

Next Guardian: the Reincarnation

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A dark version of the freedom fighter days. contains mild language and mildly risqué scenes

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1. Round Two

Knuckles stared down the new trainee. A human, a guardian of the chaos emeralds? He couldn't believe it. Knuckles decided to take it easy the first round, just to test his abilities. He had prior training, or so he claimed. Knuckles glided in at half-speed towards the emerald. The human stepped in front of the emerald, passing the first part of the test. He seemed to be contemplating Knuckles. So innocently Knuckles let his guard down. Without warning, the human, pale in the green glow from the emeralds, stepped forward and stooped down, then sprung upward, in effect benchpressing a shocked Knuckles. As he fell, the human's foot came up and stopped just short of Knuckles. Nice work. That was a neat little trick. Where'd you learn it? Knuckles asked. The human looked away, uncomfortable. I just thought of it. The first time Knuckles had heard him talk. He had a strange voice, soft-spoken, but at the same time raspy. Well, that's good. Thinking on your feet is good. Now let's take a break, I want you to meet a few friends you'll be working with. Knuckles never bothered to scrutinize the eighteen-year-old's look, but he did so now. Dark brown hair, red shirt, black pants, black coat, red gloves, and black and white shoes. Not that he noticed this on many people, but Knuckles noticed two things, both in his strange dark hazel eyes: Intensity, and a sadness, hopelessness that only years of torment could build. Knuckles wondered what happened, but didn't press the issue. But as they were leaving to meet the Chaotix, the thought crossed his mind: If he's only eighteen, then what the heck happened to make him like that?

In Knothole village, a human similar to the one we just met climbed in through an open window. This human was identical to Knuckles' student, except with a white trench coat, and boisterous confidence. He looked at the sick queen, smiling like he was pleased. In his hand, no gloves for him, he held a dagger. Your majesty? he inquired, gripping the dagger. Asleep. Good. She was going to stay that way. Picking his spot, he raised the dagger high..

Espio the chameleon, Mighty the Armadillo, Vector the crocodile, Charmy the Bee and Julie-Su, an echidna, sat around, trying not to stare. Not every day they met a human who wasn't trying to enslave them. Knuckles tried to clear the tension. Hey gang, this is Ekyt. He's an apprentice guardian, and he's gonna work with you guys. The whole group stirred. Mighty, being the most amiable of the group, got up and extended his hand. I'm Mighty, it's nice to meet you. Ekyt shook his hand, mumbling something close to you too. Vector decided to speak up. Where'd you dig up this guy Knux? This dawg ain't lookin' like he be packin' a punch, yo! Espio and Charmy angrily told him to shut up, while Julie-Su slapped him. It's okay. If he has a problem with me, he can tell me. They had heard Ekyt talk for the first time too. Vector got in his face.

Youse ain't welcome here, punk! Ekyt raised an eyebrow. Really? Even though I'm new here, let me respond to this in the way I've seen demonstrated. Ekyt punched him, instantly earning everyone but Vector's respect. Knuckles stepped between the two, holding back laughter.

Okay, okay, he deserved that, but that's enough, I.. Guardian! an urgent voice called. The echidna chief of police, Constable Remington, came rushing through the jungle. I never figured you would harbor a wanted fugitive! What? When did I do that!? Right now, with him! his finger pointed at Ekyt. What are the charges? Ekyt asked coldly. Murdering the queen, at 3:04 this morning. He was with me! He couldn't have done it! Knuckles exclaimed. Remington sighed. I know guardian, but orders are orders. Constable, remove him!

At this point a girl echidna, deep pink in fur color, looking identical to Julie-Su in every way except she had no metal in her hair, swept into the clearing. Her emerald green eyes searched for the threat. Ekyt, meanwhile, had been ready to fight, but he stopped. On earth, he'd never

felt like this. He had a disdain for humans, male and female, leaving romance out of the question. But this girl echidna.. Everything about her seemed perfect. Even all business like she was now, her hair (Deep pink with black tips and bangs), clothes (Black vest, and black pants with a red stripe up the side) seemed to suit her. Ekyt shook himself out of the daze he had been in and tried to explain. I didn't do it. I don't know who did, but it wasn't me. Yeah, save it for the judge pal. There are two humans in existence in this world, you and Dr. Robotnik. Since you're not 500 lbs, you're not Robotnik. But you are under arrest by the order of King Acorn! She forced him up to a tree and handcuffed his hands behind his back.

You see fit to murder my wife, and now you lie before me? King Acorn thundered. Sally and Elias, his children, were beside him. I'm not lying, I'm innocent. Give me a chance to prove it.

No. If Knuckles wishes to do so, he may pursue the one who committed the murder. Even if that person is you. Knuckles nodded at Ekyt, and turned to King Acorn. I will sire. He's innocent, and I think I know who did it. You may go Knuckles. King Acorn turned his attention back to Ekyt. As for you, the constable will see to it that you are detained until proven innocent.. or guilty.

Knuckles looked at the murder scene for clues. Sonic raced up. Hey red! What's up! Sonic asked. Can't talk now Sonic. My new protg got framed for murdering the queen. Someone that looked like him did it. But the only way that could happen is if he had a double.. Sonic cringed.

Waay past uncool! But a double, we had that problem! It's the cosmic interstate! He's probably got an evil twin, like we do! (That really happened in the original comic series- N.G.) That's gotta be it! Can you get there and slow him down? Then I'll catch up and we'll get him outta here! Knuckles exclaimed.

Ekyt stared ahead, not moving save for blinking. Linda-Su, the constable that arrested him, felt bad for him. She tried not to. The dungeon was cold. The human in the cell behind her must have sensed her discomfort, because he shrugged off his jacket and gave it to her. Thanks. She said, taking the coat without really knowing why. I don't think you did it, just so you know. The fifteen-year-old female echidna told the human. Glad someone believes me. Came the reply. He still hadn't moved. Linda-Su could see the same thing in his eyes that Knuckles did, but with one other thing. Something was bothering him, he was intense, and the thing she figured out? That wasn't as easy to tell. But she figured it out. It was like he could see through her, though he was looking at her. He was dead to the world, it seemed. His eyes showed her that he both cared and didn't really have any confidence. Hey, listen, I'm sorry if I hurt you back there. She told him. Don't worry. I don't blame people for doing their jobs. Linda-Su sighed. This was sad. One more chance to break the ice. But before she could do it, he did. I'm sorry about not introducing myself. I'm Ekyt. He said, extending his hand through the bars. My name's Linda-Su. She said, shaking. Do you have a sister? Ekyt asked her. Yeah, why? The surname, and you look a lot like her. I'm supposed to work with the Chaotix. Yup, that's her. So, you're a guardian? she asked, almost instantly regretting it. Supposedly. But so far I haven't done much guarding. I couldn't even save the queen's life. If only I had known, I would have stopped him. I thought he was gone. Linda-Su was confused. Who? Kyte. (Pronounced Key-tay) He's basically an evil version of me from a parallel universe. What happened? Ekyt looked at her, then away. You don't want to know. Sure I do. What happened? You know what? Tell me about you instead. Ekyt looked her in the eyes, then began the tale of what was the shards of his past..

CAN SONIC AND KNUCKLES CATCH THE IMPOSTER? AND WHAT'S THIS, LOVE AT FIRST SITE? YOU'VE GOTTA READ TO FIND OUT! GOT FAN CHARS? I'LL ADD EM! GOT A QUESTION? I'LL ANSWER IT! AND YA KNOW WHY?

CAUSE NG DOES WHAT OTHER S WON T!

NOW, A NEW FEATURE:

The purpose of this Next Guardian is a fresh perspective on the 100+ chapter original. Both will be regularly updated, along with Sonic X: Next Guardian Style. If you take offense to my slogan (Above), please reconsider, it s just me having a little fun. There are a number of authors and artists on this site/ formerly on this site who definitely have my respect (in no order, sorry if I missed you, let me know and I ll add you next ish!):

Neopetgirl
Violet_Rose
MitchellP
Jo_Pen
Flashthehedgehog
Shadowthe_Hedgehog
SkyLord
MrGimp
FalconLobo
CowGirl10
Cowgirl5
MechaSonic43
Sabrinat14
Jaideanna
Max2085
Segathehedgehog

2. The Alliance

You sure this is the right spot Sonic? Knuckles asked as they hid in the bushes. Definitely. This is where the Cosmic Interstate opens up. That imposter you're looking for should be coming by any second. Knuckles paused before asking Sonic what was on his chest. What do you think of him? Who? Ekyt. The guy I'm training. Sonic shook his head. I couldn't say Knux. Hard to tell. He'll prove himself, one way or the other.. Hey, listen! They saw their prey walking through, chuckling. What a sap! he chuckled. Sonic zipped in front of him. What's the rush pal? He asked. Get out of my way hedgehog! I'm busy. Knuckles tapped him on the shoulder. You're just who I'm looking for. Now come with us or, Ow! Ekyt's double punched him in the face. Knuckles knocked him out cold. Let's go clear that kid.

..The bullying killed what little self esteem I had to begin with. I became what I always hated. I bullied back. No one deserves that. Ekyt finished and gauged Linda-Su's reaction. Disturbed. More than I usually get. Well, hey, nothing I say is gonna change what happened. But I do feel bad that you had to go through that. Linda felt herself softening, despite the fact she was talking to the queen's suspected murderer. Ekyt perked up as the door opened. King Acorn walked in. It seems I was hasty in my judgment. You are free. Ekyt's nemesis was walked in. Ekyt grabbed him by the shirt. I told you to stay out of my life! What are you doing back!? Ekyt snarled. Kyte (the evil double) grinned. Since when do I listen you? I'm my own person. What you are is a cheap imitation of me! I'm the better one, sport. Kyte said mockingly.

Linda-Su went to restrain him, but he pushed her away, running for it. Ekyt caught him by the coat, and tossed him against the wall. Further proof you're a jerk- you don't hit a lady. Linda-Su got up calmly, gently pushed Ekyt out of the way, and PUNCHED Kyte. Ekyt and the others stood shocked. Linda-Su grabbed his face close and snarled You hightail it back to the cosmic interstate pronto, or you'll be lucky if they're not calling you stumpy when I'm done. Linda tossed him down and he ran for it. Yep, you're just like your sister. Knuckles chuckled. Yeah, well, you know how it is around the island Knux. I'd better go. She said. It was nice meeting y-??? Ekyt and Knuckles were already gone. Linda-Su smiled tolerantly. Guardians and their secrecy.. I wonder if.. Nah. Nice guy though. Linda thought as she started the walk back to the island. She felt something hit her in the side. A dart. She passed out. Her attacker grinned and replied Hey, chubsy-ubsy, I have Princess Sally, Amy Rose, Julie-Su, Linda-Su, as well as Hope. On the other end, a familiar laugh greeted the bounty-hunter. Excellent work Nack. Now bring them to me. Robotnik's voice greeted Nack the Weasel. Over and Out, Lord Lard. Nack chuckled.

Sonic raced to catch up to Knuckles and Ekyt. Hold it guys! We just had a series of kidnappings! Sorry Sonic, you know we don't deal with Knothole. This isn't just Knothole Knucklehead! Julie-Su and her sister, the constable there, what's her name? Linda-Su? Ekyt perked up. Yeah, she got taken. We need you two, me, and Shadow and Tails are going to come. We know where they are. We've just gotta pull a jail-break jam! Knuckles turned to Ekyt. Alright, I'll handle this. What, I can't come? You're gonna need the help. Ekyt warned. He's right Knux. New guy or not, we need the help.

Safe to say, Shadow didn't like Ekyt. What? You trust him? Shadow shot at the group. You

must be Shadow. I have a name. Ekyt said calmly. Like I care. Anyway, like I said, we don't need him, as long as I have my emerald- hey, where'd it go?! Ekyt stood ten feet away, holding the emerald. Property of the Floating Island. Shadow jumped at Ekyt, who was half a step quicker. He stepped to the side, riding Shadow into a tree. Guys, knock it off! Tails yelled angrily. We're on a mission! We've got to save Amy R- them! We need to go now! I'll go myself if you two can't stop acting like babies. Everyone was shocked to hear this from Tails. Shadow, rubbing his nose, pointed at Ekyt. He stays. And he started it. He stole my emerald-.. Which you stole from us. And I'm coming, with or without your permission. Ekyt shot back. Guys! Let's just get going! Sonic sped between them.

3. Building the Legacy

The journey to Robotropolis was a long one. It would take two days to enter it strategically. Robotnik had been anticipating their arrival, and they were welcomed with trap after trap that forced them to work together. A net trapped Knuckles. Ekyt, who looked the least muscular of the group, showed his usefulness. He shimmied up the tree and threw his staff (That s his signature weapon- N.G.) at the net s focal point. It tumbled to the ground, where Shadow caught Knuckles in the net. Then he dropped him. Ekyt leapt down in Shadow s face again. I d be more careful next time. Was all he said. Shadow rushed blindly forward, angry, when Ekyt grabbed him by the quills. Shadow pushed him backward, hard, then saw what happened. Ekyt stopped him from falling into a pit of spikes. Sonic almost juiced into a wall that popped up (Kind of like a toaster works) had it not been for tails flying him over it at the last second. Tails got caught by a robotic arm that Sonic destroyed with a spindash.

