

# Tails the Fox GeneX - Part 3

By 2BIT

Submitted: November 8, 2006

Updated: December 14, 2006

*Chapters 24-35, the journeys leading up to the final battles. For chapters 1-23, see parts 1 & 2.*

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/2BIT/40721/Tails-Fox-GenX---Part-3>

<b>Chapter 24 - Vortex, Guide to Shadow Arc</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 25 - The Power of the Lost Ones</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 26 - Defending the Base</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 27 - Inner Darkness</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 28 - To the Rescue!</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 29 - Awry Plans</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter 30 - Heroes of the Dark Side</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Chapter 31 - A Turning Point</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter 32 - The ARK</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Chapter 33 - Copter's Final Test</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter 34 - Path to the Dream Temple</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Chapter 35 - Tails Worst Nightmare</b>	<b>37</b>

## 24 - Vortex, Guide to Shadow Arc

Tails the Fox

Chapter 24 - Vortex, Guide to Shadow Arc

Stage 13 - Shadow Arc

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Knuckles was lost. Very lost. Gemini had told him that she could use her magic to find the Master Emerald. She had told Knuckles to meet her at the place her magic had pointed her, a place shrouded in fog. That was an understatement, as Knuckles soon found himself lost in a place where he couldn't see anything but the thick, dense fog. Soon, he smacked into a wall. "Yeow! Who put that here!?"

The fog then subsided. Knuckles spotted a sign near the front door. "Shadow Arc Laboratory. No trespassing." he read. It was the very same building that Shadow had found himself at earlier that day, and as Knuckles entered the dark laboratory, he noticed that someone had left the machinery running. Knuckles noticed that amidst the spinning torch things and the dragon statues, there were slimy bluish creatures slithering all about, the word "losol" being repeatedly spoken, supposedly by the creatures. The staircase in the back wall that Shadow had previously opened was still open, and beside it was a gate that Shadow had previously missed somehow. The gate was barred shut, so Knuckles decided to head upstairs...

Vortex was calm and content. Mostly because he was asleep. Fighting with Tails was not as difficult as he had previously let on, but he was tired after nearly being frozen to death by the Doomsayer. Vortex was soundly dozed off on his chair in what he called his room. Zipp was hovering in the air nearby, firing his guns at a dart board. He had to use the silencer so that Vortex could sleep, which was one thing that really made him mad. "No noise, no one to kill. This day is so boring!"

Just then, the door swung open and Knuckles peeked into the room. Zipp turned to the red echidna and grinned excitedly. "What do ya know? This day just got interesting!" In his excitement, Zipp had talked too loud and woke Vortex up. "What'ssss the big idea!?" He hissed angrily. The black chameleon walked over to Zipp and grabbed the gun from his hands. "Quesstionsss firsssst! Sssshoot afterward, moron!" he yelled after the situation became clear to him. "Apologiesss, sssir. I am Vortex. What bringsss you to my lair?"

Knuckles stepped into the room and looked around. Sure enough, this room looked just like every other room. Turning to Vortex, Knuckles explained the situation. "I'm looking for a friend of mine. A white dragon. Either of you seen her?"

Zipp tried to grab his gun back from Vortex, but was simply swatted aside. "You'll pay for that!" Zipp muttered. Vortex, ignoring the hornet, replied to Knuckles's question. "I've never sssseen a dragon before. However, I have been assssleep for a while. Perhapssss your friend issst losst in here. I will help you look." Vortex then tossed the gun to Zipp, who quickly snatched it back. "I don't trust this guy!"

he grumbled. "I'm not going!"

"Fine." Vortex said calmly. "I don't need you, anyway. Come, let usss begin our sssearch!"

Vortex and Knuckles left on their search through the winding, maze-like corridors of the laboratory. It was a huge building, you could easily lose a Tyrannosaurus in there. It was also dark, the blue flame torches giving off very little light, so Vortex carried a flashlight with him. The swarm of losol, which had grown exponentially since Shadow had left, didn't make things any easier. It was a stroke of luck that Knuckles had enlisted the help of Vortex, his Chaos Hole and Chaos Inferno abilities easily dispatched most losol in their path. However, Knuckles found that if you hit the blobs hard enough, they actually can be dealt some damage. Little did they realize that as they went about fighting with the slimy monsters, something was following them...

Soon, they came to a large room with many of what appeared to be a sort of lamp post scattered all over the place. All of them were turned off. There were only two exits to the room, one directly across from where Vortex and Knuckles entered. Knuckles could see Gemini standing in the large doorway on the other side, a distant expression on her face. "Hey, Gemini! Wake up!" Knuckles called. Almost as if in response, two large metal doors swung shut in both doorways, locking Knuckles and Vortex in, and locking Gemini out! "What'sss the meaning of thiss!?" Vortex hissed angrily. "Who daresss lock me in my own lair!"

A gaseous form slipped in through the cracks of the door that Gemini was locked behind, the gas collecting and combining into the shapeless form of Lospector! His jumbled face took on an expression of anger. "Who are you to attack my losol!? That's really very rude, you know!"

Knuckles shook his fist at Lospector. "So, you're the one who commands these monsters!"

Vortex interrupted him. "Your beassstssss invaded our home! If anyone ssshould be ssshouting here, it'sss me!"

Lospector faked a sad face. "Oh, boo hoo! 'Oh, they invaded my home!' As far as I can tell, you invaded this place yourself! But ya know, who even cares who invaded what? It only matters who kicks who's butt in the end! I call forth the powers of the dark!" Lospector pulled a deck of tarot cards seemingly from nowhere. "The cards shall choose your fate! Ha! Let's just see..." He started shuffling them and performing various tricks, like snapping them out of one "hand" and catching them in another. Vortex grew impatient. "Let'sss get him, Knucklessss!"

As the pair of animals leapt into action, Lospector pulled a single card from his deck and evaporated himself, reappearing behind them. As they turned around, Lospector held up his card. "Looks like you win an army of Losohsts! Which really means I win! Huhuhuhuhuhuh!"

Lospector vanished into thin air, and a bunch of creatures began rising up through the floor! They wore grayish blue cloaks, their faces hidden by attached hoods. They apparently had no legs, and their hands were covered by gray gloves. Each pulled a weapon from within their cloaks, such as scythes and axes, and Knuckles and Vortex realized they were in for some trouble! Vortex shined his flashlight on one of them for a closer look, and the creature quickly flew out of the way. Knuckles pointed at the floor beneath them. "Their cloaks are dripping with slime! They must be made of the same stuff the losol are made of!"

Vortex shone the flashlight around the room, and the Losohsts all avoided the beam of light. "There'sss a difference here! The Lossohssstssss don't like light! Perhapsss if we turn on the lampsss, we can desstroy them all!"

Knuckles turned to Vortex. "Can't you just call a black hole to deal with them?" he asked.

Vortex groaned in frustration. "I can't! It'sss too ssoon after the lassst time I did that! I have my limitsss!" Knuckles jumped to dodge a sudden attack by a Losohst. "Do you know how to turn on the lights!?" he shouted. Vortex changed his color to match his surroundings, not much of a stretch from his usual black coloring. His color change wasn't as advanced as Espio's, though, and he could be seen if one tried hard enough. "Disstract them!" he shouted, "I'll figure thiss out!"

The Losohsts mostly didn't notice Vortex while his color was changed, but Knuckles stuck out like a sore thumb. The Losohsts quickly surrounded him, but Knuckles just smiled. "Finally, a challenge! I haven't had a real challenge all day!"

Vortex spotted the switch to activate the lights on the wall. He was in the center of the room, leaving it still a fair distance away. To make matters more difficult, some of the Losohsts were hovering near the switch, guarding it. "These creatures are smarter than they look!" Vortex thought as he stealthily attempted to reach the switch. Half-way there, Vortex sneezed, and the Losohsts looked in his direction. "Darn allergies!" Vortex thought. The Losohsts had spotted him, so he reverted back to normal coloring and charged forward, narrowly dodging attacks from the ghostly creatures before retaliating with a flurry of various physical attacks. Vortex had taught himself to fight, and while his style was a bit unorthodox, he fought very efficiently with it.

Knuckles, on the other hand, generally used punching as his primary means of attack. However, the Losohsts kept flying out of the way, and Knuckles was finding it difficult to continue dodging their blades. "I can't keep this up much longer!" he thought. "Vortex better hurry with those lights!"

Vortex reached the switch, but the Losohsts were undaunted by his attacks. All the Losohsts that were fighting with Vortex now stood between him and the switch. Vortex had had enough. "Curssed Lossst Onesss! Get out of my home!!! Chaosss Camouflage!!!" Vortex's body erupted with a bright, white light. He was now glowing with chaos energy! The light caused the Losohsts to scatter. Vortex then doused the camouflage and grabbed the handle of the switch. "Lightsss out, Lossohssst!" he said, pulling the switch. The lamps flickered on and very quickly bathed the room in bright light. The Losohsts tried in vain to shield themselves, and they all erupted with ghost fire until they finally burned out of existence! Knuckles wiped some sweat from his forehead. "That was...tough..." he panted. Vortex turned his attention to the locked door to where Gemini was waiting. "Think you can punch through thiss, tough guy?" Vortex asked. Knuckles grinned. "Sure! No ghosts can wear me down!"

Knuckles launched a punch with incredible force, forcing the doors open. However, Gemini was gone. "C'mon! We have to find her!" Knuckles said, leading the way. Vortex followed hurriedly. "Ssslow down! I jusst made chaosss energy erupt from my ssskin! I'm exhaussted!"

At the end of the hallway was another large room. This room was filled with what appeared to be treasure chests, as well as the same spinning torches that were in the other areas. In the center of the room, Gemini was hunched on all fours, knee deep in loso! She had a crazed look in her eyes, and her skin was taking on a greenish coloring. Standing before her was the mysterious robed figure known as the Doomsayer! "This girl is doomed." he declared. Knuckles was shocked by this scene, but his resolve was never stronger. He called out to the Doomsayer in response, "Not if I can help it!"

To be continued...

## 25 - The Power of the Lost Ones

Tails the Fox

Chapter 25 - The Power of the Lost Ones

Boss 17 - Los Gemini

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Gemini roared as a traditional dragon might. The Doomsayer turned to Knuckles and Vortex, his golden eyes seeming on fire! "Your friend is lost!" Thunder crashed around the Doomsayer, which was odd considering they were inside. Knuckles let out a startled "Yaaah!" before questioning the Doomsayer. "Who are you? What have you done!?" The Doomsayer remained serious. "It is not what I have done. It's what she has done. Entering a world where one does not belong, can only lead to tragedy." The Doomsayer turned to face Gemini, and pointed to the slime that she was knee deep in. "The children of doom, the Lost Ones, have devoured this girl's soul! You cannot save her!"

Knuckles clenched his fists as a show of his resolve. "I'll save her! You just watch!" The Doomsayer turned to the feisty echidna. "You can try! Oh, yes, you can try... But in the end it is pointless! The doom will destroy you all!!" Ice and hail surrounded the Doomsayer as he vanished, leaving Knuckles and Vortex faced with a possessed dragon girl to deal with! "Ssso, thisss isss the dragon girl. I did not believe you at firssst." Vortex said, gazing in awe at the crazed beast before them. "The lossssol are controlling her! We mussst act fassst!" Knuckles looked at Gemini, then at the losol blob possessing her. "How do we do it?" he wondered aloud.

"We mussst get the lossol away from your friend, then desstroy them!" Vortex said. "It won't be eassy. They never like to let go until the victim'sss ssssol isss completely theirssss! We need to force them off!"

"All right!" Knuckles leapt into action, unleashing a flurry of punches at the losol. However, this did little, and now "Los Gemini" was on the attack! She opened her mouth and let loose her fiery breath toward Knuckles who was forced to move the hard way. Knuckles ran to get away from the flames, having already recieved some nasty burns. Vortex shook his head. "You'll jussst get yourssself killed that way!" he remarked. "You need to ussse the lossssol'sss weaknessss againsts them!"

"And what would that be?" Knuckles groaned. Before Vortex could answer, Los Gemini took to the air, the losol still attached to her legs, and soared over them, blowing flames in their direction. Knuckles and Vortex ran for cover, and Knuckles grabbed onto the wall. "Gotta go with what I know..." Knuckles thought, "...and I know how to fight!" He climbed up the wall and leapt off, gliding at Los Gemini, who was busy chasing Vortex. Knuckles landed on her back, and attempted to knock some sense into her. His attacks caused her to roar in pain and rage, and she attempted to shake him off. Vortex, in the mean time, had hidden behind a computer terminal that was near the back wall. He called out to Knuckles. "The lossol'sss weakness! It'sss ice!!! Break open the sssspinning torchess and take the ice flame within!"

Knuckles was too busy trying not to be thrown from Los Gemini's back. "Why can't you do it!?" he shouted while panicking from his situation. Vortex glared in his general direction. "Ice isss my weaknessss assss well! I'm a cold-blooded creature! Cold makesss me hibernate, and too much cold makesss me die!" Knuckles was flung off the dragon, and he landed beside Vortex. "You make a good point..." he said in a dazed and shaky voice. Vortex smacked some sense into him. "I needed that..." Knuckles muttered. Vortex winked at Knuckles. "Fire isss not my foe sssso much! I'll dissstract her, you get the ice!"

Vortex took off into the center of the room, shouting at Los Gemini to provoke her. "Come on, dragon! You'll never ssslay me!" Knuckles looked around, and noticed that the nearest torch was on the other side of the room near the entrance, where all the torches were. He ran out from behind the computer terminal and tore along the wall to the other side of the room. However, he found a Loskel there waiting for him, carrying a sharp looking blade. "I don't have time for this!" Knuckles shouted, launching a punch at the skeleton before it could swing its blade. Knuckles managed to break clear through it, but it quickly started reassembling itself. Ignoring that, Knuckles ran to the nearest torch and smashed it with his fist! Bad idea, though, as his hand touched the ice flame and got freezer burn! "YEOW!!!" he screamed, which drew the attention of Los Gemini. Knuckles picked up the ice flame torch, but was being backed into a corner by Los Gemini and the Loskel. "Chaosss Inferno!!" Vortex called, rushing to the loskel and blasting it from existence! "Now, Knucklessss! Ussse the torch!!!"

