



BEFORE.

MASTER SPLINTER!  
I WAS NOT EXPECTING YOU.

PLEASE, STAND AT EASE, CHILD.

THIS IS A FRIENDLY VISIT, NOTHING MORE. I PREFER TO KEEP MYSELF OCCUPIED WHENEVER MY SONS ARE AWAY ON A MISSION.

I FIND IT HELPS TO CALM MY RESTLESS PATERNAL SPIRIT.

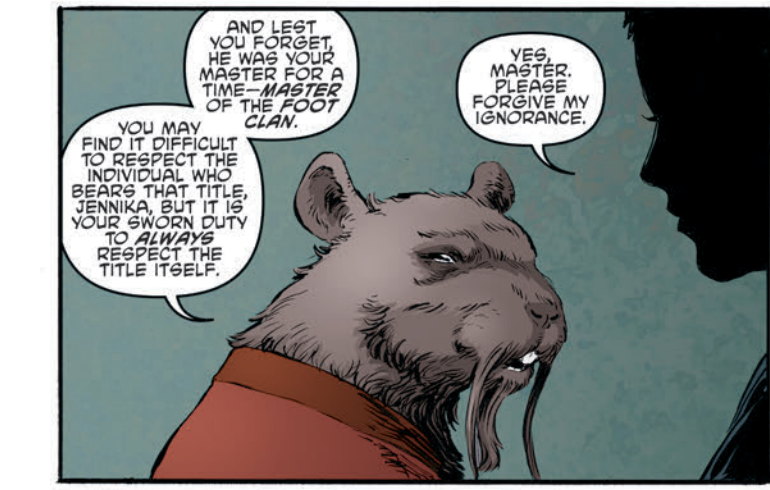


MASTER, WITH ALL RESPECT, MAY I ASK WHY YOU HAD A TOMB BUILT FOR THE SHREDDER?

AFTER ALL HE DID TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY, I FIND THE HONOR... CONFUSING

YES, WELL... SHREDDER WAS INDEED THE CATALYST OF MUCH OF THE TRAGEDY I HAVE EXPERIENCED DURING MY EXISTENCE.

BUT BEFORE HE WAS THE SHREDDER, OROKU SAKI WAS A BRAVE AND HONORABLE WARRIOR WHO, DESPITE OUR MANY DIFFERENCES, I WAS PROUD TO CALL MY CLAN BROTHER.



AND LEST YOU FORGET, HE WAS YOUR MASTER FOR A TIME—MASTER OF THE FOOT CLAN.

YOU MAY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO RESPECT THE INDIVIDUAL WHO BEARS THAT TITLE, JENNIKA, BUT IT IS YOUR SWORN DUTY TO ALWAYS RESPECT THE TITLE ITSELF.

YES, MASTER. PLEASE FORGIVE MY IGNORANCE.

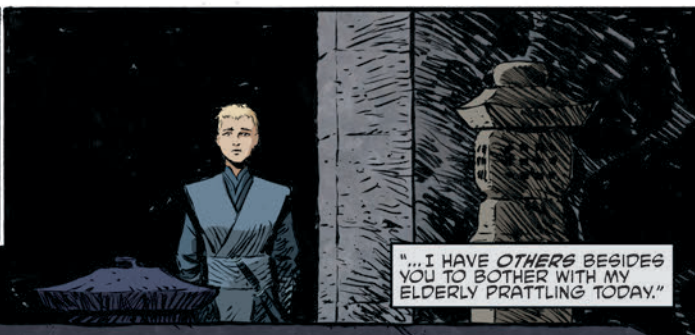


YOU ARE FAR FROM IGNORANT, CHILD. I WOULD NOT HAVE GIVEN YOU SUCH AN IMPORTANT CHARGE WERE IT OTHERWISE.

I ASSURE YOU, THIS TOMB IS FAR MORE THAN A SIMPLE SYMBOLIC GESTURE.



NOW I MUST BE ON MY WAY...



... I HAVE OTHERS BESIDES YOU TO BOTHER WITH MY ELDERLY PRATTLING TODAY."



KNOCK  
KNOCK



<GOOD EVENING, HAMATO YOSHI.>  
<GOOD EVENING, KITSUNE. THIS IS NOT AN INCONVENIENT TIME FOR A VISIT, I HOPE?>  
<NOT AT ALL.>



<THE TIME IS ALWAYS CONVENIENT WHEN THE MASTER COMES TO CALL.>  
<TEA?>  
<YES, PLEASE.>



<THIS IS VERY BEAUTIFUL, KITSUNE.>  
<THANK YOU.>  
<WHAT STARTED AS A SIMPLE DIVERSION TO OCCUPY THE LONG, LONELY HOURS SPENT IN CONFINEMENT...>



<... HAS BECOME A FAR MORE PERSONAL ENDEAVOR AS OF LATE.>  
<YES... I SEE.>



<THE DRAGON AND FOX I UNDERSTAND, BUT THE PHOENIX?>  
<AH, YES—THE MYSTICAL SYMBOL OF DEATH AND REBIRTH. YOU SHOULD NOT READ TOO DEEPLY INTO ITS MEANING.>



<FOR ME, IT REPRESENTS A HOPE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW.>

