

The Next Guardian

By nextguardian

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A Fan-fic about the guardian in training. Don't worry, there are two guardians, Knuckles isn't done yet. This is going to be an actual series, so check back for updates!

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1 - Next Guardian Issue 1

Next Guardian presents:

The Next Guardian Issue One.

Ekyt is my fan character. He is based largely on me (or at least how I would like to be_)

“Ready?” “Ready” Knuckles launched the black disks toward the emerald. The cloaked figure dashed toward the nearest and kicked it. IT exploded. Two more launched. He grabbed his cloak and caught the two in a bundle. That left one more. With a grin, he flipped backward onto the emerald and threw an almost nonchalant elbow, knocking the disk into the air. The figure showed no sign he had been hit, except for a tilt of his head to shake the fragments out of his dark brown hair.

“Good session, Ekyt” Knuckles told his trainee. “Thanks.” Ekyt turned toward the emerald and stared with an intense seriousness on his face, his harsh hazel eyes unblinking. Knuckles grinned at the expression. He had been the same way when he was training for the position as guardian. Now, with this...human helping, the emerald would be protected even more. That brought him to his subject.

They walked to Mount Fate. On the walk, Knuckles briefed him about the next mission. “We have got to go down to Mobius. As you know, after the Queen's murder, things have been in a state of disarray. The royal family has been kidnapped, as has my father. Also, the constable that arrested you was taken. Sonic, Tails, and Shadow will also accompany us.

The kid's eyes narrowed at that. “Shadow. He was just written into history...” he paused and shot a sideways glance at Knuckles, “... as a villain. Why is *he* coming. What trust has he earned.” Knuckles responded with a serious look. “He lost something too...Hope.” At the confused look, he told him “A human girl Shadow is fond of.” They set off for Mobius.

After introductions were made, they began. Shadow and Ekyt shot glances at each other. Amy Rose came bounding out of the forest. “Stop it, you two.” They didn't. WHACK! A collective groan rose from the group. She had leveled them both with her hammer.

“Why you little...” Shadow charged at Amy, but was thwarted by Ekyt with a kick that caught the older hedgehog in the stomach. WHACK! A hammer shot for Ekyt. “Can't you behave like gentle... Waahhhhh! Help, Sonic.” Tails, who had been staring at Amy, looked on helpless as a combot flew away with her.

“Hey Shadow...Duck.” Shadow ducked as Ekyt threw a glob of mud which stuck to...thin air.

“Combots.” Knuckles reacted swiftly as he glided into the one Ekyt had exposed. Ekyt threw a punch. Sonic and Tails pulled one apart, with Tails grabbing the head and flying while Sonic grabbed the legs and pulled his famous figure eight move. That left three.

While Shadow dealt with one, Sonic grabbed a power ring from a nearby lake. He was struck upon reentering. Ekyt took the ring. He had never felt so powerful. Seconds later, the combots were all damaged beyond repair. Ekyt tossed the ring to Sonic.

“Everyone okay?” asked Sonic. “Peachy,” said Knuckles, who had been thrown into a tree. “Fine,” said Shadow and Ekyt. “I miss Amy...” was all Tails could manage.

Next issue: Ekyt remembers being arrested...

2 - Nect Guardian's Ekyt Remembers

Linda-Su is a fictional sister of Julie-Su.

Next Guardian Presents:

Issue 2

Back at camp, Shadow and Ekyt talked out their differences...for about 2 seconds." "Jerk!" "Creep!" Knuckles and Tails laughed as the two tumbled around the grass. They began commentating. "Oh, a vicious uppercut to the jaw, can Shadow recover.? Oh, he does with a nice punch to the solar plexus."

Sonic sped between them. "Cool it, guys. We're on the same team." That made sense. "He's right." Ekyt said." "So he is." Shadow stated. They shook on it. Ekyt went for a walk.

So, Linda-Su had been taken. So had he... by her beauty. He remembered the arrest.

Flashback

"You'll never get away with this." Ekyt said through Gritted teeth. "Oh, but I will." His captor grinned. He backhanded the shackled 17-year-old across the face. Ekyt stared into his own face. The evil him (remember the cosmic interstate?) grinned into his batter faced. "I have work to do. I bid you...ado." He left, white trench coat billowing in the wind.

Ekyt struggled to free himself, but could not. Fortunately, Knuckles chose this moment to appear. "Thanks for coming." Knuckles grinned. "My pleasure." He snapped the chains with his sharp knuckles. "We gotta stop that cheap knock-off before he does real damage."

Back in Knothole Village

"Queen?" the parallel Ekyt inquired. Asleep. Good. She would stay that way forever.

Later

Ekyt and Knuckles raced to the scene of the murder. King Acorn was beside himself with anger. "You!" He turned to Ekyt. "Arrest him, constable." The world seemed to stop as a beautiful deep pink echidna with sparkling green eyes came into the room. Ekyt shook himself from his daze and tried to reason with them. "Save it, punk." The constable, Linda-Su, as the king had called her, kned him hard in the stomach and handcuffed his hands behind his back. As he was being escorted from the room, he pleading with King Acorn. The King gave him twenty-four hours to catch the real culprit. He had, with help from Sonic. He was given a full pardon.

End Flashback

Ekyt smiled at the memory. He had been cutting at a strong stick. He carved the ancient Echidna symbol for camaraderie. He rejoined the group and tried to sleep. He decided to take guard duty. This as his decision, as he felt the others should rest.

He stood alone and watched, eyes darting around for a threat. Shadow materialized next to him in the dark. "Lo Shadow." Ekyt took it in stride. "what can I do for you?" Shadow looked almost pained as he asked "You can help... Tell me about...my past"

Next issue:

Shadow's past (In my fan fic, anyway.)

3 - The Next Guardian: Shadow's past

Next Guardian Issue # 3

Ekyt Remembers

Ekyt's eyes narrowed at the question. Then his expression softened as he thought out Shadow's past. "Well, according to echidna history (guardians must know it by heart), you were made by professor Gerald Robotnik.

Flashback

"Yes, I've done it! I've created the ultimate life form." A knock came on the door. "Insolents, don't they know I'm busy?" Prof. Gerald threw open the door. A G.U.N agent stood there. "Gerald Robotnik? You are ordered to discontinue all experiments." The professor smiled. "It would be rude of me not to introduce you to a dear friend of mine. Maria, fetch Shadow." A little girl ran off to get her playmate. A black and red hedgehog sped into the room. "You want to see me, professor?" asked the hedgehog. "Yes, Shadow. This man seems to think you are a bad idea...and you know what happens to bad ideas, right Shadow?" The hedgehog nodded solemnly. "Good. Please finish this pest off." "Wha..." was all the G.U.N. agent managed before the hedgehog bellowed "Chaos control." The man's world went black. The hedgehog turned to his creator.

"Now, I've done your work, answer my question. How was I created." The doctor chuckled and sat down in his armchair. "All in due time, Shadow. I will tell you, however, that you were born a natural hedgehog. And now, this conversation must end. The doctor reached for the button. The red button that Shadow was told never to touch. It was fatal, the doctor told him. "Oh no." The doctor pushed the button as Shadow rammed into him. Both their worlds went dark."

Shadow awoke later, shaken, but unharmed. "Shadow, what happened?" a wide-eyed Maria inquired. "Maria, we need to go." He took the child by the hand and began to run. He ran down the metal hallway. The G.U.N. forces closed in. "Maria!" BAM! A shot rang out. Maria fell to the floor. Shadow had only a moment to grieve, before he too was gunned down.

End Flashback

“...and that's all I know. After that you were put into stasis for 50 years.” Ekyt looked at the hedgehog. His normally indifferent face was almost contorted with sadness before a wave of relief hit him. “Thank you.” Shadow walked away. Ekyt thought about it and decided telling the truth was the right decision. He decided to rest. Tomorrow was another day.

Next Issue: The Adventure continues

PLUS: Tails and Amy?

4 - Next Guardian issue 4 the adventure continues

Next Guardian Issue # 4

The Adventure continues...

"Well, this certainly is a pleasant surprise." The voice came a shock to all them. "Geoffrey Saint John?" Sonic said. "The one and only, bloke." He grinned and flicked the toothpick he had been chewing on. "If anyone is rescuing the princess, it'll be me, ya blue pin cushion!" "Over my dead body, Geoff!" Sonic snarled. "That can arranged mate," Geoffrey said. He fired his crossbow. Sonic moved, but the arrow headed straight for the group.

Ekyt took the arrow in his already wounded side. (See first issue, during the combot attack) He looked down and calmly walked over to the brawling animals. He grabbed Saint John by the scruff of his neck and held them face to face. "Let go `a me ya pansy!" he snarled. "What's your problem, mate?" Ekyt pointed to the arrow. He yanked it out straight-faced and snapped it. "You're gonna eat this if you don't leave "mate"." Saint John grinned. "Let's just see you make me."

Saint John walked away complaining about how bad an arrow tastes.

Sonic stared. "What was that about?" he asked. Ekyt grimaced. "A guardian never shows weakness." He said. Sonic laughed as he turned to Knuckles and said "What about Knux here. He flinches if I so much as look at him." Knuckles began a retort before Tails lost it.

"SHUT UP! WE ARE ON A MISSION! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHAT WE'RE DOING?" Tails stalked off toward their destination. They hurried to catch up.

Sub-Story- Tails and Amy?

After they set up camp for the night, Tails went for a walk. Amy Rose. Why hadn't he noticed that the named seemed so...perfect for her. She was perfect, too. He sighed. Ekyt strolled up beside him. "You were right back there." Tails just stared. "Didja ever have a girlfriend, Ekyt?" Ekyt looked at Tails, then grinned. "No, I've been a lone wolf my whole life." He looked the young fox directly in his eyes. "This is about Amy. Isn't it?" he asked gently. "Yeah." Said Tails before he could stop himself. Something about the way he asked made Tails trust him. Ekyt spoke again. "The last contact I had with a girl, she arrested me. The most beautiful echidna I ever saw. Don't worry, we'll rescue them Tails." Ekyt walked

away, his coat billowing behind him as he chuckled to himself. "Ah, love." He whispered.

The Epic issue # 5

The Big Conflict!

5 - The next guardian: Two worlds collide

The Next Guardian issue #5

After a restless night, the group set out. Tails hovered above, while Sonic and Shadow forged a path. Ekyt and Knuckles took the rear. They encountered some traps the closer they came to Robotnik's base. Knuckles' foot got caught in a snare trap. Ekyt deftly climbed the tree and threw his stick at the rope, which splintered. Knuckles hit the dirt hard on his side. Ekyt got caught in a net, but Sonic reduced that to pieces of twine with his patented spin dash. Shadow would have fallen into a pit of spikes had it not been for Tails catching him and Knuckles gliding into him. At last, they reached the base.

A group of SWATbots attacked. "Tails, pull down that pipe. Stop up their sensors. Then bug-out." Sonic shouted instructions to his dual-tailed buddy. Ekyt yelled "Go on." Everyone went on.

On my own, thought Ekyt. He took out two SWATbots. Then one, as it was going down, hit him with a hard elbow, which, in turn, sent him into the wall. He twisted his ankle as he bounded off the wall. The SWATbots dove on...