Knuckles ran at Los Gemini, who had landed in front of him, and thrust the torch at the losol like a sword! The losol screeched and released Gemini from their grip, forming a Losol Golem nearby! Gemini's coloring returned to white, and her eyes closed as she fell to the ground. Knuckles decided now was the time to finish the Losol Golem once and for all! "Freeze, scum!!!" he shouted as he flung the torch into the blob, freewzing it in ice. Vortex followed up by using Chaos Inferno once more, blasting the Losol Golem into nothing more than a puddle of water on the floor, which was the remains of the ice!

Knuckles shook hands with Vortex. "Thanks, pal. I couldn't have done it without you!" Vortex smirked at him. "Don't forget that. You owe me now, ssssucker!" Vortex turned to walk out the door, then stopped short. "Take care of her, Knucklesss. Sssshe'll wake up sssshortly." He then walked back towards his room, without another thought. Knuckles waved good bye to him, then turned his attention to Gemini.

The dragon lay still for a few moments, then slowly opened her eyes. "H-huh? Knuckles?" she muttered, standing up slowly. "You saved me?"

Knuckles winked at her. "Of course! I'd never abandon a friend, no matter what!"

Gemini smiled warmly. Gone was the crazed eyes of Los Gemini. It was clear that she was back to normal! Gemini then turned to the computer terminal. "My magic led me to that computer. The Lost Ones attacked me there. But not before I used my magic to find out who'd been using it. The last one to use that computer was Dr. Eggman!"

Knuckles was shocked somewhat. "Eggman?! What was he doing in a place like this!?"

Gemini shook her head. "I have no idea. But I do know one thing!" she turned to face Knuckles again. "I sensed it while I was possessed. The Master Emerald has been shattered!"

Knuckles nearly fell over from the news. He stood up straight, took a few deep breaths to calm down, and then screamed like he was being hit between the legs with a steel baseball bat!! "HOW MANY

TIMES CAN THAT DUMB GEM BREAK ANYWAY!!!!!" He started ranting and raving until Gemini smacked him. "I needed that one, too..." he mumbled. "Calm down, Knuckles! All the pieces are in the same area!" Gemini said. Knuckles tried to remain calm, but his voice gave away his tension as he impatiently demanded, "Where!?"

Gemini pulled out her wand and started waving it about. "Hold on... Abra-ka-searchra!" she said. A flash of light erupted from the wand, illuminating the whole room. The light lifted Gemini into the air, and a gust of wind seemed to be blowing her wings around as her magic searched. Finally, she dropped slowly to the ground and reported her findings. "It's at Eggman's base."

Knuckles clenched his fists and growled. "Eggman! I should have known! Let's go, Gemini!" his voice then took a more reassuring tone. "I promise you, we'll find your spell book's last page, and the Master Emerald, too!" Gemini smiled excitedly at his words. "Great! I'll meet you outside! Abra-ka-Warpra!" With a flash of light, Gemini teleported out of Shadow Arc. "I better get going, too." Knuckles said. However, he was curious about something. He stepped over to the computer screen and looked up what Eggman was using it for. A document appeared onscreen. "X Experiments..." Knuckles muttered, reading. Pictures were onscreen of five experiments. "Ah! This is about Punchy and the others! Vortex is here, too..." he exclaimed. He gazed at the picture of Experiment 3, which was apparently taken in the dark, as all Knuckles could make out was a silhouette. A very creepy silhouette. "Who or what is that thing!?" he muttered. "Forget it, Knuckles!" he said to himself. "It's time to stop Eggman and save the Master Emerald! I'm outta here!" With a resolve stronger than ever, Knuckles turned around and started on his way to find the Master Emerald and defeat Eggman and Punchy once and for all!

To be continued...

## 26 - Defending the Base

Tails the Fox

Chapter 26 - Defending the Base!

Stage 14 - GUN Warship

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right? Right? DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT!?

Punchy was sitting on Eggman's control chair, sleeping. It was so boring waiting around for something to happen, and Punchy couldn't keep his eyes open. Finally, the computer made an alarm sound, which Punchy slept through. Luckily, Rainbow was nearby, and alerted him to the alarm. "WAKE UP, ONE!"

Punchy jumped in his seat and started looking around in a panicky manner, shouting "Who, what, when, where, which?!" Rainbow pointed to the computer screen. "We have a message!" Punchy looked at the control panel and realized he didn't know how to work the computer. "OK... How do we get the message?" he muttered to himself. Rainbow pushed in front of him and pressed a few buttons, then moved back out of Punchy's way. Eggman's face appeared onscreen. "How did you do that?!" Punchy wondered aloud. Eggman looked at Punchy impatiently. "What took you so long? Never mind. Punchy, GUN is approaching your position!"

Punchy jumped again. "WHAT!? W-wait a minute! Where the heck are you?" he shouted. Eggman looked a bit irritated. "I'm... in the middle of something. And so are most of the robots!"

Punchy had begun to panic. "Well, what do you want me to do?! Sounds like we're beat!" Eggman was a bit annoyed, but tried to maintain a calm tone as he replied. "I want you to take the plane to the GUN Command Warship, land on it, and eliminate its power supply! If you do that, it'll crash and Gunner will have to form a new plan! Got it!?"

"You can count on us, Tubby!" Rainbow said excitedly. Eggman roared back at her, "TUBBY!? You insolent little..." Rainbow rolled her eyes and replied in an innocent tone. "What should I call ya? Fatty? Blobby? Balloony?" Eggman tried to control his anger, but it showed through in his reply, "EGGMAN will be fine!" Rainbow grinned. "How about Humpty Dumpty?" Eggman was enraged now. "I'm hanging up! You just defend the base until I get back!"

Eggman hung up his phone, and Punchy turned his attention to Rainbow. "All right, Rainbow. While I'm gone, I want you to look for the Master Emerald." Rainbow looked thoughtful for a moment. "You mean the big green one in the hologram?" Punchy nodded. "Yeah, that's the one. I'll help you when I get back." He stood up and started on his way out of the control room. Rainbow waved to him as he headed out the door. "Good luck, One!" Punchy stopped short and yelled back, "DON'T CALL ME ONE!!!" Rainbow rolled her eyes again. "How about Uno? Or maybe..." Punchy smacked his forehead. "Forget it! I give up!" As he ran away from the control room, Rainbow grinned contentedly. "One it is..."

After a while, Punchy found Copter's plane, the Hurricane. Punchy hopped in and looked over the controls. "How does this thing work...? I guess I'll have to learn as I go..." he muttered. As he started up the plane and began to take off, his expression turned very unhappy. "Nothing is worth all this trouble..." he thought. The plane launched into the air at a very high speed, which Punchy hadn't expected.



"Whooooooooaaaaa!!!!!!" It took a moment for Punchy to recover, and once he did, he spotted a large flying warship heading towards the base! It was still pretty far away, but the Hurricane caught up to it quickly. "Now how am I going to get in there?" Punchy wondered aloud. Before he could think of an idea, the Hurricane crashed into the front of the warship, smashing through a few walls and finally finding himself inside the gigantic warship! Punchy dizzily hopped out of the plane. "I wish I knew how to fly that thing... I could've been spared that... at least it worked..." The Hurricane was really beaten up, and it turned around on its own to fly out of the warship! "Was it supposed to do that?" Punchy muttered, realizing that it wouldn't be easy to escape the warship when this was over. To make matters worse, Punchy's crash caused an "intruder alert" alarm to start screeching throughout the warship. "I better find the power supply fast!" Punchy thought. So, he began exploring the ship.

It was a difficult journey, as GUN had employed an army of androids that beared a striking resemblance to Copter. They fought similarly to Copter as well, except they were rather fond of firing missiles out of their tails! Punchy decided that it would be easier to simply avoid the missiles and let the androids tear the ship apart, but that plan wasn't working out well. So he took cover by running into a hallway, which was too small a space for the androids to follow in large numbers. He dashed through the maze-like halls until he ran out of hallway. He found himself in an area with several bridges extending across the underside of the ship. As such, there was no floor under the bridges. Worse, several of the androids had followed Punchy there. "That does it!" he thought. "I'll just have to make them stop following me!"

Punchy turned to face the androids running after him. As they got closer, they suddenly started getting knocked off the bridge by a fast-moving object! "What the heck? What's going on here?" Punchy thought as he clobbered the one android that managed to get through. Suddenly, the object rushed toward Punchy, and he braced himself for the impact...

But nothing happened. Punchy lowered his guard and noticed Charmy hovering in the air in front of him. "All right!" Charmy said excitedly. "We sure showed them, huh, Knuckles?" Punchy growled at the bee who had just mistaken him for his nemesis. "I'm NOT Knuckles!" Charmy flew around him and chuckled. "C'mon, Knuckles! That disguise is so lame! Green fur dye kinda makes you stick out more, too." Punchy opened his mouth to protest, but Charmy wasn't finished. "By the way, didja know there's an intruder aboard the ship? Those Experiment Androids probably thought you were the bad guy with that makeup on. Robots are so dumb!" Punchy, remembering how useful Charmy had been fighting the robots, decided to take advantage of this turn of events. "Right! That's what I was doing! Searching for that intruder! I'll show him! You want to help me, kid?" Punchy said, trying to mimic Knuckles's voice as he spoke. Charmy found the voice acting hilarious. "OK, OK! Just don't talk with that silly voice the whole way. I can't take it. Hehehe... It makes you sound even dumber than usual, Knuckles!" Punchy looked away from Charmy and rolled his eyes. "I'm gonna go nuts if he keeps calling me Knuckles..." he thought.

Punchy and Charmy continued across the bridge. On the other side, Sargent Gunner had arrived, and almost walked past Punchy and Charmy, but stopped suddenly and turned back around. "You're not an android... You're the punk who stole our Chaos Emerald!" he shouted as he suddenly realized it. Punchy and Charmy turned around, and Punchy felt he would explode. "Not you again! Shouldn't you be retiring somewhere by now, gramps!?" Punchy growled. Gunner did not like the remark about his age. "I'm not so old! I'm just about as old as Dr. Eggman!" Charmy then broke out laughing. "You look old enough to be his grandpa!" Gunner glared furiously at the two youngsters. "You won't be laughing when I finally eliminate you furry freaks once and for all! You intruders won't get far here. We've been upgraded to

maximum security! Our new androids based on Experiment 2 are everywhere! You'll never get our Chaos Emerald this time!" Punchy and Charmy glanced at each other, then at Gunner. "Chaos Emerald?!" they both said, surprised. "That's right!" Gunner continued, "I don't think you'd want to take it anyway. It just so happens to be powering our ship's engines! If you take it, we'll crash, and we'll all die!" Punchy grinned menacingly at him. "Really? How convenient. I'll take it!" Gunner's eyes went wide, and his voice quivered from the shock of what this meant to him. "You fiends! Just you wait! When I get back, I'll destroy you all!" Gunner then ran away towards the front of the ship in a panicky fasion. "That's it, Gunner! Run away to your escape pod! Don't bother me!" Punchy said. Charmy watched the old sargent run across the bridge. "Wow, he runs fast for his age. He's nuts, too. Mistaking us for bad guys. Still, I bet the real bad guys are after the Chaos Emerald! We gotta get there before they do, Knuckles!" Punchy agreed, continuing his lies to the trusting kid.

As they continued toward the engine room to the warship, it began looking more and more like one of Dr. Eggman's battle ships in a more military style. Punchy and Charmy continued as stealthily as possible, so that the many turrets positioned throughout the ship wouldn't target them.

"The engine room is just a little bit further." Charmy finally said. "I was exploring this ship ever since it took off, so I know the way! You can count on me, Knuckles!" Punchy had enough of being called Knuckles. "SHUT UP!!" he shouted. Big mistake. The turrets suddenly pointed right at him, alerting the androids at the same time. "Oh, shoot..." Punchy whimpered. The turrets let loose with a hurricane of bullets, forcing Punchy and Charmy to make a mad dash for the engine room, which was blocked by androids. The androids didn't faze them at all, though, as they simply pushed past them, allowing the shots from the turrets to deal with them. "Artificial intelligence, my foot!" Punchy shouted back as the two of them continued their run for the door. Charmy reached the door before Punchy and shut it behind him when he got through. Luckily, the doors were bulletproof. "About time you got here, Charmy!" came a voice in the room.

They had reached the engine room. The main engine was in the back of the room, and inserted in a slot attached to it was the pink Chaos Emerald! Vector and Espio were standing near the emerald. It was Vector who had spoken when they entered the room. Charmy flew over to his friends and smiled excitedly. "Sorry I'm late, Vector, but I had to help Knuckles get in here because that sargent guy thought he was an intruder!" Vector and Espio looked over Charmy's companion, and both their jaws dropped at Charmy's mistake. "That's not Knuckles, Charmy!" Espio shouted. Punchy nodded. "That's right. I'm NOT Knuckles! I HATE Knuckles!" Vector pointed an accusing finger at Punchy. "I bet you're the intruder after the Chaos Emerald!" Punchy clapped his hands. "Nothing escapes you, croc boy! Now, get out of my way!" Vector stepped aside. "Be my guest, but you'll be sorry! That emerald's powering the engines!"

"Who cares!" Punchy said. "It's my job to stop this ship, anyway!"

Vector gave Espio a worried look. "Should we do something?" he wondered. Espio shrugged. "It's not our job to keep this ship in the air." Charmy suddenly took on a panicked look as he remembered something. "The ship! It's on auto pilot! I noticed while I was exploring! There's no one flying this thing!" Vector and Espio gasped with alarm, and Vector took charge right away. "All right! I'll land this thing! Follow me, team!" he said, starting to head out the door.

"You don't know the way." Espio pointed out.

