

## Kiroku / "Bandit" of the Coyos

### Backstory

**Name:** "Kiroku" translates in his language to the verb "to record". He earned the nickname "Bandit" in his late teens

**Species:** Bipedal wingless gryphon. Black coyote / blue jay hybrid known locally as the "Garrire Coyo Avem" (Chattering Coyote Bird)

**Sex:** ♂

**Age:** 24

**Height:** 5ft 9in

**Weight:** 160lbs

**Siblings:** No blood siblings, but raised in a pack with others of his age, whom he considered siblings. Around 10 of the pack are within 2 years of his age.

**Pack:** Large by pack standards, around 30 strong

**Home:** Wico Forest, secluded from New Salem, the nearest city. Various species are known to settle there

### Cultural Notes

The Coyos have been established in Wico Forest for many generations. There is some low-level, even passive, mutual antagonism between the Coyos and New Salem, each feeling that there is an 'outsiderness' to the other. For the Coyos, they assume that the city dwellers live a lifestyle of comfort, convenience, and individualism that they feel a level of disdain for. They also believe the city to be unpleasantly noisy and value the relative peace and quiet of the forest.

Forest packs are usually comprised mostly of females, as the males tend to leave upon reaching adulthood to join other packs or found their own. Some opt to move to New Salem due to the scarcity of non-city-founded community options. Although most of the males who do this move to the nearest city, some travel to cities further beyond. It is common to find a branch of the main pack that has settled into more permanent housing or chosen a combination of forest and city living.

The Coyos are not nomadic so settling in the forest is a viable option.

This trend of permanent migration to the city is not considered ideal to the pack as a whole as community is very important to the Coyos. Every member knows everybody else and everyone has a role that they fulfil to contribute to the pack, whether it's for its survival, for entertainment, or to make new discoveries. As a result of this, the concept of purpose is also important to the culture of the pack, and this encourages each member to contribute.

As a pack, the Coyos have a culture of valuing, and passing on, knowledge and wisdom. Older members teach the younger ones everything they need to know about hunting and gathering, nest-building, leadership, and any other knowledge of cultural value such as folklore and jewellery-making. While not everybody is expected to take on all jobs within the pack, they value well-roundedness in any given individual and the ability to pass skills on to the next generation.

For the purpose of clarifying nomenclature, a young gryphon is called a pup.

Most if not all gryphons have difficulty with speech to some extent, as their beaks do not easily facilitate it.

Kiroku is an original character from an unnamed story currently in production. He was born into a tribal community in Wico Forest called the Coyos, and was groomed by the elders to become a leader. Kiroku never felt this to be a good fit. He has difficulties with speech (although these have more to do with shyness than on any serious physical barrier to speech), but this has made him a quiet, thoughtful gryphon who makes a great listener.

### **Trust & Confidence**

*(newborn)*

Kiroku was born into a large pack that had, at most, irregular contact with the nearest city, New Salem (except for emergencies that required neighbourly help such as fire, famine, or defence situations). Due to his pack being both large and mostly comprised of females, his mother had a lot of support, both practical and theoretical, in raising him. As a result she was able to raise him with relative ease despite being a first-time mother. This had a lovely effect on Kiroku's development when it came to his sense of trust in the providers of his pack.

Early in his life, Kiroku had lots of quality time with his mother, and when she needed a break she would pass him to another female in the pack, who was either very experienced, or inexperienced and excited to have a go at 'looking after baby', under the watchful eye of a more experienced female.

Youngsters of the Coyos were routinely raised this way, and this communal approach to child-rearing stretched Kiroku's capacity to form symbiosis with his caregivers. Although he preferred his mother above all others, by the time he grew into a toddler he had internalised the idea that there were multiple people acting as secondary mothers, and took for granted that they would look after him. He felt welcome, safe, and loved.

### **Freedom & Self-Determination**

*(toddlerhood)*

Babyhood passed and Kiroku grew into a toddler. As a toddler, Kiroku loved to sit on the laps of the women of the tribe, watching and listening as they made jewellery, pottery, and cloth.