<AND WHAT HOPE IS THAT, MAY I ASK?>

<YOU ARE MASTER OF THE FOOT CLAN, HAMATO YOSHI—YOU MAY DO **WHATEVER** YOU PLEASE.>



<BUT TO ANSWER YOUR QUERY, I SIMPLY SEEK A SENSE OF **WELLBEING**, JUST LIKE ANY OTHER CREATURE ON THIS PLANET.>

<AND I HAVE LIVED LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT WILL ONLY COME TO ONE WHO IS ABLE TO FIND A WAY TO **RISE** FROM THE ASHES OF PAST TRAGEDIES AND PAST DEFEATS.>

<LIKE A PHOENIX?>

<JUST SO.>



<I AM CURIOUS... THIS WELLBEING YOU SEEK—DOES IT RELATE AT ALL TO THE **GAME** YOU PLAY WITH THE OTHER IMMORTALS LIKE YOU? THE SPOILS AWARDED TO THE VICTOR, PERHAPS?>

<YOU HAVE TOLD ME YOUR KIND ONLY PLAY FOR AMUSEMENT, YET I WONDER—WHAT ARE THE **TRUE** STAKES OF YOUR CONTEST?>



<OUR CONTEST? WHY, YOSHI, YOU ACT AS IF WE IMMORTALS ARE THE **ONLY** ONES TAKING PART.>

<IN TRUTH, ALL WHO EXIST ARE INVOLVED IN THE GAME—YOU, ME, YOUR SONS, MISS O'NEIL, MY BROTHERS AND MY SISTERS—EVERYONE.>



<THE DIFFERENCE IS WHO IS **PLAYING**... AND WHO IS BEING **PLAYED**.>

<AND WHAT OF THOSE WHO CHOOSE **NOT** TO PARTICIPATE?>



<THIS IS THE GAME OF SURVIVAL, YOSHI. THE ONLY CHOICE—THE ONLY RULE—IS TO BE QUICK OR TO BE DEAD.>

<IN THE END, **THOSE** ARE THE TRUE STAKES OF THE CONTEST.>

<PERHAPS, THOUGH TO BE QUITE HONEST, THOSE TEND TO BE **FAR HIGHER** STAKES FOR MERE MORTALS—>

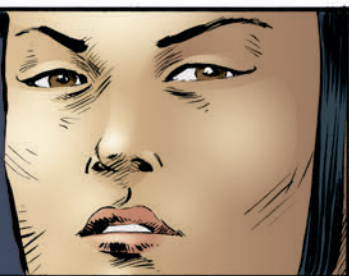


<—WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?>

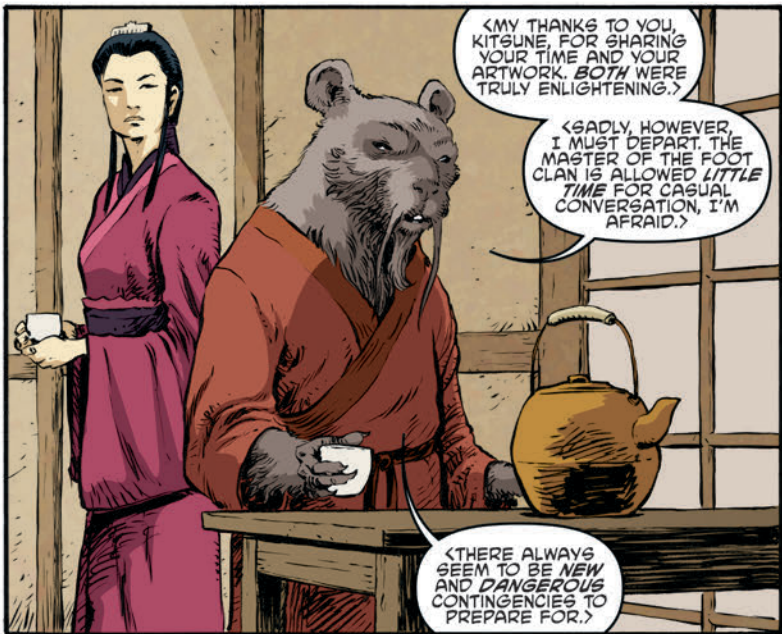
<"MERE MORTALS" IS AN INTERESTING PHRASE COMING FROM ONE WHOSE FAMILY WAS ONCE DEAD, AND YET WHO ALL LIVE AGAIN.>

<LIKE PHOENIXES, YOU MIGHT SAY.>

<INDEED.>



<YES, WELL, IT APPEARS MY TEA HAS GONE COLD.>



<MY THANKS TO YOU, KITSUNE, FOR SHARING YOUR TIME AND YOUR ARTWORK. BOTH WERE TRULY ENLIGHTENING.>

<SADLY, HOWEVER, I MUST DEPART. THE MASTER OF THE FOOT CLAN IS ALLOWED LITTLE TIME FOR CASUAL CONVERSATION, I'M AFRAID.>

<THERE ALWAYS SEEM TO BE NEW AND DANGEROUS CONTINGENCIES TO PREPARE FOR.>



<OH, BEFORE I GO, ONE LAST QUESTION.>



<BEFORE HE BECAME THE SHREDDER, WAS OROKU SAKI INDEED A PLAYER... OR WAS HE, IN FACT, ONE BEING PLAYED?>



<SAKI WAS A MAGNIFICENT AND POWERFUL DRAGON WARRIOR FROM BEGINNING TO END.>

<THE FULLY UNDERSTOOD THERE IS NO PLACE FOR COWARDICE OR COMPROMISE IN THIS GAME—NO STALEMATES OR HALF-MEASURES.>



<ONLY VICTORS AND VANQUISHED.>