired to their homes.” He looked around again and noticed two omelets, exactly the same, sitting on the counter top in the kitchen. “Oh, are you eating with somebody? Am I intruding?”

“Um no,” Artemis said, not realizing the two omelets were still there. “I just really felt hungry this morning.”

“Ah I see,” he said still a bit curious. “Well if you’re eating, I can wait until you’re done, I don’t mind.” He replied insistently.

“Oh no, I wouldn’t feel right eating in front of you, I’ll make you another omelet,” Artemis suggested.

Artemis began cooking while Richter waited, continuing to look around the apartment. He flipped through his documents and stared at the clock, trying to pass the time. Artemis finished the omelet, grabbed her plate, and walked to the couch. She passed him his omelet and he accepted. She sat down and they both took a few bites before beginning.

“Thank you very much, I enjoyed it,” Richter complimented. “Alright I assume it’s time to get down to business.” Artemis nodded and folded her hands. “Alright I looked over your documents and I see you’re one of professor Hord’s type students. According to our reports you’ve been doing research concerning general physics and quantum physics, is that correct?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Alright, unfortunately the reason why we had to cancel your facility was because based on some of the information we got from Prof. Hord, we felt it was too dangerous to leave it in the hands of the few people you worked with. We also feared for the safety of everyone there. I heard some... unexplainable things happened as you proceeded with the experiments, is that right?”

“Yes, that’s correct but trust me I’ve taken care of Vulpisdeum, he’s no longer around,” Artemis said, keeping a straight face.

“So you’ve taken care of him yourself?” Richter asked growing more curious and leaning forward.

“Yes sir,” Artemis reassured.

“Our reports say last time he escaped somewhere. Where did you take care of him?”

“I-I,” Artemis stuttered. “I took him out into the forest. It made things, much cleaner you know. If word got around that he was that dangerous it would cause a lot of problems so I did the best I could.”

“And you succeeded? Now that’s an impressive feat,” Richter said, looking Artemis straight in the eyes.

“Well I may be a physicist but I’m also part wolf and it was a full moon last night so...”

“Hmmm,” the hawk man said, still a bit unconvinced. “Well that’s very interesting to hear. For some reason I’m surprised, you don’t look damaged at all. I’m guessing it was that easy for you?”

“It wasn’t super easy; it was fine, nothing hard. He wasn’t very intelligent so it was fairly easy to end him.”

“Well it’s clear he must have been young but from what we could gather, ‘Vulpisdeum’ as you call him was said to be a very fox with the ability to control dark matter. From my observation from the video cameras he seemed to have the ability to disable his enemies even at a distance when he was in danger. So I’m actually curious how you took care of him if he’s able to perform this.” Richter didn’t take his eyes off Artemis. He studied her from facial expressions, to slight body moments, to where her eyes diverted when she wasn’t looking at him.

“He was very easy to convince that I wasn’t an enemy to him and like I said I took care of him, end of story.” Artemis said impatiently.

“Oh, it’s true we are glad he’s finished off I just wanted to know the method of how you disposed of him. From the lab, to the forest, to here, the only damage I’ve seen was a scratch or punch on a few of the trees as I passed by. Being part wolf and losing control on the full moon, one would expect to see blood scattered around the victim and the general forest area.”

He made himself more comfortable on the couch, cleared his throat and continued.

“Also, before I left the lab we got a signal from our radar that a large amount of dark matter was sighted somewhere in this city. We don’t have any portable radars on hand that can help us track it so I wanted to investigate that as well.” He gave Artemis a curious stare and a slight grin. “You wouldn’t happen to know about that as well would you?”

“Sir,” Artemis said signing. “As you know I’m the only one with a telescope able to track dark matter sufficiently. All the other inventions in my lab are faulty. Vulpisdeum no longer exists because I took care of him.”

“You have one that can track him on hand?” Richter asked surprised.

“Nnnnooooo, and if I did I wouldn’t let you use it.”

Artemis shifted in her seat after staying in the same position on the couch. She was surprised Zen was so quiet she almost forgot he was right next door in her room. She shot a quick glance into the hallway then refocused her attention on Richter.

“I feel like you’re cutting into my business.”

“My apologies, I wasn’t trying to come off that way.” He sits back, coughs under his breath, and grabs his papers, coat and hat. “Well I apologize for taking up your time and thank you for the omelet.” Richter got up from the couch and walked to door.

“Oh, one more thing,” he said turning back towards Artemis with a slight smile. “Based on what I’ve read in several reports we are offering positions in our company, would you be interested? There is a position in our physic’s department if you choose to accept.”

“Wait, what?” Artemis asked confused. “What does your company do again? You never really told me.”

“Ah, that’s right, that’s right,” Richter walked back to the couch, showing a bit of excitement in his voice but Artemis didn’t catch it. “Our company serves many different purposes. One of them is serving small facilities like yours, others include small journalism work. Basically the sum of our company, we keep the peace around the world. This includes watching the different species, with and without powers, only to make sure everyone is safe and happy. This is one of the reasons we funded your company. Should anyone have any powers, such as the child with dark matter you experimented with, we’d offer support, aid, guidance on helping him control it. However,” his voice growing hesitant. “Should we fail and the person proves unstable or unable to control those powers, we’d have to take more drastic measures.”