Over the course of a day the women would chat among themselves as they worked. Kiroku liked to listen, even if he didn't fully understand what they were talking about. He took comfort in the routines that he saw in the methodical work the women did - the steady weaving of baskets, the work of creating pottery that could survive the firing process, the rhythm of cloth-making and the creation of repeating patterns in the colours of beads in jewellery items.

As he observed all of this it started to feel to him as if everything had a place, and that left a subtle impression on him. Later, he would become quite obsessive, seeking the comfort of order that he had learned on the laps of the women in toddlerhood. This need to see order in things, along with the defeat he would later feel as he became a reluctant speaker, left him tense on the inside but externally appearing relaxed and prepared to go with the flow.

Rebellion was not completely absent from Kiroku's toddlerhood however: he liked to hold on to things as a little one: the relationships he had with the women of the tribe (which felt like something very special to him, which indeed they were), and items given to him by them and that he found himself. Kiroku was mostly a cooperative child, and sometimes this led him to believe that because he was being good, he could keep whatever he found. He discovered that that wasn't always the case, especially when he had found a bead, ball of string, or some other item that one of the women needed to use to make one of her crafts.

Differences of opinion over whether he could keep the item he had found or whether one of the women would have it tended to get settled quite quickly, but not without some protest from Kiroku.

As an adult, he came to understand the fallacy of sunk costs, so although sometimes he would sometimes hold onto a hope, personal grievance, or item for longer than was ideal, he had the mindset to recognise this and as soon as he did, would allow himself to let it go.

He began to speak during this time, but he found it difficult. The ability to speak at all was a new and exciting experience, but those teaching him how to speak seemed to feel that he was doing it wrong. They kept correcting his enunciation, and he tried to get it right, but his beak always seemed to feel wrong when he did it. He began to sense their internal frustration, however patient they appeared to be on the outside. As he had more and more speech lessons he became more adept at reading his teachers' non-verbal cues. He didn't want to displease them, but he didn't seem to have a choice.

As a result of this, sometimes he wished he could turn invisible so that nobody could see him failing, or stop time so that the moment that he failed would never happen. More specifically, he wished he could stop time after his teacher asked him a question or instructed him to try speaking, so that he could perfect his answer before re-starting time and delivering it. He continued to harbour this fanciful wish for many years and it became a background worry to him: that there was simply not enough time. Not enough time to learn things, to perfect them, not even to think about things.

The Coyos' culture was fundamentally cooperative, and as a young gryphon he felt that there was enough food, blankets, watchful adults, etc. for him. His childcare was of very good quality, especially when it came to his own safety. Therefore he didn't feel as if he had to defy anyone to get what he needed. This led him to become a cooperative member of the Coyos tribe.

### **Ambition**

*(young childhood)*

The other children of this life stage became much more energetic than Kiroku as they felt themselves becoming more competent in the use of their bodies, and began to think about what they wanted to do in the big, exciting world. Most of them started to spend less time around the women, but Kiroku preferred to stay where he was. He became more energetic too, but preferred to remain within closer proximity to the women than the rest of his age group, who liked to explore further. His sense of empathy, which was developing very well by this point, led him to tone down his expression of energy for the benefit of the women. He didn't want to disturb them, after all.

He began to daydream as an alternative to being outwardly expressive. The women told each other stories, gossiped, discussed politics, and explained new skills that the younger women in their group had yet to learn. Kiroku took what he heard from the women's conversations and spun them into stories in his head, even if he didn't fully understand all of it.

The women understood that he was taking his time to develop, as children will generally do. Pack life didn't tend to put time pressure on the gryphons in the same way as city life did, so they allowed him to stay as close to them as he needed, for as long as he needed.

As stated in the Cultural Notes (see above), gryphons tend to speak a little awkwardly. However, Kiroku was a late bloomer and always listened more than he spoke, so his beak wasn't the strongest. His shyness meant that he stumbled through words, especially if he found himself in a social situation in which he felt uncomfortable. Overall, his speech problems were more interpersonal than physical, but they became entrenched over the years nonetheless.

Instead he continued to listen to others. This, along with the cooperative cultural bias of his pack, meant that he became far more inclined to spend his time listening to others talking about their own ambitions than forming ones of his own, or observing them as they practised for their ambitions.