Sally woke up first. Then Julie-Su, then Linda-Su. Hope, who was ten years old at the most, and Amy Rose, awoke much later. They were all tied up, back to back to back to back (etc). Robotnik loomed over them. Glad you could join me girls. Robotnik! I should have know! What do you have planned you fat fiend? I ll ignore that remark Princess. Robotication. But, oh look, here comes the calvary! Robotnik saw the small group outside, getting closer. COMBOTS! GET THE INTRUDERS! ALIVE&OR OTHERWISE! Sally gulped. Combots were bad. Really bad. Between their invisibility powers, and the fact that they were extraordinarily sturdy, even for robots, made them awful to deal with. Sonic will stop you! He always does! Sally yelled out. I doubt it princess, but I have backup plans, just in case. Well, I see you have a new member in your little group. A human? Him? He s not one of us! He s a guardian! And you know what they can do, don t you moron? Amy Rose said. Be quiet, you little pest, or you ll be first!

The group stopped for the night. Ekyt stayed up, taking guard duty. His own idea, nobody else knew. The air was crisp, but he didn t seem to notice. He heard a footstep, and turned to face Shadow. I don t trust you. Shadow said simply. Oh well. Trust is something earned, and I ll have your respect someday. Ekyt answered, wanted to avoid a confrontation. Shadow disappeared again. Ekyt heard another step.

It was a shy-looking Tails. Hey, Ekyt, I m sorry to bother you, but you re the only one awake. No problem. What s up. I-I m worried about Amy. Ekyt smiled understandingly. I kinda guessed you had a crush on her. She ll be fine, don t worry. Tails was no dummy. You ve got a crush on that girl echidna don t you? Ekyt rolled his eyes. Yeah. Tails smiled. I won t tell if you won t. Deal. You d better get some rest buddy.

Clang. Step. Clang. Wake up! Combots! Ekyt yelled. One struck him hard, but he stayed on his feet, kicking the mud below him, covering the combot. Getting an idea, he yelled Hey Shadow! Duck! He threw a handful of mud over Shadow s shoulder, where it stuck to- thin air?

Combots! Ekyt drew his staff and backed up. Two had Knuckles back to a tree. Ekyt smacked one on the head, leapt up and wrenched it s head while Knuckles punched it s neck, destroying the bot. Sonic raced around three bots with guns, drawing their fire. They all hit

each other. Shadow grabbed one's legs while Tails held its arms. Tails flew upward, breaking the bot in half. In minutes, all the bots lay broken.

Another figure approached the group. It was Geoffrey Saint John. I thought something stunk! Sonic exclaimed. Whadda ya want, Geoff?) (Geoffrey Saint John is head of the King's secret service and bodyguard. He's in love with princess Sally, therefore he hates Sonic. He's not one of my characters, he's from the original Archie Comics). Geoffrey drew his crossbow. I'm going to save the princess. And you're not Gloryhog. In an instant, Ekyt was in front of Sonic, taking the arrow on his ribs. Get outta the way mate! Hey! What are you doing bloke? Ekyt, made no indication he felt the arrow other than pulling it out. If you don't leave, you're going to eat this.

Oh, and some little human daisy is gonna make me? Geoffrey St. John walked away with splinters on his tongue. What was that about? Sonic asked. Guardians don't show pain. Ekyt said simply. Where do you fit in Knux? Sonic snickered.

No one could sleep after that. They moved on, finally meeting the foreboding steel doors of Robotnik's fortress. Sonic opened them quickly. They entered the long hallway carefully. AMBUSH! yelled Tails. Swatbots came out. Only three. You guys move on, I'll handle these guys! Ekyt told them. They did. Ekyt fought off two, but one self-destructed. A piece of metal caught Ekyt in the leg as the last remaining swatbots punched him. Ekyt hit the wall, ankle twisted and bleeding from the metal.

Sonic opened the doors to Robotnik's lab. It's over RoButtnik! Robotnik hit a button his console. Think so, rodent? he yelled from his hovercraft. Well, hedgehog, you've got a choice, you can chase me, or you can save your friends! What are you rapping about? Knuckles called out. Look down, cretin! A chaos emerald-powered bomb. Right beneath the girls. Thirty (30) seconds remained. That wasn't even fast enough for Sonic. Suddenly, a blur flew in. Ekyt held a power ring. Pausing for a split-second, he tossed Shadow his emerald. Chaos Shield!

4. Just When You thought it was Safe...

The shield protected them during the blast. They all had little cuts running to escape the collapsing building, but nothing major. Mostly nerves were shot. It was time to go home and rest. Ekyt, depressed by nature, was somehow more depressed even though he had helped save their lives. He thought he knew why. He climbed to the top of Mount Fate, looking down on Mobius.

Oh, you were so brave Sonic! Thank you! Sally kissed him. Well done Sonic. Elias, the prince, extended his hand. You're in for a reward m boy. King Acorn said.

Thanks Knux. Not that I needed the help. Julie-Su joked. Yeah, yeah, I know you can handle yourself. She kissed him on the cheek. It's the thought that counts.

Tails and Amy went off to play by the pond where the power rings came. They were holding hands.

Shadow wasn't in love with hope. But she looked so much like Maria. He couldn't help but protect her like he was her sister.

That left Ekyt. He would have to lick his wounds alone. He thought of Linda-Su. Beautiful girl. But I'm human.. man, that's a drag. He heard someone climbing behind him. He turned, ready to strike, but stopped. Linda-Su stood before him. Hi. Ekyt said, surprised to see her. Hi. Um, I wanted to thank you for rescuing me. It's my job. Ekyt said, blushing. No, your job is protecting the chaos emeralds. Okay, I like to help out. I know. And it's really sweet of you. She kissed him on the cheek. From his shocked look, she cocked her head. You never did tell me if you had ever been kissed. No. I just never met the right girl. Ekyt answered, still shocked. Linda smiled, then looked down at his leg. Oh My God! How on earth did you walk on that? Let alone climb or run? Huh? Oh, it happens. That's all you have to say about it? And geez, what happened to your side? An arrow. My God! Give me that shirt! Ekyt reluctantly shrugged it off. Linda pulled a knife from somewhere (Ekyt was ashamed he hadn't realized she was armed.) and cut the shirt into strips. She tied one around his slender midsection and the other around his leg. She had seen a lot of wounds in her time with the police, but these were bad. She bandaged them quickly. Thanks, but you didn't have to.. Linda-Su shook her head. I knew you guardian's were a different breed. The stupidity is a human trait. Ekyt said, actually chuckling. Linda-Su grinned. Well, um, I'd better go. But I'll see you around the Island, right? Yeah. She decided to kiss him again.

Sonic saw this, and smiled to himself. Way to go kid! Then he was knocked unconscious. Nack stood behind him with a broken bat. Hey kid! Nack yelled, then threw a knife with a note attached at Ekyt. Ekyt knocked it down with his staff, then read it.

Olive grove tomorrow at dawn, if you ever want to see Sonic alive again.

Kyte

I'd better get this to Knuckles! Thank you again! She grabbed him. Hold it, I'm coming too!

Just jump, Between your coat and my dreadlocks we ll glide. Ekyt dove off, and glided toward the home of the guardians, Haven. This was huge, and he wasn t about to mess it up for Sonic, the first one to trust him.

5. Opposite Day

After a brief session with Knuckles, Ekyt limped into the Olive Grove. He was dressed in the traditional clothes of the duel, which was bearfoot with loose fitting pants (think Karate Gi s, but in black) His evil counterpart was almost exactly the same, except he wore white pants. Ekyt knew his only chance of winning was to go on the defensive, because his leg and his side (he was injured in past issues- N.G.) were still not 100%. In this was his opponent s first mistake.

Now, in the fight scene, EKYT is the good guy, and KYTE is the bad Guy. Anyone have a better name for the reverse Ekyt? Really, that name kinda sucks, lol.

Kyte focused on attacking Ekyt s leg and side, forgetting Ekyt had arms and another leg. Kyte flipped Ekyt over and grabbed his leg. Linda-Su watched as Ekyt s leg was being bent at a horrible angle. It didn t break, and Ekyt simply bit down on Kyte s other hand before attacking himself. An onslaught of offense on both sides was what Sonic woke up to. He pretended to be out cold, so Ekyt wouldn t get distracted. Ekyt landed a hard kick to Kyte s face as Kyte (Pronounced Kee-Tay, for the record- NG) punched Ekyt s hurt ribs. Both fell. Ekyt s leg was hurt worse than ever, but he had Kyte on the run. Ekyt grabbed onto his evil duplicate s head and fell backward, driving the evil imitation into the ground. After a count of ten, Ekyt was still standing. Kyte was not.

Ekyt s side had been opened again. He limped away, and called to Linda-Su. Would you mind breaking the lock on the cage? Sonic needs medical attention. And so do I& Ekyt slurred.

Knuckles grabbed him to steady him. Just a little dizzy. Linda-Su helped Ekyt back to Knothole, where Doctor Quack sewed him up. King Acorn and Ekyt met for the first time. Ekyt went to bow, but the doctor, king, and Linda-Su all stopped him, fearing that he would hurt his side. It s an honor sire. Ekyt coughed out. Always a pleasure to meet a new subject. Ekyt, is it? And you re a guardian? Yes sir. Ekyt answered. But should you ever need my help.. Ekyt said. King Acorn smiled. Yes, I will keep you in mind. You guardians have proven helpful in the past. At any rate, I wished to extend my get well wishes. Thank you sire. You too. (King Acorn s been sick for a long time- NG). While he was sitting around, Linda-Su asked him some questions.

Have you been here long? No, just a week. Ekyt answered quickly. Then she dropped the bomb. Why did you come here? Ekyt ran a hand through his hair, then stared angrily at his now-bloody hand. I ve always wanted to be here. To guard. To protect. I ve grown to hate my own species somewhat. Ekyt answered. Why? What could have happened to make him that upset? Ekyt s tone turned somber. I was ridiculed. Labeled a freak. All because I wouldn t conform to their stupid standards. Drugs. Loveless sex. I wouldn t dress like them, act like them. I was different. Bullied. After a while I embraced their taunts, became a freak like they wanted. I mistook their amusement for respect. Something I ll never do again. But you know, I knew about Sonic and Knuckles, everyone here who does what s right. That s why I m here. Linda-Su was impressed. She decided to throw him a curve. Ever have girlfriend. Ekyt shook his head. I never had time. Besides, they saw me as a freak too. He looked away. Linda decided to stop there. Ekyt had suffered enough for one day.

6. Future Shock: Part 1 of ?

The Future Shock Part 1

Fourteen years in the future, things had gone horribly wrong. Many had died. Robotnik had control of part of the land, but in what was dubbed the Second Great War, the Mobians fought back. King Acorn himself had perished. Princess Sally and her Brother, Prince Elias, disbanded the throne. The future saw a union of the floating island and Mobius. They each needed the other to survive. Ekyt, Sonic, Knuckles, and Linda-Su were in charge. Of the group, Ekyt and Linda-Su had children, as did Knuckles by Julie-Su. Sonic and Sally hadn't yet been married, as their wedding day had been marred by an attack. At age 32, Ekyt was still in his prime, and Linda was 28. They had one child, Paula-Su, age 11. She was 99 per cent echidna, with only her father's dark brown hair. She took to combat, and was a loner much like her father, Ekyt, had been all those years ago. Today was the day they were going to storm Robotropolis. Ekyt himself was to lead the charge. He was to lead it. The ring, with the emerald on top Ekyt had given Linda-Su glistened on her finger. They had a quiet debate about his participation. It has to be done. This is no way to live. I want better for our daughter, and better for us. Ekyt, his hair slightly grayed, his coat frayed from years of service, now had an intensity to protect.

Before he could leave, a young hedgehog, red in color, stumbled into the conference room. Half bloody, the ten year old slurred out parents dead. That was all too common in this age. Ekyt, seeing that the boy didn't have much time left, quickly called for Knuckles. It would take the chaos emerald to save his life, and time was of the essence. Ready Knux? Ekyt called. You bet. The two concentrated. The emerald began to lose its color, then shattered. The red hedgehog was green. But his wounds were healed and he was breathing. Ekyt smiled. It was a hollow victory, but a victory for sure.

The hedgehog sat up, nearly freaking out when he saw he was green. He sat calmly while Ekyt explained what happened. Kurt, as he was named, told his story. His mother and father, Paul and Clover, had been killed by robots. He managed to escape. These days, Robotnik killed first, and roboticized prisoners only. Ekyt helped the hedgehog up and handed introduced him around. The hedgehog especially hit it off with Colin, a twenty year old echidna who was training to be a guardian, next to Paula-Su.

Charge! Ekyt yelled out. He ran forward, his staff parrying attacks and dishing out punishment. He caught a shot from an exploding bot, the sharp metal cutting his arm. He ignored it and fought forward. The group gained ground, then stopped outside Robotnik's control room. Ekyt turned to his wife and daughter. Linda wondered if he knew his life was forfeit. Ekyt hugged his daughter, then kissed his wife. I'll be fine, I always am. He told her. Then he charged, the last one of the group left alive.

End of the line Robotnik. Ekyt, exhausted and bloodied from combat, snarled. After the years of war, it would finally be decided. One way or the other. Guardian, too often you have meddled in my schemes. Perhaps I'll have the pleasure of killing you personally. He aimed a gun at Ekyt, who dove behind the roboticizer. Robotnik fired, destroying it. You'll pay! Do you

hear me? You'll pay! Robotnik shouted. Let's settle this whopper! Ekyt spat. He vaulted toward Robotnik's hovercraft.

7. Future Shock- Part 2 of ?

The two combatants, Ekyt on the side of good, Robotnik on the side of evil, fought. History would describe the battle in different ways. But one thing that could never be contested was the winner. Before we get to the history, let us look at what happened that day, 14 years in the future.