There was a pause in the room.

“Such as?” Artemis asked, breaking the suspenseful air.

“Well, personally I don’t know, I don’t deal in those matters. I’m a desk worker and a networker, answering phone calls, setting up appointments, those types of jobs.”

“Sorry, not interested,” Artemis stated firmly, her patience clearly dying.

Richter closed his eyes and dropped his head for a moment. “Oh, alright then. Well if you change your mind,” he said, reaching into his pocket and handing Artemis a business card. “I’ll be waiting for your call, other than that thank you for your hospitality.”

“You as well,” she said flatly.

Richter got up from the couch, walked to the door and into the hallway, his footsteps fading into the distance. Artemis closed the door behind him after waiting till the sounds of his shoes were in great distance from her.

Artemis ran back to her room finding Zen sitting crossed legged on the floor, not making a sound.

“Zen are you okay?” She asked.

“Yes, I’m find. I didn’t know I was hungry though.” He transferred to her.

“Sorry I interrupted your breakfast, someone came in looking for you. I’m not sure if it’s safe for you to stay in the city anymore.”

Zen tilted his head, both curious and confused as to why that would be. *“Where will I go then? Well I was thinking of exploring, you wanna come?”* He asked, tails wagging.

“Well, wait, WHAT?” Artemis asked, surprised how calm Zen asked.

“Well I was going to explore inside and outside the city anyway? Do you wanna come?”

“Well, I, umm, well I can’t just pick up and leave right now.”

“Awww, ” another pause of silence filled the room. *“Then I’ll come with you.”*

“Z-Zen I think you need to understand, these things take planning and everything. I’m out of the job and walking around the forest is dangerous if you’re not use to it.”

“Then we’ll walk around the city and find you a new job.”

Artemis had a loss of words. She was angry because Zen wasn’t taken this seriously but couldn’t stay mad at his innocent and curious expressions. Men were after him but Zen didn’t see any dangers that could cause. After pacing around the room trying to find her thoughts she continued.

“Zen, it’s not that easy.” She sighed. “It could take months for me to get a new job.”

“Hmmm,” Zen said, closing his eyes thinking. *“Then... What do you do in a job? What job do you want?”*

“My old job was for me to do research on Quantum Physics.”

Zen nodded. He remembered a lot of things from Artemis’ computer about some of the topics she was researching. He also remembered an online diary he might have accidentally loaded but knew it was secretive and chose not to bring it up.

Artemis saw Zen thinking and quickly interrupted before he could offer any more suggestions she couldn’t talk him out off.

“Okay Zen, getting you out of here is my first priority. Look, for your safety I’ll get you introduced to my family. They should be able to help us with support until I can find a job to sustain us. I have to get to packing so we can head out maybe the day after tomorrow. Zen you can,” she thought for a moment. “Read some books or something while you wait.”

“Ms. Artemis, were those people mad at me too?” Zen asked.

“Honestly, I don’t know what they want with you exactly but apparently you’re disturbing the peace.”

Zen decided he wasn't going to question that further. He felt like being around Artemis would be better than going with the people she used to work for. Artemis said she wanted to help Zen before, and if she didn't trust them Zen wouldn't either, especially since they were mad at him and Zen didn't know them.

While Artemis continued to pack in her room, Zen sat on the couch in the living room. Zen could only hear the sound of her stuffing cloths and other materials into her bag. The afternoon went by quietly while Zen looked at the window watching the light of the sun disappear and reappear after the clouds passed them. Artemis, noting the silence, came out of her room and provided Zen with her quantum physics books. She sat them on the table in front of Zen, opened up the book to a picture of the earth. The curious eyes of Zen flipped through the rest of the pages. His focus was solely on the book that he didn't notice Artemis retreat to her room to finish packing.

Later on while Artemis continued packing she began to talk to Zen about his appearance, questioning what type of clothes he should wear. Currently Zen had on a white t-shirt with brown outlines around his collar and edges of his shirt and some brown shorts. Zen didn't mind what he wore since he had little preference. Artemis told him to think of some other type of clothes he should wear so Zen got to thinking. Artemis turned her head to continue packing but when she looked back at Zen she dropped the lotion and comb from her hands and nearly gasped.

Zen's eyes were closed but dark matter circled around Zen's body, slowly shifting shapes, sizes, and colors the more he thought about clothes. To Artemis it looked like hundreds of incredibly small marbles circling around in mid air but somehow changing form in response to Zen's thoughts.

"ZEN WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" Artemis snapped, breaking Zen's concentration and returned the dark matter back to normal.

"Hmm, I was thinking." Zen thought back to her.

"That, with the clothes changing? It was floating in mid air, and then they formed around your body? I just- I just don't know how you did that."

Zen tilted his head confused. *"What did I do?"*

“Think of- think of clothes on your body again.”

Zen closes his eyes again and thought of clothes to wear. After several seconds he thought about the different robes monks wear in temples. Just as fast, the dark matter turned into saffron robes that were perfectly fit Zen. The robes were creamed colored with orange linings.

“Okay stop and stick with those clothes.” She chuckled a little. “Guess there’s no need to pack you a bag.”

Zen gave her a brief smile and his tails wagged. *“Problem solved.”* He stated.

“Yeah... Problem solved.” She sighed with concern. “What else can you do?”

“Haven’t tried it so I don’t know it yet.”

A light went off in her head. “What a minute, since you have that power in your head,” she trailed off, “I wonder. Zen, think of a tube of tooth paste,” she instructed.

Zen closed his eyes again and thought of tooth paste. The dark matter surrounding him morphed into the exact item he was thinking and landed on the table.

“Is this it?” He asked.

“That’s, that’s perfect.” She replied. “Now can you think up some towels and a little bit more tooth pastes? I just thought of something else I needed to pack for our trip.”

Artemis ran back into her room and pulled out several journals from her desk. She needed to take notes on Zen’s abilities which might come in handy later. When she turned she dropped the notebooks on the ground, finding it hard to believe that after 30 seconds in her absences her

living room was filled with towers of towels stacked on each other and already over 50 tooth pastes and tooth brushes flooding her carpet.

She looked over and saw Zen crossed armed, eyes closed, still thinking and one after the other, more appeared.

“Okay, okay that’s enough Zen stop.”

Zen stopped but the towels, tooth brushes, and tooth pastes remained.

“This is way too many towels Zen. Please just make two of each.”

Zen looked at the towers of towels scattered around him and imagined them away. In moments only two of everything remained, impressing Artemis further and leading her to be more curious.

“Zen, I want you to try and make one more thing for me okay?”

Zen turned around and listened.

“I want you to create cube,” Artemis explained. “On the outside I want it to appear as a cube, on the inside though; can you make it so it holds anything and everything?”

A confused fox closed his eyes and began to think. A cube in appearance, but on the inside was able to carry anything no matter what shape or size. Zen focused on that while Artemis watched. A cloud of dark matter hovered over the table. It appeared huge at first, but slowly began to shrink and take to form of a cube. However, Zen knew it wasn’t enough. He continued to focus, trying to picture what little Artemis could explain. The dark matter started flowing into the cube like water into a cup, soon it went faster. The calm flow of dark matter became loud like a water fall hitting stone from 50 feet up. Artemis saw Zen struggling and was about to interrupt him. She took one look at the cube, and how much dark matter was being transferred into a small space and decided against it. Zen’s focus was on point, everything around him felt as if it didn’t exist. The room responded to that thought. Within seconds, the couch, the chairs, the rug, and the

table began to gently float from its surface. The refrigerator, counter top, and microwave began to shake calmly.

“Okay, Zen” Artemis said as she observed the abnormality of her room. “I think that’s enough.”

Her voice did not reach Zen and soon she found herself beginning to float off the ground. Artemis didn’t notice until she was too far up to grab something to keep her leveled to the floor. Zen was still focusing, trying to pour as much dark matter into this small cube as possible. Sound, movements, levitation of objects, nothing stirred Zen’s concentration.

“Zen, Zen!” Artemis panicked, believing he would lose control again.

The force of the dark matter flowed into the cube faster. The appearance of a waterfall falling into a cup transformed into a tornado of dark matter with the cube in the center of it. Anything not rooted to the ground was afloat but not moving with the current of the dark matter’s spinning motion. The silverware in the drawers rattled until the drawer came out and the silverware in it began to float out, poking Artemis’s hoof.

“ZEN ENOUGH!” She screamed, piercing the air straight to Zen’s ear.

Zen opened his eyes, breaking his concentration but not his focus. The dark matter vanished and slowly Zen moved all the furniture back to the floor, placed the silverware back in the drawers, and placed Artemis down atop the couch. The lights that flickered during this shut off but a glow emanated from the table.

Artemis was awestruck. She got off the couch and sat on her knees in front of the table. A cube surrounded but condensed with dark matter emitted a purple and blue glow from inside. Artemis tilted her head over the cube and inside she could see an exactly replica of the galaxy she remembered seeing in her physics book.

“Wow,” whispered Artemis, unable to find a better word for its beauty.

Zen observed Artemis' reaction and realized she was satisfied with what he made, causing his tails to wag. Artemis shot a quick glance to Zen and ran to get something from her suitcase.

"Okay, let's test it." She suggested, holding a shirt over the cube. Slowly and steadily she moved her arm closer to the oval entrance above the cube.

Zen watched carefully trying to envision how the item might get sucked in. A mistake on his part, as he envisioned the shirt getting pulled in Artemis began yelling for Zen's help. Zen snapped out of his trance to see Artemis slowly losing her shirt, fingers, hand, and her arm. Strangely nothing was shrinking into the cube, but being disassembled into smaller particles. Zen got off the couch and pulled Artemis' other arm but to little avail. His body didn't muster any strength after his mind focused consistently on making the cube. In moments, Artemis was in the cube, leaving Zen to wonder if Artemis would at least like what he did on the inside of the cube instead of the outside.