This had a range of effects on Kiroku, some helpful, some detrimental. He found that his willingness to listen and let another gryphon take the spotlight was an attractive trait that prompted youngsters and adults to like him. The adults in particular found him agreeable and easy to keep under control, and it encouraged Kiroku to think deeply about everything he heard. Among its more detrimental effects was a tendency to put others before himself to the extent that he sometimes forgot that he too deserved the time, food, toys, or whatever else was on offer. He also made an easy target for the more dominant-minded of the pack. This didn't become too much of a problem given the small size and isolated nature of the pack, and any unpleasant dynamics were dealt with, with wisdom and strength, by the elders.

Despite his self-consciousness about talking, Kiroku took pleasure in having the astuteness to notice small changes in his environment and the behaviour of others. He also began to try his hand at making the various items the women were making, and took great pride in a job done well.

Externally he would downplay his accomplishments, partly because pride in individual achievements made for a poor fit with the culture of his Coyos, and partly just in case his teachers had corrections to make - those humiliating speech lessons had taught him not to be complacent or to celebrate prematurely. Not celebrating too much (or at all) felt like a safer option.

Despite these downers that Kiroku had on himself, he developed an interest in other children who were unlike him. One of the most interesting to him was another, slightly younger pup named Luka. The women noticed his interest and encouraged him to reach out to Luka. They intuited that Kiroku and Luka would enjoy each others' company as both had reason to feel like the pack's odd one out (given Kiroku's speech issues and Luka's odd fur colour).

Like Kiroku, Luka struggled to speak due to the shape of his beak. Unlike Kiroku however, Luka didn't seem to care. Where Kiroku withheld from speaking as often as he could, Luka spoke a lot. Kiroku started playing with Luka and spending time with him, and the two became inseparable.

## **Productivity**

*(older childhood)*

Kiroku continued to practice, and to seek instruction, in various crafts and tasks relevant to the maintenance of the pack's way of life. With the right tasks, it felt more like fun than duty. He almost always preferred to work rather than indulge in actual play, especially if the play time offered to him was particularly boisterous. It didn't fit with Kiroku's relatively low-key way of expressing himself.

As Kiroku developed a clearer understanding of his emerging role in the pack - that of teacher, guide, mentor, and leader, owing to his attention to detail and his externally well-moderated temperament - and as he reached age 7, he tried to teach the skills he had learned to younger or less-adept members of the pack. He was good at what he did, but his speech impediment made it difficult for him to pass on the knowledge as eloquently as he understood it.

The more he tried to resist this, the less satisfied he became with his performance.

For the perfection-driven Kiroku this felt crushing, and humiliating all over again. He felt as if the expertise he had painstakingly developed had gone to waste. The willingness and ability to pass on skills within the pack was one of its key values. He was willing, but felt unable.

For a while Kiroku became so critical of himself that he couldn't bring himself to try new things or continue to learn skills that he had not yet mastered. This life stage is about the development of competence and of starting to become a productive member of society, so this self-criticism felt very defeating indeed for Kiroku.

Over time (and at Luka's suggestion), Kiroku learned to use his strong tendency to seek fault in his own work to his advantage. Rather than refusing to do anything that he wasn't sure would turn out perfect, he decided to challenge himself to seek, and systematically eliminate, the imperfections in his work. This alternative approach of seek-and-destroy felt to him like a better alternative to refusing to produce perfect output, and it became his new modus operandi.

It also helped that both he and Luka were being trained to become one of the pack's primary food providers, and this fitted Kiroku much better than his primary training. Luka, embracing his own primary training, had developed an interest in sources of food and medicine, and this encouraged Kiroku to go hunting and gathering with him. They often went into the forest together to see what they could find.

He and Luka had become very close by this time, and with the understanding, support, and encouragement that Luka provided, Kiroku had begun to re-assess other parts of his life, including his thwarted ambition to teach skills to the next generation. Now that he knew Luka he felt he had the support necessary to find himself, make the best of himself, and to decide on an ambition that suited him.