Ekyt threw Robotnik out of his hovercraft, and started hitting buttons. A sexless computer voice announced ONE MINUTE UNTIL SELF-DESTRUCT! ONE MINUTE UNTIL SELF-DESTRUCT! ONE MINUTE- Robotnik hit Ekyt with the butt end of a rifle. Ekyt kicked it away. Robotnik, in desperation, knowing his life was probably forfeit, threw a white phosphorous grenade. Ekyt kicked it into a corner. THIRTY SECONDS UNTIL SELF-DESTRUCT! Honey, take the kids and go! Ekyt yelled to Linda-Su. I m not going to leave! This place is going up! Ekyt looked her in the eyes. I know. Please. Take care of them. Robotnik hit Ekyt hard. He flew back into the concrete wall, his ribs forcing some to crumble. Robotnik stabbed down with a knife. Ekyt, tasting the copper-salt taste of his own blood, grabbed the knife with the one arm that wasn't injured. It hit his ribs. Go! He choked out. TEN SECONDS UNTIL SELF-DESTRUCT! Robotnik retrieved the rifle and aimed it. Goodbye guardian. Your pitiful attempt at stopping me failed. Ekyt's last breath summed up his life: No. You defeated yourself. Robotnik shot. Ekyt died instantly. SELF-DESTRUCT ACTIVATED! The building exploded.

Fragments rained down on the populous that had gathered. Those who were wearing hats and rags took them off and held them to their chest, all silent for the hero who had lost his life. Only then did a small cheer go up about Robotnik's defeat. Paula-Su, eleven, was aware what happened. She tried to stay strong for her mother. Tears wouldn't bring her father back. Kurt, however, dug furiously. He found nothing. I can't even bury him.. Kurt broke down. Knuckles eased his way from the scene. They all looked on, as if by some miracle Ekyt would emerge alive. It had happened before, why not now. But hope was lost. There were robots to clean up, cities to rebuild, and dead to mourn. The years of tyranny had ended, but at a price. To most, it seemed fitting. To Linda-Su, it seemed as though the one strong link in her life lay dead beneath a ton of concrete and steel. She clutched the ring he had given her, hoping against hope he would come back to her some day.

PRESENT DAY:

Sonic dropped Ekyt in to doctor Quack. Dear Lord, what happened? He lost a ton of blood doc. Big fight. He won, but, ya know. Sonic said. He needs a transfusion. I need to get a volunteer. Right here, doc, strap me in! Sonic called. I don't know what side-effects he is going to have.. Speculate later doc. More action, less talk here! In minutes, Ekyt was stable. But he felt.. fast! After leaping off the table, thanking the doctor, and nodding to Sonic with a race ya! The two took off at light speed. The forest disappeared, and all of a sudden, Sonic and Ekyt hit a building. What? Where are we? Ekyt looked around. Mobius. But not during our time. I think we rushed into the future. The two began to search. They were found quickly by an older animal, a dog. He was half metal. Flesh? You must come with me! We have been expecting you! Ekyt and Sonic followed, without really knowing why.

BACK TO THE FUTURE:

Ekyt's death had been in vain. That much was apparent, only a day after his sacrifice. Robotnik had survived, and with one less leader, the resistance effort crumbled. They retreated to the underground bunkers. Linda-Su was in charge. Some didn't want to trust her, and the old you married a human flack came back. She finally snapped. You mock him? He's dead, you self-absorbed jerks! Does it matter what species? No, it doesn't. If you're not down with helping us out, you're welcome to leave and be robot chow! I loved him, still do, always will. Anyone have a problem? She snarled. No one dared speak up. Good. I didn't think so. A knock came on the door, followed by a code. The code matched up with a dog, Sarroc (Sar-rock), who entered, with Ekyt and Sonic in tow. A hushed silence fell over the room. Linda, forgetting that this wasn't her husband (yet), hugged him, tears flowing freely. She remembered and apologized. Ekyt didn't understand, until he heard a whisper. But he was dead.. Silently, stunned, he turned. When did I die Linda? he asked solemnly. Only a day ago. But how? Long story. The big question is, can we save me? Apparently I'm important. Ekyt said dryly, tossing a look at some creatures that had said some unkind things about his species. Well, someone, other than you, has to go back to yesterday and save you. Sonic volunteered, and as he was being prepped for his mission, Linda asked to speak with Ekyt. I know this is strange. You died yesterday, in a fight with Robotnik. You were both supposedly killed. I don't know how, but he survived the explosion and.. She explained the whole thing to Ekyt. Ekyt closed his eyes, trying to take it all in. D-Dad? A small, but strong voice asked. Ekyt, I'd like you to meet your daughter. Ekyt felt his jaw drop. He stooped down to the eleven year old, who hugged him. A shocked Ekyt hugged back. Dad! I knew you'd come back! Paula-Su exclaimed. Kurt! Dad's alive! The green hedgehog raced in and hugged Ekyt, who looked over the hedgehog's shoulder at Linda. He eased the green hedgehog off, and Linda said something to the two kids. How did you and I.. I mean.. I'm human, you're a.. Huh? Ekyt stammered while Linda laughed. I can explain. Let's go to our room.. I mean my room.. and talk privately. Sarroc, please make sure we're not disturbed. Sonic is in charge. She said, leading Ekyt away.

8. Things Explained

I get that I died, and I get that I married you..&But how did the two of us&.you know&.have a totally echidna girl? Ekyt asked Linda-Su awkwardly. She smiled tiredly. That was your wish at birth. You didn't want her to be ostracized the way you were. So we made sure the child would be echidna. But she got your hair. Linda said, smiling, looking younger instantly. Anyway, it happened right after we were married. In about 2 months, the egg hatched. You did a lot during those two months. Violet (Violet_Rose) and Shadow buried the hatchet, Eden (Violet_Rose) has sort of forgiven Sonic, and Flash and Blain, are still, well, Flash (Flashthehedgehog) and Blain (MrGimp). Then, a storm hit and destroyed Knothole. That's when the resistance fell to Robotnik. You and I took charge and fought back. And it's been that way for 14 years. Linda-Su suddenly spoke angrily. After you died, people began to get on my case about marrying outside of my species. Then you reappeared, and they acted nice to your face. Linda stopped as she could tell something didn't sit right with Ekyt. You mean, after all this time&..all we did&&They still don't accept me? They-& What will it take Linda? Ekyt asked solemnly. I gave my life for them, and what did they do? They dumped on my grave! Insensitive jerks! And they can't leave you alone either?! He stopped, shaking his head, then continued. You know Linda, there's a song, and part of it is perfect for this: And I'll die to win, cause I'm born to lose (Firefly by Breaking Benjamin-NG). Linda had to admit that did sum the situation up. Sarroc instructed Sonic. When you need to return, speak into the microphone. We will hear you across time. Sonic gave a thumbs up. No prob. I go rescue my buddy, zip back here, and they live happily ever after. And I go home, right? That's it. Cool. Fire that time-thingy up, cause this hog's gonna jam!

(Back to yesterday- sounds like an 80's band, doesn't it?- NG)

SELF-DESTRUCT! ONE MINUTE UNTIL SELF-DESTRUCT! ONE MINUTE- Robotnik hit Ekyt with the butt end of a rifle. Ekyt kicked it away. Robotnik, in desperation, knowing his life was probably forfeit, threw a white phosphorous grenade. Ekyt kicked it into a corner. THIRTY SECONDS UNTIL SELF-DESTRUCT! Honey, take the kids and go! Ekyt yelled to Linda-Su. I'm not going to leave! This place is going up! Ekyt looked her in the eyes. I know. Please. Take care of them. Robotnik hit Ekyt hard. He flew back into the concrete wall, his ribs forcing some to crumble. Robotnik stabbed down with a knife. Ekyt, tasting the copper-salt taste of his own blood, grabbed the knife with the one arm that wasn't injured. It hit his ribs. Go! He choked out. TEN SECONDS UNTIL SELF-DESTRUCT! Robotnik retrieved the rifle and aimed it. Goodbye guardian. Your pitiful attempt at stopping me failed. Wrong, Lord Lard! Sonic shouted. What? Hedgehog, you've ruined me for the last time! Sonic zipped around the room, drawing the fire away from Ekyt.

Ekyt couldn't believe what he was seeing. Somehow, though, he wasn't surprised. That makes no sense. Oh well, time to make the most of this. Tying his shirt around his wound, Ekyt grabbed his staff. THWACK! He broke it over Robotnik's skull. He'll live. We've gotta juice buddy! Grab on! Sonic told Ekyt. Right. Let's go! Sonic yelled into the mic Let's go! A flash of light left in their wake was all that was left. Robotnik couldn't believe it. SELF DESTRUCT INITIATED!

BAM!

Ekyt aged instantly when he unfolded from his crouched position. Being a guardian, he was all but immortal, but he could still show some age. The same with Linda-Su, who saw him coming.

You did it! She yelled at Sonic, then ran to her husband. Ekyt smiled sadly in the background. You ready to go blue? You bet, let's blow this wacky place before something else happens! Ekyt held back a second. He walked over to his son and daughter. You two take care, okay? Ekyt told them. Paula laughed. You're not my Dad. Well, not yet. Ekyt gave her a fond smile and hugged her. Kurt, you and Paula-Su keep in touch, okay? You ever need, you know where to find me. Oh, that reminds me. Ekyt pulled a picture out of his pocket. It was a group picture taken after a victory. You hold on to this, your mom wouldn't tell me why. Ekyt said to Kurt. Kurt nodded absently, too busy staring at a black and red hedgehog in the front row.

9. Things're Heatin' Up!

Now the hardest parts. Ekyt had to say goodbye not only to Linda but to the older version of himself. The older Ekyt was as socially awkward as the present-day Ekyt. Finally, the older Ekyt said Geez, take care of yourself, you're making me old! Ekyt returned with a grin. You just take care of your family. Good to know I get something in the future. Yeah. Oh, and if you try to kiss my wife, I'll kill you. Ekyt chuckled. Wouldn't dream of it. Wait. Yeah, I would. So he turned to Linda-Su. Thank you for everything. If you ever need my help& Do me a favor. Don't let my younger self get that stupid tattoo. When did you do that? In a few weeks, I will. Gotcha. Sonic was ready to go, and Ekyt was too. Here we go again, hope this works! Ekyt and Sonic ran incredibly fast, until Ekyt hit a tree. Son of a gun, what is going on?! Ekyt said, massaging his nose. We're back home, at least. Sonic mentioned. Thankfully. We'd better skip the race.

Linda-Su was curled up at home. She reading a book. And when the bird cawed, Ekyt app-huh? Linda dropped the book, smiling a little. I've got that goofy kid on the brain. Why go after him when you can have me? an echidna asked her. The echidna was a reddish-brown color, with a lambskin vest and snakeskin boots, along with a big tooth from some animal on a chain around his neck. Staph? Look, there's a reason you're my ex-boyfriend. Linda started. Yeah? Well, you know me well enough to know I always get what I want. He reached out to grab her. Ekyt saw the scene through the window. He bashed it open. I suggest you leave her alone. Ekyt said calmly. Staph smiled nastily. Yeah? And what do you think you're going to do if I don't? Use force. Ekyt answered simply. Yeah, okay, now go bother someone else. Me and Linda got things to do. He reached out to grab her again. Ekyt grabbed him by his vest. I said to leave her alone. Now, you can leave now, or I'll forget I'm a nice guy. Ekyt snarled this time. Staph went for his weapon, a knife with built-in brass knuckles. Linda grabbed his hand and banged it against the wall. As he howled in pain, Ekyt kicked the knife away. Staph quickly ducked under Ekyt and through him out the window, then went back to grabbing Linda-Su. She kicked him in the face. Ekyt crawled back in through the window. Even in his rage, he thought to himself I must like this girl.

Wasting no time or words, Ekyt simply cracked Staph in the face, then rammed him into the wall. Finally, he dumped a bookcase down on him. Is he-.. Dead? Linda-Su asked. He'll be fine. But we'd better leave. You know Eden (Violet_Rose) right? Maybe you can stay with her, in case he comes back. I don't want to Ekyt was interrupted by Staph, who held a knife to Linda-Su's throat. If you attack me, I kill her. If you know what's good for her, you'll give yourself up the the alliance. Ekyt dropped his weapons as he was ushered into the back of a police-type truck with Linda-Su. Who's the alliance? Ekyt asked. Robotnik and the Dark Legion. And they don't take kindly to traitors! Staph gave Linda a vile smile. Her past is just that- her past. And if you hurt her, I'll kill you. Ekyt said, suddenly fired up. Linda pulled him back down next to her. It's okay. I was with the Dark Legion. But then I woke up. I'm sorry I put you in all this trouble. She said apologetically. It's okay, it's what I do. You'd better rest up. Because we're in for a lot of pain. She laid her head on Ekyt's shoulder and went to sleep.

10. The First Real Loss

To Ekyt's surprise, the truck pulled up Haven. Locke was fighting viciously. Everyone else, Thunderhawk, Sojourner, Hawking, Sabre, Archimedes, all of them, had been evacuated. Locke was getting beaten horribly, but would not surrender the chaos emeralds. Staph forced Ekyt's head to the window. You see that? We can easily wipe out your kind! So join us, and you'll even get to keep Linda-Su. Speaking of Linda, she caught Staph's leg between the two of hers, and fell to the ground, breaking his leg, then stepping on his face, smashing his teeth.

Take his keys and go help! I'll get the others! Ekyt was uncuffed, and angry as all get-out. With a yell of primal rage, he charged forward, creating an aisle toward Locke. He got next to the echidna. Ekyt? How did you get here? Never mind that now Locke! We've got bigger problems! Please, run now, while you still live. Locke pleaded. I'm not going to leave you Locke. Then the world stopped.

A loud CRACK was heard.