"Oh, right..." Vector said sheepishly. "Charmy, lead the way!"

"OK..." Charmy said. "But we better be careful! Those gun turrets are nasty!"

As Team Chaotix rushed out of the engine room, Punchy turned his attention to the Chaos Emerald. Suddenly, he heard a voice behind him. "Don't touch that yet!" Punchy stomped his foot and turned around. "Interruptions, interruptions! Why can't everyone leave me alone!?"

"Nice to see you, too, Dark One." said Illusi, who was the owner of the voice. Punchy sneered at the shrew. "Stop calling me that! I'm no dark one! I'm just... me..." he sounded somewhat unsure as he spoke the last word. Illusi chuckled at him. "Oh, really? Are you now? I do believe you need a wake up call, and I'm just the one to give it to you!" Illusi called forth an illusion of Knuckles. "I can show you just who you are..." he said, "Many seem to think you are this guy, but that's not quite true, is it? Half true, maybe..." Punchy hurled his fist at the illusion, which vanished before he hit it. "That's enough out of you!" Punchy snarled. "I don't need you to tell me who I am! I'll shut you up once and for all!!!"

To be continued...

## 27 - Inner Darkness

Tails the Fox

Chapter 27 - Inner Darkness

Boss 18 - Dark Punchy

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Punchy charged at Illusi. That shrew had gotten on his last nerve, and Punchy was determined to stop him once and for all. Punchy aimed a punch at Illusi's face, but Illusi was defended by a wrongo that smacked Punchy aside. Illusi shook his head. "You say you're not a dark one. How quickly you forget..." Punchy faced Illusi, growling slightly as he listened to what the illusionist had to say. "You have been fighting to take the Master Emerald from its home." Illusi said. Punchy looked at him like he was crazy. "It's mine! That emerald was stolen from me!" Illusi ignored him as he continued. "You stole the government's Chaos Emerald!"

"Shut up!" Punchy snapped. Illusi looked at Punchy questioningly. "Such anger! Are you afraid of the truth?" Punchy grew defensive. "What truth?! You... You're a liar!" Illusi shook his head. "I told no lies. You stole that Chaos Emerald. You serve Dr. Eggman!"

"I serve no one!" Punchy shouted in his rage. Illusi glared at Punchy, and let out a frustrated sigh. "You call that better? You serve no one. I suppose so. You don't even care for your friends..." An uneasy silence followed, as Punchy looked guiltily at the floor. Finally, he looked up at Illusi. "Why do you care, anyway? Who are you!?" Illusi grinned at this, and stepped backward away from Punchy. "The question is.... who, are, you!"

Suddenly, a dark vortex appeared on the ground between them. Rising up from it was a creature that looked much like Punchy, and at the same time looked very different. It was a black echidna, with green fur surrounding his eyes. It's arms were also green, and it wore red gloves that matched its eyes. The vortex vanished, leaving the black and green echidna standing between Punchy and Illusi, facing Punchy. "Take a good look at what you are!" Illusi shouted. "You are a being of supreme darkness!" Punchy clenched his fists, ready to fight. His voice quivered with uncertainty as he spoke. "That's not me... It can't be..." Illusi moved away from the two echidnas, and spoke to Punchy in a menacing tone. "It is the very image of your soul! You wouldn't try to fight yourself, would you?" Punchy was having a terrible internal conflict. All the facts said this was true, but Punchy would not believe it. "It's... not... true!!" The room seemed to fill with darkness as Punchy cried out in protest. "NOOOOOOOO!!!!!"

The black echidna, Dark Punchy, interrupted Punchy's internal conflict with a forceful jab at his gut, causing Punchy to fall over in pain. "You cannot fight the darkness!" Illusi said. "You ARE the darkness!" Punchy slowly rose to his feet. Dark Punchy shot his fist at him again, but this time Punchy caught the attack, and pushed Dark Punchy away. "I am not a dark creature! I will defeat this thing!" Dark Punchy cackled at him. His echoing voice sounded just like Punchy's, but somehow darker. "This is your destiny, fool! You can't win!"

"I will!" Punchy shouted back. The room and everything in it almost seemed to vanish to Punchy. It was just him and his shadow, about to begin a battle for supremacy. Illusi watched from the shadows, his

wrongos surrounding him as shields, just in case.

Punchy sprang into action, attacking Dark Punchy with fists of fury. Dark Punchy was being clobbered, but seemed unfazed as he shielded himself from the attacks. "Chaos Shroud!" Dark Punchy retaliated by calling a shroud of dark energy that wrapped over him, protecting him from Punchy's attacks. Dark Punchy smashed through the shroud and knocked Punchy back into a wall! Punchy fell to the floor, but quickly rushed back to his feet. "You want to fight like that, do ya? Fine! Chaos Avelanche!" Pieces of the floor were flung at Dark Punchy, who simply called another shroud and easily endured the attack. "Is that the best you can do? You reject the darkness too much!" Dark Punchy said, cackling at Punchy. "Give it up! I'll take it from here!"

Punchy responded by rushing at Dark Punchy, plowing into him with all his might! The two echidnas tumbled over, struggling against each other, until finally Dark Punchy threw Punchy off of him. "Pathetic fool!" the black echidna growled. Punchy charged back to him and threw his fists at him. Dark Punchy responded in kind, causing their fists to connect! They pushed each other with their fists, and once again Dark Punchy overpowered Punchy, knocking him on his back. Before Dark Punchy could make a follow up attack, Punchy called out, "Chaos Blast!" A chaotic explosion followed, sending a flaming Dark Punchy tumbling away. He stood back up quickly, barely reacting to the flames. Punchy stood up as well, and looked on in awe as Dark Punchy simply shook the flames off. "The power of darkness makes me invincible! You can't overpower me!"

"This is impossible..." Punchy muttered. "Nothing hurts him... What IS he?!"

"I'm you, Punchy!" Dark Punchy responded. "A stronger and better you, that is. You can never beat me. A weak being of darkness cannot defeat a dark lord such as myself!"

Punchy grinned and replied confidently, "That's interesting, but I'm not weak OR a being of darkness. I don't follow your rules."

Dark Punchy had a constant air of anger about him. He snarled at Punchy's statements. "Lies and foolishness... That's what makes you weak. If you don't believe me, I'll prove it! Chaos Inferno!" Dark Punchy fired the inferno beam at Punchy, who quickly dodged and hit Dark Punchy with Chaos Avelanche, knocking him over. "I told you, you can't overpower me!" Dark Punchy growled as he rose to his feet, then into the air. "It's time to finish this!!!"

Dark energy resonated throughout the room, banging up everything in the area. The wrongos were struggling to hold back the dark power, but Illusi did not stir. He merely watched intently as the dark energy pounded on Punchy, as though the air itself was trying to kill him. Punchy struggled against this, and slowly approached Dark Punchy. The black echidna was cackling manically, and was covered in a dark shroud, which Punchy found was difficult to penetrate. "I am you, fool!" Dark Punchy shouted. "You can't overpower yourself! This is a fight you can never win!"

The dark energy forced Punchy backward, and Punchy then fell to his knees, unable to stand any longer. He was bruised and battered, and it seemed hopeless. Punchy thought it was surely over. "He's right... I can't overpower him. This just isn't working...." then, he realized something. "Wait a minute! He's not me, I'm me! But if he's really part of me, then I should be able to suppress him! I can't use brute power, but maybe I can use willpower!" Punchy struggled back to his feet, no longer acting on strength. He was working under sheer willpower now, and slowly stepped to Dark Punchy, allowing the dark energy to lift him into the air in front of him. Dark Punchy glared at Punchy, eyes full of hatred and

contempt. Punchy, no longer trying to overpower the black echidna, simply reached his hand out to him. His hand passed effortlessly through the shroud, and grabbed Dark Punchy by the throat. "W-what!? H-how!?" Dark Punchy gasped. The dark energy suddenly weakened, just long enough for Punchy to launch a punch with his other hand and smash right into Dark Punchy's chest! In fact, his fist passed right through Dark Punchy's chest! "You really are part of me..." Punchy muttered. "And because of that, if I choose to, I can suppress you!!"

"NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!" Dark Punchy screamed as a bright light emanated from where Punchy's fist had gone through him. Dark Punchy exploded into a blinding flash of light, which Illusi watched through a pair of sunglasses. As the light faded, the room returned to the way it was before the battle began, undamaged, with Punchy standing with his eyes shut tight in the center of the room. Punchy slowly opened his eyes to see Illusi standing in front of him, clapping. Punchy rubbed his eyes, then gave Illusi a confused look. "What are you clapping for? I just beat your monster!" Illusi just laughed. "Monster? There was no monster. That was an illusion, crafted to look like you." Punchy crossed his arms. "It didn't look like me one bit!" Illusi laughed again, then turned serious. "So, do you understand why I did this?" Punchy looked up at Illusi and replied in a very serious tone. "I don't care. Whatever your intentions, one thing is clear! I am who I choose to be! I am Punchy the echidna! Not a dark creature, not Knuckles." Illusi put his hands on his hips. "Oh, really?" he said. Punchy smiled. "I'll prove it to you yet! You'll see!"

Suddenly, the whole warship shook fiercely! It sounded as though they had crashed, until finally the shaking stopped and the engines powered down. Vector's voice was heard on the PA system. "Attention passengers! We have landed in the ocean! Grab a plane or a boat or somethin' and get to the shore!" the PA was left on as Espio spoke to Vector, "Nice crash." "Oh, man, you almost killed us!" Charmy added. "What? I just craftily saved us all! You're all nuts! And turn off that microphone!" Vector replied.

Illusi stepped aside. "You can take the Chaos Emerald now. Farewell, Punchy the echidna!" Illusi vanished with his usual puff of smoke. Punchy smiled with the knowledge that Illusi was not his foe after all, and pulled the pink Chaos Emerald out of the engine. His expression grew more serious as he turned to leave the room. "My descent to darkness continues... How will I ever escape becoming that monster?" he muttered. "And... could I really be an experiment?" that was a question he had pondered for quite some time. He thought for a moment. "The secret lies with the Master Emerald! I have to find it before Knuckles! So, I'd better see how Rainbow is doing..." With that, Punchy began his search for a plane he could hijack in order to escape the warship before it sinks. This was it. The last job he would do for Eggman was now complete. It was time to end his battle with Knuckles once and for all, and claim the Master Emerald!

To be continued...

## 28 - To the Rescue!

Tails the Fox

Chapter 28 - To The Rescue!

Stage 15 - Under Construction

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Sonic was hungrily munching away on his chili dog lunch, while Tails sat across from him, tensely awaiting Eggman's call. He knew he shouldn't, but still, Tails blamed himself for what happened to Amy and Cream. He was supposed to protect them, but instead he went chasing after that black fox. Now, he had to set things right.

Soon, SPOT hopped onto the table and projected a hologram of Eggman. "Good afternoon, Sonic! Did you enjoy your lunch?" the hologram chuckled. Tails impatiently banged his fist on the table. "Get to the point, Eggman! Where are Amy and Cream!?"

"Be quiet, fox boy!" Eggman growled, "I'm talking to Sonic, not you!" Sonic stood up and started impatiently tapping his foot. "Then talk, Eggman!"

"OK then, Sonic!" Eggman said. "Meet me at the top of the construction site at 5:00! That should leave you plenty of time, right?"

"Twenty minutes? C'mon, where's the challenge in that?" Sonic chuckled.

"Just remember to bring all the Chaos Emeralds you collected! You'll need them!" Eggman said as the hologram vanished. Tails looked at SPOT's monitor. "OK, we've got the coordinates! Let's go!"

Upon reaching the construction site, Tails produced a bag with three emeralds inside. It consisted of two Chaos Emeralds and a yellow fake. "OK, Sonic! You take this Chaos Emerald, and I'll keep these. I'll meet you at the roof!" Tails said. "All right!" Sonic said. "Good luck!"

Meanwhile, Amy was banging her hammer on the bars of the cell Eggman was keeping them in. "Let me outta here, you rotten egg!" she shouted. Eggman simply laughed at her. "Not a chance! You'll make a valuable hostage...assuming Sonic really cares about you..." Amy started pounding the bars more violently. "How can you say that!! Of course he cares!!!" Eggman pretended to look around. "Then where is he? Muahahahaha!!" Amy backed away from the bars, tears forming in her eyes. "Stop teasing me!" Cream tried to comfort her. "It'll be OK, Amy! Sonic will be here soon." Eggman grinned devilishly. "Ha! I almost wouldn't count on it!" This was all Amy could take. "That's it!! Out of my way, Cream!! I'm breaking out of here!!" Amy slammed the bars of the cell with all her might, finally smashing through! She ran out of the cell and charged down the stairs into the construction site. Cream, however, was unable to escape, as Eggman's robots quickly blocked her exit. "Oh, well. A single hostage will be easier to manage." Eggman said calmly. "Whatever happens, Sonic can't stop me this time anyway! Hahahahaha!!"

Sonic had been dashing through the construction site for a few minutes, clobbering any robots in his way. The site was pretty close to completion, but was abandoned for unknown reasons. Over time, it fell

into disrepair, and it seemed almost like a haunted tower. In several places, the floorboards had fallen to termites. Sonic had to step carefully. Unfortunately, Amy didn't realize this, and soon fell through the floor and landed on top of Sonic! "Help! Ambush!!" Sonic shouted in alarm, but then noticed that his "attacker" had offered her hand to help him up. Sonic stood up on his own and looked at Amy, whose face had lit up since seeing him. "I knew you'd come for me, Sonic! That Eggman's an idiot!" Sonic cracked a slight smile. "Glad to see you escaped..." he looked up at the hole in the roof. "Uh, where's Cream?" Amy looked up as well, and her face went pale. "Oh-my-gosh! I got so caught in the moment that I forgot to make sure Cream got out!" Sonic started back on his way to the roof, leaving Amy behind. "Hey, wait a minute! You're not going to leave me here!?" Sonic turned to her. "I have to help Cream! You should stay here. There's no room in the plan for you!" Amy, upon hearing this, whipped out her hammer. "What do you mean!? Wasn't saving me part of the plan!? What are you saying!?" She had an almost demonic look in her eyes, and Sonic realized that he had said something VERY stupid. "N-now calm down, Amy! I didn't mean it like-- Aaaack!" Amy started chasing Sonic through the tower with her hammer, swatting aside any robots that may get in her way. Apparently, she can almost keep up with Sonic if she puts her mind to it...

Soon, they came to a floor without floorboards. The top of the stairs ended abruptly, and Sonic nearly ran over the edge! He lost his balance stopping, and was about to fall over, but Amy caught his arm before he fell. "That was a close one!" she said, panting from the effort it took to keep up with Sonic. "So, still think there's no room for me in this plan?" Sonic peeked over the edge of the stairs. The floor below looked as though it would have broken if he fell on it, and it may possibly have been a fatal drop. "OK... You make a very good point. Thanks Amy..." Sonic finally admitted. He looked across the tower and spotted a stairway leading up. The only way to reach it was to jump from girder to girder. The girders were spaced too far apart for Amy to jump across, and to make matters worse, Eggman had left a small army of robots resembling bats with a pair of lasers mounted on their backs. "I don't think you can follow me from here, Amy." Sonic said, a bit nervously (as she was still carrying her hammer). Amy winked at Sonic. "That doesn't mean I can't still help!"

Amy moved to the top step and waved her arms about, shouting, "Hey, dumb robots! Over here! Catch me if you can!" Half of the robots immediately took off in their direction. Sonic was confused. "Amy, what are you doing?!" Amy didn't have time to answer, as the robots reached them and she ran down the stairs, leading most of them away. "Good luck, Sonic!" she shouted back after a moment. Looking ahead toward the exit, Sonic noticed that the other robots had targeted him with their lasers. "Can't we talk this over?" Sonic said sarcastically. The robots, totally ignoring him, fired immediately. Of course, Sonic saw this coming, and quickly leapt into the air onto the first girder. The other girders were apparently too far for even Sonic to jump to, so he decided to use the bats swarming around him as stepping stones, leaping from bat to bat, finally landing on a girder close to the stairs. However, a group of Egg Pawns were waiting at the stairs with rocket launchers, and had spotted Sonic, so they fired their rockets as well. Sonic was forced to run back and forth along the girder, trying to think of a way to get across. There weren't enough bat robots left to get him to the stairs, and it was too far to jump. Running along the girder, Sonic realized the only solution, and dashed at the wall at top speed. He had built up so much speed, that he was able to run along the wall all the way to the staircase! Once there, he leapt off the wall and into the Egg Pawns, giving them no time to react as he reduced them to scrap metal! "Next time I should look for an elevator..." Sonic said to himself as he climbed the stairs to the next floor.

It took some doing, but Sonic finally reached the roof of the construction site, without a second to spare. Dr. Eggman was hovering in his plane above the center of the roof. Suspended from a cable attached to



the plane was a cage containing Cream & Cheese. On the ground were two robots, one red and one yellow. They looked like a cross between the Egg Wizards and the E-2000. Eggman waved to Sonic, a sinister grin on his face. "Just in time, Sonic! Did you have fun with my little friends on the lower levels of the tower? What about the wall lasers?" Sonic looked at Eggman quizzically. "Wall lasers?" he questioned. Eggman pounded his fist on the side of his plane. "Blast it! Why won't those lasers work! Whatever! Let's get down to business, eh, Sonic?" Sonic held up the Chaos Emeralds, one red and one white. "Here they are, Eggbrain! Now let Cream go!" Eggman shook his head. "Hand them to the robots first!" Sonic obeyed, handing one emerald to each robot. Eggman glanced at them. "Just two? Sonic, Sonic, Sonic.... What do you take me for? My scanners detect not two, but FOUR Chaos Emeralds! Given your track record, I bet you just handed me at least one fake! Tails has the real ones nearby, doesn't he?!" Eggman's plane rose into the air, and the two robots placed the emeralds into their "pockets." "Robots, get that hedgehog!" Eggman commanded. "Show him the true might of the Eggman Empire!"

The two robots produced a pair of staffs in their respective colors. A crystal ball was at the tip of each of the two robots' staffs, and they began to glow violently. "Something tells me this would've happened anyway." Sonic said. "Bring it on, Eggman!"

To be continued...

## 29 - Awry Plans

Tails the Fox

Chapter 29 - Awry Plans

Boss 19 - Egg Wizard Elite

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

"There's no hope for you this time, Sonic!" Eggman declared, "My Elite Wizards are far more powerful than the originals!" The red wizard's staff shot out a blast of fire at Sonic, while the yellow wizard shot an electric laser. Sonic quickly ran out of the way and rushed at the wizards at full speed. However, before he reached them, the wizards warped out of the way and reappeared behind Sonic! As Sonic turned around, the two wizard robots changed colors, the red one turning blue and the yellow one turning purple. Sonic, not interested in finding out what this meant, instead charged at them, hoping to catch them before they could warp. The purple wizard swung its staff, which fired a jet of water at the area in front of Sonic, while the blue wizard's staff shot a cold wind that froze the water into a sheet of slippery ice! Sonic found himself sliding out of control and nearly slid off the roof, but the ice hadn't reached the edge of the roof. Sonic wasn't safe, however, as two powerful gusts of wind from the wizards started to blow him toward the edge. The now green wizards had done their best to cut off Sonic's escape, and had succeeded. If he tried to run through the wind, he'd be stuck on the ice, where he'd be a sitting duck, but since it was his only option, Sonic ran straight through the wind. As he passed onto the ice, Sonic rolled into a ball in order to speed straight through. The robots had switched to fire attacks as Sonic rolled by, thus causing the ice to melt away. Eggman, having grown frustrated and impatient, started pressing buttons on his plane's control panel. "I'll blast that hedgehog myself if I have to!" he growled, as a pair of laser weapons appeared on the sides of his plane. "Hopefully these lasers work better than the wall lasers! Now to find out!"

The lasers began firing shot after shot at Sonic, who gracefully jumped and ran out of the way. The robots began firing their own lasers as well, but Sonic was too fast for this to work. So, the robots switched to wind and ice modes, while Eggman held down the trigger for his lasers to fire a constant beam. With one of the wizards blowing fierce wind and the other freezing everything in sight, Sonic realized that he couldn't keep dodging like this forever...

Meanwhile, Tails was watching with binoculars from a nearby rooftop. The Tornado was parked on the same roof, ready for when it was needed. SPOT was sitting in the cockpit with the white and yellow emeralds. "I think it's almost time to put the plan into action!" Tails thought. "I just hope this works. The whole thing's my fault. I'll do anything to fix it." He climbed into the Tornado, sitting SPOT on his lap. "Time to go..."

Sonic was gaining the upper hand, managing to get off several hits on the robots. One of them, the blue, ice wielding one, was shooting off sparks, as if it would explode at any moment. Sonic was deliberately attacking this robot. It was all part of the plan. Sonic was ready to wrap this up. He ran at the green robot, whose wind slowed him down a bit, and the damaged icy wizard approached Sonic from behind.

Just before it reached him, though, he jumped out of the way of the icy attack, which the wind blew back at the robot, freezing a large portion of it! Now was Sonic's opportunity. He launched into the air, curling into a ball in order as he hurtled toward his frozen foe. Sonic smashed right through it, causing it to explode and sending the red Chaos Emerald it held flying. Sonic quickly caught it, and then taunted Eggman, sticking his tongue out at the mad doctor. (and I do mean mad!) Eggman shook his fist angrily at his eternal foe. "You've not won yet, Sonic! I still have one wizard left!"

Tails apparently didn't know that, as he suddenly dropped from the sky, landing in front of Eggman. SPOT followed, holding the two emeralds in its mouth. "Great job, Sonic!" he said, waving to his hero. Sonic frantically pointed at Eggman. "Behind you, Tails! Behind you!!" Tails seemed unable to hear him. Eggman, seizing this opportunity, snatched up SPOT using a metal claw concealed inside his plane! This seemed to take Tails by surprise, as he turned around and looked shocked. "Tsk, tsk, tsk... Tails, you should have known that I wouldn't fall for fake Chaos Emeralds again!" Eggman said. He tried to grab the emeralds away from SPOT, but the robo-dog proved more stubborn than he expected. SPOT tossed the emeralds over to Tails when Eggman loosened his grip on them. So, Eggman tossed SPOT to the floor in frustration. "Blast it! Plan B then!" the doctor motioned to his remaining robot. It approached Cream's cage and aimed its staff at the cute young rabbit. "Hold on! Can't we talk this over!?" Cream cried in a scared tone, holding Cheese tightly as if to protect the Chao. Tails panicked as well, and quickly called to Eggman. "Stop! If I give you the Chaos Emeralds, will you let her go?"

"What are you doing, Tails!" Sonic shouted, sounding almost as though he was pretending to be shocked. Tails held out the emeralds for Eggman to see, and the doctor was about to extend his claw to grab them, but noticed something odd. "Hey... That's the yellow Chaos Emerald! We already have that one! You sneaky little brat! Sonic WAS carrying the real emeralds! I'll obliterate you sneaky tricksters!!! Robot, absorb the Chaos Emerald you collected!"

The green wizard suddenly glowed with a bright light, which was quickly interrupted by sparks and violent shaking. Eggman looked at his robot in shock. "W-what's happening here!? What have you done to my robot!?" he shouted in bewilderment. Sonic and Tails smiled victoriously. "Looks like we win, doc!" Sonic observed. However, something unexpected suddenly happened.

The robot, panicked and ready to explode, attached itself to the side of Eggman's plane, like a frightened child clutching its parent. Eggman, completely defeated, could only shout out the obvious. "My robot wants me to fix it, but it's about to explode!! I'll get you for this, Sonic! At least I'll take your little friend with me!" the crazed scientist pressed a button on his plane and retracted the cable that was holding Cream's cage, bringing the cage closer to where the blast was about to occur! Tails realized that the explosion would likely kill Cream, and a terrible feeling of panic shot through him. There was no way he'd let this happen! Tails, without thinking, jumped to the cage with his spring shoes and smashed the cage open with a powerful tail whip, which he had quickly used the tailband he got earlier to make sure he would break it. Sonic, acting fast, caught Cream as she fell. However, Eggman was not going down without taking someone with him, so he caught Tails with his plane's claw. "I didn't really want to hurt the rabbit anyway! Now I'll eliminate one of my most annoying foes!" Eggman growled.

Before anyone could act, the robot sparked up much more violently and then exploded! Eggman's plane and Tails went flying into the distance in different directions, with Eggman shouting vows of vengeance as he soared off into the distance. SPOT beeped loudly, activating something on the Tornado, which Tails had left flying in circles above them. The plane now darted off in Tails' direction, a desperate move

to catch the poor fox and save his life. However, both Tails and the plane were gone from sight very quickly. "Oh, dear! I hope Tails doesn't get hurt!" Cream said with alarm. Sonic had a very grave expression on his face as he looked into the distance where Tails had been sent flying. "He's gonna be hurt... Let's hope he survives!"

Wasting no time, Sonic and Cream hurried out of the construction site to find a shaken Amy waiting for them. "I saw the Tornado flying off after Tails! What happened!?" she asked, worried. Just then, SPOT began beeping loudly. Sonic looked to see what the robot was so excited about, and it suddenly projected a hologram of Vector, with lots of static interference. "Well, what do ya know! It works! I guess I owe you ten bucks, Charmy..." Vector said. Espio's voice could be heard in the background. "Don't just stand there, say something!"

"Yeah, the signal's really weak, so we don't have much time!" Charmy added. Vector looked a bit annoyed. "Don't rush me! I'll say it!"

"How'd he figure out how to work that thing?" Sonic wondered aloud. Vector, apparently unable to hear him, spoke his message, but the signal was so bad that it could barely be heard. "OK, I hope you're listening, Sonic! -e --- b-- ---s! C--- -- -g---n- ----! It's o-..." Vector tried to say something, but the signal got worse and worse until finally the hologram vanished. "Rats, rotten timing!" Sonic grumbled. "I can't help Vector, because I gotta help Tails! Anyway, I don't know where he is..."

SPOT beeped again, and text on his monitor read, "I have traced the call to GUN Warship, located near an island not far from here." Sonic still didn't care. There was a chance Tails was alive, so he couldn't leave without trying to help him. At that moment, Cream stepped forward. "Sonic! You should go help them! They might need your help more!" she insisted. Sonic and Amy looked a bit confused. "What about Tails?" Amy said. Cream picked up SPOT. "I'll go with his robot to see if he's all right! He saved me back there, so I'll return the favor! Please, Mr. Sonic, don't worry! Just help Mr. Vector!" Sonic saw the determination in her eyes, and realized that this was something she had to try. "All right, then. I'll try to catch up with you as soon as I can, though!" he said. Amy put her arm around Sonic quite suddenly. "Great! Sonic and I can take a romantic cruise to that island, then!" Sonic made a disgusted face, which he quickly hid by running away. "Sorry, Amy! No time to lose!!" Amy pulled out her hammer in response. "Don't just run away from me like that! Come back here!!" she shouted as she chased after him. Cream looked at SPOT's monitor, which read, "I am equipped with a 'Tails-Tracker' sensor. Follow me, Cream." Cream smiled. The sensor also showed his vital signs, which showed that he was still alive. "All right! Let's go find Tails, Cheese!" she cheerfully said to her Chao, who responded with an enthusiastic, "Chao! Chao!" SPOT took off in the direction Tails was in, and Cream followed quickly. After all, Tails was surely hurt from his fall, and she had to help him!

To be continued...

## 30 - Heroes of the Dark Side

Tails the Fox

Chapter 30 - Heroes of the Dark Side

Stage 16 - Android Assault

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Rainbow frantically paced Eggman's control room. On a table she was near were a few sparkling green stones. "Awww, One's not gonna like this..." she said worriedly. "What won't I like!?" Punchy said as he walked into the room. Rainbow faced him innocently. "Weeeell... Y'know that big, green emerald I was supposed to find..." she said. Punchy crossed his arms. "Yeah, what about it?" he asked. Rainbow pointed at the stones on the table. "It ain't so big anymore..." she said sheepishly. Punchy ran over to the shards of the Master Emerald, fiery rage in his eyes. "It's BROKEN!?" he roared. "Tubby must've broke it, One." Rainbow said. "It was like that when I found it."

The two echidnas were interrupted by a voice they had never heard before. "EGGMAN!! Where are you!?" A black and red hedgehog entered the control room. It was Shadow! Punchy became a bit defensive, raising his fists. "Who do you think you are?" he growled. Rainbow looked him over quickly. "He looks like one of those weird cyborgs!"

"Androids!" Punchy corrected.

"Gazundheit!" Rainbow replied.

Shadow approached them slowly, unsure what to expect, considering how they didn't look like the sort of characters who would work for Eggman. Punchy backed up a little. "What do you want, robot?" he demanded. Shadow tossed a Chaos Spear attack in his direction, which he barely dodged. "Yow! It's malfunctioning!" Rainbow shouted. Shadow growled angrily. "I'm no robot! I'm the REAL Shadow! Don't ever call me an android again! What's with the disguise, anyway, Knuckles?" Shadow said, noting Punchy's resemblance to the red echidna. Rainbow was first to speak up before Punchy could. "He ain't Knuckles!" she said. "That's right!" Punchy enthusiastically added. "He's One!" Rainbow said. Punchy and Rainbow then started arguing.

"PUNCHY!! Is my name that hard to learn, Rainbow!?"

"I prefer to use the name yer daddy gave ya! Or was it yer mommy?"

"Why I oughta..."

They continued like that for a few moments until Shadow finally became frustrated. "QUIET!!" he shouted. "Where's Eggman? I have some... questions for him..." Punchy and Rainbow turned to him and thought for a moment. "I'm pretty sure Tubby isn't here. Can we take a message?" Rainbow offered. Shadow looked at her like she was crazy. "As if I'd trust you. I don't even know you!" Rainbow returned his look with her own puzzled expression. "Haven't you been paying attention? I'm Rainbow, he's One, and you're... Shadow? I'll call ya Shade!"

"Please don't." Shadow muttered.

"Listen you..." Punchy started to say, but was interrupted by a loud alarm!

"That sounds like BAS!" Rainbow shouted over the alarm. Punchy and Shadow covered their ears and

looked at her like she was nuts. "BAS?!" Punchy said. "The Base Alarm System! Tubby was talking to it earlier!" she said. The alarm started speaking, in a surprisingly expressive voice. "GUN Troops have landed on Darkegg Fortress!" the noise subsided, and Shadow called to the alarm. "Where's Eggman?" BAS took a moment to process what Shadow had said, then responded. "Dr. Eggman is not here. He is out on a mission." Shadow was not satisfied. "What kind of mission?" he wondered aloud. BAS laughed at the question. "Information is classified. If I told you, I'd have to kill you!" the alarm said in a sarcastic voice. Shadow was extremely annoyed. "Great, an alarm that thinks it's a comedian!"

"Hey, Shadow!" Punchy called, "If you want to talk to Eggman, he might listen if you stop GUN's attack!" Shadow looked suspiciously at Punchy. "Me, fight with GUN? You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he said. "We don't have time for it, Shade!" Rainbow said, "Me and One have to go find those emerald pieces!" Shadow looked thoughtful for a moment. "I suppose I would like to speak with Eggman before GUN captures him. I guess I'll do it then... One..." Shadow said as he started to walk out of the control room. Punchy shook his fist at Shadow. "That's PUNCHY!! I don't like my stupid experiment number!!" he shouted angrily. Shadow stopped short. "You're Experiment 1?!" he said, shocked. Punchy tried to chase after Shadow now, but Rainbow held him back. "CALL ME THAT AGAIN!! I DARE YOU!!!" he screamed. Shadow walked towards the door. "I'll see you again, Punchy the echidna." he said as he walked out. Punchy calmed down at that point. "At least he respects my name." he sighed, exhausted from all the excitement. "That name's silly, One." Rainbow commented. "WHY YOU..." Punchy stammered. "I'm gonna call you Colors from now on!" Rainbow smiled and started toward the door. "You do that, One!" she said cheerfully. Punchy followed her slowly. "Phooey..." he muttered.

Shadow found his way to an elevator. According to BAS, the intruders had gone into the basement of Eggman's base, Darkegg Fortress. It was a huge tower, with the control room at its top floor. As Shadow entered the elevator, someone ran in his direction. "Hold that door!!" It was Copter, who had recently returned from the Mystic Ruins, and was still wearing the Tailband of Chaos. Shadow held the door, seeing no reason not to. Copter panted heavily as he entered the elevator. "Almost missed it..." he muttered. Shadow glanced at his tailband, and noticed his second tail. "Tails...?" he said quietly to himself. Copter, after resting, looked over at Shadow. "Have we met? Are you with Eggman?" he asked. Shadow shut his eyes and thought for a moment. "I'm not against him." he said finally. "Me neither." Copter replied. Shadow opened his eyes and pressed the button on the elevator's controls. "Tell me, are you an experiment?" he asked. Copter leaned against the wall of the elevator. "You're talkin' to Experiment 2!" he said proudly. Shadow wasn't surprised. "So, you're the wayward experiment." he thought. As is customary for Darkegg Fortress elevators, BAS said the direction the elevator was going. "Going down! Basement level!" Hearing this, Copter noticed that there was only one button on the elevator. "Wait, this one ONLY goes to the basement!?" he exclaimed. "That is correct, sir. This is the express elevator. Brace yourself." BAS cautioned. Copter jumped in panic. "Brace myself!? Hold on!!!" but it was too late. The elevator shot toward the basement like a bullet, Shadow calmly holding on to the rail while Copter was flung into the roof, and began screaming as they went down. "STOP THE RIDE, I WANNA GET OFF!!!!!"

The elevator crashed to a stop, and Copter crashed to the floor in a heap. The doors opened, and BAS said a cheerful, "Thank you, come again!" Shadow stepped out of the elevator, and Copter rolled on to his side in the fetal position. "I th-think I'll st-stay here a while... If I live, I'll continue s-searching for a space sh-shuttle..." he said shakily. Shadow looked over at the traumatized fox. "A space shuttle?" he thought, "Maybe I should follow him after this."

The basement level of Darkegg Fortress was like a huge mining facility. It was an expansive series of tunnels filled with mine shafts and carts. Some parts of the facility had crumbled and collapsed, and judging by the burns on the walls in those areas, it was apparent that this was likely GUN's handiwork. It wasn't long before Shadow encountered yet another of Eggman's agents, Metal Sonic. "You again! I wasn't expecting to see you!" the robot said. It aimed a laser at Shadow. "Are you with GUN?" Shadow ran behind the robot really fast, so he wasn't being targeted. "I'm here to fight GUN. Put that thing away!" he said. Metal Sonic turned around, lowering the weapon. "Why would you help us?" it asked. Shadow shook his head. "I'd rather know why you're helping Eggman. You locked him up before, and we all had to fight you on his Air Fleet." Metal Sonic went through its data bank a moment. "No such encounter in memory!" it finally declared. Shadow looked thoughtful a moment. "The doctor must have erased your memory..."

Metal Sonic explained his mission objective to Shadow. "GUN is building a makeshift elevator in order to get inside the base. They entered here through tunnels they created, and unleashed an army of androids in the mines. Said androids were reprogrammed versions of Eggman's battle androids based on the experiments, and you." Shadow couldn't believe it. "GUN took control of the Shadow Androids!?" he said, alarmed. "Correct." Metal Sonic replied. Shadow looked ahead and spotted androids resembling himself, Punchy, and Copter heading their way. "GUN's being run by cowards, not even using their own forces! All right, then, Metal Sonic! Let's take them down together, and prove our superiority to these inferior models!"

"Agreed!" Metal Sonic replied. The two hedgehog creations took off through the mines, obliterating any androids in their path. They were strong, but no match for Shadow and Metal Sonic together. It wasn't long before they reached the tunnels built by GUN. Soldiers guarded the path to the new elevator, but never had a chance. Shadow and Metal Sonic left them unconscious, and entered the a large cavern where Sargent Gunner was shouting impatiently at Spy, who was trying to finish the elevator. "Hurry up, Spy! I don't want Eggman to have a base to return to!" he snarled. Spy was hurriedly reading a manual as he worked. "Let's see... Insert tab B into slot... X47822!? What the heck is that!? Who would have thought building an elevator would be so complicated!?" Spy stood up to say something to Gunner. "Sorry, Sarge, but... EEEEEK!!!" he let out a girlish scream when he saw Shadow and Metal Sonic standing behind Gunner. The sargent whirled around to face them. "Shadow!? What are you doing here!?" he demanded. Metal Sonic pointed its weapon at the elevator. "Target found! Destroy target!" Gunner snapped his fingers, and a robot dropped down between Metal Sonic and the elevator. It was Techno Sonic, the same robot Copter and Punchy had thought was defeated at the Security Tower! "I see you've joined up with Eggman, Shadow. I knew you would. All you furry freaks are alike! Treacherous and evil, the lot of you! I despise you!" Gunner roared, pure hatred burning in his eyes. Shadow raised his fists. "You're the one who told me Sonic was evil! You're the villain here, human! It's hateful manipulators like you that destroyed the ARK and took Maria from the planet she loved so much! I won't let you get away with any more of your villainy!"

Gunner grinned smugly. "Exactly the attitude I expect from you. I will never believe that nonsense. If anyone destroyed the ARK, it was YOU! Not that I care, I wasn't there. However, I will get revenge for those poor souls here and now! Techno Sonic, destroy them!!!"

To be continued...

## 31 - A Turning Point

Tails the Fox

Chapter 31 - A Turning Point

Boss 20 - Super Techno Sonic

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Metal Sonic approached Techno Sonic, aiming his laser at him. Techno Sonic let out an evil laugh. "Original Sonic copy is inferior! Techno Sonic is supreme!" As Techno Sonic spoke, his plasma shield began to surround him. Metal Sonic, however, didn't notice. "Target locked... Fire!" Metal Sonic fired his laser at Techno Sonic, which merely bounced off the shield. However, each shot weakened the shield, and soon it was very weak. In response, Techno Sonic took in the remaining energy and fired his plasma shockwave at Shadow and Metal Sonic, forcing them to jump out of the way. Metal Sonic wasted no time shooting back. The shots banged up Techno Sonic a great deal, but Sargent Gunner simply watched, grinning evilly. Metal Sonic's laser soon ran out of shots, and Techno Sonic was looking a bit worn out. Shadow crossed his arms as he watched. "This robot is pathetic! It can't seem to do anything!" he remarked.

Techno Sonic remained eerily quiet as Metal Sonic rushed to try to finish him. It was then that Gunner gave his command. "Techno Sonic! Transform!!" Techno Sonic held a White Chaos Emerald over his head, another fake. In a brilliant flash of light, the emerald was absorbed by Techno Sonic, who began to glow as he was charged with the energy. His blue metal body now shone golden. "Transformation complete! Super Techno Sonic, ATTACK!!" The transformed robot took to the air and charged at Metal Sonic, delivering a crippling blow that sent Metal Sonic flying into the wall, dropping to the ground in a crumpled heap! "Mission failed..." he quietly said.

"Whoa! Are you OK?!" came a voice. Copter had caught up with them, and was now examining Metal Sonic's damage. Metal Sonic simply buzzed in response. "I'll take that as a no..." Copter muttered. Gunner backed toward the elevator, eyes wide at who he now saw. "Experiment 2 is here, too! It's a big conspiracy!" he said. Spy looked up from his work. "Sure, or maybe Eggman was really behind everything from the start..." This statement irritated Gunner a great deal. "Shut up and work, Spy! I need to crush these minions of the Eggman Empire!" he growled. "I'm not on Eggman's side, Gunner! I just want to know what he's up to!" Shadow insisted. "LIES! ALL LIES!!" Gunner screeched, "You let Sonic go before, so you're not on my side!"

Shadow suddenly couldn't help himself. He just started laughing, almost uncontrollably. Gunner failed to see the humor. "What's so funny! Stop laughing at me, you freak!" Shadow stopped laughing, but continued grinning. "You really have gone nuts." he said. Gunner was fed up with this. "You won't trick me again! Nor will we ever cross paths again!" he threatened. Shadow became serious once more. "You think your Sonic copy scares me? That fake emerald will just produce a fake super form. I can beat it."

"Oh, insert tab A into slot A... What moron thought that up?" Spy could be heard in the background. "I



said shut up!" Gunner snapped. "Super Techno Sonic! Destroy that traitor, Shadow!" he commanded. Techno Sonic roared from overhead. "ELIMINATE BLACK HEDGEHOG!!!!"

"Shadow!" Copter shouted, "You take care of that clown! I need to try and fix metal moron over here!" He began tinkering with some tools he had "borrowed" from Spy when no one was looking. "How would Tails do this? Attatch red wire to green wire? This could take a while..."

Shadow looked up at Super Techno Sonic. "All right, sarge! You asked for it!" he said. Gunner ran over to where Spy was working, and shouted his last command to Techno Sonic. "Kill him! No one gets away from GUN!"

Super Techno immediately dashed at Shadow at such incredible speed that he couldn't be seen! Shadow couldn't even see him as he made it behind him and gave him a powerful kick, knocking him over. Techno then dashed behind him again and repeated the attack, sending Shadow face first into the floor. Shadow rose to his feet shakily. "He's using Chaos Control, isn't he?" Shadow thought. "Does he really expect to beat me with my own moves?" Shadow used Chaos Control himself, at the same time as Techno Sonic, and they both reappeared on opposite sides of the room. So, they tried again, with the same result. "This isn't getting anything accomplished!" Shadow shouted. "Quit cowering and fight, robot!" Techno Sonic responded by firing plasma beams from his hands, which Shadow found difficult to dodge, and was nearly hit several times. As he got close to Super Techno, the robot responded by unleashing a series of physical attacks to Shadow's gut, ending with a powerful uppercut attack, sending Shadow flying into the roof and falling back down. "This isn't working..." Shadow thought. He struggled to his feet, hearing Gunner's amused laughter in the background. "Come on, Shadow! You know you can't beat a super form! Just die quietly!" the sargent taunted. Shadow was not one to give up easily, and decided it was time for a different tactic. "Chaos Spear Storm!" A blizzard of spears erupted from Shadow and flew at Techno Sonic, who simply brought up a plasma shield. However, the shield couldn't hold out against so much force, and Techno Sonic soon found himself pummeled by hundreds of Chaos Spears. In order to escape, Techno Sonic used Chaos Control again, reappearing in front of Shadow and giving him several more physical attacks. This time, however, Shadow managed to use Chaos Control himself to get away. Super Techno's attacks seemed to only grow stronger as the battle continued. Shadow wondered how he could win at this rate, but quickly shrugged off those thoughts. He ran after Super Techno again, this time using Chaos Blast once he was close enough. Super Techno glowed even brighter as he withstood the attack, and proceded to attack Shadow more violently than ever, ending up by smashing a fist into his jaw! Shadow was flung several feet from Super Techno, his body beginning to show signs of damage. As he picked himself back up, Shadow noticed his nose was bleeding. "Oh, that does it! I'll rip you to shreds!" Shadow shouted, unleashing another Spear Storm attack. Techno Sonic began glowing more violently as he withstood the attack, now seeming more red than gold. It Chaos Controlled itself away once more, but now sparks were shooting out from him. Gunner's cocky grin now turned to a frown. "What's happening! ? Why is he sparking like that!?" he wondered aloud. Shadow smiled. "A robot can't hold so much energy. He can't take much more!" Super Techno Sonic seemed to grow redder as it became filled with rage. "Silence! I have been ordered to destroy you, and I will! Charging to maximum power! Time to end this!" The robot warped to Shadow's location and began unleashing furious attacks at Shadow, whose wounds began to bleed as he struggled to withstand the assault, and even fight back. Finally, Shadow decided the time was right, and warped away, just in time for Techno Sonic to fire his fully charged plasma beam! The beam instead hit the wall, causing a small cave in, but nothing major. Techno Sonic was sparking violently, and struggled to speak as he turned to Shadow. "Kill... black... hedgehog..." he managed to say. Shadow had enough,

and charged at Techno Sonic with all his might, rolling into a ball as he impacted and soared through the robot's body, leaving a hole in its chest that sparked violently before Techno Sonic finally died in a violent explosion! Parts of the robot flew all over, and a small fire remained where the robot stood. Shadow was bloody and tired, but he had won.

Gunner shrieked with devastation. "Nooooo!!! My ultimate android! Curse you, Shadow!" Metal Sonic, whom Copter had succeeded in repairing, joined Shadow in facing Gunner. "Mission complete, thanks to Shadow!" he said. Copter joined them as well. "You're finished, Gunner!" he said, excitedly. Gunner began to panic. "We've been cut off from our reinforcements..." he realized. Shadow, whose wounds seemed not to bother him, started to approach Gunner. "You're leaving this place now, one way or another!"

Suddenly, the elevator Spy had been working on sprang to life. "What do you know! Sarge, it's working!" Spy said happily. Gunner was more shocked than ever, considering Spy did something right for a change. "It is?! Finally, some luck!" The sinister sargent hopped into the elevator. "So sorry, furry freaks! You lose!!" At Gunner's words, the elevator shot up into Darkegg Fortress, taking Gunner and Spy inside. Shadow, Copter, and Metal Sonic ran to the spot the elevator had been and looked up to see the elevator disappear from sight. "Not good. There's now a saboteur in the base!" Metal Sonic pointed out. "I must give chase!" With that, Metal Sonic ran out of the cave and back into the mines. Copter let out a frustrated sigh and looked at the clock on his wrist. Terror suddenly washed over him. "It's 5:30!? NO!! No, no, no!! I'm so short on time!! I must get to Space Colony ARK immediately!!" he shouted in alarm. Copter then ran into the mines as well, not stopping for a moment. Shadow's eyes went wide as he realized what Copter had said. "ARK!? What in the world would he be doing there!? Now I have to follow him!" he realized.

Copter very quickly found his way to Eggman's space shuttle and started up the engines. Shadow stealthily stowed away on board, making sure Copter didn't know he was following him. BAS was also installed on the shuttle, and announced the liftoff. Copter was horrified as the shuttle left the Earth, but his mission was at stake, and he had to go. Once they were well under way, BAS made an announcement. "Now approaching Space Colony ARK! ETA to landing, 3 minutes!" Copter looked at the time. "Stupid piece of junk! Hurry up!" BAS simply taunted him. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me!" BAS then noticed Copter was up to something. "Hey, are you playing with my buttons!?" Copter was, and he started banging on the control panel. "Work! Work, darn you!!" The shuttle suddenly began shaking violently, and Copter, Shadow, and BAS all started screaming. "YAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!!!"

Somehow, they landed on the ARK. Copter stumbled out of the shuttle, threw up, looked at his clock, and ran off. "I can't waste any more time! I must complete my mission now!" Copter said to himself, "Everything depends on it!"

To be continued...

## 32 - The ARK

Tails the Fox

Chapter 32 - The ARK

Stage 17 - Space Prison

Boss 21 - Zipp the Hornet

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Copter was frantically searching the ARK for something. The colony was in such disrepair that the journey was incredibly treacherous. There were still Artificial Chaos hidden throughout the corridors as well, but Copter largely ignored them. He was desperate to complete his mission as soon as possible. After some exploration, Copter managed to find the the replica of the Master Emerald shrine where Shadow had fought the Biolizard before. Hovering in the air in the center of the room was Zipp the Hornet.

"Hey! If it isn't Copter!" the hornet said, surprised. "What are you doing here? Are you lost, like me?" Copter had never met Zipp before, and was naturally confused. "Who are you? Have we met?" he asked. Zipp flew over to him at eye level. "I'm Experiment 4, Zipp the Hornet! I believe you've already met Experiment 5, Vortex." At Zipp's words, Copter jumped in surprise. "Vortex was an experiment!? A fifth experiment!?" he stammered, nearly speechless. He thought he was the last, it didn't make sense to him for more experiments to exist. Zipp put his hands on his hips, disappointed in Copter's response. "C'mon, get with the program! There's six of us right now!" he said. Copter thought it over. "There's me, Punchy, Vortex, you..." He stopped suddenly. Zipp shook his head. "You don't know the other two? You don't keep good track of your brothers!" Copter shrugged this off and remembered his mission. "Hey, Zipp, are you here to..." he started to say. Zipp knew what he was referring to. "That's right. I'm looking for him now. Come with me, brother! Let us complete our mission together!" he said. Copter wasn't quite ready to leave yet, though. "Who are the other experiments?" Copter asked. Zipp had already started toward the exit, but stopped suddenly when Copter asked this. Without turning to look at him, Zipp simply said, "I can't tell you that, Copter. It's classified information." This wasn't enough for Copter. He grabbed Zipp by the arm. "No more secrets! I must know everything he didn't tell me!" he demanded. Zipp broke free of Copter's grip and aimed a pistol at him. "If I told you, I'd have to kill you! So, why don't I just do that first!" Copter dashed out of the way as Zipp fired a few shots at him. Zipp laughed manically as his visor targeted Copter. "I've been watching you for some time, slowpoke! This will be like shooting fish in a barrel!"

Zipp fired a few more shots at Copter, discarding his pistol as it ran out of bullets. Copter was dodging too easily. Zipp was surely toying with him. The hornet now produced a gatling gun, which Copter couldn't figure out where he was hiding it. "You're a traitor, I guess. So ready to question our master. Or perhaps not. I have had an itchy trigger finger all day, though, so I'll blast you to bits, regardless!" the demented hornet declared. Copter growled viciously at him. "Guns, guns, guns. All of my enemies are cowards! I don't have time for this!" Zipp responded by letting loose with a torrent of bullets from his gun, his aim weakened by his rage. As Copter scrambled to avoid the shots, Zipp yelled furiously at him.

"Don't insult my guns! Don't you DARE!! Grrrr, I'll blow your head clear off!!" he looked around, he was so preoccupied with simply shooting blindly that he lost track of Copter. The black fox had dashed behind him, and now tried to smack him with a tail attack, which Zipp, living up to his name, zipped out of the way, nearly as fast as Sonic! "Stand still, you glorified fly! I'll swat the information out of you!"

Copter tried to catch Zipp and land an attack, but the hornet repeatedly flew away and fired shot after shot at Copter, who found it very difficult to avoid the shots. Every time Zipp depleted the bullets of one weapon, he somehow produced another. This was getting ridiculous. Copter got tired of it really fast, and fought back using Chaos Whirlwind. A chaotic wind blew around the area, and since Zipp was so small, he was easily tossed about. In the attempt to escape the attack, Zipp ditched his gun and put all his effort into flying away. Once he did, he realized that he had run out of guns. "This is impossible! How can you be so lucky as to avoid so many perfect shots!? Perhaps a different approach..." Zipp produced a supply of bombs! He rapidly threw a barrage of them at Copter, who wasn't hit directly, but was caught in the explosions and sent flying into the liquid that surrounded the center platform. He quickly jumped out, considering the fact that he didn't know, or want to know, what the yellowish liquid was.

Zipp had used up all his bombs already, so now he resorted to his only remaining tactic. "I guess I'll just impale you on my stinger then!" he shouted. Zipp had the ability to shoot his stinger at his foes, and a new one would grow back fast enough so that he could fire rapidly. He chased after Copter and began shooting his stingers at him, but since this was a complex maneuver for Zipp, (considering the position of a hornet's stinger) Copter found that Zipp was moving more slowly. Seeing his opportunity, Copter ran after Zipp in order to attack him. A few stingers hit him as a result, but they weren't as powerful as bullets, and Copter was able to reach Zipp and smack him with a tailband-powered tail whip! Zipp was knocked away with such force that he landed in the shrine replica. Copter took a moment to pull the stingers out of him, which left him with several cuts, but nothing serious. Then, he ran up the steps of the shrine.

Zipp had landed on his head, and was sitting on the floor rubbing his helmet. "That tailband... So powerful..." he muttered. Copter leaned down to talk to Zipp. "So, will you tell me about the experiments?" he asked once more. Zipp stood up and flew back to eye level, rising with Copter. "Truce! If you help me find him, maybe HE will tell you!" Zipp said. Copter shook his hand. "Fine. Grab your gun and let's go!" Zipp flew over and picked up some of the guns he had dropped earlier. "Time to shoot up some Artificial Chaos!" he chuckled. Copter looked at his clock again. "Time's running out! We better hurry!" he said to himself.

So, Copter and Zipp set about their search through the ARK. Zipp was extremely helpful in fighting the robots that were still hanging around, especially since Copter wouldn't take the time to bother with them. None of the robots posed much of a threat, and Copter was afraid of something much more dangerous that would happen should he fail.

After a while, they reached a prison area in the colony. This area looked much newer than the rest of the ARK, because it had only recently been added. It was a facility designed for a single purpose. Copter and Zipp knew exactly what that was, and it was the reason they were there. The two experiments soon found the object of their search, a large, dark room with nothing inside save a large, rubber door in the back. Vortex was waiting at the door, tapping his foot impatiently on the ground as Zipp flew over to him. "You're late! Did you find the lockpick?" he said. Zipp handed a device to Vortex, while Copter examined the door. "Why would they make the door rubber like that?" he thought. Vortex pushed Copter aside.

"Let me work, you ussssleless old clone!" he said. Copter pushed him back. "You let ME work! I can break that open, easy!"

"Let him work!" Zipp shouted to Copter. "You have something else to do! An old friend is here who's just been dying to see you again!"

Copter, confused by this, slowly turned around to see what Zipp was talking about. In the darkness, Copter could make out a figure hanging on the roof by its tail. The creature dropped to the floor, using its broad wings to slow its descent. It held a familiar scythe, and had a growling, canine voice. "Grrrrrrrr.... Hello..." Copter recognized him immediately. "You... Guard the Gargoyle! I thought I killed you!" he said in disbelief. Guard chuckled in a sinister manner. "You thought so, eh? Grrrrrrr, what sort of moron are you? I was created to be able to destroy you, and that's what I intend to do! Let's go, it's time for a rematch!"

To be continued...

## 33 - Copter's Final Test

GeneX - Tails the Fox  
Chapter 33 - Copter's Final Test  
Boss 22 - Guard the Gargoyle

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

"What are you even doing here?!" Copter shouted, still confused by Guard's presence. "Zipp should be blowing holes in you by now, but he's not. Why!?" Vortex and Zipp were no longer paying attention, preoccupied with attempting to open the strange rubber door. Guard slowly approached Copter, and in the silence of the prison, Copter could hear a strange whirring sound coming from him. "You mean you don't know by now?" Guard said with fake surprise. "It just so happens that I, Guard the Gargoyle, am also Experiment 6!"

Copter was stunned. It was as though he had been hit by a ton of bricks. It was just not possible. How could his creator also create his arch enemy? It was unthinkable. Was it his creator's goal to destroy him? He almost wanted to cry, but he had no time for that. He had no time for anything. He slapped himself in the face in order to snap out of it. "That has to be a fantastic lie, and I'm surprised the others fell for it. You work for GUN, for that old sargent!" Copter pointed out. Zipp took his attention away from the door. "It's true, Copter! He is Experiment 6. After all, we both know Gargoyles don't really exist! I'm surprised you couldn't guess that he was one of us!" Zipp laughed at Copter's ignorance and resumed working on the door. Guard nodded in agreement. "Grrrrr... You're a fool, Experiment 2! But you did knock me into a fall that would kill most. Grrrrr.... I have a score to settle with you!" Copter looked at him like he was crazy. "At least I learn. Remember, I did beat you once. I can easily do it again!"