This was easier said than done, and for a long time this presented its own source of conflict. Kiroku felt from personal experience that it was important to have a specific area of interest, something that the individual cared about enough to turn into a skill that would be useful to the pack. He encouraged others to care enough to find their own interest and develop their expertise, but felt like a hypocrite for not being able to find one for himself. As interested in food and medicine as he was, he didn't feel that that was the right path for him either.

He had been aware of the city beyond the edge of Wico Forest for some time, and in true Kiroku style had been interested in it. He and Luka talked about it sometimes, and decided that when they were old enough they would like to work and live together in New Salem. More specifically, Kiroku wanted a job that required coordination and passion.

He also wanted a small group of friends. He didn't want the big gaggle that some of the more outgoing Coyos pups had developed. They seemed to actively be on buddy terms with everybody but that didn't appeal to Kiroku: it seemed like too much information (non-verbal cues, individual friends' hopes, fears, and dreams, etc.) to keep track of. Instead he wanted a small group, a group that would be easy enough to manage, and whom he could care about (and who could care about him) deeply. Becoming friends with Luka had been a revelation and he wanted to repeat that, without sacrificing the depth he had achieved with Luka.

### **Child to Adult Transition** *(adolescence)*

As Kiroku grew into his teenage years he came to be well liked and respected among the elders of the tribe. He spent a lot of time with them which prompted them to like him, and they liked his gentle, quiet, thoughtful, and respectful nature. They were convinced that he would make an excellent mentor and guide to the next generation, even if he didn't. They did not think his communication difficulties would be a problem, and considered them to be mere childhood shyness.

Kiroku loved the other members of the pack, and appreciated the various skills and aptitudes that they brought to the proverbial table. This respect and high regard of the pack was evident enough that most, if not all, of the pack liked him for seeing and appreciating them. He remembered the histories of each member of the tribe and this contributed to their awareness of his valuing of them.

He had a very small circle of close friends but also had friends who were not as close, but still had a warm regard for them anyway. He maintained a great love and respect for the elder women of the tribe who had brought him up.

There were some politics among the mothers and elders of the tribe that Kiroku never became aware of. While the mothers who had supported and nurtured Kiroku saw him as gentle-natured and thoughtful (in their eyes, ideal qualities for a leader), others considered him too submissive, shy, and even effeminate, "special" or "slow", and felt that he had only been put on the path to leadership because he was being unfairly favoured. The mothers who had so far supported Kiroku protected him from hearing about this.

Kiroku saw the elders of the tribe as role models, and he also used Luka's differences as

the basis for making Luka a role model. Luka was still more talkative than him.

The elders were aware of the amount of time Kiroku and Luka spent together, and felt it was a little odd. This didn't detract from either of their characters, but the elders slowly became aware that it was unlikely that either Kiroku nor Luka would have children of their own as they preferred each other's company. There was a certain amount of pressure on Kiroku to eventually have a family. In his pack, a leader was expected to have a family in order to be respected.

Kiroku had only one partner, and that was Luka. By the time they reached their late teens they had experimented physically together.

Kiroku and Luka wanted more than a few liaisons however, and the idea of a long-term relationship appealed to both of them. They began sneaking off to the city. Luka became familiar with it and that made him more confident and daring about going deeper into the city, more often. He was particularly fascinated with the variety of foods, medicine, and people available in New Salem. Kiroku however, was less keen and found the city an alien and scary place. To him, it was a place that Coyos gryphons went to if they wanted to abandon the pack.

One night, Luka led Kiroku to the edge of the forest. Kiroku already knew what Luka wanted to suggest; a trip into New Salem. Luka had a surprise for him. In a bag that Kiroku himself had woven were two sets of city clothes that Luka had bartered for earlier that day. Kiroku tried to convince Luka not to do this as he feared not knowing what to say or how to act in front of city dwellers. They went in regardless, and spent the evening there.

Eventually he became more comfortable with the city. They began to go there together quite often, sneaking in to barter jewellery that Kiroku had made or rare items from the forest that Luka had found. Kiroku started to bring back newspapers and other written works, and anything small that he could easily smuggle back into the forest without his pack seeing. This habit earned Kiroku the nickname "Bandit".