Locke fell to the floor.

Ekyt knew he was dead. He got down next to him to hear Locke's last words: The emerald lives on. Then the life left his eyes. Ekyt's first intuition was to give up totally. But every intuition failed to find its way. Ekyt let go of his humanity, somehow drawing power from the chaos emeralds housed deep within the island. Because he knew the location and was close enough, he drew power from them. His milk-white skin turned a pale green. Heck, his whole body turned green. Mega Ekyt had seen enough. With the death of a father figure, Ekyt charged, playing no defense. At least a hundred fell that day. Unlike Locke, they would live. When his power ran out, so did Ekyt's will to fight. He surrendered. He was to be brought before a court.

Ekyt was to be executed. The judge read off his list of crimes. Ekyt almost laughed at treason. Pardon me, but wouldn't I have to have sided with you to be accused so treason. The judge ignored him. Lien-Da, the judge's sister, sauntered over to him. If you be my personal slave, not only will you stay alive, but you'll get the (Licks lips) fringe benefits. What will it be? I'd sooner die than betray Linda-Su and Locke, God rest his soul. Ekyt responded. Lien-Da slapped him. Ekyt didn't really notice. The noose was around his neck and was tightened. Any last requests? The executioner asked him. Let me bury Locke. Ekyt responded. No. I wouldn't really give you one, it's just fun to ask. Ekyt spat in his face. The angry executioner decided to make Ekyt suffer. It's all your fault, and now you can take that to your grave. His hand reached for the lever&

TO BE CONTINUED&

11. Lost

Ekyt bowed his head and accepted his fate. At that point, however, the calvary arrived. Sonic and Knuckles barreled through, smashing soldiers. Sonic raced over to the executioner and cut the rope. Haven's lost, we've gotta jam! Ekyt shook his head. If it goes, I go with it. Sonic understood the loyalty, but decided to take matters into his own hands. Swiping Linda-Su's handcuffs, he cuffed Ekyt and led him out of the door. Ekyt didn't struggle. The Dark Legion had won Haven and taken the life of one of Ekyt's father figures. It was hopeless.

Back in Knothole, Ekyt plunged into depression. He tried to go about his business, but everyone could tell something was wrong. He finally quit working altogether and sat on a log, staring at nothing. It's my fault. I couldn't guard anyone or anything. I let them all down. I let myself down. Ekyt decided that his days as a pseudo-hero were over. He started working on a hut on the edge of the Great Forest, just inside Knothole Village. When it was finished three days later, Ekyt started to dig beneath the house by hand. No one could figure out why. Linda-Su, Sonic, and Knuckles watched as Ekyt skipped meals and refused sleep. He dug and dug and dug. Finally he stopped digging, and started making walls. Linda-Su was relieved. I guess he wants a basement. She shrugged. It's his house. After a week or so, Linda-Su dropped by to visit. Ekyt was in the basement, working feverishly on weapons? He had made a fallout shelter in one part of the basement. In the other a gym, and finally, he made a bedroom. It was dark, and it suited him.

Hi Ekyt, how are you? Linda asked carefully. Ekyt shook his head, not looking her in the eyes. After the years of torment, he couldn't bring himself to look at her face to face. She had nothing to do with it and didn't know about the bullying and the stabbing he had lived through, but it scarred him for life. Nice place! Linda commented. Thanks. Ekyt said quietly. Would you mind stepping out for just one moment? He asked courteously. Oh, sure. He probably wanted to change clothes, his were full of dirt. When Ekyt reemerged, he wore a plain white shirt and black pants. No coat. No staff. Man, you look different without your coat. Linda stated. Yeah. I guess that's the point. He hesitated, then bowed his head. Linda I'm done with the fighting, the being a hero. All of it. Linda was shocked. Why? I mean.. I couldn't protect Locke. And the real citizens here don't accept me. Fifteen years old, and Linda understood all of this.

You have a great job. So one life was lost. I know it meant a lot to you, but the Dark Legion is cruel. They would have killed you too. I belonged in Haven, fighting to the last with Locke. They won Linda. Ekyt lowered his head. They won.

Uh oh, time for some tough love. Did I just think that? Maybe- figure out your feelings later! she scolded herself. She grabbed him by the shirt. Now you listen to me! Did you give up when you were injured? No. Did you give up when things were hopeless with Robotnik? No. Well, then, there's no excuse this time! You get that coat, and get back in the fray! Knothole needs you, Angel Island needs you, the chaos emeralds need you, and..-I, er, everyone needs you, whether they know it or not. Ekyt shook his head. Linda-Su sat him down on his bed. I know you feel bad. But it wasn't your fault. Maybe not. But I didn't help the situation either.

Knuckles came in next. There's a way to save my Dad (Locke), Ekyt, but I need you, Linda, and a few friends to cooperate. It's called Soultouch. You find your true soul mate. Then, with the help of a power ring, your soulmate holds your life in their body, giving you a chance to save a life. But we need witnesses. Knuckles explained. Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) Violet (Violet_Rose), Eden (Violet_Rose), Tails, Amy, and Sonic all gathered around the chaos emeralds (They were hidden in Knothole for safekeeping). The brotherhood would arrive soon,

and then the truth would be revealed.

NEXT ISSUE: FAN CHARS, FAN CHARS, FAN CHARS! CAN EKYT SAVE LOCKE? AND FINALLY, SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE:
FEEL FREE TO MENTION THE NAMES OF ANYONE WHO HAS LEFT FAC, OR IS HERE IN A REDUCED CAPACITY. IT S HAPPENED A LOT. SO, LEAVE A NAME (IT CAN BE YOURS, YOUR FRIENDS, ANYONE S). AND WHY AM I DOING THIS? CAUSE NG DOES WHAT OTHER S WON T, THAT S WHY!

12. From Beyond the Grave

The ceremony began. It was decided Ekyt would go. Linda would hold his life inside her. Everyone knew what would happen if something went wrong.

Ekyt landed in front of Aurora and Athair. Locke was about to step through the portal to the echidna after life. Wait! Ekyt tore across the clouds. His death is wrong! Ekyt exclaimed. His time has come. Athair said sternly. He can offer so much! He knows things that have not yet been passed down. Be that as it may, he died. In the line of duty. Athair, with all due respect, you were the only one in the line of Edmund not to hold the mantle of guardian, while I speak from experience. We need him. Probe my mind, watch what happened! Whatever it takes. Locke deserves to live. Athair stepped forward. I have spoken my piece guardian. If you stay, you risk death. Aurora was a little more lenient. I wish to see these last moments. Kneel if you will guardian. Ekyt knelt down. She held a power ring to his head.

And there it was. Locke fighting, getting hit from all sides. Then, through Ekyt's eyes, it showed him getting closer and fighting. Ekyt? How did you get here? Never mind that now Locke! We've got bigger problems! Please, run now, while you still live. Locke pleaded. I'm not going to leave you Locke. Then Locke's body fell.

Ekyt was unconscious during this. Aurora spoke to Athair. His point proves noble. Aurora argued. To her surprise, Athair smiled. As I knew it would. The young man is showing signs as guardian. As for Locke, perhaps it is in the human's best interest to learn from him. And he needs a mentor as well, a fireant. Archimedes is available and has already expressed desire to assist in future guardians. Ekyt stirred and woke up at this point. We see your point Guardian. Locke will live. Ekyt was too tired to cheer. Then came the killer. You must stay in his place. Ekyt looked over at Locke. I agree.

Knuckles was getting worried. Then Locke popped back. He did it! Thank God! Dad! Knuckles hugged his dad. Locke pushed him away gently. Knuckles, it happened before I could stop it. Ekyt has to stay in my place. And there's no way to reverse it. Linda-Su went numb. Suddenly, another pop. Ekyt was back. I can hardly think of a more worthy sacrifice Locke. Ekyt said with a smile. How did you.-? Everyone sputtered collectively. It was a test Locke. They wanted to see just how far I would go to keep you alive. I passed. Knuckles shook his head. Thank God they never gave me a test like that! Ekyt got up and excused himself. Where are you going? Mount Fate, I guess. I can't think of a better suited place.

Mount fate was made of the ashes of the charred chaos emeralds. Dmitri had been a scientist, and decided that he would rejoin Mobius and the Floating Island. Things went horribly wrong. Eleven shattered chaos emeralds coursed through his veins. He became mad with power. He was defeated. At that point.

Ekyt heard the rumblings below his feet. He jumped back. Dmitri! he stood defensively. Right you are. But I am so much more. All these years.. Wisdom has become my greatest weapon. If you were wise, you'd crawl back into the hole you came from. Dmitri sneered and then spotted the white band across Ekyt's upper chest. A guardian? I see it is my lucky night. Before Ekyt could react, Dmitri shot a blast of chaos energy, hitting him square in the chest. Ekyt fell down the mountain. He looked up and saw Dmitri ready to finish him.

GOTTA KEEP READING! DOES EKYT LIVE? FIND OUT NEXT TIME. THE NEXT GUARDIAN HAS BEEN REGENERATED, AND THAT'S CAUSING WHAT OTHERS WON'T! IF YOU WANT YOUR FAN CHARS IN, LET ME KNOW!

13. Are they for Real?

Ekyt rolled across the ground, narrowly avoiding Dmitri's shots. That's no way for a dignified guardian to fight! Dmitri sneered. Ekyt stopped dead once he had some cover. He's right. What kind of guardian am I? If he wants those emeralds so badly, he'll have to kill me ten times over. No retreat, no surrender! You're looking in the wrong place for easy fight Dmitri! Ekyt charged forward. His white band glowed and he sped up. He swiped at Dmitri, who flipped away and took another shot. This one hit Ekyt's leg. But his adrenaline was going. Good thing. Because the Dark Legion had something to say about him being alive.

Knuckles' band glowed. Ekyt's in trouble. Sonic zipped out the door, calling out. Let's juice gang! We're with ya Sugahog! Bunnie called. Oui. Antoine spat, unhappy with the situation. Right on! Nicole, project his whereabouts! Sally told her computer. Yes Princess. His coordinates are.. Linda-Su grabbed Ekyt's trench coat and staff from his basement. Time to come out of retirement. She said to herself. (She's referring to Ekyt's resignation in issue 11 NG-)

Hmmm.. 20-1 odds huh? You seem to be out numbered. Dmitri commented, grinning unpleasantly. It's 2000 to 1, and I've had worse. Ekyt spat. In a fit of rage, he tore at Dmitri, pounding him into the mountain. The Dark Legion closed in. Ekyt turned and threw punches, kicks, elbows, and knees at everyone who came near him. Finally, he stopped and climbed up Mount Fate. From there he saw the calvary.

Sally stayed back at Knothole with her security detail, which consisted of Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog), Kurt, and the still injured Locke. All the rest; Sonic, Knuckles, Linda-Su, and Julie-Su hustled to the Floating Island. When they arrived, Ekyt was on Mount Fate, throwing soldier after soldier back down. But he was overrun. Sonic decided a spindash would take care of some of the problem. Antoine and Bunnie charged forward. Antoine seemed to have second thoughts, though. Knuckles glided into some of the soldiers. Julie-Su fired her pistol (Set on stun) into the crowd. Linda-Su scrambled up the other side of the mountain. Ekyt almost threw her off. Sorry. He kicked one soldier in the face, sending him sprawling. Brought ya something. She handed him the coat and staff. Hold that thought. He looked down. Linda-Su's eyes widened. No. Don't even consider it. Ekyt jumped down, landing in the huddled mass of confused soldiers. Dear God he's lost it! Then she did something just as crazy. She jumped down too. The ragtag group fought the Dark Legion all the way to Haven. Ekyt and Knuckles both had feelings for the place, and immediately decided it needed to be won back. They fought for all they were worth.

The good guys were standing when the dust cleared. The bad guys, the ones that could stand, ran for it, some carrying their injured friends with them. Knuckles, Sonic, Bunnie, and Antoine all got away unscathed. Julie-Su had a small burn. Linda-Su and Ekyt, however, both had hurt ribs from their maniacal jump. What the heck were you guys thinking? Sonic intoned. That's just it, I wasn't. Ekyt said. Linda nodded her agreement. Well, you two would make a perfect couple. You're both nuts. The two looked at each other. Knuckles asked to speak with Ekyt. Julie-Su needed to talk to her sister.

Listen sis, I know what you're thinking, and he's perfect for you. Julie said immediately. Huh?

Who? She asked, genuinely surprised. That human guy. You're kidding. I don't even know him. Julie smiled mischievously. We all saw you plant a big wet one on him. C'mon, admit it. He's got potential. She huffed, in a way that both she and Julie-Su knew that Ekyt was a good match for Linda. But would he go for it? Linda questioned.

Knuckles turned to Ekyt and said right off the bat that girl is right for you. Ekyt looked stunned. You don't think that because I'm human and she's; We've had couples just as strange. Look, you obviously care for her. You've gotta roll the dice man. Don't wait. Sonic zipped up. I couldn't help overhearing. I bet. Said Knuckles. Red here is right. I've seen her kiss you. You two are right for each other. I'm not the sentimental type, but it'll be good for you. But will she go for it? Ekyt questioned.

The one thing none of them questioned was what was happening in Knothole. They should have, because it was under siege. Fortunately, help would come in the form of a familiar yellow hedgehog..

ANOTHER PERSON HAS LEFT FAC! SO, UNLESS SHE COMES BACK, VIOLET_ROSE S CHARS WILL NOT APPEAR. I DON'T WANT ANY MESSY INFRINGEMENT STUFF, SO THAT PART OF THE STORYLINE IS NOW DONE.