Guard took off after Copter at top speed. As in their first fight, Copter flew over Guard and landed behind him. This time, however, Guard turned around quickly and swiped his scythe through the air in front of him, firing a blast of energy from the blade! The blast took Copter by surprise and knocked him on his back. Guard stood over him, grinning. "Grrrrr... I learn, too. I picked up some new tricks!" Guard's gloating had cost him time, however, and Copter had managed to muster up a Chaos Blast attack, knocking Guard away from him. Copter scrambled to his feet. "There's no way you'll stop me from completing my mission! Stay out of my way!" he shouted. Guard sent a few more blasts from his scythe at Copter, who dodged the first few but was knocked over by the last. It was apparent that the events of the day had begun to catch up with him, he was moving more slowly than he had been all day. Guard ran in his direction, firing more blasts at him along the way. Copter took to the air to escape and tried to get behind Guard, but the gargoyle flew up after him and tried to slash him with the scythe. He missed, and Copter used this opportunity to grab at the scythe. Guard pulled back and kicked Copter away, causing him to fall to the ground. Guard landed in front of him. "Grrrr... We're completing that mission for you! We don't need you!" he growled. Copter stood up, glaring at him. "If we have the same mission, then why do we fight? What's the matter with you!?" he shouted. Guard leaned against his scythe like a cane. "Grrrr... Let me think.... No, you'll just have to survive long enough to ask the master. Take this!" Guard twirled the scythe around, then slashed in Copter's direction. Several energy spikes were shot out

in Copter's direction, but this time, Copter was expecting it. "Chaos Whirlwind!" The gust created by his attack blew the energy spikes back at Guard, blasting him backwards. Guard, furious with this development, quickly took to the air and flew at Copter, who flew after him at the same time. Copter dodged Guard's scythe again and grabbed it, this time pulling it away from Guard. The gargoyle responded by flying around him and kicking him from the side, grabbing the scythe away as Copter was knocked away. The fox was not about to quit this time, though. As Guard began swinging his weapon at him, Copter flew at him, gracefully dodging the attacks. Upon reaching Guard, Copter twirled in the air in order to slam his foe with a powerful tail attack. The power of the tailband sent Guard soaring away, tumbling to the floor in a defeated heap. Copter dropped to the floor and stuck his tongue out at him. "Still can't hold a candle to me! Ha!"

"Bravo, bravo! Well done, Experiment 2!" Someone was clapping behind him. His voice was one that Copter knew very well. He slowly turned around, and found that Vortex and Zipp had opened the door. Standing in the doorway was a brown rat in a lab coat, with yellow eyes, and wearing purple and black shoes. "Ah, it's great to finally be free!" the rat said, in a sophisticated, almost noble sounding voice. He turned to Vortex and Zipp, who were standing to his right. "Thank you, four and five." Guard slowly rose to his feet and limped over to the rat, standing to his left. "Grrrrrr.... I left my post to witness your return, master!" he said. The rat raised an eyebrow. "Really? Your loyalty is almost moving, six." he turned to Copter. "I'm a bit surprised at you, two! I ordered you to release me, and here I find you fighting with six!" the rat said. Copter began to approach him. "I tried, but that green goon got in my way! He was trying to kill me!" The rat crossed his arms. "Now, why would they do that?" he said, apparently not believing Copter. Guard tugged on his lab coat. "Grr! I was supposed to fight Experiment 2!" he said, confused by the fact that the rat was feigning ignorance. The rat pushed him aside, sparks flying from his hand as he did. "Silence! Do not forget whom you are speaking to! I am your creator, Bucky the Rat!" Zipp flew behind Vortex and chuckled, quietly joking, "Lab rat..." Bucky shot Zipp a dirty look, and he silenced himself. As Bucky returned his attention to Copter, Vortex smacked Zipp on the head. "Sssshut up, Zipp!"

Copter looked thoughtful for a moment. "Hey, why was Guard guarding my cell if you wanted me to escape and free you?" he wondered. Bucky heaved a heavy sigh. "It was GUN's idea of 'containment.' Since Guard is more an android than a real living creature, GUN programmed him to guard you. Yet, he still remained loyal to me. Your little battle was a nice test..." A spark flew from the rat's hand as he pointed to the roof. Copter looked up to see someone fall in front of him! It was Tails, and it seemed apparent he wanted to fight! Bucky suddenly took on a panicked tone as he pointed at the young fox. "Look, two! Your original has come to prevent my escape! Destroy him, now!"

Copter looked at Tails, who appeared prepared to throw a punch at any moment. Something seemed fishy to Copter, and he was running out of time. "Enough! I don't have time for this! Master, help me first!" Copter shouted. "Stop Tails first!" Bucky demanded. Copter glared angrily at Bucky. "Excuse me, but did I not do what was asked of me?" Copter flung off his glove, revealing the wrist timer on his wrist. "BUCKY!! Remove this bomb, now!!"

Vortex, Zipp, and Guard all jumped back in alarm. None of them had bombs attached to them. This didn't make sense. Yet it was true, Bucky had threatened Copter with an explosive end if he would not release him. Copter growled in frustration. "You owe me now!!" he said, desperate. Bucky suddenly looked cold and vicious. "As I recall, I MADE you, you insolent, disloyal gnat!" Tails suddenly exploded in a shower of sparks, causing everyone but Bucky to jump in surprise. "Was he fake!?" Copter said,

bewildered. "It wasss the masssster'ssss powerssss!" Vortex gasped. Bucky raised his hand, and sparks flew from it. "With my electric power, I can even create holograms! It was your final test of loyalty, and you, you miserable waste, have failed!!" he declared. Copter was terrified and stunned. "A-a test.... Wh-what?"

The timer on Copter's wrist bomb was very nearly at zero. Bucky laughed manically. "Guess what, 'Copter,' it is now about six P.M. So, you are FINISHED!!!" Cackling like a madman, Bucky pointed his fingers in Copter's direction, and lightning shot from his fingertips, shooting through the helpless fox's body. Copter let out a terrible scream as he fell to the ground, on the edge of death. "He's about to blow!" Bucky shouted. "Let's get out of here, my loyal friends!" The three experiments followed Bucky out of the prison, Guard sticking his tongue out at Copter on his way out. "I had such high hopes for him." Bucky muttered. "Aside from Experiment 3, he should have been the most powerful of all my experiments..."

Copter could not stand up. All he could do was struggle to move his arm so he could see how much time he had. Mere seconds. There was no hope left for him. This was it. "Doom...sayer.... was right...." he muttered. As the timer ticked off the last seconds, a single, final word hung on his breath. "Tails...."

Bucky watched the doorway from a safe distance. Once he heard the explosion, he turned to leave, followed by his experiments. "Such a waste..." he thought.

Copter lay in the prison, his body charred and burned by the explosion. Somehow, he was still in one piece. He was even still breathing. However, he had been mortally injured. He was at death's door, and although he was passed out and unable to see, a presence as grave as the Reaper himself was standing over him. It was the Doomsayer. "The time has not yet come. I grant you a divine rebirth. Experiment 2, awakon!!"

At the Doomsayer's words, a beam of light shone down on Copter, seemingly coming from nowhere. An icy mist filled the room, and Copter's body began to glow softly. The beam of light seemed to lift him into the air as the mist surrounded him and filled him with a new breath of life. Copter gasped his first new breath as his eyes opened. The beam of light gently dropped him on his feet, then faded. "...Impossible...." was all he could say. The Doomsayer nodded. "Improbable."

"Now, do you understand my power?" the Doomsayer said. Copter looked at his hands. His body was healed, the burns gone with the bomb. "I was... dead... wasn't I?" he murmured. The Doomsayer nodded again. "As I foretold." Copter glanced at the mysterious figure who had just gave him a new life. "You told me to beware my light counterpart. Funny, didn't know how literal you meant that." he chuckled. "You were not quite gone when I revived you." the Doomsayer admitted. Copter looked surprised. "Why did you bother to save me then? Your prophecy..." The Doomsayer raised his hand, calling for silence. "I have my reasons." he paused, then pointed at Copter's tail. "If you hadn't found that tailband, nothing could have saved you." Copter looked at the gold ring around his tail. He knew it would come in handy. "So, if I get the other tailband..." he started to say. "Yes, that is what you must do." the Doomsayer agreed. Copter looked out the door. "What about Bucky?" he wondered. The Doomsayer shook his head. "What, indeed. He created you, he destroyed you. You no longer owe him anything." Copter looked at the Doomsayer and laughed. "Then forget him! I'll just defeat Tails and take his tailband! Then, nothing can stop me!" he declared. The Doomsayer stepped backwards into Bucky's former cell. "Good luck to you, then. Not that it will save you in the end! Farewell!!" His trademark hailstorm even blew up



there in space, and covered him up as he vanished.

Copter lingered a moment, relieved that he no longer had to worry over the time. As he turned to leave, he saw Shadow waiting in the doorway. "How long have you been waiting there?" Copter asked. "I just found my way here." Shadow said. "I just got lost in that space shuttle, you know. I know this colony like the back of my hand. Although, this prison is new. So, did you find what you were looking for?" Copter gave Shadow a thumbs up. "You expected less?" he said. Shadow chuckled in response. "Then what will you do now?" he wondered. Copter led Shadow out of the prison. "I am a clone." he said. "I was copied from Tails. I'll never be anything more than his shadow as long as he's around." There was a slight pause before Shadow asked his next question. "Do you plan to destroy him?" he asked. Copter shrugged. "I don't plan to. If he makes it necessary, then I shall. I won't let him get in my way."

"In the way of what?" Shadow questioned.

"Of me surpassing him, of course! Then, I'll get Sargent Gunner good!" Copter declared. Shadow smiled, as though this was the answer he wanted to hear. "I don't like the idea of mirroring Sonic by befriending a fox, but I do sympathize with you. I believe I'll join you for a while."

Copter grinned smugly. "Think you can keep up with me?" he said. Shadow returned his grin. "Think YOU can keep up with ME?" he replied. Copter winked at him. "Race ya!" The two science projects tore off through the space colony on their way back to the shuttle. With Copter's new life came a new alliance, and a new mission; To defeat Tails the Fox!

To be continued...

## 34 - Path to the Dream Temple

GeneX - Tails the Fox

Chapter 34 - Path to the Dream Temple

Stage 18 - Forest of Dreams

Boss 23 - Shadow Tails

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Tails burst out of the water, gasping for breath. He had no idea how he wound up in a lake in the middle of a forest. Looking around, he realized that he had never been here before. It was endless trees in almost every direction, but across from the lake he had awoken in there was a small shrine that appeared to be made of crystal. Tails decided to check it out. Perhaps there might be someone there who could tell him where he was. He opened the door and peered inside. It was pitch dark inside, and he could not see a thing. A bit afraid, he decided not to enter. He turned to leave, but then spotted a shining orb of pinkish light. Tails knew he had seen it somewhere before. The familiar light orb darted past Tails and into the shrine. It apparently wanted Tails to follow it. He couldn't recall where exactly he had seen this light, but he felt he could trust it. Gathering up his nerves, Tails entered the crystal shrine...

As he stepped inside, the door slammed shut behind him. Then, the room seemed to transform. It was still dark, but now Tails could see. It seemed as though he was transported to a cavern somewhere, and he could see no exits. As he looked around the area, he realized that he had seen this place before. It was the same place he saw in his nightmares!

Standing in the center of the room was a familiar fox whose features were hidden by the lack of light. "No, it can't be!" Tails found himself shouting. "You're him! You're...." The dark fox turned to face Tails, and stepped closer to him. On closer inspection, Tails realized that the fox had all black fur, black shoes and gloves, and glowing red eyes. "Welcome, mortal," the dark fox said, without moving his mouth, "to the Dream Shrine!" Tails stepped backward, a bit scared. "Th-the Dream Shrine?" he questioned. The dark fox circled around Tails as he spoke. "Here, you see the world of your dreams.... or nightmares!" his voice had a demonic quality to it. Tails felt he was speaking to fear itself. "Who-who are you?" he managed to say. "Me?" the dark fox said. "I am the creature you see in your nightmares! Call me Shadow Tails!" Tails watched Shadow Tails as he walked around him. There was something he had to know. "Are you supposed to be Copter?" he asked. Shadow Tails stopped and faced Tails. "No, I am YOUR NIGHTMARES!!!! HA HA HA HA!! You cannot stop me!" Tails shut his eyes and backed away. "It's just a dream... It's j-just a dream... He can't hurt me..." he said to himself. However, with his eyes shut, he did not see that Shadow Tails had approached him. He opened his eyes fast as he felt Shadow Tails grab him by the throat and lift him into the air. "Fool! You face death here! In this place, your nightmares are real!" Shadow Tails snarled. Tails struggled to break free, gasping for breath. He managed to kick Shadow Tails in the head, causing the creature to drop him. Shadow Tails did not let up, though, and ran after Tails to attack him. Tails stood his ground and fought back, struggling against the shadow creature. Finally, Shadow Tails caught him by the throat again and flung him onto his back. As Shadow Tails ran at him, Tails scrambled to his feet and pushed Shadow Tails away. Tails then ran

to get as much distance from Shadow Tails as he could. The shadow creature laughed. "You are afraid! You fight hard, but you are afraid!" the creature declared. Tails raised his fists into a defensive position. "That may be so, but that doesn't mean I can't beat you!" he shouted back. Shadow Tails' eyes narrowed. "Why do you fight on? Such fear stops most in their tracks..."

"I can't let villains like you hurt anyone! If I let you beat me, you might hurt my friends next!" Tails shouted defiantly. Shadow Tails shut his eyes, pondering something. "Ah... You take the fear and use it to drive you to fight... Interesting..."

Suddenly, the room returned to the pitch dark from before, and the door Tails had entered reopened in front of him. Tails turned around and shouted at Shadow Tails, who he could no longer see. "Copter!" "Not me." Shadow Tails responded. "I am merely a figment of your dreams. Come to the Dream Temple, located in this forest. You may find the answers you seek there."

"Where is it!?" Tails asked, but Shadow Tails had fallen silent. "I guess he's waiting for me there..." Tails thought. "I have to find my way there. I need to find out if he knows anything about Copter. Maybe he knows why he looks just like me...and what he's after."

Tails left the Dream Shrine with no idea what to do next. If there was a Dream Temple in this forest, it was hidden well. He looked around and noticed some people talking at the corner of the shrine. One of them was Espio, and the other was someone Tails had never met, Illusi. As Tails approached, they stopped talking and faced him. "Ah, Tails, are you lost here, like Espio?" Illusi asked. "How do you know my name?" Tails said, confused. "Who are you?" Illusi bowed slightly to Tails. "I am Illusi the Shrew. It is a pleasure to meet you at last, heroic one."

"Illusi grew up in this forest." Espio said. "He can show us the way out." Tails wasn't ready to leave yet. "I need to find a place called the Dream Temple. Do you know where that is?" he asked. Illusi grinned, as though he expected this question. "I know the way, but I can't take you there. I do know a creature that can, though." he snapped his fingers, and an odd, green check mark shaped creature appeared. "This is a Righto. Much friendlier than my Wrangos. Follow him to the Dream Temple, but don't be slow! He won't stop for you. This makes things difficult, because the Lost Ones are patrolling this forest. So, I would like to request that Espio assist you." Illusi turned to the chameleon, who nodded in agreement. "I suppose I can lend my assistance." he said. Tails shook their hands. "Thanks a lot, you guys!" he said gratefully. Illusi pointed to the Righto. "Get moving. The Righto will go slowly, but won't stop. If you deviate from its path even a little, you will be lost. This forest is cursed..."

As if on cue, a howling sound was heard around them. A new breed of Lost Ones stepped out from behind the trees. Several of them. They all resembled nine tailed foxes, but the tips of their tails seemed to end in blades. Their bodies were drenched in losol slime, and their eyes glowed red. Their mouths concealed a layer of razor sharp fangs, and they were truly terrors to behold. "Run for it, Tails! It's the Los Foxes! They're fast and lethal, so don't waste another second!" Illusi shouted before snapping his fingers and vanishing, leaving Tails and Espio alone.

The Righto took off into the forest, and Tails and Espio had to take off quickly to keep up with it. A pair of Los Foxes were standing in the way, and attempted to slash at them with their razor sharp tails. Espio changed his color to become invisible, making it difficult for the Los Foxes to hit him, while Tails flew over them. They ran off through the forest after the Righto, with the Los Foxes in hot pursuit. The Righto often made sudden turns, darting one way to another through the trees, making it difficult for Tails and Espio to keep up. However, Tails was determined to find the Dream Temple, and wouldn't let anything stop him. Not even when more Los Foxes dropped from the trees to block his path. Tails simply used his

spring shoes to hop over them quickly. They kept up well, but neither Tails nor Espio expected what happened next.

As they reached a small clearing, the Righto was suddenly attacked by a blast of dark energy that caused it to vanish, destroyed. Lospector flew into the clearing, taunting Tails and Espio from the air. "Nya nya, no more guide for you! Aw, but don't worry. Look, my little pet foxes are here. I promise, they'll tear you apart quickly!" The spectral slime spirit laughed like it was all a hilarious joke, then vanished. Looking around, Tails and Espio realized they were surrounded. "Now what do we do?" Espio said, somewhat frustrated. Tails looked around and spotted that same pinkish light in the trees, floating there as if waiting for him.

"All right, Espio! I think I know how we can still reach the Dream Temple! Follow me!" Tails shouted. The Los Foxes suddenly tore off into the clearing after them. Tails flew past them and ran after the orb of light. Espio followed, throwing ninja stars at the Los Foxes in his way in order to knock them out of his way. As Tails reached the light, he heard a familiar voice call out to him. "This way!"

The light took off down the path the Righto was leading them. Tails followed intently, feeling they were almost there. Espio followed behind Tails, apparently unable to see the light. They were still being pursued by the Lost Ones, but they had a much larger distance between them than before.

Soon, a large, crystal building came into view. The building itself had a very dreamlike quality to it, so Tails knew it had to be the Dream Temple. The light orb stopped suddenly, while Tails and Espio continued forwards toward the building. Tails realizing the light had stopped, turned around to see what was going on. Espio looked as well, and saw that the Los Foxes were catching up. Suddenly, the light orb took the shape of Tikal the Echidna, whose body glowed with a powerful energy. "Lost souls of darkness, begone!!" she shouted. The light coming from her glowed even brighter, and consumed the Los Foxes as they attempted to pass. In a brilliant flash of light, Tikal and the Lost Ones vanished. Espio rubbed his eyes in disbelief. "What just happened?!" he wondered. Tails smiled. "We just got help from an old friend." he said quietly. He then turned to the Dream Temple. "Now I gotta go in there. Maybe then I can find out why I keep having that same nightmare, and what Copter has to do with it!"

To be continued...

## 35 - Tails Worst Nightmare

GeneX - Tails the Fox  
Chapter 35 - Tails Worst Nightmare  
Boss 24 - Dream King

Note: Sonic the Hedgehog and related characters are (c) SEGA and Sonic Team. You knew that, right?

Tails walked up the stone steps leading to the entrance to the Dream Temple. Realizing that he was heading in alone, he turned around and called to Espio. "Aren't you coming, Espio? You've been such a big help so far, and I was hoping you might help me here, too." Espio looked up at him. "I can't go any farther, Tails. Don't worry about it, though. You have been alone for the entire trip." Before Tails could say anything, Espio vanished as though he never existed. "Gee... I wonder where the real Espio is..." Tails murmured after recovering from the surprise. Truly, he was on his own.

The interior of the Dream Temple was also crystal, except for the floor, which was stone. The entrance room was a large chamber with several hallways leading in different directions. Directly across from the entrance door was a stairway leading up. This was the path Tails had to take, he could feel it. He climbed the stairs, and as he did, everything appeared to grow darker the higher he climbed. As he reached the top, the walls and floor of the temple appeared to be swallowed up by the darkness. However, that was all the darkness hid. Tails could see standing across from him, clear as day, Shadow Tails. Tails was also shocked to see his friends, tied up and suspended in midair by the ropes. Cream, Amy, Knuckles, and even Sonic were held captive, and were apparently unconscious! Shadow Tails cackled devilishly. "So, you have come, young hero of light. And now, you face your nightmares. I know all your fears, everything that terrifies you." he said. He turned to his captives. "Let's see what happens when I do this..." Shadow Tails fired a beam of energy from his hands at Knuckles, who disintegrated into ashes upon impact! "No!!" Tails shouted, horrified. Shadow Tails just laughed in response, then fired another bolt at Amy, reducing her to ash as well. Tails watched helplessly, only able to shout out, "Stop it!" Shadow Tails continued laughing. "Oh, now we're up to 'stop it,' eh? Let's see what happens when I smite your hero!" Another energy bolt pierced through Sonic, yet another reduced to ashes. Each one's remains seemed to vanish into the darkness, leaving nothing. As Shadow Tails turned to Cream, Tails could take no more. He ran after Shadow Tails and threw a punch at him, which Shadow Tails quickly turned around and caught. Grasping Tails' arm, Shadow Tails cackled menacingly as he fired his another bolt and finished the last of Tails' friends. As Shadow Tails released Tails, the young fox fell to his knees, sobbing. Shadow Tails seemed to find this incredibly amusing. "All right, I guess you're lonely...." A wave of his hand brought those he had just destroyed back into the room, this time wide awake. Tails, not taking time to think, ran over to his friends, then watched as they collapsed into dust again from another attack by Shadow Tails. "Do you understand the nature of this place yet?" Shadow Tails asked. "Here, you face your darkest nightmares. But the only person actually here is you... And perhaps me." Tails, slowly comprehending what he had been told, turned to face Shadow Tails. "Who are you!?"

"Who am I? A funny question. Am I perhaps a symbolic mirror? A ghost? Perhaps I don't even exist at

all..." Shadow Tails speculated. "This is for you to decide. Perhaps the question you should ask is not who, but what."

"What, then?" Tails asked. Shadow Tails let out a low, menacing chuckle. "I am the darkness within your spirit, manifested by your dreams! For you see, there is darkness in every spirit. It is shown to us in our nightmares!"

Tails thought a moment, then asked another, more pressing question. "If you know about my dreams, can you tell me the identity of the dark fox?" Shadow Tails nodded. "Yes. But I shall not." he said, but Tails had to know. "Is it Copter?" he wondered. Shadow Tails laughed. "I will not tell you!" Tails thought another moment, then tried again, a bit shakily. "Is it... me?"

"Let's find out..." Shadow Tails whispered. Suddenly, the ground began shaking violently as Shadow Tails began to morph into a new shape. He began to transform into the same monster Tails remembered from his nightmares, but since Tails had never been asleep long enough to see what that creature actually was, the transformation stopped short. Instead, the creature decided to take the shape of a giant black serpent with fangs as big as Tails himself. The creature let out a laugh that echoed through the temple. "I am the Dream King! The dark lord of nightmares!"

The temple began to shake increasingly more violently, and Tails struggled to keep his footing. "W-what's happening to this place!" he shouted. The Dream King began to slither around Tails, surrounding him with its snake body. "This temple is collapsing! Your nightmares shall become your tomb!" Thinking fast, Tails decided to attempt to fight. He slipped on his Tailband of Chaos, and flew above the black snake. The Dream King looked up at him and made a disgusted face. "What's that? A Chaos Tailband? Bah! Not even that can save you now!" Tails landed a good distance away from the Dream King, and watched it transform again, this time into a skeletal wolf creature. Tails fear began to make him doubt himself. "Maybe he's right. I can't fight something like this. It would even take the Chaos Emeralds for Sonic to beat it..."

Suddenly, the voice of Tikal called out to Tails. "Don't listen to the Dream King! Follow your heart! It will lead you to the truth!" Tails thought about Tikal's words for a moment. The Dream King began to run after Tails at the same time. Just before the skeleton wolf could catch him, Tails jumped and smashed the skull with a Tailband powered attack! As Tails flew away from the Dream King, the bones collapsed and then took the shape of a black wyvern. Tails stood firm in the face of this threat. "I can see the truth. That Dark Fox isn't me, or Copter!" The Dream King laughed uncontrollably, nodding to confirm Tails' statement. "It is darkness itself!"

"Believe in yourself!" Tikal cried. Tails nodded. "I can do it... I th-think...."

The Dream King burst forth with wicked laughter again. "You are afraid! Your fear will destroy you, without delay!"

The Dream King flew after Tails, blazing flames erupting from its mouth, claws thrashing to slice him to ribbons. With a new determination, fueled by the desire to escape and help his friends, Tails jumped onward into the sky with the aid of his Spring Shoes, using all his strength to crash into the Dream King's dark form. A brilliant explosion of flames and light erupted from the point of their impact, filling the entire room, which had begun to collapse, with a blinding flash. The flash slowly subsided, and the temple ceased its shaking...

As Tails slowly opened his eyes, he found himself standing before the Dream King, collapsed on the ground. Its wyvern body was wreathed in flame, and its glowing red eyes were glaring at Tails. "Well done... Hero of light!"

The Dream King vanished in a vortex of flames, leaving Tails alone in the dark. As Tails turned to look for an exit, he saw Tikal standing behind him. "Good work, Tails!" she cheered. Tails looked at her questioningly. "Why did you lead me here, Tikal?" he asked. "I was hoping you'd understand by now." she replied. Tails, not taking a moment to think, said what he believed in his heart. "The dark fox in my dream... It wasn't Copter." he said. Tikal smiled, nodding excitedly. "That's right!"

"Then, maybe he isn't really such a bad guy. Maybe Eggman's exerting some sort of hold on him." Tails speculated. Tikal looked thoughtful. "Possibly..." she said. "I can't help thinking that there's more to it than that." Tails said. "But you know what you must do!" Tikal said. "Confront Copter! Save him from his dark path!" With that, Tikal vanished, and light illuminated the room, allowing Tails to find the stairway back down.

As Tails started down the stone steps in front of the Dream Temple, he came to a realization. "Now what am I gonna do? I don't know where Copter is..." His thoughts were interrupted by a familiar beeping sound. SPOT dashed out of the trees and pounced into Tails' arms. "Hey! How'd you get here, buddy?" Tails said, delighted. He got his answer when Cream & Cheese emerged from the trees as well. Tails placed SPOT on the ground and ran to Cream, a look of concern on his face. "What're you doing way out here, Cream?" SPOT followed Tails and beeped at him, so Tails looked at its monitor and read what it had to say. "Sonic had to go help Vector?" he read. "Yes." Cream said, "So I came to look for you myself. But there were a lot of scary monsters in this forest..." Tails examined SPOT. "There must've been. Looks like SPOT used up all his weapons to protect you... I'm so sorry, Cream. I didn't want you to put yourself in danger..." Cream interrupted him by tugging his arm. "That's OK, Tails! But we should catch up with Mr. Sonic, quick!" she insisted. Tails agreed. "SPOT, where is Sonic?" he asked. SPOT displayed some text on its monitor, as well as a map. "Dr. Eggman's new stronghold, Darkegg Fortress. Sonic is there."

"Then let's go! Time to take down Eggman!" Tails declared. He pulled out the Tornado Remote he had used on Aqua Isle to call the Tornado before. "We'll fly to Eggman's base! Ready, Cream?" Cream and Cheese looked excited and ready for action. "We're right behind you, Tails!" she said. Just then, the Tornado arrived and landed nearby. As they climbed in, Tails felt a new determination within him. Similar to what he felt fighting the Dream King. He knew that the final battle of this adventure was nearing, and he was determined to help his friends put a stop to Eggman's latest plan, and to help Copter escape from the dark forces that controlled him!

To be continued...