


A once peaceful gathering had been ripped apart in a terrible battle. Lady Tomo, the phoenix and mascot of Naka Kon, had been slain by Lord Byakko, the Tiger God who had challenged her for the rights to the convention. The people of Naka

Kon began to choose their sides, and they often found themselves at odds with those they cared for. Friends turned on one another as they faced off to either save Lady Tomo or stand with the invading forces of Lord Byakko. Both sides rushed to gather the dust motes of the fallen phoenix for their own purposes. In the end, however, Tomo's supporters prevailed by gathering enough dust motes to resurrect her.

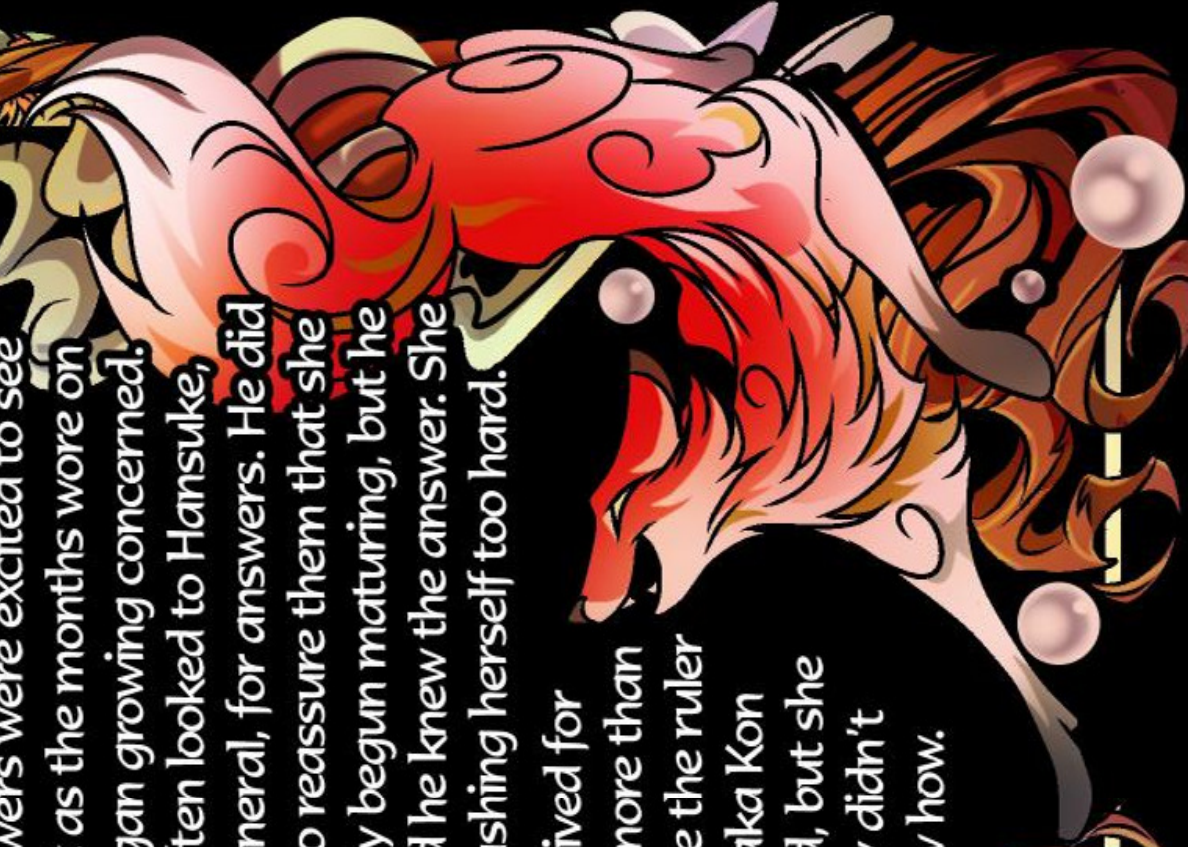
With the help of her forces, Tomo finally succeeded in driving out Lord Byakko. All was supposed to have returned to normal, but it hadn't.



While it is true that phoenixes rise from the ashes, they do not always return the same. Tomo's followers often found themselves curious about her behavior. She seemed more enthusiastic about the year's celebrations than ever. Whereas before she had delegated much of the details to her followers, she now worked tirelessly alongside them as they planned the festivities. At first her followers were excited to see this, but as the months wore on they began growing concerned.

They often looked to Hansuke, Tomo's general, for answers. He did his best to reassure them that she had simply begun maturing, but he was afraid he knew the answer. She was pushing herself too hard.

She strived for nothing more than to become the ruler that Naka Kon deserved, but she simply didn't know how.



Around this time, a request that had been sent directly after Lord Byakko's defeat arrived at it's destination

Inarisama...

A message has arrived for you.

A message?

If it is only that, then why do you seem so distraught?