SPECIAL THANKS TO MY CURRENT READERS (THE ONE S I KNOW OF)

QuanticChaos1000
Jo_Pen
Flashthehedgehog
Shadowthe_Hedgehog

14. A Risk Worth Taking (?)

Swatbot attack! The group that remained in Knothole wasn't much of a force compared to the 2000 swatbots that were now marching across the horizon. Locke was too weak to fight, and Sojourner, Thunderhawk, and Sabre were too old. Hawking had since died. It was peaceful. The only ones in any condition to fight were Sally, Bunny, Antoine, Rotor, Kurt, and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog). It was decided Antoine would stay with the echidnas, along with Sally. Before they could do that, a door flew open. Hey gang, havin' a party without me? A yellow hedgehog intoned. Hardly Flash (Flashthehedgehog), this is war! Sorry bout the Sugahhog, but we've gotta hold them off till the calvahry arrives. Flash scratched his chin. Where is the calvary? They're on the floating island. Sally answered.

Nicole, project whereabouts of Sonic the Hedgehog. Nicole, Sally's computer, confirmed that. Okay, I'm probably the fastest here, how about I go get them? Flash asked. It's dangerous, monsieur Flash. There is ze horrible swat-bots, and zose dastardly combots, and (Shudder) zat evil Robotnik! Flash contemplated him. Uh-huh. You're chicken, aren't you? Okay, I'm off!

Ekyt had his head and torso bandaged. Linda-Su had her stomach bandaged. I can't believe you just did that! Linda-Su exclaimed. Ekyt did a double-take. Me? How about you? You were right behind me. So we're both crazy. Linda said. Looks that way. Ekyt agreed. I can't tell her what Knuckles said. It was great of you to help me like that. Ekyt said. Linda-Su blushed and squirmed. Well, you would've done the same for me. In fact, you have, haven't you? I can't tell him what my sister said. No matter how tempting. Knuckles and Julie-Su walked over to them. Pleasant chat, you two? Anything we can help with? Julie-Su asked mischievously. Linda-Su shot her a forbidding look. Yeah, you know, we're all friends here. You can tell us anything. Knuckles said. Ekyt gave him a look. We're fine! they said in unison. Then blushed. Uhhhh-huuuuuh.. Well, Knux, what's the verdict? Julie-Su asked playfully. Wellll.. given the evidence, I'd say these two are..-! Ekyt tackled Knuckles as Linda-Su tackled her sister. Flash chose this moment to appear, out of breath. Guys (huff-puff) Knothole (wheeze) .. under attack! -? What the heck? He looks at the scene. I'm not gonna ask, and I'm just gonna assume you're gonna help. Ekyt nodded as the others (Minus Linda) did their best not to crack up.

Chaos storm! Tiffany shouted. That attack was particularly effective against swatbots. Kurt punched one that got too close. Hang in there Tiff, they've gotta be here soon. Kurt said. Yeah. This is tiring! Ah know what ya'll mean! Bunnie agreed, kicking a swatbot with her metallic foot. Sakes alive, no wondah ah can keep mah girlish figure! All this exercise! Rotor didn't agree. I'm a walrus! Why am I getting this much exercise? What happened to brain over brawn? Amy had stayed back to help guard. Tails, however, was out on the battlefield. He had just gotten knocked out of the air.

Okay, so they need us quick? It's not exactly a short trip! Sonic commented. Ekyt looked up. I'm gonna get fired for this, but everyone, form a chain and the lead hang on to my coat. Since I'm not a full-fledged guardian, chaos control is forbidden to me. But this is more important. Hang on!

To Be Continued

15. Mourning a Loss...

Several SWATbots burst from energy. That's chaos energy! exclaimed Tiffany(Shadowthe_Hedgehog). And it's not Shadow's! I don't recognize it! Take cover! The others, Ekyt first, followed by Linda, Julie-Su, Knuckles, Flash (Flashthehedgehog). Sonic was going to run back. They landed in a heap. C'mon, this never happens with Shadow! Flash complained. Later. Ekyt said quickly. He was looking at a SWATbot's foot. Tiffany wrecked it just in time. Argue later! Right now we need help!

Ekyt rolled away, avoiding a laser. He rolled to his feet and grabbed onto a beam in the ceiling.

Knux, little help here! Flash, you get everyone out of here! Knux got the plan. He jumped and snapped the huge beam with his knuckles. The other half of the building collapsed. Ekyt swung off the beam and landed. A quick head count told him everyone was there. Okay, good work. Bunnie, Antoine, you'll stay with me. Knuckles, Ekyt, Linda-Su, and Julie-Su, you make sure the Brotherhood is safe. Flash, you meet with Sonic.

Self-destruct-initiated! Countdown 30 seconds. 29-28-27-26-25.. Got a live one! It's a bomb. Rotor, can you kill it off? Ekyt called. Not in 20 seconds. 10-9-8-7-6-5-.. Locke dove on the SWATbots. Oh my God. Knuckles muttered. It blew sky high, launching Locke with it. No doubt about it, he was dead. No one had time to move or react. Knuckles knelt near his father's body.

The rest of them were silent, watching. Hoping. Believing that, with two guardians and a chaos emerald, they could pull saving him off again. Knuckles waved Ekyt over. They saw the two talking. Knuckles dropped his head. Ekyt put his hand on his shoulder, and got up.

Knuckles wants someone to inform Doctor Quack that the time of death was 0807. Ekyt said simply. Tails and Amy were wide-eyed. Can't you help him? Amy asked. Ekyt shook his head. Knuckles wants him to die peacefully this time. He's asked that we don't interfere. No one was going to argue. Away from the group, Ekyt stiffened his face. damn. I wish I could've done something. Linda-Su approached him. Don't blame yourself. You and Knuckles saved everyone else. Well, they owe their lives to Flash, not me.

You know, my sister was talking about you. Linda said in an effort to lighten the mood. Knuckles was talking about you. Ekyt countered. Interesting. At the same time, they said They think you're..cool. They both froze for a moment. Then they laughed. C'mon, we'd better get back. They're going to cremate Locke in the morning. They need you two to stand watch tonight. Apparently they do it over the emerald, using its energy, returning some of it. Linda-Su told him. Yeah, that sounds right. I wonder what's going to happen in Haven now. They've lost two of their own in a day's time.

Athair had the answer for him. And it wasn't the one he expected. Archimedes, you meet with the human in the morning. He said. Agreed. Good to be back in business. Give Locke's soul my best. Indeed. Athair answered the fire-ant. With a bamf sound, he was off.

But what had become of Sonic? A rotten purple thing had gotten him. Knack the Weasel was back in business.

16. All That Glitters...

The funeral began. Knuckles and Ekyt carried Locke's body to the emerald, which was glowing with raw energy unlike anything this group had ever seen. Gently, they placed Locke's body down and let the flames of chaos lap it up. Knuckles and Ekyt kept a stiff face, but nearly everyone else was openly mourning the loss of a true hero. Speaking of heroes..

Sonic woke up, immediately recognizing Nack the Weasel's airbike. Excellent work Nack. Now, bring me that hedgehog! Robotnik's voice commanded. No way chubby, you're coming to get him. Last time I came to you, you stiffed me. Robotnik grumbled. Very well. Robotnik out. And don't forget my money fat-stuff! Nack out. Sonic bashed into him. Darn right! Now, he had to get home..

Knuckles moved closer to the emerald. Ekyt took this as a signal to back up and give Knuckles some time alone. Suddenly a table from nearby Knothole Village came flying at him. Oof! What the..?! Ekyt hit the dirt as a piece of machinery, seemingly guided toward his head, came whizzing at him. What the hell? Linda-Su muttered. Back away! Ekyt said to everyone. This thing's aiming at me! Finally, a hedgehog walked out from a clearing. I'm Silver the Hedgehog! And YOU, he said, his outstretched finger pointing at Ekyt, Are to be destroyed!

Sonic stole Nack's airbike and left him to deal with an angry Robotnik. He set the auto-pilot for Knothole and sat back. A really unpleasant site greeted him.

What did I do? Ekyt asked, genuinely surprised. You are the key to the Chaos Vortex! I cannot let you unleash its power! You've got to be kidding me! The Chaos Vortex is a legend! It doesn't exist.. or at least it hasn't for generations. Ekyt reasoned. You don't fool me! Ekyt suddenly couldn't move. That is, until he was lifted in the air. Ekyt hated heights. Indiana Jones had snakes, Rick O'Connell had mummies, Ekyt had heights. That was remedied as he was dropped down hard. Then he was slammed into a tree. Linda-Su shook herself out of the stupor she had been in and cracked Silver over the head. He turned toward her and started to attack. Suddenly, Ekyt dove into her and ran, carrying her. What on earth?! Suddenly she was why.

Sonic spotted the view from above. Yee-Hah! He aimed the Airbike at Silver and jumped. He saw Ekyt get Linda-Su away. Sonic landed and shook his finger at Silver. You again? I'm not the Iblis Trigger, and he's not.. whatever it is you're after this time! Why don't you scam, before I have to hurt you? Sonic taunted. Hedgehog, you won't humble me this time! Silver said, aiming a rock at Sonic. Ekyt batted it away with his staff. That's enough! I'll make you a deal Silver. I'll give myself up if you explain what's going on and why you're after me. If you can prove I've done/ will do any of these things, then you have my word, I'll accept whatever fate you decide. If I can prove myself innocent, then you stop attacking me and anyone else here unless you have real reason. Silver agreed. Pick one person you trust to come and vouch for you. Ekyt was spared that by Linda-Su striding forward and grabbing his arm. Lead the way Silver. She said coldly. That's Silver.

17. Desperate...

Okay, you're telling me I'm responsible for the Chaos Vortex, is that right? Ekyt asked Silver. Yes. And you're telling me that I've got to die to stop it. Yes. Uh huh. You understand that I don't die so easy? Ekyt said with a straight face. I understand you're tough, but my powers could bury you. Ekyt nodded. Linda thought this was stupid. You understand the legend of the Chaos Vortex? Ekyt asked. Yes. Silver said, but Linda shook her head. It's only fair you know.

Before the Ancient Walkers, there was a power used by the natives. It gave them immense power of epic proportions. As the society became closer to what we know today, the elders realized it's mystic energy was too great for them to comprehend. By using the power themselves, they created a vortex, which sucked the powers away. It laid, buried, for centuries. It was unearthed by an evil echidna. Dmitri, also known as Enerjak, tried to use the power. But he was thwarted by Locke.. At this point Ekyt stopped. The mark of a guardian.. That's what was left of the power! Linda and Silver both had no idea what he was talking about. The white stripe on the chest of a guardian, it represents the burn suffered by the first guardian, Edmund, when the Chaos Vortex was unleashed. Ekyt just realized it himself. He looked down at his own chest. He had the mark. It matched Knuckles, and that of Locke and all the others.

Now it was Silver's turn. Only his story had been trumped. Ekyt.. let me see the mark.. I can tell if it's real or not. A real guardian would never let harm descend upon his home. Ekyt showed him the mark. It glowed for a split-second. Silver stopped. If not you, there must be another who has the ability. A descendant of this Dmitri. He has many, but only two fit your description. Ekyt said. Linda agreed. My rotten half-brother and half-sister. Kragok and Lien-Da! Silver darted toward her. How do I know it isn't you? Let me see! Ekyt had seen enough. THAT is a bit too drastic. You will not touch her. Ekyt snarled. You won't stop me guardian. Silver taunted. Linda-Su was getting more annoyed. Take your hands off me! she said. I need only to check, then.. I said to let her go. Ekyt said, louder. Not until I'm sure. Silver said. I don't want to have to hurt you. Ekyt warned. You couldn't. Ekyt kicked him in the head. Silver fell down. I guess I can. Silver got up suddenly. But his eyes.. They were red. Something was wrong..

Knuckles was joined by Julie-Su. He had been emotional since his father's death. How are you doing Knuckles? she asked quietly. I'll live Julie. He said quietly. She was hard-pressed for words. I'm really.. sorry. About your dad. About his funeral getting ruined.. And all the pain it's caused. Knuckles looked up. Well, that's the life of a guardian. Sacrifice for your duty. It's how I was raised. I don't regret it, I guess. I just wish it hadn't been the death of him.

Speaking of death..

Something tells me I've made you angry. Ekyt said. Linda, get out of here! It's you he's after! I'll handle him. Ekyt didn't have a chance. Silver put him into the wall and held him there, choking him. If you had let me see the girl, you wouldn't have to be torn limb from limb. Ekyt fought the psycho-kinesis for all he was worth. Linda-Su watched on, helpless. She had to do something. She formed a plan. It was desperate, but desperate times call for desperate measures. Silver, let him go. He's not the key to the vortex.. Silver stopped, and looked over at her. I am. Ekyt slid to the floor. They were in a tree-house on Mobius. Hidden in this branch was a power ring.

Probably for a swatbots attack.. Ekyt was human, and didn't know what would happen if he touched it. But, considering the girl he was.. friends with was about to be killed, it seemed like a good option. He grasped it and immediately felt the power. He just hoped it would be enough..

18. KO'ed

Ekyt barreled across the room and charged into Silver, sending them both falling from the tree house. Silver hovered up toward Linda. Ekyt ran up a tree (How the heck did I do that?) and flew at Silver again. He felt like he floated as his shoulder made contact with Silver's sternum, again knocking the hedgehog over. They crashed through a huge tree branch, which brought everyone in Knothole running. They gasped as Ekyt seemed to be winning.