When he got confident enough he even went into New Salem alone.

### **Closeness in Relationships**

*(young adulthood)*

In time Luka and he decided to move to New Salem together, as they felt that they would fit in better there than among the Coyos. Bandit felt that he simply was not the leader that he had been groomed to be. Breaking the news to the elders, the tribeswomen, and his mother was hard. They tried to convince him to stay, but he remained adamant that he wanted to go. In classic Bandit style he pointed out that while the Coyos were entitled to keep its culture distinct from that of the city, a link to New Salem would be beneficial to the pack.

He was careful to manage this discussion so that he and Luka would not lose their place in the pack altogether, as both wanted to maintain contact. He succeeded in this, and they moved to the city.

Before too long, while Bandit and Luka were still settling into New Salem they met Dakota, a canine, a dragon named Bastian, Carson, a raptor.

Although Bandit, through his own dedication to improve, had become very good at making friends, working, or otherwise teaming up with others, he limited it as much as possible. With very few exceptions, he found contact with others stressful. He owned this, as he understood that it was his problem and not the fault of any person he felt uncomfortable with, so this rarely escalated to a personal dislike, at least on Bandit's side.

He is capable of speaking with strangers, although he doesn't particularly like this and can come across as awkward and formal or impersonal towards them.

Likewise, leadership can be a strange thing: many people respond to the leader differently to how they respond to other members of the group. People can idolise, resent, rebel against, over-comply with, and challenge the leader. Over the years Bandit had become familiar with members of the pack responding to him in these ways. Indeed, it was one of the reasons he and the leaders got on so well. As their preparation of him for a leadership role became more obvious, members of the pack responded to him differently, and he found that the current leaders offered him a break from this by treating him as just Bandit, when he needed it. As a result of all of this however, Bandit went out of his way to avoid leadership in the city.

In the current day, Bandit works as a typesetter in New Salem. He is passionate about his work and enjoys the attention to detail required, along with its need for a methodical approach. He prefers to be left alone to focus on it. When he has to deal with a lot of interruptions, he prioritises paying attention to the person rather than his job (whether he wants to or not; to listen properly to the person is what he was raised to do), and he finds this stressful.

He is also interested enough in his role to want to know more about it, so he has been known to read about typesetting while not at work.

Bandit continues to have a romantic and sexual relationship with Luka, which is very emotionally deep, trusting, and mutually nourishing. Despite their deep emotional connection (and Bandit is almost completely emotionally open with Luka), he struggles to be particularly physically affectionate. Despite Bandit being bigger and older than Luka, they do not particularly indulge in power play. They indulge in this a little bit, along with role sharing, and fluidity, which they express physically, emotionally, and romantically.

### **Passing on Responsibilities**

*(older adulthood)*

In the longer term, Bandit would like to retire from typesetting to teach, and to settle down quietly with Luka. In particular regarding his long-term professional goals, Bandit is interested in tying his city life and earlier, forest life together. More specifically, he likes the idea of spending time in Wico Forest finally fulfilling his role as a mentor to the next generation.

He has done what he can to ensure his and Luka's freedom to travel freely between the two. Bandit is aware that Luka would still enjoy hunting, gathering, and scavenging in the forest for the pack if he was given the opportunity, and would love to offer Luka a way to resume these activities.



Although Bandit and Luka will never have children of their own, they want to do the nearest equivalent and support the next generation of the Coyos.

## **End of Life**

*(old age)*

Bandit is currently unsure of how he feels about death, but his feelings about it currently range between acceptance of its inevitability and anxiety. For Bandit, the most anxiety-inducing elements of death for Bandit are no longer being present, not being able to observe life happening, and not being around to help. He also fears both passing before Luka, and passing after him. He feels anxiety about time being fleeting, but is also aware that he cannot control this.

In the pack, death is seen as a sad and impactful loss. When a person dies, the rest of the pack are acutely aware that a lifetime of knowledge and wisdom have been lost. This is partly the driver behind the pack being so keen for older members of the pack passing on their knowledge and wisdom the next generation. Much of their way of life and culture is based on ideas, skills, and knowledge, so they are keen to keep these alive.

## **Credits**

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy