# Eat

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## \*Chapter 1\*: Eat

Tails is frolicking through a meadow and cackling, chasing after a bumblebee.  
He doesn't want to catch it, he just wants to follow it. To see where it goes.

An avalanche of emotions washing over the kid, much as the beams of the sun wash all over his face.  
If you were to touch the fur on his face in this moment it would be almost like a gentle burn that would fill you with more joy than it would hurt you.  
Mouth open, the toothiness of his grin emphasized by the teeth that aren't present - his pupils widening to the size of a low denomination of pre-war Mobius coins. As he turns his trajectory towards the sun and the ultraviolet rays cloud his vision with pure light, except for that little floaty buddy bouncing around the sky, his heart gets fuller than it has ever been.

If you held him at gunpoint to conjure a thought in his thoughtless head in this moment, a moment of purely joyful id, he'd probably tell you that he was too busy basking in magic to answer that, if you gave him enough time.  
But you're not holding him at gunpoint, and he wouldn't have the time to come up with that answer even if you were. Because while he's lost in the sunrays haze of magic and bumblebee, his general appreciation of the magic of the world around him is cut short when a green metal club cleaves through obscurity as a shadow of pain and smashes the back of his head into the grass and dirt by cracking some things in his face.

A metallic THUD and an organic CRACK are followed by a FOOMF and a few seconds of silence before the shrill screams catch up with the pain inflicted and echo through the forest.  
Coughing up blood and loose teeth while screeching like a bat through a bullhorn full of rancid meat. High pitched, sloppy and actively tearing through itself.

"I GOT ONE I GOT ONE!" Grounder exclaims, grabbing the child by the ankle and damaging the structural integrity to the very limb he chose to lift his trophy by. "LOOK SCRATCH I GOT THE MUTANT."

"The MUTANT?!" Scratch says, crashing and clanking his way across the field awkwardly as if a marionette strung along by a novice puppeteer. "HuhuhHAWHAW! HOW DID YOU NAB THE \*MUTANT\*?~!"

"I HIT HIM IN THE MOUTH AND THEN I GRABBED HIS ANKLE!" Grounder says, holding the thrashing, screaming animal up by his ankle. "HE WENT DOWN LIKE A MUTATED SACK OF POTATOES THAT HAVE MUTATIONS!"

"HUH HUH HA! HUH HUH HA! HUH HUH HA HAAAA!" Scratch says, delighted that he can take part in a positive for once.

"I think we should call the boss for once," Grounder says, dangling the lifeless sack in front of his own understanding of things. "I think this is good. I think he'll like it."

"He won't like shit unless it's Sonic," Scratch says, waving him off. "We don't want to go off halfcocked here, you understand? He'll punish us!"

"He'll punish us?!" Grounder shrieks. "Why would he do that?!"

"Grounder, he gave you pain receptors only to tear you apart piece by piece and make you reassemble yourself while in excruciating pain. He did that for you for your birthday. As a present. And you want to approach him with a job that's half finished with room for failure."

Grounder scrapes his drill hand against his chin area while the child in his other hand hangs upside down is still screaming and bleeding. "Hrmm. I suppose you have a point."

"We need to take care of this ourselves!" Scratch says, licking his metal finger with his metal tongue, the screech sending it down the organic child's spine and back down again. "And when we use this little brat to capture Sonic, we'll graduate from dumbot status to goodebot status!"

"THAT SOUNDS GREAT!" Grounder shouts, drilling his drills into the air. "THAT MEANS ROBOTNIK WON'T MAKE ME FIX MYSELF WITH PAIN RECEPTORS AND DRILLS AS A BIRTHDAY PRESENT."

"That depends on whether or not we compose ourselves! HUHUHUHUAAAHHH! For instance, you shouldn't let that bag crawl away!"

"I thought I had it in my hand!" Grounder says, turning his drill into his hand! "I GUESS MY HAND TURNED INTO A DRILL DIDN'T IT. AND THEN I DROPPED THE HOSTAGE SACK!"

"This is exactly the kind of thing that puts pain receptors deep, deep into my grundle, Grounder!"

"Grundle Grounder," Grounder says nodding, with full commitment dedicated to skirting his lack of understanding. "I should conk him and grab his sack again!"

"Exactly!" Scratch shrieks.

Grounder smashes Tails in the head through the bag he is crawling in with the blunt instrument that is his mechanical arm.  
When Tails crumples into a pile of burlap, his throat gurgles unknown substances into the sack. They bubble and bend the structure of things.

And he is dragged along through the dirt and sagebrush. And his screams echo throughout the valley.

When they throw him into his cell at Ironlock Prison, he isn't ready to talk yet.  
Scratch and Grounder leave the prison to find a nice hill on which to watch the sunset.

After some trial and error, they notice the sky has changed from a bright pink to a deep and settling purple.  
They watch the way the sun rearranges the shadows of the geography for quite some time. Blank expressions across their face the whole time.

"Do you really think this will make Robotnik like us more?" Grounder asks, disrupting the serenity.

"Sure," Scratch says, his eyes not leaving the landscape before them. "Robotnik likes Sonic right?"

"Seems to love him!" Grounder exclaims.

"If Sonic loves the mutant the way the mutant loves Sonic then we'll be livin' on easy street!" Scratch says.

"What do you mean if?" Grounder inquisitates.

"What?" Scratch asks, finally looking at him. "What IF?"

"What you said!" Grounder says, visibly beginning to sweat and to rust. "What do you mean if Sonic loves the mutant the way the mutant loves Sonic! What did you mean by that, Scraaaaatch!"

"What do you think I meant, Grounder?!"

"I think you meant that his might not be a good trap for Sonic," Grounder says. "Scratch, does that mean that all of this could be for NOTHING?!"

"SHUT UP YOU IDIOT!" Scratch says. "OF COURSE SONIC WILL COME FOR HIM. HE WAS SCREAMING HIS NAME THROUGHOUT ALL OF THE FOREST."

There was a serenity he found when he noticed his brains leaking out from the head attached to his body that was being dragged at the time he thought this.

His brain matter was like a litter of puppies he just leak out of his brainwomb. He smiles and tries to name them all.

and for a second his claw turns into fingers, reaching out to him. That doesn't last long.

When Tails opens his eyes it's dark and when he closes his eyes it's also dark. But when he also opens them again it's all grey and he calls out with words he doesn't understand to something he doesn't understand.

His words echo back at him and ultimately he feels nothing about it. The spirals forsake him and the world goes dark again.

Grounder can't tell if the sun is going up or down in this moment. "Is this a sunrise or a sunset?" he wonders out loud.

Scratch can't tell either, he has no idea, but he makes an assumption and he sticks with it. "It's a sunset, you idiot! The dawn is on the rising sun! How could you be so STUPID?!"

"Haha, I guess I don't know," Grounder says, appreciating the colors the general aesthetic of watching the sunrise from on top of a cliff and under a palmtree. "I guess I never knowed, isn't that right, Scratch?"

"Thaaaat's always true, GROUNDER!" Scratch says, huhHAWing before Grounder can even respond. "HuhHAW! HuhHAW! HUHUHUHAWHAW! HAWHAWWW!"

Grounder takes a painful minute. He looks at the sunrise and he tries to look at himself. He can't. His body is literally not built for that.  
But he looks back out at the sunrise. "Why is the sun rising instead of falling if it's a sunset, Scratch?"

"That's because we have work to do," Scratch says, stomping his way back down the trail they came up on. "C'mon, let's get it done."

Grounder doesn't respond. He's lost in the rising sun.

"Grounder," Scratch says. He says it again. "Grounder."

But he's not here with them right now, not in the sense that they are. "Scratch?"

The chicken scratches at the bottom of his beak, always looking for a new angle. "Yes, Grounder?"

"Do you really think I will be promoted to a Goodebot?" Grounder seems to be holding himself when he asks this question. His gaze gazing as far down as is physically possible for the robot, which isn't far.