It bears Lady Tomo's seal, but it was delivered by a former soldier of Lord Byakko.

When I inquired as to what happened, he informed me that he had begun working for The Phoenix after she defeated The Lord of the West.

Frankly, Inarisama, I did not think it possible.

He must have underestimated her. Hopefully he learned something from this.

Our little bird has piqued my interest.

Yamato, read the message.

It's possible. He is as arrogant as ever.



"Inarisama, let me begin with something that I know you've wished to hear. You were right. I have been vain and selfish. I did not believe you until I saw some among my own people siding with that filthy tiger. I am reborn again, but I feel as if a piece is missing. You once offered to help me become a better ruler, and in my foolishness I refused. I have learned the error of that day, and now I beg for your assistance. Help me, Inarisama, you're my only hope."



She's a bit dramatic, don't you think?

Oh well, I'll just burn this and...

Yamato, you'll do no such thing.



After all, she did say that I'm her only hope.

It would be too cruel to ignore such a plea for help.

No offense, Inarisama, but your help can be just as cruel.

Have you enjoyed eavesdropping?

Well, since you went through all the trouble, what's your opinion?

Should I help our little bird?

You say that as if it was a bad thing.



You always were too smart for my own good, Inarisama.

Since you asked, I suggest only this: Help her as you did me.

My, my...

Here I thought that you were the kind one.



Should I send in a scribe to send your reply? If so, I'll just go and...

No need for a scribe, Yamato.

Instead, you'll be my reply. You've helped with such matters in the past.



As you wish, Inarisama.

I'll ready my things at once.

No need to sound so upset. After all, you are allowed to have *some* fun.

Oh, Inarisama.

I was **COUNTING** on it.



Not long after...

Careful, Aiko!
You wouldn't want to hurt yourself.



If I were you, I'd be more worried about **HER** hurting **YOU**.

FLING

Eep!



It's so much fun!
Thank you for teaching me, Aiko.

No need to thank me, Lady Tomo. I am at your service.



As for this insolent cur, however...

Ha-ha?



It's so sweet.





You can almost feel the love

I even see you hugging one another with...



Wait, you're hugging that man's neck rather tightly.

Ah, never mind that. It seems you're choking that poor man out.



Carry on then.



WHO ARE YOU TO SIMPLY WALK-

My apologies, Sir

I'm afraid you caught us a bit off guard. We're preparing for this year's celebration.

My name is Tomo. And you are?




You really are a pretty little bird.

Had I known...




I would have been here even sooner.



YOU WERE
NOT GIVEN
LEAVE TO
TOUCH
M'LADY!

JUST WHO DO
YOU THINK
YOU ARE?




I'm so glad you
asked! I've
always wanted to
say this. "I'm
here! Now, what
are your next
two wishes?"
Nevermind that,
though, you only
had one wish, or
request as it
were.


Stop talking
gibberish and
get to the
point!

Sorry, General,
but I'll only speak
to Lady Tomo.
After all, an
official messenger
from Inarisama
shouldn't have to
deal with the likes
of you.

My name is
Yamato, and
you'd do well
to remember it.



Inarisama
sent you?



My apologies, Yamato.
Thank you for traveling
all this way. Have you
brought a reply from
Inarisama?

Better still...

Yes, and
here's my
proof.

I **AM**
the reply.



I've come to assist you, Lady Tomo.

You asked for help becoming a better ruler, and Inarisama sent me. If you can rise to my challenges, you'll do just that.

Challenges?!
I asked for Inarisama's guidance, not *tests!*



Careful what you wish for, Lady Tomo.

What do you mean by this?

Simply put, if you can overcome my challenges, then Inarisama will help you. If you cannot, then no aid will be given.

You wanted assistance, and you now have it in spades.

You'll be left as you are, waiting for the next competitor like Lord Byakko to come and steal Naka Kon from you.



I swore never to put my people through such a trial again. I will not stand to see them divided while...

Oh, they won't be divided.

In fact, I'll even allow your beloved convention goers to help you with the tasks.

Trust me, if you wish to win against me and my bag of tricks...

You'll need all the help you can get.



No harm will come to any of them?

Have I your word?



...



I LIKE YOUR SPUNK!



Very well then, no harm will come to a single one of them. You have my word.

If your word can be trusted.



Very well then, we have a deal.

Know this, though, **WE** will **WIN**.

We'll see about that, little bird.

We'll see.



Hansuke,

Aiko,

Now, Yamato, I'll give you a tour of Naka Kon. I wouldn't want to win due to you being unprepared.

You know what to do.

How very brave of you. Very well, lead on.



Last year we were divided, but this year let us stand as one. We will not stand by idly while another challenger arises!

We are stronger together! The challenges are set before us.



ARE YOU WITH US?

The Program has the events marked. Prizes will be awarded to those who help the most!

**FOR
NAKA KON!**