Sally grabbed Nicole. Nicole, what are the effects of power rings on humans? she said urgently. Processing Sally.. No known instances Princess, however I have two theories.. Proceed Nicole. For one, the human's system is unaccustomed to the power of the rings. It will last longer than in, for example, Sonic's system. That much is certain. Theory one: It will be too much for Ekyt's system. The more energy he exerts, the more life energy is taken from him. Theory two: He will react normally and the ring will wear off, thereby leaving him at Silver's mercy. Sally shot Nicole a look. And just who are you betting on Nicole? My micro chips are on the hedgehog. Sally snapped the computer shut.

Ekyt felt himself tiring. Better make this next move devastating. Running full speed, he jumped incredibly high- not bad for a kid who could never dunk a basketball- and brought his entire weight down on Silver. Silver recovered quickly and used his powers. Ekyt was frozen. The power ring was leaving him. His leg was still free, and he used it to kick Silver's arm, freeing himself. Quickly he tackled him and pinned his arms down. No dice. Ekyt was thrown off again. He landed hard. Silver turned toward Linda-Su.

He fought for me.. Was he just doing his job? Or was there something else there? I'll save that for later. She reared back and punched Silver as hard as she could. Silver, exhausted from the battle, fell down, unconscious. Ekyt was just getting to his feet. He had seen what happened and wanted to congratulate her. He made his way over to her. For some reason, she expected him to mad. She had stolen his victory. He walked over to her and stared for a moment. Then broke into a smile and raised her arm to a cheering Knothole village. She kissed him on the cheek and whispered thanks. Blushing, he waved off her thanks. No problem. You- look out! He pushed her behind him as Silver shot something from his hand. It hit Ekyt in the side of the head, on the temple. Sonic spun into Silver, making it his business. Out of nowhere, Shadow used the rings he habitually wore on his wrists and blasted into Silver, knocking him unconscious.

Shadow had no plans of letting that little backstabber out of his sight.

Nicole, scan for vital signs! Sally ordered. She turned to the others. Bunnie, Tails, watch Linda-Su! She's still in danger! The rest of you, check the monitors for movement from Robotropolis! She turned back to Nicole. She breathed a sigh of relief when Nicole said Normal, Sally. C mon Sugah, y'all've had a hard day. Bunnie prompted. Yeah, you better take a rest. They eased Linda away. He okay Sal? Sonic asked. She smiled. He will be Sonic. Alors, zat uman. Perhaps he ez not zee co'ard I took heem for. Antoine said quietly. I don't think any of us knew what he was capable of- until now. Nicole and I will get him to where Linda is and keep an eye. He'll probably need Doctor Quack's attention. Maybe Rotor can cook up something to keep him comfortable. Meanwhile, Sonic, Knuckles needs a friend now, more than ever. In the confusion, it had been all but forgotten that Knuckles had just lost his father. Sonic nodded and

burned rubber over to him.

You okay Knux? Sonic asked. Knuckles was sitting near the emerald where they had performed the ceremony (See last ish- NG). Yeah Sonic. I m glad he s finally getting the rest he deserves. To Sonic s surprise, Knuckles was smiling. I used to hate him for what he did to mom, never realizing he was just doing what was necessary. Sonic sat down next to him quietly, amazed at Knuckles attitude.

Ekyt was awake a few moments later. At the are you okay? questions, Ekyt shook his head.

Yeah. It s my own fault for letting my guard down. He started to get up, but was immediately pushed back down by Linda. No. Tonight you are not a guardian. Tonight, you take it easy.

Ekyt didn t struggle. Are you okay? That s the real question here. I m fine, thanks to you. Sally nodded at Rotor. Ekyt, I m glad you re okay. Thank you Princess. Please, call me Sally. Until Robotnik is defeated, I m not the princess of anything. Ekyt understood her pain. I know. And I know how much trouble you ll get for keeping me here. I don t belong, and I apologize. Ekyt said with head bowed. That s not true. In fact.. Antoine handed her the sword of Acorns. She tapped him on the head. I knight you as a protector of the Kingdom of Acorn. Ekyt smiled.

Thank you. One by one, they all filed out, leaving him and Linda.

OH, THIS GONNA BE AN INTERSTING CONVERSATION! AND WHAT ABOUT SILVER? IS SHADOW ENOUGH TO CONTAIN HIM? AND WHAT GOT INTO HIM? AND HERE S HOPING KNUCKLES IS OKAY! STAY TUNED FOR MY CHAOS NEXT TIME, CAUSE THAT S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN NG DOES WHAT OTHER S WON T!

19. Ready fir Issue 20???

Ekyt shifted, awkwardly. Partly due to the pain. Mostly due to the fact that the object of his affection was in the same room as he was. "How are you feeling?" she asked kindly. "Never better." Ekyt coughed out. Linda gave him a comical look with her eyebrow up. "Really? Huh! I could've sworn you looked like you were in pain." Ekyt sat up, turning to look over at her. His ribs ached, but she was worth it. His eyes widened. "damn! Get down!" Ekyt dove to the ground, pulling the bed over as an unconscious Shadow flew through the window. Silver, his eyes red, grinned maniacally. "You're mine!" Ekyt pushed Linda toward the door. "Run. I'll handle this." Ekyt tipped the bed over. As Silver began to use his psychokinesis, Ekyt kicked the bed into his face. Silver was up in a flash, going immediately for the ribs. Ekyt kicked him hard in the face. Silver again used his psychokinesis and threw Ekyt into the ceiling. Then down to the floor. Ceiling. Floor. Ekyt reached out in desperation and grabbed Silver's quills. He yanked hard, pulling one loose. That distracted Silver long enough for Ekyt to do something that amazed him.

All the power in his body seemed to go into this one attack. Linda was watching from outside as the human's body glowed red. "CHAOS FURY!" He snarled. From Ekyt's hand came a flurry of red flames. They struck Silver, burning his fur. Ekyt flew into him once more, putting them both through the side of the hut. Ekyt ripped his shirt open. "Here's your proof!" In Ekyt's band, it proved Linda's innocence. It showed her doing good deeds, saving lives, and stopping murderers. Silver's struggles ceased as he watched. He stood up, seemingly at a loss for words. "I-I don't know what came over me.. Those two told me that it was her..." "What two?" Ekyt said quickly. Silver handed him a picture. It was of a blood-red colored echidna, wearing a deer-skin vest. "That's my ex-boyfriend!" Linda-Su said. Ekyt was silent, but she could tell that he didn't like hearing that. "You two have to run! The Dark Legion is aligned with him, and they want you two dead." Silver told them. He ran off before Ekyt could say anything else.

Ekyt didn't question Linda-Su about Staph. She said to him "I was in the Dark Legion. But I left.. And Staph.. He stayed. I never realized how bad he was..." She seemed to be almost in tears. "Don't worry. I'm not going to let them get you. We've got to go. We can't stay here, we'd only risk everyone else's lives."

They wound up in the chaos emerald caverns. Linda-Su had a backpack full of food, as well as a blanket and water. The two set up camp deep in the caverns. When they were done, Ekyt stood near the only entrance. "You should get some sleep." He said quietly. "Come sit next to me." Linda told him. He did. "Geez, it's freezing in here!" She crawled up onto his lap sleepily. He was shocked, but didn't say anything. "I'm sorry to put you through this." She said, clearly upset. "It's okay." Ekyt assured her. Her green eyes were sad and angry at the same time. Her eyes met Ekyt's. She stroked his hair, ignoring the blood that decorated it. She kissed him gently, then buried her shoulder in his, falling asleep.

Ekyt was shocked at that. Yes, he was running for his life. Yes, he would be in big trouble for using a chaos attack. But as he looked down at the cute echidna currently sleeping on his lap, his life didn't seem so bad.

20. Supreme Sacrifice

Linda-Su slept through the night. Ekyt nodded off once or twice, but for the most part stayed awake. Linda stayed on his lap. She seemed so vulnerable, but at the same time, deadly. Ekyt pulled his coat around in a way that it covered her. It had been a great night. Linda's simple show of affection, falling asleep cuddled on his lap, made him count his blessings. Blessing he would defend.

Knuckles was summoned to Haven by the brotherhood. Thunderhawk, Sabre, Spectre, and the real Tobor (Sabre's son, he was replaced by an imposter in the comics -NG) sat at a brushed glass and steel table. Knuckles sat at the head of the table. "Knuckles...the time has come for you to serve us." Knuckles cast them a weary eye. "And by that you mean." Thunderhawk smiled and began to speak.

Kragok led his group of echidnas to the chaos chamber. The implant on Linda-Su led them right to her. "Are you sure you have the right one?" Kragok questioned the blood-red echidna. "Positive, lord Kragok. As Master Enerjak stated, the girl is the one we want. Linda-Su of the house of Dmitri." "Good. OPEN THE CAVERNS!" Kragok shouted.

Ekyt heard the shout. "Linda, wake up." he said urgently. She snapped awake. "They found us." Ekyt nodded. "No matter what happens, stay behind me, and stay hidden." He said. The door blasted open.

The Dark Legionnaires saw Ekyt studying one of the emeralds. "Can I help you?" he asked them. "Take us to the echidna that's hiding here!" Kragok demanded. Ekyt put on a mask of confusion. "I'm the only one here. These gems are fascinating. Have you noticed." A knife slit Ekyt's shirt. His white guardian band was revealed. "Good work guardian. Cunning is built into your type isn't it." Ekyt agreed. "Yeah. Cunning." His hand flashed out and narrowly missed Kragok, who dodged backward. "Get Him!" he yelled. The horde of echidnas rushed forward. Ekyt fought them as best he could, with knees, elbows, fists, feet, and even threw one into the cave wall. An emerald fell loose and clattered to the floor. He picked it up. The surge of power he felt was incredible. He threw echidna after echidna back. One managed to get him with a taser, 50000 volts ran through Ekyt's body. The emerald he was holding exploded, raining small shards down on him. But it had protected him. He kicked the taser away and threw the offending echidna into a series of others. But the goons piled on, finally forcing Ekyt to the ground.

Linda-Su couldn't take anymore. She burst from her hiding place, pulling a knife from it's sheath in her boot. With practiced ease, she sliced the enemies, nowhere fatal. But her heart jumped in her throat when Staph confronted her. "Hello Linda." He said, smiling. Behind his back he held a rifle that would finish her off. Ekyt stood up silently and kicked at the echidna, who brought the rifle down across his leg. Ekyt yelped in pain and twisted his ankle as he went down. Linda brought the butt-end of her knife across the echidna's skull three times.

"I can't do that." Knuckles said. Sabre lowered his eyes. "I know how you feel. I don't like it anymore than you do. No matter what Thunderhawk says. But it must be

done if he is ever to come back." Knuckles banged his fist on the table. "That's ridiculous!" "Knuckles, it's the only way to save your father. The balance of the population is very fragile." Knuckles sat down, defeated. "Fine."

Ekyt leaned against the wall, bleeding and burned from the beating. Linda-Su was mostly unharmed. "We've got to get out of here." She said. BAMPF! Archimedes, a fire-ant who was an advisor to the guardians appeared. "Ekyt, you're needed in Haven." He said somberly. "Can you get us there Arch? I'm kind of in pain, and we need a quick exit." "Sure thing." Archimedes said. BAMPF!

Another BAMPF! And Ekyt was in front of the Brotherhood and Knuckles. Linda-Su was with Archimedes. She was safely hidden, so Ekyt was satisfied. "You need to see me?" Ekyt asked with a small bow. Thunderhawk's unpleasant voice greeted him. "Yes, you see, we..." "Oh, knock it off Thunderhawk. Sabre pushed the older guardian aside. "Ekyt, we did some research. Locke can be restored. But at a sacrifice. And it's one only you can make." Sabre was trying to remain stoic, but Ekyt's expert eye saw emotion in his. "In echidna history, the guardian's have all been of the distinct lineage of the House of Dmirti. Though that name shames us (Dmitri became Enerjak, an incredibly tough villain. -NG), we really have no choice." Ekyt felt puzzled, and it must have shown, because Sabre finished with "The Brotherhood hereby relieves you of all guardian duties."

21. Multiple Choice

Ekyt stared, dumbfounded at how things had turned out. "Your guardian stripe must be burned to restore Locke." Ekyt yanked it off. Archimedes gave him a burning twig. Ekyt set fire to the one thing he had been good at. The flames danced and crackled merrily, serving as a reminder to Ekyt of his days as a guardian. The stripe disappeared. Ekyt bowed to the Brotherhood and stepped out of Haven into a desert-filled section of the Forbidden Zone. Knuckles called after him. "Wait, Ekyt." Ekyt turned, his face stony. "Thank you. You've done me the greatest favor anyone could have." Knuckles extended his hand, which Ekyt took. Knuckles pulled him into a hug, one between two friends and co-workers who were now being separated. "Thanks for everything." Ekyt said.

A white stripe, not unfamiliar, floated in the Forbidden Zone.

Ekyt thanked Archimedes. "My pleasure kid." He sat in the palm of Ekyt's hand. "I'm sorry about this." He whispered, so Linda-Su couldn't hear. "You had tons of potential." "Thank you. I'll always consider you a mentor and a friend Arch." With a BAMPF!, Ekyt was left with his thoughts and Linda-Su, who was concerned.

Ekyt sadly explained what happened to Linda-Su, who immediately jumped to his defense. "They can't do that!" Ekyt smiled sadly. "If it brings Locke back, it's a worthy sacrifice. For now, I'm going to get off the island." Linda-Su had some misgivings about that. "I can't leave, I'm in the police department, and they don't accept resignations without a good reason. And since we're not married, and I'm not of age to be married, I'm stuck here." She said. "I'm not leaving permanently. I just can't live here anymore." His voice cracked with emotion at the end. "I'll be fine."

Ekyt grabbed the few belongings he had on the island and looked sadly at it one more time. A dream destroyed. Upon returning to Mobius he found a spot in the great forest untouched by war machines or Freedom Fighters. He moved some boulders to form a fence that was chest height. Unfolding a shovel from his pack, he dug into the ground. Over the next week, he built wooden walls and floors, and finally a ceiling, which he camouflages with tree branches. A hidden ladder ran from the bottom of his home (Five feet below ground, and ten feet tall) to a small hidden treehouse. It was home. Over the course of another week, he segmented the cavernous room into sections. He had an office in one corner. His bedroom, a dark room that showed little trace of life outside of a bed, was in the corner opposite the office. In the corner next to the bedroom Ekyt had his training room. It was the second-largest room. One wall had throwing knife targets and punching bags. Another wall held a stash of weapons. Swords, knives, hooks and staffs decorated the wall. Ekyt's favorite weapon, a white-oak staff, stayed with him at all times. It could compact to two feet and it could extend to six feet in the flick of a wrist.

The other corner of the house held another bed in a lightly furnished room. It was a guest room. In Ekyt's mind, no one would ever occupy it, but it seemed to fit in.

The last part of the house was a kitchen area. It was well stocked, despite the fact that Ekyt hadn't eaten in two days, and felt like he never wanted to eat again.

It was against this grim backdrop that Ekyt realized he had to figure out what to do with himself as he rehabbed his leg. A couple of torn ligament, and he had no doubt aggravated it while moving those rocks.

His choices:

Return to the island and live as a civilian, maybe join the police force.

Return to the island and join the Chaotix

Stay on Mobius and join the Freedom Fighters

Go back and forth, dealing damage to his enemies as needed.

The last choice made the most sense to him, and he decided to couple it with the second and third choices, making him a member of two groups. But he couldn't do it; not right away. Right now he was untraceable to everyone. Linda-Su couldn't leave the island, and she was the only one who knew where he was.

For the first time in a year, Ekyt truly felt worthless. He lay in bed, awake, before he got up and trained. As he was lifting the forty-pound dumbbell, an argument broke out that even he heard:

Tails: You treat me like a baby!

Sally: Tails, we're just trying to protect you!

Sonic: She's right little bud.

Tails: "Little" bud? That's it, I'm leaving!

Sally: Tails, please, think about this!

Tails had already left. Unfortunately, he had attracted the attention of two SWATbots. He was unaware as he marched toward them, grumbling. He looked up, shocked to see them. Ekyt burst from his hiding spot and raced toward Tails, hoping he wasn't too late...

22. Reble WITH a Cause

(Note- I was listening to "Allstar" by Smashmouth. Listen to it, and the Words below describe Ekyt a little -NG) "My world's on fire, how 'bout yours, that's the way I like it and I never get bored" -Smashmouth

Ekyt exploded out of his hiding place, jumping in front of tails. With a flick of his wrist, he had smashed one SWATBOT's head in. With a full swing, the other was flung into a small puddle left by the last rainstorm. "You okay Tails?" the human asked, sounding concerned. Tails nodded. He had always liked Ekyt, even if he had been somewhat wary of him. Tails only knew one other human, and that one was tipping the scales and was pure evil. "Nobody usually comes this way. You alright?" Ekyt asked, stating the question differently. "They don't appreciate me." Tails blurted out. Ekyt smiled an understanding smile. "I know how you feel. Here, follow me. But keep it under your hat okay?"

Tails followed Ekyt inside his strange home. Ekyt opened the door to his training center and pulled out a staff. This one was brown, but a favorite of his. He handed it to Tails. "For the next time you run into trouble." Ekyt said by way of explanation. Tails wasn't stupid. "You don't normally hang around here Ekyt. What happened?" Ekyt gave Tails a sad smile. "They don't appreciate me." Crash! Ekyt had squeezed a glass so hard it burst. Tails couldn't help but be impressed as Ekyt didn't seem to notice the wound in his hand. "Sonic and Sally treat me like a baby! I've been in plenty of fights!" To his surprise, Ekyt nodded. "You're as brave as any of them. They care too much. But, don't be upset that they care. If anything, prove yourself more. Before it's too late for you, like it was for me." Ekyt said. Then he cursed silently, as he knew that Tails was going to grill him for details. Not that he minded telling the young fox, but it was a painful recollection for him. "Hey, why don't you come along? You can help me with a little chore I have to do." At Tails obvious puzzlement, Ekyt gave him a grin. "Com'on, you get to destroy stuff, vent some frustration." Tails gave Ekyt a matching grin, like Ekyt was his cool uncle that had come to visit.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) couldn't help but grin as she was named commander of Prince Elias's secret service. It was a great spot, and she was finally getting recognized. She would have to talk to Linda-Su. When she did, she couldn't believe her ears. Linda nodded somberly at his fate, when his telltale coat swished in the distance. Whatever he was doing couldn't be good."

Ekyt looked around his old home on Angel Island. He looked over at Tails, who was eagerly holding the box of matches. "You ready?" Ekyt asked him. Tails nodded eagerly. "Alright. Let it go!" They both flicked matches and dove safely away, burning down the home that held too many memories. (It was built in issue 11 -NG) Tails was clearly enjoying himself, which is just what Ekyt intended.

Linda-Su and Tiffany ran over to watch the blaze. "Are you crazy?" Linda said in exasperation, grinning in spite of herself. "Yup." Ekyt answered. The fire crackled merrily. "It held to many memories." Linda laughed and shook her head. "Well, how about making one more memory?"

She hugged him and looked up into his eyes. One kiss later, and Ekyt did indeed have one more memory. "That was fun. But I'd better put out this blaze." Tails spun his tails, sending dirt onto the fire, putting out the small controlled burn. The Echidna Fire Department came hurrying over, to find the blaze put out. "Time to go." Ekyt said. He was putting on a show for Linda and Tails. Inside, his heart was on fire too. Half his world had just been yanked out from underneath him.

Vector, Mighty, Charmy, Espio, and Julie-Su made up the Chaotix. They were sitting in a small clearing, discussing the possibility of a new member. "I dunno dawg, he's kinda...trippin', know what I'm sayin'." Vector started. Espio gave him a look. "You're just angry because he punched you in the face. It was well deserved, I might add. He's got my vote. His knowledge of Martial Arts and loyalty are impressive." Mighty agreed. "He's got a good heart." Julie-Su was also in favor of Ekyt. "The kid just lost his job, and I know, that job and my sister is his world." Charmy (Remember, this is the old Archie Comics charmy, he's not hyper -NG) "You know, it's a good idea. We've had an awful lot of trouble around here lately, and with my mother on my case, I don't know how long I can dodge her." (Charmy is engaged to be married to Saphron, by his mother, the Queen Bee. It's an Archie comics storyline.) It looked like Ekyt was in.

Tails thanked Ekyt for the fun, and then started to walk home. Even Ekyt, who wasn't overly emotional, could see his depression. "Hey! Wait up! I'm gonna drop in on the old gang." Ekyt said. Tails grinned. Ekyt tended to shake things up...

23. Doing the Right Thing

"So, how are things?" Sally asked, carefully. She wasn't sure how Ekyt would react. Humans are so unpredictable!

"Fine, Princess. Is everything well around Knothole?" "Oh, yes!" Sally exclaimed. "Hmm. I see one problem, your highness." Ekyt said thoughtfully. "What's that?" Sally asked. "Tails. He seems to think that you...how to put this...Don't have much use for him. I know it isn't true, but when he came to ME..." Sally nodded. "I know. I don't mean for it to come out that way. I guess we all care too much. I don't mean to treat him like a kid, he's done as much as any of us." Ekyt hadn't expected her to agree. "Well, thank you. I guess I'd better go guard..." Ekyt froze. Damn! He hadn't thought of being a guardian since he was helping Tails with HIS problems. Sally looked concerned. "Is something wrong?" she asked. Ekyt was sweating a little and used the back of his hand to sweep it off his forehead. "I...um...well...I'm not a guardian anymore...yeah." "Oh..." was all Sally could manage. "If you'll pardon me..." Ekyt left as Tails ran in to talk to Sally. Soon, all was right with their world.

But not with Ekyt's.

The jungles were always his favorite. Now they were a haunting memory. He knew he had to go back to civilization, but not yet... He thought to himself "I'm glad to do it for Locke. If this is what it takes for him to come back, I'm glad I did it." It was hard to swallow either way, but selfish was not a word Ekyt wanted to be described by.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) had a day off since Prince Elias was on his father's council today. She ran into Ekyt, who was up to...she didn't really want to know, on second thought. He was preoccupied, and it looked like he had all but stopped trying to fix things. And there was a lot that needed to be fixed...

Whenever someone asked Ekyt "What happened?" Ekyt ended his response with "I had a choice between saving someone else's life, or enjoying mine." Everyone seemed to be stunned, but understanding. Everyone who knew Locke was glad he was back. Everyone who knew Ekyt, on the other hand, wished he WOULD come back. He was there, physically, but mentally...

As Ekyt laid on the cool grass, his head propped up on an uncomfortable log, a shadow approached him. "If you're here to kill me, think twice. I've got nothing left to lose." He spouted without getting up. "Far from it." Linda's smiling face greeted him. He scrambled to get up. "Sorry about that." He mumbled. "Someone been bothering you?" she asked. "Just one luckless guy from the Dark Legion. He decided to try to knife me. But, I don't die so easy, I guess..." He pointed to a small cut on his arm. Then to a larger gash across his shoulder. "You play with knives, you get cut." Ekyt said simply. Linda sat down next to him. "Aren't you going to ask what I'm doing here?" she said teasingly. Ekyt raised his head, searching her eyes briefly. "Yeah. I'm sorry, I'm just kind of lost I guess..." She put an arm around his shoulders. "No worries. I'm here to stay,

at least for a while. After Tiffany and I talked (Last issue) she told me that they're looking for a bodyguard for Knothole's brain trust. You know, Rotor, Dr. Quack, Sonic's Uncle Chuck. It's temporary, but I took some time off from the force (She's a police officer for the EPD- Echidna Police Department -NG) to do this. I figured you could a little company." Ekyt hugged her gratefully. "I've missed you." He said, then laughed at how lame that was. She hugged him back. "It's no problem. If I had MY world yanked out from under me, I'd be depressed too. Things'll get better. If someone brought ME back from the dead, I'd be grateful, to say the least." "Yeah. I was happy to do it for Locke."

Speaking of Locke...

SORRY, YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT ISSUE! TIFFANY AND LINDA GET THEIR FIRST ASSIGNMENTS, LOCKE RETURNS, AND THERE'S GONNA BE PLENTY 'O CHAOS!

24. Welcome Back

"So you're here to guard the geniuses?" Ekyt said. "Well, and to make sure that you don't do something insane." Linda said as if she were discussing the weather. "I really appreciate it. You know, I used to pride myself on being in control. Of everything. My situation, my appearance, myself... I never NEEDED anyone else. Then something hits my brain, and I crash. Now I feel so useless...It's damned frustrating!" He kicked a tree aimlessly before continuing. "It's like...I can't trust my own judgment anymore." "Perhaps it's time we talked." Ekyt jumped back. Locke was standing before him and Linda.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) and Flash (Flashthehedgehog) flanked Prince Elias as he walked toward his private shuttle. When shots rang out, the two communicated without words. Flash could pilot the craft while Tiffany covered their escape. Sounded good on paper. Except there were at least one hundred swatbots and one Tiffany. "Need some help sis?" Shadow skated through the swatbots, destroying them. "Sure, the more the merrier." She skated the opposite direction through them.

"You okay?" Flash called back to the Prince. "I'll live. Just a little cut to the arm. WHOA!" Flash turned around to see Elias kick a swatbot. "An unscheduled passenger? Sorry, I'll need to see a ticket." Flash charged up one hand and punched the robot, the energy from his hand destroying it. "Problem solved." Flash said, returning to the controls. "I owe you one." Elias called out.

"Are you okay Locke?" Ekyt asked. "Yes. Thanks to your selfless sacrifice. Are you ready to return to the island?" Ekyt's eyes brightened for a moment. "What would I be doing?" "Well, Haven needs a servant and..." Ekyt stopped him. "That's a considerable step down from my last career Locke. I can't do it. I've got nothing but my pride and Linda-Su." "She must return." Locke said. "What?" "She's being ordered to return. The island owns her." "She's not a piece of property!"

Locke motioned Linda over while Ekyt seethed. He whispered something to her that seemed to distress her. "But they decided...They can't!" "They have. I'm sorry Linda." Linda turned to Ekyt "Ekyt, I never did tell you this, but, um..." Ekyt's world vanished in a red haze. "I never said anything because it wasn't going to happen, but they've decided. I'm...engaged."

Engaged?

Ekyt couldn't even answer for a minute. "Who is the guy?" Ekyt asked quietly. Linda winced even more, mumbling her answer. Ekyt looked at Locke for an answer. "Staph." (Linda's ex-boyfriend, from issue 9) Ekyt softened. "Linda, is this what you want?" he asked her. "No. That jerk almost killed me." "Locke, I want to challenge him to a duel at the Olive Grove." "Well, you know the rules as well as anyone. He puts up his marriage to Linda. If you lose, what do you offer?" Ekyt closed his eyes. "I'll offer my freedom. If he wins, he can do with me as he pleases." Locke nodded. "Fair enough. The duel is at 6:00 am

tomorrow. And lad, please come early. I wish to speak with you."

25. The Winner is...

Ekyt arrived early at the duel, as Locke requested. Since he wasn't a guardian, he didn't wear his normal uniform. It would have been forbidden anyway. The traditional duel attire was black, loose athletic pants. Ekyt wore those. No shirt. Embarrassment aside, this gave his opponent less to grab onto.