"Not you," Scratch says, confidently, placing his filthy metallic wings on his filthy metallic hips and letting out a robot guffaw. "HuhuhuhuhAW! HUHUHAW! HUHUHAWHAWH!"

"I'm sure glad that I'm friends with you," Grounder says, meaning it. "Please think of me when you-"

Claws turn into a blunt instrument very quickly when they smash Tails in the face several times until he is twitching and his screams sound more like dubstep than they do the screams of a child.

"Hey wait," Grounder says, asking a question or something. "Is that OK?"

Tails opens his eyes. Several things happen.

There wasn't a single crack in his skull that he didn't convince himself that he didn't deserve.  
Scratch says a lot of things while he's beating a small child to death with his giant metal club of an arm.

Tails isn't dead yet, but he's getting there. Scratch thinks his slaps work like human slaps because he saw that on television and in real life.  
Grounder is cheering Scratch on. They both don't really know his motivation tactic is causing as much harm as it is.

"Calling all Freedom," Tails says, leaking fluids from every orifice. "Ten niner amen ack ack ack ack ack."  
Tails is probably usually the most intelligent Freedom Fighter if we're being honest with ourselves. However, in his current condition, he doesn't seem like himself at all.  
"Screed door at nine o' clock," he spits more blood into his drool. "Did you know every friendship is not without wheels."

"What are you saying!" Grounder says, pointing with his angry drill. It's whirring menacingly. Grounder and Tails stare into each other's souls for a minute. And before you give me any shit about Grounder having a soul, robots have souls in my AU and if you don't like that you can go read some trash that's completely devoid of robot souls, okay? If you're not here for robot souls you can get the fuck out of my face.  
"Hiccup," Tails says, not actually hiccuping. Just saying the word. He says it again, watch. "Hiccup," he says. See?

Grounder wants to stab Tails in the face, but Scratch recognizes this in his soul(ful) little eyes. And that's why he decides to do something about it.  
Scratch grabs Grounder's arm and he speaks to him as if he were dumber than he actually is. "Grounder, I think he's speaking in code."

"Like what makes us get up and go?" He asks Scratch before turning off his hand drill. He looks at his hand drill as if it could give him some deeper meaning insight to the nature of his very existence.

"No, \*idiot\*," Scratch says, rolling his eyes and letting out an uncannily mechanical huff. "That's really old bones you're thinking of. Like, really, really old bones. That's how we get up and go, idiot."

"Yeah but I thought Dr. Robotnik made us think good and do stuff with code."

"It's no secret to us that \*I\* can think good, Grounder," Scratch says, scratching against his mechanical hips with his mechanical claws. "If you could think good like me, you'd know that he's secretly telling secrets! Like! In the open!"

"Secret sauce secret moths. Angry horns in my direction," Tails says, drooling. He reflexively spits.

"Heyyyyy!" Grounder says, furrowing his brow with angry and hurt. "I don't like secrets!"

"Me neither, Grounder! Check him for a wire!"

"How do I do that?" Grounder asks, drillscratching his cranium.

"Oh, I have to do EVERYTHING," Scratch huffs. "You check for a wire by tearing off their shirt, like in Robotnik's JAG tapes!"

"Scratch I don't think-"

"Shut up and watch how it's done!" Scratch rips some fur and skin and blood off of Tails's chest. "HYAAAAH!"

Tails's eyes widen and he's screaming for the first time in at least a day.

"Scratch, I don't think that was a shirt," Grounder says, trying as best a robot can to chew on the corner of his mouth.

"AWH, HICKLEBERRIES!" Scratch says, cursing, and throwing the bloody, furry strip of flesh back into the Fox's face, muffling his screams and adding a slight gurgling and flapping to them with their placement and texture.

"I don't think he's wearing a wire," Grounder says.

"I KNOW I don't think he's wearing a wire, GROUNDER," he seethes, producing prosthetic sweat and heat emotions through his face while his shoulders expand and retract in ways that only Dr. Robotnik could possibly understand. "HOW do you think YOU KNOW THAT?!"

"I thought it was in my code to figure things out like that," Grounder shrugs. "I don't know?"

"YOU don't know because I DO. YOU'RE programmed to understand things AFTER ME! Understand?!"

"I guess so.." Grounder says, his eyes darting to the side. His shoulders slumping and his metallic teeth trying as best they can to chew on the other side of his frown.

"I KNOW so! Huhawh! Huhawh! HUHUHUHAWH! HAWH HAWH!" Scratch pretends he has physical impulses when he is laughing, just like the squishy man thing that created him. He puts his hands awkwardly on his stomach and bends over and stands back up before repeating this motion several times. "I got RAMmed better than you. Hopefully one day you'll get RAMmed by the big daddy man as good as me! Huhawh! Huhawh! HUHUHUHUHAWHHAWH! HAWH HAWH!"

"I guess I should get RAMmed better," Grounder says, as unsure of himself as he's ever been.

"Yeah you should, and-"

The narrative collapses momentarily when Scratch smashes Tails in the head with his clawfist to make him stop screaming.

Tails wakes up to the sensation of getting dragged behind two robots. He doesn't understand what's happening and he doesn't understand why either.  
He tries to say something but the dirt that enters his mouth when he opens it and breathes in is overwhelming, suffocating.

His body convulses and he wretches several times between spraying lines of decidedly less chunky puke as they go along.  
The robots don't notice him. There's a good chance they don't even know he's there.

He wears his paws over his snoot as a makeshift filter while spitting up onto his glued-on chest skin.

Suddenly the painful movement stops. Tails clutches his muzzle even more.

"CAWCAWH!" Scratch says, holding his hand to his beak. Causing the tinny sound of his voice to project even tinnier. "CAWCAWH! CAWCAWH!"

Tails thinks he sees Sonic dragging Sally approaching, but then he wonders why he thought that. Truth is that he saw that and gaslit himself into thinking he hadn't seen that.  
Truth is, he had.

Sonic is standing proud before the two robots and the unconditional body of one of their teammates. Sally is puking from the attack on her equilibrium and the disconnection from her body and the socket of her arm from which he dragged her.  
She passes out from the pain. Sonic doesn't notice.

When Tails reaches up to the sun, praying it really is some kind of god, Scratch turns around and grabs him by the scruff of his neck.  
Scratch waves him around like a banner or some other effortless way of flagging yourself to the enemy.

"Remember what I told you?" Scratch says to what he personally considers the green lump of failure behind the rock. "Remember what you're supposed to say?!"

Grounder speaks before the audience. Behind what he understands to be a corpse. "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. I AM VERY GOOD. I AM EVEN MORE THAN OKAY! DO ME A FAVOR AND DROP ALL YOUR WEAPONS AND STUFF AND COME PICK ME UP OVER HERE. I SWEAR I'M GOOD."

Tails's eyes are bleeding. He's looking Sonic directly in the eyes while being shaken unforgivably around.

"IN ORDER TO BE GOOD YOU HAVE TO PUT ON THESE HANDCUFFS. THEN YOU'LL BE GOOD." Scratch says in a voice desperately trying to sound like Grounder's Tails.  
Tails isn't sure when Grounder left or how far into that that he just woke up but he's not taking any chances.

He starts screaming. Again.

A buzzsaw goes through Scratch and sprays hot oil onto everything around him. Tails screams louder.

Scratch tries to say more things through his flapping corpse but that's when a threatsized buzzsaw cuts through it and splashes blood all over Grounder and that's the only thing that is alive aver Sonic accidentally catapults itself off a cliff and Scratch and Sonic are gone.

Tails screams. He screams harder than he's ever screamed before because his entire chest has been torn off and launched down the biggest canyon he's ever known.

He can hear the cries of Sally Acorn from the distance. He wonders when she'll clutch his dead hand.

Sally Acorn's screams echo the forest. She'll probably die from bloodloss.

Grounder's gone. So will Tails.