"I'm glad you could come early." Locke greeted Ekyt. Ekyt greeted him with stoicism. "What is you have to say to me Locke?" Locke sighed. "You know, I have my problems with Knuckles mother, my ex-wife. And I guess what I'm saying is that I hope this works out for you. You obviously care for the girl. And..." Locke looked nervous as he spoke. "One member of the Brotherhood, Thunderhawk, has a vendetta with you. That's why you were removed. I'm back, and I'm fighting for your re-instatement. But, just know that...unlike with my own son, I can support you. Good luck."

Staph tossed off his dear-skin vest and stared Ekyt down. Ekyt didn't flinch. "Hope you won't mind wearing the maid outfit when you become my property. Linda and I would have had a happy life anyway, but with you as our slave..." "Don't listen Ekyt! Focus! He's a jerk!" Linda called from the sidelines. "You have a big mouth, my friend." Ekyt informed Staph. "That just means a bigger target to hit."

The two charged. The advantage was Staph's. His mind was clear. That much was apparent early when he locked Ekyt in a painful submission hold. He wrenched his arm so hard Ekyt's collarbone popped out. Ekyt struggled to his knees, relieving the pressure. Using his good arm, he punched Staph in the midsection, hard and fast. He rolled forward, forcing Staph to relinquish his grip. Staph slapped him, and then gave Linda a vulgar gesture, taunting her. "You're mine sweetie!" he called. Ekyt grabbed the echidna's leg and flipped him, fists hammering away. With a crack, Ekyt broke his hand across Staph's jaw. Undaunted, and powered by adrenaline, Ekyt used his elbow to attack. Staph shot him off and wrapped his arm around Ekyt's. The pain was almost too much for Ekyt. As he was about to black out, Ekyt grabbed the echidna and threw him backward.

Both were down. Ekyt was nearly unconscious, and Staph was knocked goofy by the sudden toss. His ribs had been broken by the impact. The referee began to count. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9... Staph started to stand up, but Ekyt's hand pulled him back down. 10!

The duel had ended in a tie. This was a first. The Dark Legion showed up to support Staph, trying to wake him up. Sonic, Knuckles, and Linda tried to wake Ekyt up. "Should the duel not be restarted in ten seconds, I award the match to Staph, under the home-advantage clause." The referee, an older echidna, announced. Linda made a frantic decision. She grabbed his head and brought hers down to kiss him. She was struck suddenly by a shot. Sonic gave Ekyt a good slap, which jolted him. "What happened to her?" he asked. He spun around to find Staph holding a pistol. He had his back to Ekyt, raising his arms in victory. Ekyt ran into him from behind, his shoulder hitting the echidna's back. Ekyt grabbed his head and squeezed, angry enough to break him in half. When Dark Legion members started to attack, he threw Staph into them, before charging himself, nearly insane with rage and pain.

The referee had ended the match. He rang a gong. Ekyt turned to it. The referee held two flags; a red one signifying Staph, a black one for Ekyt. "I have made my decision, as both men answered the ten count. The winner is..."

26. Breaking Point

"...Staph." Two heads immediately snapped toward the judge. Ekyt started to say something, but Linda-Su stopped him. "Let me handle it." Ekyt backed off, curious as to just what she was going to say. "I'm not marrying that piece of crap. And I think you're a slimeball for the decision you made." The judge grabbed Linda. "You have no choice and I" "Take your hands off her." Ekyt snarled. He was already seeing red, and that made things worse. "You have no authority here. Stand down." The judge commented. "Let go of me." Linda's voice left no room for argument. "I'll be at the wedding." The judge said dryly. "Like hell you will. There won't be one." Linda said. It was obvious she was furious. "Then you aren't welcome here." "Bite me." Linda said, earning chuckles from Ekyt and a few of the bystanders. She continued. "Then I'm leaving. I'm not marrying that piece of trash." Locke cleared his throat. "Judge, you are dismissed. This fight is restarted. And I expect no qualms about the victor."

Ekyt and Staph were both exhausted. Ekyt had everything to gain and nothing to lose. But so did Staph. He really did love the girl, no matter how he acted. But where did her love lie?

The match restarted. The crowd was amazed at the match. Every punch, every block, every move struck a chord. The match became so intense, so bloody, that those watching were unable to turn away. Was the highlight of the match when Staph landed a swift kick to Ekyt's jaw, causing a cut lip? When Ekyt grabbed both of Staph's arm and raised him high before dropping him on his face? Most agreed the most spectacular moment came at the end.

Ekyt was bloody and exhausted. Linda asked for a time-out. "Listen, you don't have to defend me, if that's why your doing this." Ekyt looked at her. "Just tell me if you want to marry him. If you do, I'll back off." "Of course not!" Ekyt nodded. "Then I'm going to win."

Staph grappled with Ekyt. Ekyt caught the echidna around the head, at the same time as Staph caught him around the head. It was a choking battle. Staph had the strength advantage, as he demonstrated by lifting Ekyt into the air. Ekyt released his grip and used his new-found leverage to fall behind Staph. He snatched his arm while wrapping his legs around his torso. Staph struggled, finally releasing himself with a headbutt. The hold took a lot out of both of them.

At the 1 hour mark, they were still fighting. Ekyt's white flesh had turned red with his own blood. Staph had bit his head drawing more blood. Ekyt felt dizzy, but he couldn't lose this fight, not with so much at stake. So he took a risk, knowing that if he didn't land this opportunity, it was all over...

27. A hard Question...

Ekyt climbed up on top of the vine-covered wall. "Comon coward. Come and get me!" Ekyt called out. He was dizzy, and he was banking on the fact that Staph was too. Staph climbed up. "End of the line kid." He punched. Ekyt dodged backward.

The crowd followed every move. Ekyt's head snapped back, again and again. They gasped as he held on with one hand, the fall being big enough to hurt big time. He grabbed Staph's leg, pulling down, so Staph landed with, er, the wall between his legs. He slid off slowly. Ekyt jumped off, the crowd gasping. He put his full body weight on Staph as he hit the ground. It was over. Locke raised Ekyt's arm.

Linda pushed past everyone and ran to Ekyt. She jumped and he managed to catch her. "Thank you. I owe you big time." She whispered. "No, I owe YOU. Thanks." "Let's get out of here." "Right. We're not welcome here." Locke stopped him. "Ekyt, wait...We want to reinstate you as guardian. Effective immediately." Ekyt looked at Linda. She nodded. "I accept Locke. Thank you." "You earned it." He said.

Suddenly the echidna's ran. Staph was up, holding a gun. "On behalf of the Dark Legion, you are under arrest." "Bite me." Linda snarled, thumbing her nose at him. Ekyt pushed her behind him. "You won't shoot. Small-time villains like you are yellow. Because you wouldn't dare kill a guardian. Back off! Everyone, run for it, but stay calm!" Ekyt turned back to him. "If it's a prisoner you want, you can have me." "You can have us." Linda corrected him. "Master Kragok will be pleased..."

"Tell me guardian...where are the chaos emeralds?" Kragok questioned. He was an imposing echidna. His left arm and eye had been replaced by bionic attachments. He was the leader of the dark legion. "You've been in the sun too long if you think I'll tell you." Ekyt spat. "Valiant. But you're playing for the wrong side." "Screw you. I know what I'm doing." "Oh, is that so. You wouldn't want me to have to hurt little Linda, would you?" "You wouldn't dare, you piece of crap. Because you know I'd beat your sorry can across the island." Linda grabbed his hand, forcing something into it. Staph got close to her. "Maybe your little friend won't talk, but I know you will." Ekyt cast a glance at his hand. A power ring.

Sonic and Knuckles had little time off. They were relaxing in a pool of clear water on the Floating Island. "You know Sonic, I think that things are gonna heat up soon. Our respective villains have been silent for too long..." Sonic laid his head back. "Yeah. I'm thankful for the break, but I can't wait to beat the stuffing out of ol' Ivo again."

Ekyt clutched the ring, breaking free of his restraints. He scooped Linda up and ran for it. "Stop him! That guardian is a valuable prisoner! Get him!" Ekyt ran incredibly fast, dodging the gun fire. "Where the heck did you get the ring?" Ekyt asked in wonder. "Staph! That was my wedding ring! If that moron had known what I'd use it for... Yee-hah!" Ekyt jumped down a short cliff, kicking up dust as he ran.

He set her down gently, before sitting down himself. "Thanks again. You didn't have to fight." Linda-Su told him. "Yeah I did. He was insulting me. And, more importantly, you." "Well, thanks." "That's what friends are for." Ekyt said. "Friends are also for patching each other up. Well, that's one-sided here. Good thing I've got bandages." Ekyt pointed to his back. "That's killing me." He said. "Hmm. I thought your modesty would be, or did you forget you don't have a shirt on?" Ekyt's neck turned red, which Linda took as a sign. God, he was fun to tease, but he was so innocent at the same time. Then again, so was she. But it was hard to see her blush when the tone blended in with her fur so nicely. She had to try...Linda kissed him, then looked into his eyes. "Ekyt...Do you think we can be...more than friends? I mean, when does this relationship cross the line from "Doing my job?" to "Boyfriend/Girlfriend?" It was then she noticed he had passed out. Probably something the power ring did to his system. With a sigh, she laid on his coat for a moment, before getting some water.

28. Thinking (can be dangerous)

Ekyt woke up, shaking his head. The paradise that was Angel Island was even better with someone like Linda-Su with him. But something was tearing at him...That self-doubt that was drilled into his head for so long...For once, instead of the rock-solid guardian he normally looked like, he seemed...intimidated. Much to Linda's surprise, he sat up, staring intently at a waterfall. "Are you okay?" She asked. He jumped, spinning around to see who the attacker was. "Oh, so you're feeling better, good!" she said teasingly. "I wish I could answer your question." He said. "What...oh." She was sure he had been unconscious (See last ish-NG) when she had said that.

"The truth is, I'm totally clueless. I'm as innocent as I seem. Right now, the question on my mind is...are you sure I'm what you want." Linda had to stop for a second to make sure she heard him right. "What?" "Are you sure I'm good enough..." Ekyt said, more timidly than he wanted. "I wouldn't be sitting here with you if I wasn't sure. After what you've done for me...you should be asking if I'm good enough for you." Ekyt didn't change his area of focus. "I did what anyone would have done for who they...loved. The fight was never about my pride, I don't have any. It was about what you wanted. If you had said you loved Staph (Linda was forcibly engaged to him), then I would have given up. I know I don't belong here..." Ekyt said simply, gesturing at the lush green paradise. "But even knowing that, I'd sacrifice just about everything to stay..." Linda stood up next to him. "You really don't give yourself any credit. And you should." Ekyt grinned ruefully, while limping pathetically toward the waterfall. "Damn, forgot my swim trunks." He said feebly. Linda shook her head in mock wonder. "You know, you don't have to be shy in front of me." "No, but I shouldn't be naked in front of you either." "Damn, why not?" Linda said jokingly. "You sure you're okay? I mean, I can give you your privacy here, and I can stick around. I'll just go rest my eyes. I was up all night, keeping an eye on you."

Linda laid down on Ekyt's coat. She smiled at his somehow youthful embarrassment at her joking suggestion. He is as innocent as he seems she thought fondly. He took the good-natured teasing well. It seemed like he was mechanical in his responses to her. Mechanical, but sweet. She rolled over to look at the bright day-time sky. It always seemed the weather was perfect. She fell asleep to thoughts of her goofy human friend. She just wasn't sure if "boy" should be in front of "friend."

Once he was sure he was out of site, he stripped his clothes off and walked under the waterfall, cleaning himself up. The water felt great against his cuts and bruises. He bent down to the pool of clear water at the base of the waterfall, cupping hands and lapping it up greedily. As he knelt in the clear pool, he realized just how much it meant to him that Linda would keep an eye on him all night. And how bad he felt about passing out, just as she was at her most vulnerable. Not that the choice had been his. She cared for him, the best he could guess. This was his first...relationship? Was that the right word? Suddenly angry, he batted his reflection in the water. That was mature. But still...I don't understand anything! Nothing makes sense! Maybe I'm even more of a whackbag than I thought! If she still cares, after the fact that I'm a complete dolt when it comes to anything romantic, then that's a

special girl. Not that I didn't already know that. Putting those thoughts behind him, he scrubbed himself clean.

Drying himself off with some giant leaf off a plant that looked like a palm tree, Ekyt looked at his clothes. His shirt was beyond hope, and his pants were ripped in a way that might be suggestive. Still, he wasn't going to walk around in his underwear. He pulled them on, wishing he could cover up with his coat. It was habit-forming, wearing that coat. He felt naked without it. Then he realized that Linda had it, and those feelings vanished instantly.

Ekyt sat next to her, not wanting to leave her. He felt he had to return the favor. He sat still, until he heard a sound. He crept toward it. He jumped back as a knife slashed him across the stomach. He grabbed the arm holding the knife and snapped the wrist of the offender. He threw the knife into a rock, where it stuck, blade-first. The echidna with the knife ran, cradling his arm. Ekyt watched dispassionately, before walking over to the knife. He brought his foot down hard across the handle, snapping the blade off. Wrapping the remains of his shirt across his new cut, Ekyt sat back down. Linda stirred, and laid her head on his chest.

Fake sleeping routine. I want to see his reaction... Ekyt, however, didn't have one. He simply laid still, even when she put her arms around his neck. Finally, she sat up. "You are incredible!" she said enthusiastically. "You didn't even move when I did that! And where'd that cut come from?" "Some loser attacked while you got your nap in. I think I broke his wrist." "Good!" Linda responded viciously.