Meanwhile, the rest of the group raced to Robotnik's room. "Okay `Butnik, it's all over for you. Let them go." Robotnik turned around and cackled. "Fools. Look below you." The group gasped. A chaos emerald. Strapped to it was a detonator. "That's right, rodents. A bomb. It reads two minutes. So you have a choice, don't you. Go after me..." he pointed... or save your friends. It's up to you." He laughed again as he sped off in his hovercraft.

The choice was easy. Until they realized they had 30 seconds left. Suddenly, just before Robotnik left, a blur sped by. He tossed 50 rings and a chaos emerald to Sonic and Knuckles. After hesitation, he tossed an emerald to Shadow. It was Ekyt. Or, more accurately, him in a mega form. All three jumped on Robotnik, but he got away. The bomb had ten seconds left. "Shadow, it's up to you," Ekyt said gravely. Shadow nodded and grabbed his emerald. "Chaos Control!" he bellowed, and formed a protective blue shield around them.

Next Issue: Does everyone Survive? Keep on reading.

6 - Next Guardian Two worlds Collide Part 2

The Next Guardian

Issue # 6

PART 1

“Everyone okay?” Shadow asked. Like he cared. He only cared about Hope. She had been close, she was fine. Everyone was.

Back in Knothole

“And lastly, we wish to knight Sir Ekyt. For your services to the kingdom, I knight you.” King Elias knighted him with the sword of Acorns. The echidna high command was there. Locke spoke up. “We wish to make an announcement. Knuckles, it is time. You may proceed.” Knuckles began: “First of all, I present Ekyt this ring. It is forged from seven chaos emeralds and 50 power rings. It is more than enough to herald the return of your mega side. Second, the echidna high command has informed me that, through dimensional travel, the Floating Island will remain in this dimension.” A cheer rose up.

After the ceremony, they went to the people they wanted to rescue. “You're cute,” Amy told Tails. Tails blushed. The Royal Family talked to Sonic, and he held Sally close. Knuckles and Julie-Su cuddled under a tree. Shadow and Hope went for a walk to sort out the past. That left Ekyt. He walked to Mount Fate and stood on it.

He looked a sight in his black coat billowing behind him, his dark hazel eyes staring ahead with an unmatched intensity. Then they softened. He was fooling no one. Everyone had someone to tend to their wounds. Except him. He stood alone, only duty and honor to comfort him. He heard footsteps and he casually reached for his throwing knives on his belt. He spun to face his attacker.

It was Linda-Su

His knives clattered to the ground. She spoke with urgency. “Oh my God, Ekyt. Are you okay?” “I'm...fine.” The question had took him by surprise. She embraced him and kissed him on the cheek. She felt his shoulder. His side. Saw his limp. “Dear God. These aren't even bandaged.” She had seen a

lot of wounds in two years of police work, but these were bad. He didn't even seem to notice. Or care. Whatever. She was here to deal with it. "Give me that shirt." He looked at her, eyes wide. "Hurry up. These wounds need to be taken care of." He shrugged off the shirt and handed it to her. She tied it in such a way that it covered his side and shoulder. "Thank you."

Sonic saw all this. He smiled when she kissed him. His expression was priceless. His eyes were as big as dinner plates. "Way to go, kid. You deserve it. Mmmph!"

Sonic was dragged away.

Next Issue: Part two of Two Worlds Collide.

Who kidnapped Sonic?

7 - The Next Guardian Issue 7 Two worlds collide part

The Next Guardian issue # 7

Archimedes and Knuckles were working together on some mysterious ancient echidna history when Ekyt ran in. His hair was tassled and out of place, hand on his side from running the long distance from Knothole to the former Floating Island. He gasped out a few words as Knuckles and Archimedes ran to his side.

“Wait, slow down, what?” Archimedes asked. “Sonic (huff-puff) kidnapped. “I heard that,” said Knuckles. “Who did it?” “Don't know, just heard, (Huff-Puff) from King Elias. This note...” He tried to catch his breath as Knuckles and Archimedes read it.:

To the Guardians:

Echidnapolis is doomed unless you surrender the chaos emeralds.

As for Sonic, well, you have one day to rescue him.

Fools, trying to deal with me. This riddle is the only clue to my identity. Figure it out,

If you can:

Speed meets power,

Best of the best,

No mind of my own,

No contest

Me vs. you,

The one and only,

Or so you may think,

Figured it out? We've met before.

"Well, this rules out you, me, Archimedes, Sally, the freedom fighters. That leaves only Shadow in this universe." Ekyt shook his head at Knuckles offer. No, Shadow wouldn't bother. All indications of his past behavior tells us that he's in business for himself. Besides, he has a mind of his own. There is really only one person left. And they are out of this universe. Me."

"Wait, are you talking about that cheap knockoff, screwed up version of you? What does he stand to gain?" Knuckles inquired. "Revenge. Remember, you and Sonic helped clear my name. So, Knux, I know you can handle yourself, but if I know me, then I'd go after you, too." Knuckles narrowed his eyes. "Are you suggesting that you do this alone. Because, frankly, you are an excellent fighter, but that parallel universe is an upside down world. You can have all the ethics and morals in the world, but that doesn't mean you counterpart will."

"He's right," said Archimedes, but his voice was not the only one. Linda and Julie-Su came in. Both Ekyt and Knuckles blushed. The two female Echidnas smiled and walked deeper into the chaos chamber. "No way you guys are gonna go this alone. It's going to have to be just us." Both Knuckles and Ekyt began to protest, but when they set out, along with Archimedes, they weren't alone.

As they were walking toward the cosmic interstate, a sai (Three- pronged martial arts weapon) hit a tree as the group ducked. There was a note attached. The group took a moment to recover. Ekyt walked over and untied the note:

So, you figured it out, did you.

Meet me at olive grove in *my* universe.

We'll settle this the only way I know:

Duel

See you there, if you want to save your home,

And Sonic.

Ekyt

“Olive Grove? But that's were. Oh man.” Knuckles shook his head as Linda-Su finished his sentence. “That's where the gravest of challenges are settled. There is a one on one duel, no weapons duel. There is an impartial judge designated by the chaos emerald. But it's incredibly dangerous.” “Well, it's settled then.” Ekyt rose fast, kicking up a cloud of dust near the entrance. “I'm not putting any else in danger. I want you all to stay here.” “You're whacked if you think that's gonna happen,” said Knuckles. “Yeah,” said Linda-Su, “Besides, It's more dangerous to leave us all unprotected, don't you think?” Ekyt froze. He sighed. “You're right. On all counts. Let's just get to the Olive Grove. BUT BE CAREFUL.” He turned and walked, a worried expression on his young face. He listened intently as the rules were explained by Archimedes. He soaked in the landscape. He took it all in. Knuckles, who was leading the group, stopped. He moved aside some thick leaves as he said “Here it is. The Olive Grove.”

Next Issue: Two Worlds Collide Part 3: The Duel

8 - The next guardian issue eight: the fallout plus: w

The Next Guardian Issue 8: Two worlds Collide pt. 4

(Writer's Note: Bold-face **Ekyt** is evil Ekyt. *Italics Ekyt* is the good Ekyt.

The two Ekyt's stared at each other. *Ekyt* was dressed only in the traditional deuling garments, black, loose pants. **Ekyt** was dressed in white pants of the same make. They circled each other menacingly.

"This is the end for you !" *"We'll see, you dime-store imitation. I'm gonna prove to you and your army of clones that there ain't nothing like the real thing!"* **"Don't be too sure. Take a look..."** *Ekyt* looked. There was Sonic. He was obviously in pain. He was bound and gagged. The evil Knuckles stood over him with a whip. **"You see, every time you feel pain, so will he!"** *"Who is the judge? Actually, according to the age-old rules the apply in every dimension. So, I choose...Athair!"* The whole group was stunned. *"Who better to be impartial?"*

"Do you really think this wrinkled, used up old echidna can help you?" *"I don't expect him to. He just has to be fair."* Now let's go." *Ekyt* snarled the last bit.

The rest of the group seemed shocked at his intensity. But that disappeared as the duel began. At first, both combatants were testing each other. They seemed to be matched, move for move.

A punch. A kick. **Ekyt** gained the advantage as Sonic moaned in pain. *Ekyt* caught his outstretched arm and threw him. **Ekyt** landed hard on his back. *Ekyt* was on him instantly. He threw punches, hard and fast. He threw a kick, aimed high at the head, but his attack was blocked. **Ekyt** swept his valiant counterpart's leg and began to twist on his bad ankle. Wrenched his wounded shoulder. Punched his injured side.

The group watched on. He wouldn't quit. The punishment he was taking to save a world that he was not even born in to. To save someone who was not related.

Ekyt felt the pain, but tried not to show it. A guardian never shows weakness. He never quit. Not with a world at stake, he didn't. He threw his weight forward and launched his counterpart into the vines that encircled them. Athair floated above them, watching. *Ekyt* threw a punch that echoed. But it took a lot out of him.

Ekyt grinned. He had his adversary on the ropes. He hit him as hard as he could. But he never gave up.

The duel continued. Both combatants had threw all they had. The group looked at *Ekyt*. He was banged

up. A black eye. Bruised rib for sure. Athair had stopped the duel. Why>

The whetted echidna spoke: I award this duel to *Ekyt*." As the bad guys whined, Athair gave his explanation. "You fought for the right reasons. Selfless reasons. For others." **Ekyt** snuck up and tried to attack Athair, but *Ekyt* stopped with a kick. "You have merely proven my point. Release the hedgehog and his friends." The guards did as they were told.

Ekyt put on his red shirt and leaned heavily on a stick to walk. His evil double had messed him up, but good. He had won. "You did it!" Linda-Su exclaimed. "Thank you. You have done us all a great service." Archimedes shook his hand.

But the harmony was broken as a chaos bomb was launched into their midst. They all dove for cover, except for the wounded *Ekyt*. He covered Sonic as best he could. His world went black.

Next Issue: Will *Ekyt* and Sonic Be okay

Plus: What it takes to be a guardian

9 - The Next Guardian Issue 9: The fallout plus Linda

The Next Guardian Issue number 9

Sonic woke, thick smoke all around. The olive grove was burning. The human. Human. Ekyt. That was it. Man, he had to move. He put Ekyt into a fireman carry and juiced toward Knothole. The whole group was waiting. He dropped Ekyt off in the infirmary. After Doctor Quack assured him he was okay, he sped off to the royal palace.

Ekyt awoke a short time later. He ached, both physically and mentally. He moved his head and looked into Doctor Quack's flashlight. He blinked at the light. Doctor Quack said something to what sounded like Rotor. C'mon eyes, focus. There. He saw a group of concerned faces. He went to get up, but was pushed gently back down. "Wha happen?" he slurred.

"Oh, you're okay. Thank God. We were worried." The voice of King Elias greeted his slightly-singed ears. As he moved to bow, he was again pushed back. "He's okay. Whew." Ekyt moved and pushed past the restraint. "Could you give me a moment, sire? I want to get back into my own clothes." He had noticed the hospital gown and wanted to get rid of it. "Of course." Elias smiled and moved. Ekyt put on his trademark red shirt, along with black pants. He felt under the bed for his sneakers, black and white striped things (writer's note: Think original Addidas style, for lack of a better reference). He found them okay, a little muddy though. Ah, that's better.

He walked out through the curtain. The freedom fighters all breathed a sigh of relief. "How are you feeling," asked Tails. "I'm all right." He was still bruised good though. "How's Sonic?" he asked.

"Unharmred. Thanks to you. He's the one who brought you here." Ekyt raised his eyebrows comically. "Ahhhh, that explains why I'm not pushing up daisies in that goofy parallel universe." The group chuckled, until Ekyt rose. He realized two of the group was missing.

Mount Fate. Boy, this has caused a lot of lore. How much was true? Whenever Knuckles had instructed him in combat, he took the Zoot Shoot (remember the zoot shoot?). Ekyt opened the hole and dove in.

He landed on his good side, rolled and emerged in a combat position. Knuckles came gliding over from a shadowy corner as Ekyt hit the dirt. Then Shadow plowed into him.

"Oof!" Knuckles chewed out Shadow. "You nutty black hedgehog, the kid's injured. What're you thinking?" Shadow favored Knuckles with a look. "Me? You nearly took his head off." "Hey, guys? I'm fine, thanks. Where's Linda?" Knuckles walked over this time. "She's off in the new emerald chamber, doing some target shooting. She was worried sick, man. You better go tell her you're all right.

AND NOW, THE LONG-AWAITED LINDA-SU SOLO!!!

Linda-Su took aim and fired. She missed. No wonder. Her hands were shaking. She was only kidding herself to keep trying to keep things normal. With Ekyt d...

A figure in a long, black coat was suddenly beside her. "Miss me?" He asked with a grin. She hugged Ekyt. "Thank God you're okay. I was so... I mean...Um." "Worried?" Ekyt said teasingly. "Well, yeah," she said as she blushed. He kissed her on the cheek. He could sense her surprise. "I'd better go." The courage Ekyt felt was gone quickly. He turned and walked away. Linda-Su started after him, but stopped. The kid had risked his life countless times in the past few hours. But he couldn't face her yet.

She decided to see what Knuckles had on file on this kid. There had to be something to tell about his past. He never sat and talked, never just chilled like a normal kid. He was always on the move. Something was different. Maybe that's why she was so intrigued...

"His bio? Sure." Knuckles rummaged in a cabinet full of papers and handed her a slim portfolio. "Thanks Knux," she said and waved.

His Bio read:

Name: Ekyt

Species: Humans

Hair: dark brown

Eyes: hazel

Height: 5'8

Weight: 125 lbs.

Likes: martial arts, justice, making weapons

Dislikes: tyranny, oppression, bullying

Other: A 17-year-old human. He is currently training to be a guardian of the chaos emeralds, under current guardian Knuckles. Has a history of being bullied.

She read the last line twice. That explained it. He was shy because of lack of contact. He was willing to

risk his life, but not his feelings or his heart. She slid the information back into the portfolio. What could she do? Had he been betrayed too often? Hmmm?

A little mystery always made a guy more interesting. She'd have to make sure he was okay. Where was he this time of day. She smacked herself in the forehead. Duh! Studying or training on Mt. Fate.

She snuck up the mountain. He was somewhere else, but he left a checklist. It read:

What it Takes to be a guardian:

By Locke and Archimedes

Extensive physical strength training.

Endurance

Willingness to learn

Thorough knowledge of echidna history

approved by Echidna high command

So, he throws himself into his studies. An escape? She'd find out.

Next issue: Number 10! Linda-Su Bio, and the main event: Flesh and Bone vs. Metal and Stone.

When robo-robotnik comes to town, it's up to our heroes to put him down!

Linda-Su Solo part 2

10 - The Next Guardian: The Epic tenth issue!

Next Guardian: The big issue: # 10

Flesh and Bone vs. Metal and Stone part 1

Ekyt spent his time making weapons, training others, and he trained himself. Nicole, Sally's computer never lied. Mobius was about to be rocked by an attack of robots. An intercepted transmission from Robo-Robotnik, who had united with this world's Robotnik, had been planning a major offensive. They had twenty-four hours to prepare.

Knuckles moved up beside him while he was working with Tails and Amy Rose. "Well, kid, you're getting good at this. But, the echidna high command has summoned us. Linda and Julie can take over for now. It's urgent. The women kept training the younger kids. Knuckles and Ekyt walked to an especially thick part of the Forrest. In it's green bosom it held Echidna-kind's most revered of place: The Grand Conservatory, which connected to Knuckles home, Haven.

Knuckles ran his hands over a series of ancient carvings in the stonewall before a ramp fell to grant them access. They walked down. Dusty trucks and now-obsolete technology greeted them. Then the echidna high command came into view.

Knuckles got down on one knee. Ekyt followed suit and raised his head to look at the Echidna wise men. Locke, the leader, spoke.

"Now, more than ever, our world, as well as others is in grave danger. Knuckles, I believe it is largely up to you and your protégé' to protect all of Echidna kind as well as the freedom fighters in Knothole. And, should we all survive a major assault, we need both of you to retrieve a relic of Mobius' past, belonging to the royal family. It is the Book of Acorns. In it's sacred pages are words that are critical to restore former-King Acorn to full health. Do you accept the quest after this attack?"

"Yes...Dad." Said Knuckles "Yes." Ekyt said. "I hope you have recovered from any wounds you suffered from your kidnapping." The old echidna smiled. "Yes, I have. Thank you. And Archimedes has informed me of your duel. Excellent work." The young man blushed at the compliment. "Knuckles, my son, I leave the fate of the echidna future in your capable hands. You may go." Knuckles and Ekyt rose and left.

"How'd it go, boys?" Julie-Su and Linda-Su wanted to know. "We've got to repel this attack. If we all survive, Knuckles and I have a mission to recover the Book of Acorns." "Oh, that reminds me, Tails and Amy want to show you what we taught them. Go ahead, guys." Tails and Amy ran up and flipped the

older two onto their backs and had their arms trapped in one motion. "Impressive! Good work." "Wait, there's more. Amy. "Piko-Piko." She said simply. Knuckles and Ekyt looked at each other. Amy's mallet stopped just short of their heads. "Good work. Keep it up."

Knuckles walked away with Julie-Su, to make contingency plans. Ekyt turned toward the others. "I have something for each of you. For you, Amy, I made this." He held up a diamond hammer with a gold handle. "I had some help." He slid a glance at Linda-Su. "For you, Tails, I have this staff. It was made from your old house, before Robotnik. It was given to me by Sonic, who got it from your parents." The kids left, hand in hand, marveling at their new toys.

Ekyt smiled grimly at their satisfaction. "They're gonna need those. Oh, before I forget, this is for you." He handed her a crossbow, painted deep pink to match her skin tone. "It's... so beautiful. Thank you!" He looked at the ground. Linda-Su remembered what was in his bio. Maybe it was time for confessions.

"Listen, Ekyt, I need you to know, I've seen your bio, and I want to tell you, there's no reason to be shy around me. I'm not gonna bully you. I want to be there for you." The young man blushed nervously and mumbled. "It's gonna take some time...I do like you...just never...relationship." He looked up. Then lowered his eyes quickly. "Sorry. Just a little nervous. Most girls just, well, think of me as a weak link, small, too smart for my own good. You're the first girl to treat me like I belonged. I can't thank you enough." "S'okay." She smiled at the clearly embarrassed human. "We gotta get back to work." She said.

They went back to work. The storm was coming in twelve hours and counting.

LINDA-SU SOLO STORY # 2

"Thanks Knux." He had Linda-Su's bio. This girl wasn't like the others. He had to know more.

Name: Linda-SU

Species: Echidna

Skin: Deep Pink

Eyes: Green

Likes: Target Shooting, Justice

Dislikes: Criminals, disorder

Other: Has been a police officer on Echidapolis for two years. She is 15 years old.

“Hmm. Nothing like a tad of mystery to add to my curiosity. It's probably me.” Ekyt had been talking out loud. He heard footsteps. They were lighter, belonging to a female. He bolted for the other door silently.

Linda-Su walked in. She was exhausted. The kid's self defense class was worthwhile, but exhausting. She had been forward with Ekyt, and she saw a glimmer of hope of him getting some self-confidence back. She saw her name on the outside of the portfolio on the desk.

Ekyt's fingerprints were all over it (Remember, Ekyt was arrested for a crime he didn't commit, and he was arrested by Linda-Su.) She decided to shoot some targets before bed. She was about to do that, when she spotted a package on her bunk. She opened it and a projectile weapon rolled out. She read the note:

Please take care of yourself,

Enclosed is a human-made gun.

I hope it serves you well in combat, as we

Need your expertise.

I really need to thank you for helping me.

Ekyt

“Huh!” she said. Well, time to take this baby for a test run. She moved to her shooting area in the new chaos chamber. The weapon was long and bulky. She took aim at a destroyed SWATbot. THUDDDWUSHHH! A projectile blew the SWATbot into a pile of nuts and bolts.

“This'll come in handy. Thanks kid.” She hit the sack. In ten hours, the fate of the world as she knew it would be decided, for better or worse.

Next issue: Flesh and Bone vs. Metal and Stone Part 2

11 - The Next Guardian issue 11 Flesh and Bone vs. Meta

Next Guardian: Issue Eleven

Flesh and Bone vs. Metal and Stone pt. 2

Linda-Su Solo.

And so, the dark hour came to pass. The intense hatred only added to the fire this battle was going to set on Knothole Village. Nobody joked. Nobody laughed. Nobody cried. The pure, raw emotion could not be expressed. At the center of this were the leaders of the rebellion. Sonic, Princess Sally, Knuckles, Tails, and Ekyt.

Doors were barred as the innocents took cover. The brave soldiers of the rebellion took their position.

Sonic checked his watch. "10 minutes." He said gravely. They all nodded. Ekyt stood at the front. His black coat billowed like flag in the wind. His eyes surveyed the hill from which the robots would attack. He held no weapon. He had given them all to the younger generation to balance the power. Though he was only seventeen, he felt older. A war had that effect on a person. Still, he held his mystery in place.

Then they came forth. The metal machines of doom. Both sides charged. Sonic had taken out a series of robots before he was caught with a magnetic blast that temporarily paralyzed him. Knuckles took a running start and was working along side Amy and Tails. All three were hit another paralyzing blast. Larry Lynx (Remember him-super jinx?) dove in front of Sally to stop a blast and he too was frozen.

It is said that all the dead do not belong to one side on a battlefield. Never was that more true than on this fateful day. The frozen members of Knothole were just starting to stir when the order came. A voice with regal bearing rang out. "Fall Back! Fall back!" Everyone struggled to comply, some carrying "frozen" friends with them.

As the robots stormed Knothole, a decision was reached. Only the elite would go back on the battlefield. Ekyt, Sonic, Knuckles, Tails, and Shadow would form a last line of defense while the others escaped. Good-byes were made.

They ran back out, and just aimed to do damage. They played no defense. They had nothing left to lose. Ekyt remembered his ring. If what Locke said was true...

He gripped the ring hard and thought. Power coursed through his veins. He had only felt this powerful once before. It was time for his mega-form to rear it's head.

End of Part 2

Linda-Su's solo

Boyfriend? Could that describe her feelings? Maybe. All she knew was a loved one was about to make the ultimate sacrifice for the good of the whole. She felt guilty immediately for thinking this way. This battle was not a foregone conclusion. He was tough, he would be fine. Things would be normal.

She shook her head. "We'll all be fine." She said to herself sternly. Was she really feeling guilty because she hadn't fallen in the line of duty? That wasn't right. Was it? Wait, what about that weapon. The projectile- thingy. She ran to get it. She needed a good vantage point... She could think of none better than Mount Fate...

12 - The Next Guardian chapter 12: Flesh and Bone vs. M

The Next Guardian issue 12

Flesh and Bone vs. Metal and Stone part 3

Ekyt felt the power he needed. There were hundreds of robots, and only five of them. He spied a lone figure on Mount Fate. The figure carried a huge weapon. It fired twice into the midst of the robots. More than half were destroyed.

Thanks Ekyt thought silently as he charged forward, dodging and zig-zagging. A flying kick took off a SWATbot's head. He used that as a springboard between two bots, who fired on each other a second too late as he jumped. He took their weapons. He fired a continuous stream into the remaining bots.

It was over. Blood had been shed on both sides. Ekyt himself had hurt his leg again, plus a collarbone was popping out. He felt drained. He supposed that was a mixture of the battle and the chaos energy leaving him.

"So, you think you've won? Think again." It was Robo-Robotnik. Behind him stood a huge stone creature. The ground shook as it removed the rest of its body from the earth. The group decided without talking to retreat. "Maybe Nicole and Sally could help us out. It's worth a shot." Sonic said. The group nodded as one.

"Nicole, please display all known info on this stone creature." *"Yes, Princess. The stone creature is called a Golem. Its weakness is fire. According to my theory, its magnetic components within the rock are susceptible, once heated, to extreme force. Known forces: Bunny Rabbot, Knuckles the Echidna. That is all."*

"Thanks Nicole." Sally turned to the assembled freedom fighters. "Any ideas?" Rotor offered to make a flame-shooting weapon, but said it would take days. "Dulcy!" said Ekyt. Sonic whistled. Minutes later, a large dragon poked its head in the window. "You called, True Blue?" she asked sweetly. "We need you to light a fire under our resistance. Can you heat up that big rock? "Naturally." She turned to go off, but was held up. Wait! Take Knux and Bunny with you. And you need a distraction..." "I'll do it." Ekyt had spoken up. He picked up his staff and threw on his coat.

A distraction, huh? It was going to have to be a heck of a distraction. He ran towards the ponderous monster, and threw his staff like a javelin. Next, he took a power ring he had concealed nearby, and used it for speed. He raced around the golem's fists. Until it got smart. It stuck out a gigantic foot and tripped Ekyt. Ekyt would be smashed.

"Heads up, Sugah!" Bunnie was suddenly there, along with Knuckles. Dulcy was shooting flames at the

huge stone creature. Until she was hit. But the thing was glowing hot. "Knux! Take this." He tossed his ring to Knuckles. Knuckles glowed a vicious red until he turned to a glowing pink color. Hyper Knuckles and Bunny should do it.

Using his staff he had retrieved, he sprung off it like a pole-vaulter and kicked the golem in the face, then covered it's eyes. It thrashed around, trying to reach what was blocking it's sight. Knuckles and Bunny ran forward and punched. The creature toppled, with Ekyt about to be crushed...

The Next Guardian: Issue 13

Flesh and Bone vs. Metal and Stone part 4

gone and she was alone.

End

“Well, good luck to you. May Steppenwolf guide you swiftly to your destination and back safely.” This was a blessing from the Echidna high council. They had said their goodbyes in Knothole. They left with wishes of a safe and quick return. They decided to start their search at the very bowels of society. They would look in the chaos caverns.

The chaos caverns were long abandoned. The first echidna settlers had harvested the chaos emeralds here in hopes of scientific progress. Legend has it that it is guarded by booby traps as well as a beast at the end of the caverns.

End

Is it true? Find out in Issue 14: History of Acorns, part 2

14 - The Next Guardian Issue 14: The history of Acorns

The Next Guardian Issue 14

The History of Acorns part 2

Plus a Shadow solo

The caverns were dark, now that the glow from the chaos emeralds were gone. Knuckles held the torch, while Ekyt searched. They walked on silently. Knuckles looked over, seeing the young man with a serious look on his face. That was one reason he was going to make a great guardian someday.

With his long black coat swishing and his hazel eyes glowing like a cats, Ekyt held out his arm. Knuckles stopped as Ekyt pointed upward. A crack of light was shining through. Ekyt held the torch as Knuckles clambered up the wall and looked through. Dragons. Vesuivious. He hopped down.

“A buncha dragons up there. We should get moving. The last thing we need is a confrontation with a bunch of fire-breathing, scaly- off!” Knuckles never finished the though as he hit the dirt, as did Ekyt. Thousands of arrows were flying through the air. One hit Ekyt in the arm. He plucked it out without a word and combat crawled forward. The torch snuffed out for a moment, and when it did, Ekyt hit a wall. Head-first. “Ow. That freakin' rock.” Knuckles tried not to laugh.

He took the torch and struck it against a wooden beam, creating enough of a spark to ignite the torch. He moved forward, until Ekyt seized one of his dreadlocks. “What the...?!” Knuckles said as Ekyt pointed again, down this time.

Knuckles had almost stepped off a cliff. “There's no way across for a human. Knux, you glide across, I've got an idea. Knuckles did, trusting his protégé'.

Knuckles waited at the other end. A large poof of wind nearly knocked him over. “Thanks, Dulcy.” Said Ekyt. “Anyone ever tell you ya know how to make an entrance, kid?” “No. Well, maybe Linda, but no one else. Thanks for the compliment.”

They walked along until they saw the exit. Unfortunatley, the thing guarding the exit also saw them...

End

Shadow sat in the hut he shared with Hope. She was out, playing with Amy Rose and Tails. Shadow had clocked Tails by mistake when he yelled "TAG" and hit Hope. He apologized, but laughed all the way home.

He grinned. That subsided quickly, as he thought of that strange human in that weird coat. He thought that all humans were scum. But this one was different. He made an effort to help Shadow. A friend that was a human. Except for Maria and Hope, no human had ever treated him well.

Shadow stood up and walked to the former Floating Island. He would seek out the temporary guardians, the Chaotix, to see if they could tell him anything about this human.

"Nutin'." Said Vector. "He looks soooooo cool." Said Charmy. But Espio knew something. "I trained with him. We exchanged knowledge of martial arts. I believe he talks with Linda-Su. She seems to know him pretty well." Shadow zoomed off.

Linda-Su sat by herself in her study. The hours were longer, the nights nearly unbearable because of fear. Two champions were off on a perilous quest with no contact. She missed Ekyt. She thought about him quite often these days. She wondered if he thought about her?

Shadow entered without knocking. Linda-Su, startled by his presence, took a moment to calm down. "Hi Shadow." She said. "Linda-Su, I need to ask you something. What do you know about that strange human's past?" Linda thought. Who did he mean. Then it hit her. "All I know is that he knows martial arts. And that he was bullied a lot." Shadow nodded. "Thanks." He turned and left.

Linda-Su watched him go. "Huh!" she said. I wonder what he wanted that for? She thought. Oh well. A storm was going on outside. She curled up with a book, but fell asleep quickly.

Shadow mulled over what he knew. There was nothing that accounted for the human's friendliness. Then it hit him.

End of Part 1

What does Shadow know?

The history of Acorns part 3 is up next.

Any questions about the story, leave a comment and I will answer on your profile.

15 - The Next Guardian 15: The history of Acorns part 3

The Next Guardian Issue 15

The history of Acorns part 3

Plus Shadow Solo

The thing was massive. It's was that of a dragon. It had no arms or legs, but it still looked evil nonetheless. Knuckles suddenly fell to the ground, groaning. "No, no, not again. P-please." Ekyt soon felt the plight. This monster made them relieve their worst moments. Ekyt remembered his Grandfather's death. Remembered being bullied. Remembered being pushed down the stairs at school, while a bully walked away. The memories were as painful as any attack.

Then he remembered being arrested. Linda-Su. The thoughts shattered. Ekyt struggled to his feet. "Knux! Think of Julie-Su!" Knuckles soon was on his feet again. They both dodged behind the thing, avoiding it's eyes. With two hits, they sent the creature crashing down on the rocks on the cliff. They both raced toward the end of the tunnel.

Arctic cold filled the air. Ekyt tossed Knuckles a leather jacket before asking "Where are we?" Knuckles said, through chattering teeth, "The polar end of Mobius, by the feel of things." He said sarcastically. They trudged on through the snow. It was an hour before they met any opposition. In the form of roboticized walruses.

One jumped on Knuckles. He bent his knees and sent the thing sailing. Ekyt followed with a kick, his foot sinking deep into it's blubber. Another was going after the exhausted echidna. Ekyt followed with a series of kicks. His feet never touched the ground, he just bounced off the blubber again and again.

But Ekyt could continue for so long. Soon the walruses just piled on. They forcefully carried the tired creatures back to the base, deep inside the arctic tundra.

Handcuffed in a cage, they were greeted by a familiar, though unwelcome sight: Robotnik. "Well, well, well," he said "Two of the creatures who forced me here. I think I'll roboticize this red dog first, then deal with this useless human. "Ya know pal, if I had a face like yours, I'd try to make up for it with some sort of a personality." (Credit to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles the movie." Robotnik hit the human in the jaw. He didn't flinch. Knuckles was led away.

Ekyt worked to hatch a plan. Knux would be a robot in seconds. There was only one option...

“Robotnik, wait...I...you win. Let the echidna go, and you'll have me.”

What happens next.

Shadow Solo

Shadow knew why this human seemed so...nice. They were both bullied. But, thanks to Sonic, he was spared his fate of becoming what he despised most: A bully. All this time he thought he hated humans, but he hated bullies. Of any kind.

He went to Knothole. On the way, he saw Geoffrey Saint John pushing around Tails. Shadow walked over and caught the end of the exchange.

“No way, Saint John, Sonic is better.”

“No way, lad. I'm the better hero. Sonic isn't even fit to lick my boots.”

“Sonic is a better hero and friend that you could ever hope to be!”

“Why, ya little pest. I'll... Gahhh!”

Shadow held Geoffrey. He simply cold-cocked him.

He still hated humans, but he decided not to let anyone take advantage of him or anyone else.

16 - The Next Guardian Issue # 16 The history of Acorns

The Next Guardian Issue # 16

History of Acorns part 4

Plus Linda-Su Solo

“Well, know this is a surprise. Fine. Snively!” “Yes, oh round one?” Snively answered meekly. “Take the echidna to the middle of the tundra and leave him. I'll handle this little spitfire.” “As you wish, my rotund master.” He led the shackled Knuckles out the door.

Robotnik turned back to Ekyt. “Well, boy. You've got guts. No brains, but guts. So tell me. Why are you here?” Ekyt stared ahead, as if he could see through Robotnik. “So, the silent treatment. Swatbot unit 14789-3, bring me the torture devices. Aw crap, thought Ekyt. Hope Knux is okay.

Knuckles was released in the middle of the tundra. He turned to Snively. “Hey, scuzzbucket!” Snively turned. BRACK! Knuckles nailed him and quickly stole the key for the handcuffs. He had to rescue that kid. He had to explain that to the swatbots that were in his way.

“Tell me!” Whap-Shu! The whip cracked down on Ekyt's bare back again and again. His shirt was used to gag him. It didn't matter. It was buying Knuckled time. “Not talking yet? We'll see if we can change that.” Robotnik held in his hand a hypodermic needle. “Know what's in here? A special blend from the tundra landscape. If I inject you with this, part of your blood freezes. Temporarily, of course. I want you to be of use to me as a robot slave. This is very painful. Do you want to find out how painful. Answer me!” he slapped the seventeen year old again.

Ekyt struggled to a vertical base, his lip bleeding, his eye black. Then Robotnik spied the gash the arrow left on his arm. He jabbed the needle violently into it. Ekyt gritted his teeth, though a hiss escaped. Robotnik chuckled at the human's pain. “Now, will you talk?”

Ekyt stood again, even grinned. “You know what's really pathetic? You can't beat me without me being tied up. Fair fighting never was your specialty. Was it? Always hiding behind some robot and running away when you get be...” Ekyt doubled over in pain. Robotnik stood over him and laughed.

Knuckles charged into the room and nailed Robotnik in the chin. He helped his protégé up. “C'mon, we gotta get outta here!” Knuckles urged the kid on. He struggled to his feet and they made a break for it. “Knux...Gimme...ring” Ekyt choked out. Knuckles handed him a gold ring. Ekyt put it on his arm.

He felt a warm sensation. His arm was healing.

Robotnik was up. He hit a self-destruct button. “Run for it if you can, slime!” he yelled, as he zipped

away in his hovercraft.

Knuckles started to run, but Ekyt held back. He caught up, holding something bound inside his shirt. "What've you got?" Ekyt held up a golden book with an Acorn on it. "The book of Acorns! How did you get it?" "Power rings have the ability to find other magical sources. This was hidden under the floor. I stole it as Robotnik was escaping. Wanted to buy you some time." Knuckles looked in amazement, then shook his head. "Let's just get back to Knothole."

End

Linda-Su

Linda-Su threw a punch, which Sally dodged. Linda caught her leg and flipped her. Sonic zipped in.

"Sorry ladies, but you've got a visitor. Two actually." They followed Sonic to the royal palace. Knuckles knelt near King Elias. "...And that's how it happened, sire." The King turned toward Ekyt, who was massaging his back from the beating he had taken. His shirt was wound tight around his arm.

Sally raced in just behind Sonic. "You've got it! I don't believe it!" Sally took the book to her study. Ekyt smiled, then grimaced and returned to massaging his back. Linda walked in. She saw him in the corner of the room and ran to him.

"I...missed you." She finished lamely. He looked up into her eyes. Then his eyes scanned the room. Everyone was busy. He kissed her quickly. "I missed you, too." Then he blushed about 7 shades of red, and turned and walked quickly away.

Linda-Su stood there, unable to move for a while. He cared.

17 - The Next Guardian Issue 17

With the Book of Acorns retrieved, Ekyt and Knuckles, along with Sally and Sonic, return to the Echidna high command in Haven.

Kneeling before the esteemed echidnas, Knuckles and Ekyt told their story. The high command, with Locke, Archimedes, and others, nodded their approval. "Have either of you suffered injury?" asked Locke. Ekyt rubbed his arm without thinking about it. Knuckles answered: "I myself have a small case of frostbite, but he...well, maybe you better show them..."

Ekyt nodded and took off his shirt and turned his back to them. "Hmmm..." said Locke, "What caused this injury?" "Robotnik whipped me, sir." "And why did you let him?" "With all due respect, I didn't have much choice. I was handcuffed. My arm was wounded by an arrow in the caverns, then Robotnik gave me a dose of something that freezes blood. It was healed by a power ring." Locke thought for a moment, then conferred with the others. "Princess, may I speak with you?" "Certainly, Locke." She and Locke walked into the main area of the Grand Conservatory.

Ekyt looked over at Knuckles. A strange look marred the echidna's face. Ekyt really didn't know what to think.

"Are you sure Locke? I mean, has he really done anything wrong?" Locke stroked his beard. "Princess, we are governed by age-old laws on Echidnapolis. He has broken a rule. It may seem unfair, but... Ekyt. Please allow me to confer with you."

Ekyt got up and walked over to Locke. "What's happening, Sal?" Sally choked back tears. Locke returned and spared her the problem of telling Knuckles what happened. "By order of the echidna high council, Ekyt you are banished!"

Ekyt's normally white face turned even whiter, though he knew better that to argue. "Under what grounds?" he asked. "The misuse of a power ring to heal yourself. That is for emergency use only. Please turn in your ring." Ekyt did. He shook hands with Knuckles and the Princess and left.

They stared after him. "Locke, please, he was sent nearly to his death and simply wanted to complete his mission." "I'm sorry Princess, but this is out of my hands. The council has voted."

Ekyt walked alone. He was beyond grief. He needed to be alone.

So he walked for miles. There was nothing he could do. He just wandered aimless until he was off Echidnapolis and even past Knothole. He had stopped only to grab food and the few possessions he kept. He left a note for Linda-Su. As far as he was concerned, his days as a somebody were over. He now only wished to slip into the margins, as he had done before he came here.

With a last look at the island he sought to protect, and the people he cared for, he set off. Alone.

Next Issue: The backlash

18 - The Next Guardian Issue # 18 The Backlash

The Next Guardian Issue # 18 The Backlash

Linda-Su read the note. It had been years since she had cried. But now the tears flowed freely. She dropped the note and left. She headed for Mount Fate. She had to find Knuckles.

“Knux! What happened? Is there anything we can do?” The words just came forward. Knuckles just shook his head. “I tried to reason with the council, but they refused to relent.” He sighed. “Their laws are out of date and useless.” Linda stood there for a moment.

Just do what he did. Throw yourself into your work. She made a record number of arrests that day, though she barely noticed. Her heart ached. She hoped he was alright.

Ekyt trudged through the damp jungles of Mobius, machete making a narrow path. He did his best to make the path undetectable. He didn't want to drag anyone else into this.

He was still welcome in Knothole. But he couldn't. Not yet. It was just too painful. He decided to stop. It had been a full day before he stopped traveling. He had made good time. To nowhere. He was nobody. Just like he wanted. Just like before. He stuck his machete into a tree as he made a bed of leaves. He laid there, thinking.

He had to keep moving. To escape. Movement was life. He moved from his bed, and destroyed it with his machete. He sheathed it and moved forward.

After another day, he came to a clearing near a stream. The materials around were suitable for long-term shelter. He set to work. He took his time. There was no rush. He had nobody, nothing. But himself. Just like old times. But without the false optimism.

He trained by night. He didn't know why. Maybe the darkness hid him. Hid him from himself. By day, he slept or gathered food. Though slimmer, he was stronger. His body was tougher. Not that it mattered. He had only himself to impress. Or blame, depending on the mood.

Back in Knothole, the residents returned to their normal lives. They scarcely noticed the missing human. Well, almost everyone was normal. The small group he had worked with, Tails, Amy, Sally, Sonic, and even Shadow missed the human's help.

Sonic still had super speed, Sally was still a princess, Tails could still fly. But they were without the

comrade that had helped lead them to victory. A narrow victory. What would happen without him?

19 - The Next Guardian Issue 19 The backlash part 2

The Next Guardian Issue 19 The backlash part 2

Ekyt stared at the wooden roof of his hut. His home. He could never get used to thinking that. He was banned from his home. He pulled himself off the soft earthen floor and took a walk.

In a week he had fortified and camouflaged the place with rocks. Through his binoculars he could make out Knothole. Far away. He sighed and retreated behind his wall of rocks. He heard a noise in the bushes. He grabbed his throwing knives and threw one where the feet of his attacker should be.

Linda-Su stepped out of the brush. She wasted no words but ran over to him. She hugged him, then pushed him away. "No time. We need you. Knothole is under siege." "It's not my problem. Not anymore. There's nothing over there for me anymore." He grumbled. "Not even me?" she asked with a sad smile. "Not even-huh?" She smiled again. "I moved to Knothole in protest. So get your stuff. Knothole's in huge trouble."

Without another word he scrambled to get his stuff. He started toward Knothole. "Hold it. Why walk when you can ride?" She moved back the leaves to reveal a motorcycle. "My police car," she said by way of explanation.

He climbed on, and she climbed on behind him, and, after a moment's hesitation she wrapped her arms around him. She felt his tight abdominal muscles. She saw the back of his neck blush. But she just held tighter as he throttled it.

He dodged around trees and roots. Knothole was in site. So was its attacker. Robotnik. Of course.

"Stay here!" Ekyt said to Linda-Su. He shot the bike forward. Standing on the seat, he readied himself for the jump of a lifetime. It was too high. But that could change.

Robotnik heard THUNKTHUNKTHUNK! He looked over the side to see throwing knives in the side of his hovercraft. Clinging to one was that meddling human.

Ekyt looked up and saw Robotnik. He used the knives to climb up face to face. "Chill out, chubby." He said matter-of-factly. He reached into the hovercraft and pushed all the buttons on the dashboard. Robotnik lost control.

Ekyt free-fell the five feet and landed perfectly. "Curse You!" Robotnik shouted. Ekyt never stopped moving. The pent-up rage he had felt the last week came out all at once. With a roar, he charged robotnik's minions. He threw a series of Knives and then dove in the fray, punching, kicking, elbowing.

Sonic, who had been exhausted, had the break he needed. He jumped back in the middle. Between Ekyt's raw power and anger, and Sonic's speed and agility, they destroyed the robots that were plaguing Mobius.

The battle was won. The human had returned. But things weren't the same. He was being booed. "Now hold it, what are you mad at me for. I just helped save all of you!"

What are they mad about?

Find out next issue

The Big one- Issue Twenty!

20 - The Next Guardian issue 20 The perilous journey

The Next Guardian Issue # 20: The Perilous Journey

"You're mad at me because I don't fit in?" Ekyt said to the group. He was being bullied all over again. Linda-Su came over and put a supportive hand on his shoulder.

"Yeah, and we don't like it when ya hang out with that echidna bimbo." Yelled Geoffrey as the crowd gasped. Ekyt looked calmly over at Linda, who gave him a solemn nod.

He pounced and soon was all over Geoffrey. Geoffrey fired desperately and struck Ekyt with an arrow in the shoulder. Sonic held back Ekyt, while Bunnie grabbed Saint John.

"Alright, that's enough. I think he belongs here, but there is a way to find out. That is, if my brother is willing. Oh, and we need the echidna high commands permission." She went to find King Elias and her father while the crowd muttered excitedly.

"Geoff's a jerk, but take it easy. Oh, and thanks for the rest earlier." Sonic said. Ekyt just looked down and nodded. "Hey, man, you'll be alright. We need you. Just remember that." Sonic clapped him on the shoulder and walked away.

"Geez, don't you ever take care of your wounds?" Linda had a bandage. She wrapped it around his shoulder and shot an angry look at Geoffrey. "Linda..." he asked. "You don't think I...well...don't belong, do you. I mean..." She kissed him on the cheek. "Does that answer your question?" she asked softly. She saw him turn red again. He looked into her deep green eyes. For a second anyway. Then he looked at the ground again.

"Announcing, King Elias and the Esteemed Maximillian Acorn!" King Elias wheeled in his father. "I have spoken with the echidna leaders and they have agreed that Ekyt can serve penance as well as prove to you that he belongs." He paused and looked at the crowd. Daring someone to argue. When no one did, he continued.

"Sir Ekyt, please approach me." Ekyt did and kneeled before the king. "For your penance, for want of a better word, you must complete three tasks: Number One: You must steal a dragon's nose ring. Number two: you must travel to the parallel universe and defeat three enemies. You also must bring back proof. And Number Three: You must confront Robotnik and rescue at least 10 captives."

The crowd gasped. Ekyt still kneeled, but had turned whiter than usual as he asked his only question. "Sire," he began, "This will allow me to resume training as a guardian?" The king nodded. "On behalf of all the citizens of the Kingdom of Acorn, I wish you the best of luck."

The crowd seemed to feel sorry for Ekyt. The jeering stopped. No one threw garbage. Ekyt and Linda-Su left through the crowd. "Take my bike." She said when they were away from the crowd.

Ekyt paused. *It's now or never, knucklehead. Do it quick.*

"Linda...I...I'll miss you." Then he kissed her. It was an innocent kiss. Linda and Ekyt closed their eyes and savored the moment.

Seconds later it was over, and turned red and looked at the ground. "Wish me luck." Said Ekyt. He mounted the bike and was off.

"Good Luck." Said Linda-Su.

21 - The Next Guardian Issue #21

Ekyt set off. He really wasn't sure what to think. He just knew that he had to get *this* right.

First stop, Vesuvius. This would take stealth. Rather than the caverns, he took the direct root. Since the volcano was inactive, he could go in normally.

He threw the grappling hook. It took a couple of tries, but he hooked in on a piece of rock. He gave the rope and experimental tug, then began the climb. *Don't look down...*

He made it over the top and scrambled to an edge. The dragons were all asleep, minus two sentrys. He moved to a lower ledge. Then another. Finally he was close enough to...

The ledge crumbled and Ekyt fell. THUD! He coughed and dusted himself off. A fiery blast hit next to him. He was eye to eye with a dragon. "Easy, I'm just here for a nose ring. See?" he held out the paper from the king carefully. The dragon let loose a powerful roar. All the dragons came flying in, forming a circle. *Crap, this isn't going too good...*

"What's the commotion," asked Glint, the leader. "Human sir. I say we singe him." One dragon sentry snorted a flame just inches short of Ekyt. He didn't flinch. Glint circled the human. He took the paper from the guard and read it.

"A ring? Well, there are two ways to get a ring. The first one is to slay one of us in combat..." "No way! I'm not killing an innocent dragon." Ekyt said flatly. The old dragon smiled. "I can see you are pure of heart. So, the second way is your other option. You must retrieve a ring from the pond the appear at, and let us fashion it into a black singe ring." The old dragon leaned on his staff, awaiting an answer. "I'll do it." Ekyt said. "You have just an hour to retrieve it. Best of luck."

"Would you like a ride, Ekyt?" Dulcy asked. "No thanks Dulcy. I'm forbidden to ask for help." The dragon gave a sly grin. "*I asked you!*" she said. Ekyt raised an eyebrow, then returned the grin. "Sure. That I can do."

One short dragon ride later, Ekyt was at the pond. A ring should pop up...

With a "sploosh," a ring came forward. Ekyt grabbed the ring and hung from a tree limb. Until the branch got cut.

Ekyt let go and landed on the other side of the pond. He turned to face the assailant. It was more robots. "lovely." He snarled.

They fired as he dodged behind a rock. He had left Dulcy a distance back. He regretted that now. He leaned out of the rock and threw his staff. It knocked the guns from their metal hands. He sprang out from the rock and threw a vicious kick. He used that as propulsion to the other swatbot. He reached into

it's sensors and yanked out whatever he could reach. The SWATbot ran into the pond with its vision impaired. "Bedtime for bonzo!" exclaimed Ekyt as he turned to the other metal moron. It shot and struck his already injured shoulder. *Can't use the power ring this time.* He thought.

He ducked the second shot and rolled at the SWATbot's feet. He used his staff that he had retrieved and swept its legs before jamming the stick into the optical sensor. He used that to fling it into the pond, where it sparked. Ekyt took that as a warning and dove for cover. It exploded. Most of it missed but a flying bolt struck him just below the eye. He shook it off and headed back to Dulcy. Time for the ride back to the volcano.

Sonic and Knuckles

Sonic dove as Knuckles came gliding down. He used the momentum for a Sonic spin that caught the echidna.

"Good work, rad red!" Sonic said as he helped Knuckles up. "You too." Said Knuckles, massaging his back. "Neat move at the end."

They decided to get some water from a spring nearby. "Hey, Knux, d'you think that kid will do it." Knuckles gave Sonic a look. "Sure. He's tough. He's been trained by the best, too." Knuckles pointed at himself. Sonic chuckled and said "Its just not right. What did he do wrong. I think something's up." Knuckles nodded in agreement. "Yeah, but what."

Sonic shrugged. "Dunno. But we better check it out. Starting with your high council." Normally, Knuckles would've taken offense to this, but his father had been acting weird.

"Allright." Sonic gave a thumbs up. "Race Ya!" Knuckles just rolled his eyes.

22 - The next guardian issue # 22

Ekyt and Dulcy arrived at the volcano with only 30 seconds to spare. "Excellent work. No one before you has completed it within the time limit." The old dragon smiled. "Your quest is certainly noble. Wolpar! Fashion this ring accordingly."

AFTER THE RING IS FINISHED

"Thank you again, Glint. And you, Dulcy. I owe you." Ekyt bowed to the creatures. "You are most welcome. The choices you have made show you to be trustworthy. A trait we dragons admire most. Go, now, and complete your task." Ekyt left Vesuvius, the black singe ring in his pocket. As he walked, he felt a slight chill. Oh well. He had left his trust coat with Linda-Su. He jogged to the cosmic interstate. He checked his list. Three opponents. Hmmm. They would probably come to him.

He walked into the universe. Immediately, he was tackled by a blue hedgehog decked out in leather and shades. "What's the hassle, schmassel?" the hedgehog said sarcastically. "You tell me, porcupine." Ekyt said. "That's "Hedgehog", bozo. Sonic the Hedgehog to you." (Everyone remember the parallel sonic from the original Archie comics series?)

"You wanna go?" asked Ekyt in his tough-guy voice. "You betcha. I haven't had a *real* fight in a long time."

They circled each other. At first, it seemed the hedgehog would win. Until Ekyt rolled out of the way of a spindash and threw a backflip kick that sent the hedgehog on his quill. Ekyt moved in menacingly.

"Yo, pal, take it easy. You win. The next one ain't gonna be easy, though." "Sonic" snarled. "Just hand over the shades, blue boy. Now." He grumbled, but complied.

"Who's next?" Ekyt snarled. "That would be me, you pathetic human wuss!" He turned to face a leather clad Knuckles. "Bring it on, immitaion echidna!"

The scuffle continued with neither gaining the upper hand. Ekyt was the more skilled, but he had already fought two battles. An uppercut to the jaw left him with a bleeding lip. That, and an attitude adjustment.

Now he was mad. He charged, putting all of his energy and concentration. Thirty seconds later, he won. Knuckles handed over his leather hat.

"Now who?" Ekyt wondered aloud. "That's me," said a familiar voice. Ekyt turned to face him. The evil Sonic and Knuckles jumped him and held his arms behind his back for his next assailant...

End

Sonic and Knuckles walked to Locke. "What do you want?" he snarled. "Dad, I need to know the truth...Why did you banish my protégé? He did no harm.

Locke smiled, not at all a comforting gesture. "Because I needed him out of the way to deal with you two!" Sonic and Knuckles were both frozen.

TO BE CONTINUED...

23 - The Next Guardian issue 23

The evil sonic and knuckles held Ekyt's arms back. He decided to bide his time and conserve his energy. The face he looked into was his own. "Not you again." Said Ekyt through gritted teeth. His evil twin smiled. "Me again." Whap!

He had slapped Ekyt. "Well, well, well, what do we have here?" He removed the bandage from Ekyt's arm. "You disgrace us both," said the evil Ekyt. "Can't do anything without a boo-boo, can you?" he said mockingly before spitting in his face. He flicked Ekyt's ear. Until Ekyt bit his finger.

"Ow!" He used the distraction to throw his assailants and rush his counterpart. He darted behind him and took him down. They tussled in the grass. The good Ekyt took punch after punch, while trading off some of his own. The creatures piled on. Ekyt, with one more burst of strength, flung them in different directions. "This is between you and me, coward." Ekyt yelled to his evil "brother" "Fight your own battle." "Why should I do that?"

Time was running out. Ekyt had to diffuse this situation. He used a throwing knife to pin the evil ones down before holding "himself" hostage. "Give up, or you're done." The evil Ekyt raised his arms. "Gimme your coat. Now!" The evil him did as he was told.

Ekyt grabbed the coat and stared down his enemies. His hazel eyes had a cold look. The evil clones ran away. Ekyt walked back toward the cosmic interstate. Just one more task.

The last task was to rescue ten prisoners from Robotnik. He stood outside the factory. He could try the stealth approach, or he could let himself get captured. No. If he was captured, Robotnik called the shots. He decided on plan "A"

Or he would have, had he not been captured at that moment by Snively and a team of thirty SWATbots. "I give up." "Good choice, runt." Said Snively. He shackled Ekyt and marched him inside.

In the war room, Robotnik paced. Then the doors slid open with a swish. His most hated human enemy was in his grasp once more. Robotnik broke into a smile at the site. He started to talk, but Ekyt was faster. "So, slime-bucket, what are you gonna do to me this time. I'm alone, so take your time. Oh, and Blubberbolts, I would suggest Atkins." Robotnik growled and grabbed a weapon. It shot a laser that broke Ekyt's cuffs.

"Just you and me." Ekyt taunted. He gulped inwardly. I hope this works.

Robotnik opened fire. He had forgotten that this was his own war room... Ekyt rolled behind a critical machine. The machine that could contact the robots. "Curses! Oh, how you'll pay for that." Robotnik continued to fire. Ekyt snuck up from behind. He tapped Robotnik on the shoulder.

"Eh?" said Robotnik. That was before Ekyt's fist slammed into him. Ekyt picked up a weapon and

locked and loaded it. Time to finish the job.

To Be Continued...

Linda-Su had restless dreams. About war. About Ekyt. Ekyt. She sat up with a start. What a dream! He had been hung by that creepy skunk Saint John. She shuddered and grabbed the coat she used for a blanket. It was his. She sighed as she breathed in every fiber. It smelled like hope.

She turned on her back and stared at the ceiling. A human and an echidna? How had that happened. No matter how, it did. He cared. That kiss told her that. She smiled fondly at the memory. I wonder how he's doing. Maybe I'll check out Mount Fate. For some reason, that was where she went to think.

As she arrived, she saw a strange site. Sonic and Knuckles were bathed in a green glowing light. And they were frozen. She started towards them, but a hand on her shoulder stopped her. "Another for my collection." Linda-Su didn't even have time to scream.

24 - The Next Guardian Issue # 24

The Next Guardian Issue # 24

Ekyt raced down the corridors, blasting open cell doors. He stopped at the end of a hallway to make sure everyone was with him. A collection of animals followed him. He counted them...10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 69. That was more than enough. He just couldn't leave anyone behind.

They encountered no resistance until they were outside. Snively and his thirty SWATbots again. Only this time, Ekyt had the advantage. "Take cover! Move!" he shouted. Animals struggled to comply. "What? SWATbots, open fire!" Ekyt dodged behind a rock, then sprang out, the weapon in his hand blazing. He had mowed down twenty before the ammunition ran dry. "Got you now. SWATbots, capture him." Ekyt fought them the best he could, but it was an uphill battle. Until a group of four prisoners helped him.

"Charmy, take out Snively. Espio, do your thing. Mighty, chuck this rock. I'll do my usual." Vector and the other Chaotix began to help. That left two for six for Ekyt. There had been worse odds. He ripped off one's head, and threw it like a bowling ball, knocking over two other SWATbots. He pole-vaulted off his staff and threw a kick into another. That left three more. Um, actually, they were all destroyed. Espio had pulled his chameleon moves off and destroyed the rest. "Everyone okay?" Ekyt yelled to the group. They all answered in the affirmative.

"Thanks for your help, Chaotix. You got me out of that mess." "Our pleasure." Said Mighty. "Okay, Knothole is this way."

Two hours later...

Everyone was accounted for. Ekyt received no dirty looks, and no insults. He was congratulated several times, though. As he knelt before the king, he presented the proof that he had done the three deeds requested. "Well done," said King Elias. "To be honest, I never doubted you were one of us." Ekyt blushed with pride, and mumbled "Thank you sire"

Now it was on to the floating island.

Issue # 25: Ekyt vs. ???

Find out next issue!

25 - The Next Guardian # 25

The Next Gardian Issue 25

"You. But...you're dead. You've gotta be." "Fool! I'm immortal. The power of eleven chaos emeralds coarse through my veins. Do you really expect to defeat me? A mortal? Hah" "It's happened before-Enerjak! Or whatever you call yourself. Now you let Sonic and Knuckles go." He rushed Enerjak, but stopped as Enerjak held his other prisoner up above his head. Linda-Su.

Ekyt stopped. "What do you want, Enerjak" Enver mind. It's always a chaos emerald. Put her down and I'll show you where it is." Ekyt looked resigned. Enerjak smiled that vile smile and set her down. Ekyt began a brisk path to Mount Fate.

"So, this is the place, is it? Get it for me! Now!" Ekyt grinned and then turned toward Enerjak. "Boy, being alive for years certainly didn't do much for your wisdom, did it?" Ekyt threw a right cross punch that caught the ancient echidna in the jaw. "You'll pay for that, boy!" He threw his shoulder into the seventeen year old. Ekyt hit the ground and rolled immediately into his legs, knocking off his balance. Enerjak punched though, sending the human into Mount Fate. He cocked a weapon and aimed it at Ekyt. Ekyt stared down death with hatred. This had to be it.

"Chill out!" Sonic slammed into Enerjak and moved the blast away from Ekyt. "Didja miss me, gramps?" shouted Knuckled, gliding into him. "Gahh! Fools. You'll pay!" "Ekyt! Catch!" Linda-Su threw him his staff. Ekyt caught it and bashed Enerjak in the head, though he was rewarded with a kick to the face.

"Get...50... rings. I'll hold him off." Ekyt and Enerjak continued the fight as Sonic dashed off, with Knuckled in tow. Ekyt blocked a shot with his staff and used the momentum to deliver a strike. Enerjak threw him. He landed on his feet and came back. Ekyt dodged a blast with that weapon and used his staff to vault over Enerjak and deliver a sweep kick that swept the echidna off his feet."

"You know, for someone "immortal" you sure fight like a wuss!" taunted Ekyt. *Hurry up guys!* he thought. Enerjak struck down, but Ekyt blocked with his staff. It was a stalemate. "You're through" Ekyt snarled. "Your mistake was going after my friends...Dmitri." The echidna let loose a scream. Ekyt broke the stalemate with a kick to the stomach. Then two blurs rushed by.

"Mix 50 rings, add some chaos emeralds, stir, and you have...SUPER SONIC and HYPER KNUCKLES" All three attack, driving Enerjak back to his imprisonment. Enerjak was almost into the chamber. Linda-Su held something...A chaos syphon! "Linda! Go for it!" She switched it on. Enerjak screamed, but soon was nearly drained. "Curses! You haven't seen the last of Enerjak!" He fled.

Sonic and Knuckles lost their super forms. They were tired. Ekyt was exhausted. And he ached. He

hadn't noticed it before. But as the adranaline left him, his body became fatigued." Linda and Sonic helped him up while Knuckles retrieved his staff.

"Nice work, Ekyt."

Somewhere in Knothole, a saucy yellow hedgehog watched through binoculars. So that was the famed Ekyt. Sasha had her next target.

26 - The Next Guardian Issue 26

The Next Guardian Issue # 26

Sasha (From Texas_Luver's fanfic "Reality check"- Thanks for letting me use her!) watched the human struggle to his feet. Then he was hugged by that echidna Linda-Su. She licked her lips. He could be quite a challenge. She was a sucker for underdogs.

Ekyt got to his feet. He was embraced by Linda. "God, do you ever noticed you get injured?" She had spied the blood on his shoulder and his cut lip. "C'mon, easy does it, let's get you cleaned up. Then you can clear your name with the real Locke." "The real Locke?" Ekyt asked. "Yeah, I saw him when I unfroze. Enerjak had gotten the jump on him, too." Ekyt frowned. "Then maybe I'm not banished..." A glimmer of hope appeared in his eyes. Linda-Su smiled.

"Oh, Ekyt, there you are!" a voice sang. "Huh?" Sasha sauntered up to him and kissed him on the cheek. "C'mon, sweetie, let's go grab a bite." "What, hold it, who are you?" Ekyt asked. Sasha bumped Linda with her hip. "Oh, just thought I'd" she breathed "Thank you." She moved to embrace him, but he was helping up Linda-Su.

"Who's that." Snarled Linda. "Never mind, time for a little girl talk." She put on a false smile and took Sasha by the arm. "Let's have a little chat." Sasha gave Ekyt a wink. "Be back sweetie!" she said as she blew him a kiss.

Ekyt turned to Sonic and Knuckles, who were both laughing hysterically. "Do either of you know who she is?" Ekyt asked. Sonic answered, "Yeah, she homed in on me once. She likes to wreck relationships." At that moment, The two women were yanking each other's hair. Ekyt moved between them and pried them apart. "Look," he said, trying to be polite, "I don't even know you. I'm sorry, but I'm with Linda here." Linda made a move toward Sasha, but he held her back. "Easy, I don't know her. Let her be. She'll go bother someone else." They walked away.

"Huh!" Sasha said, stamping her foot. Well, she'd just have to get rid of Linda-Su. This guy was no Sonic, but he'd do. At least until she met someone better.

Linda was sitting on Mount Fate, thinking about today's strange encounter. Ekyt was off, talking with the Echidna High Command, along with Knuckles. "Hi, sweetie." Sasha handcuffed Linda-Su and gagged her. "Sorry, honey. This one's mine." She sauntered off, looking for Ekyt.

MEANWHILE ...

“And that's what happened, Dad.” Knuckles had explained everything to Locke. “Hmmm, I see. I never would have allowed Ekyt to be banned. Misuse of a power ring, indeed.” He turned to Ekyt. “You may resume training as a future guardian. “Thank you, sir.” Ekyt bowed and left. He had to tell Linda the good news.

Sasha hurried up along side him. “Hey, welcome back. I heard you're not banned anymore.” She put her arm around him. Ekyt blushed, but told her firmly. “Look, I have no interest in you. It's nothing personal. Well, except for the fact that you like to ruin relationships. Now, please, find someone else.” Ekyt continued his walk to Mount Fate.

Sasha, normally yellow, turned red with anger. He was harder to crack than Sonic. Then she spied Knuckles. “Hmmm. He'll do.” She jogged after him.

Ekyt gound Linda-Su, still handcuffed and gagged. He took off the gag. “Who did this to you?” he asked “That smutty hedgehog.” As Ekyt went to work on the handcuffs, she asked “Be honest, Ekyt. Did you know her before me?” Ekyt gave her a comical look with his eyebrow raised before shaking his head. “No. I've always been a lone wolf. Until you helped me come out of my shell a little.” Snap! “There we go. Now, what do we about her?” Linda grinned. “I have an idea...”

27 - The next Guardian Special # 1

The Next Guardian Issue 27 :Welcome back party special part 1

"Hey Knux, gotta warn you. Stay away from the hedgehog." Knuckles grinned. "You know I've only got eyes for Julie-Su." Ekyt nodded. "Now, I just wanted your permission. You know how diamonds are a girl's best friend? Well, Linda-Su thinks that emeralds should be a hedgehog's best friend." Knuckles look confused until Ekyt explained the plan."

LATER

"Hey, Sash. Sorry `bout that. Had to put the show on for Linda. You know I can't resist beauty." Ekyt grinned. He flashed a thumbs up to Knuckles and Linda outside the window. Ekyt cozied up to her. "Now, how about I kiss you goodnight?" He asked. "But it's the middle of the day." She said. Ekyt smiled. "Not for you, it's not!" "Huh?" said Sasha before green light covered her. "Hey! What's going on?" "Change of plans, baby." Linda-Su and Knuckled walked in. Together, they picked her up and carried her to the cosmic interstate. Ekyt said to Sasha. "Here we are. Maybe my alter self will like you better. Oh, and stay away from Linda." They tossed her in.

The alter Ekyt looked up to see what was causing the shadow. He caught the hedgehog, who's emerald prison disappeared. "Hey there," he said. They walked off.

"Good riddance!" said Linda. She looked up to Ekyt. He blushed. He still couldn't make eye contact with her. He hugged her, though. "Hey, I'd better get back to training. But I've got a surprise for you later." He walked off with Knuckles.

IN TRAINING

Ekyt threw a kick, back flipped, and landed in front of the emerald. He untied the cloth covering his eyes. His placement was perfect. "Your instinct to protect the emerald is almost fully developed." Knuckles said. "Thanks Knux. I've gotta go." Knuckles grinned. "Yeah, me too. You ready for this?" "No!" said Ekyt. "Aw, c'mon, you know me and Julie, and you know Linda. Look, it's *not* a date." Ekyt blushed at the word and mumbled. "Just...my...first...don't know..." Knuckles chuckled. "Relax, this is a group thing. Tails and Amy, Sonic and Sally, Me and Julie-Su, and you and Linda-Su. No big deal. Just chill. Let's get ready."

Ekyt wore his red shirt, with black pants and his long black coat. His normal look. Knuckles wore a tie.

Ekyt walked to Linda's and knocked. "Hi" he said. "You ready?" Yup

EARLIER

"...And so, in honor of Ekyt being welcomed into our society, there will be a celebratory party. Thank you all for your time." King Elias finished his speech.

PRESENT

"I'm sorry about that whole Sasha thing..." Ekyt said, looking down. This was killing him. He liked her, but this was awkward. She smiled at his obvious embarrassment, and put her hand on his shoulder, and stifling laughter when his neck turned red. "Hey, not your fault. Let's go."

So the party began. Everyone was having a good time. But the life of the party was Tails and Amy Rose. Until their bed time. Sally, who treated Tails like a little brother, put him and Amy to bed. The party continued. Until a robot crashed through the wall. "Wha..." Ekyt herded everyone away from it. The he joined Sonic, Knuckles, and Shadow in the standoff. "Robotnik!" they all said.

"Right, pathetic animals! Sorry to crash the party, but I wasn't invited. "No Duh, `Buttnick. You have a bad habit of spoiling the atmosphere." The robot lashed out one giant hand and sent all four of them flying. They all hit the wall, but were back up in an instant. "You know the old saying," said Robotnik, "If at first you don't invade, try, try again." He laughed as he launched missiles, arrows, and lasers at the group.

TO BE CONTINUED...

28 - The Next Guardian special part 2

The Next Guardian Special #1 part 2

Sonic and Shadow moved the guests out of the building while Knuckles and Ekyt distracted Robotnik. Tails air-lifted Amy (They woke up when they heard the confusion). Amy swung her hammer and cracked the giant robot's windshield. Glass hit Robotnik. But he made the robot knock them out of the air. Knuckles caught Amy and Ekyt caught Tails. "Good job. We'll finish it." Ekyt climbed up on a table. "Hey Robo-brain! Thirsty?" Ekyt threw a half-full punch bowl at Robotnik. Controls sizzled from the liquid. "Cursed!" Robotnik shouted as he tried to control the robot.

The robot took the supports off the building. It was going to collapse. Knuckles and Ekyt dove out windows as the building collapsed. Robotnik was beneath the rubble. Sonic and Shadow had returned. The robot's legs were sticking out. "Let's take away its mobility." Said Shadow. The group nodded in approval. Before they could do that, one giant leg kicked out and caught the group by surprise. Sonic and Ekyt each jumped and ran up the leg. Knuckles took the unconscious Amy's hammer. "Ekyt! Here!" He tossed the hammer. Ekyt caught it and pounded on one leg while Sonic worked on the other with a spindash. Shadow and Knuckles took thick boards from the building and used it to pry up the broken building. Piece by piece it lifted.

Robotnik snuck behind the group. He took the unconscious Tails and Amy. He jumped in his hidden hovercraft and shouted. "Foolish mammals. I've got your tenacious little ruggats. Back off if you want to see them ever again." They all stepped back hands raised. "Good." Robotnik muttered something into his dashboard communicator. Seconds later, SWATbots surrounded the four left standing. "Now, I think I'll take you two." Robotnik pointed at Sonic and Ekyt. "You two have forced me to tear the hair from my head." Ekyt laughed. It was time for a gamble. "From where? There's nothing up there, chrome dome." The group laughed as they guessed his plan. The SWATbots shackled Sonic and Ekyt. Three pairs of handcuffs each. Two sets of leg shackles. Even chain around their shoulders for good measure. Sonic and Ekyt let them do it. Wait for it...

"Run for it! Bug out!" Knuckles and Shadow ran unwillingly. Robotnik grabbed the human by his shirt and snarled "That was a mistake. We may both be humans, but I think we know who's smarter." Ekyt laughed. "Yeah, that's an easy one. Why do you set yourself up? I'll say it. *I'm* smarter, right." Robotnik punched the human in the jaw. "If you were, you would have kept quiet."

They were marched miles, with SWATbot rifles jammed in their backs. Ekyt looked down. "My fault Sonic." Sonic just shook his head. "No, it's not. Just bad luck mixed with evil." Ekyt still looked down. He spotted a sharp stone. He looked at Sonic expectantly. "Yo Robotnik, don't look now, but it looks like the freedom fighters want a word with you." Robotnik looked to the left as Ekyt kicked the stone up into his fists. *This'll come in handy* he thought.

“What happened?” asked Amy “Yeah, why can't I move?” asked Tails. “Be quiet, you pests.” Snively hit Amy and Tails. Ekyt and Sonic both turned red with fury. They both dove forward and hit Snively with their heads. Ekyt landed painfully on the side of his face. Sonic nipped-up and jumped up and down on Snively. Until he was shot in the leg.

“There goes your speed, you super blue pest.” Robotnik cackled. “I'll heal someday, `butnik. And when I do...” For the rest of the journey Sonic walked with a limp.

They arrived at a dark-looking building. “Welcome to my prison. You are either roboticized or dead when you come here.” Robotnik cackled. “Question from the crowd!” said Ekyt. “You missed the part where we escape and beat you to a pulp.” Robotnik threw them all into a cell. He held Ekyt back. “I am going to make you regret ever coming here.”

WHAT IS ROBOTNIK GOING TO DO?

29 - The Next Guardian issue 29

The Next Guardian Issue # 29

He threw Ekyt into the cell. The human's neck snapped back. Robotnik slammed the door and laughed as he walked down the hallway. Ekyt shook the cobwebs loose. He took his sharpened rock and went to work on his cuffs. He had picked the locks on all of them, then handed the rock to Sonic, who did the same.

Tails and Amy were mad. Amy Rose blamed herself. Ekyt strode over.

"Are you okay?" he asked, kneeling down to them. "I wish I had my mallet. I would break Robotnik in half. Ekyt smiled. "You've got spunk. Tails, how you holdin up?" Tails was pacing, resigned. "Just fine." He said shortly. Ekyt left him to his thoughts.

Sonic was looking at his leg, trying to pull the bullet. "Sonic, this'll hurt for a second." Ekyt took the slim, sharp rock and reached it in and popped the rock out. There wasn't much blood. With nothing else to use, Ekyt took off his shirt and tied it around Sonic's leg. All he could for now.

"Food time! Hope you like slop." Snively cackled and shoved bowls of the disgusting gunk through the bars. Everyone ate but Ekyt. He ate half, then looked at it. He saved it. There had to be some use.

They had taken his knives and staff. Amy's mallet was back in Knothole. Sonic couldn't run yet, and the low ceiling prevented Tails from flying. No way in or out but through the door. They had to bide their time.

"Okay. Tails, you fly Sonic out. Amy, you and me are gonna tackle eggman and free the rest of the prisoners. Remember the flip thing you did (Ekyt and Linda-Su taught Amy self defense) to me and Knuckles. Do it to Robotnik. I'll keep him busy. Then make a break for it. Any questions?"

Sonic said "Are you serious. I am sooo gonna tackle Robotnik." He stepped forward, but winced. "Okay, you're plans fine. I'd just be a hindrance." Sonic looked down. "Sonic...can I ask a favor?" "Sure, Ekyt, what's up." "If I don't get out of here, tell Linda-Su I..."

The door opened. "Now!" yelled Ekyt as he threw the mush that was food at the SWATbot, clogging its sensor. He took his gun and blasted it into a pile of junk. "Amy, stay behind me." He was counting on Robotnik underestimating her. He ran down the hall, freeing prisoners. "Follow the flying fox!" he yelled. "Tails, get them outta here! Ready, Amy?" he said. Amy just smiled.

Ekyt kicked open the door. "Remember what I said Robotnik? I told you I'd get out. No face me!" Robotnik snarled and turned toward him. Until Amy hit him in the head with the rock that had opened the

shackles. He turned toward her. Ekyt got down on his hands and knees and Amy threw a kick. Robotnik stumbled. Amy seized his arm and threw him with a thud. Ekyt bashed all the buttons on the control panel. One had to open the gate.

“WARNING! SELF DESTRUCT IN THIRTY SECONDS AND COUNTING!” “Aw crap. I dind't want to do that! C'mon Amy, climb on me piggyback.” Amy jumped on and Ekyt ran. He pulled out the black singe ring the dragons gave him (See Ekyt's quest to redeem himself) and hoped it still worked like a regular power ring. He put on a burst of speed. Ten seconds. Three robots came out, firing. “Go Amy. I'll deal with them.” “No you won't!” She threw a kick at the first one while Ekyt dealt with the second two. Five seconds. The door was in sight. They dove.

The explosion was movie-violent. Robotnik's prison exploded, tongues of flames shooting out the windows. Then the whole thing collapsed.

“You okay, Amy?” Ekyt asked. “Yeah, just a little shaken up.” They ran back toward Knothole.

IN KNOTHOLE

“My God, they did it! They made it.” A wheel-chair ridden Sonic shouted. The others all came running. They praised Ekyt. Amy looked sad. “Well, all of you have Amy Rose to thank. She flipped Robotnik over!” Everyone fussed over Amy. Ekyt smiled and winked. Amy caught up to him. “You didn't have to tell them that.” She exclaimed. Ekyt just chuckled and said “I just told them the truth. You did most of the work, Amy.” He kept walking, pretending not to notice Amy getting kissed by Tails.

“...And that's how it happened, Linda.” She grabbed him and felt his ribs. “I'm just a little bruised.” He said. “That's called a hug, you dope.” She made dope sound like a compliment.

SEE YOU IN ISSUE 30!

30 - The Next guardian Issue # 30!!!

Ekyt had been training only physically to be a guardian. He needed mental and spiritual strength as well. Knuckles' latest exercise was a test of Ekyt's instincts to protect the emerald.

Ekyt was blindfolded and walked around. "Okay, I'm sure I'm in the chaos chamber. Now what?" Knuckles checked the video monitor he was watching Ekyt on. "You are in the room with the emerald. Now, concentrate." Ekyt took a comfortable stance, with his weight centered. He heard a whirring sound. He moved in front of where he thought the emerald was and took a fighting stance. The whirr came closer. Robot? At least one. The whirr got closer. Ekyt showed no sign that he heard it until he threw a kick. He missed by about an inch. He ripped the blindfold off and kicked the robot, sending it flying into the wall. Knuckles came in and tried to calm Ekyt down. "Relax, everyone misses. You were only, like, an inch off. You did everything else right. Well, except the whole temper thing. It happens to the best of us." He looked his watch. "That's enough for now. Take a rest. We'll try again later."

Ekyt left the chamber and went for a short walk to mount fate. He looked down through a pair of binoculars. He considered himself a vigilante of sorts. A threat to the emerald, or his friends, was a reason for a fight. Knothole was quiet.

Ekyt gazed a little longer, then took a walk to a new casino that had opened. The name was *Double N's Playtime Palace*. Ekyt walked through the doors. The place was shimmering. Slot machines. BlackJack tables. The whole deal. The manager's office was in the corner.

The dealers all wore strange smiles, as if fixed. They smiled, win, lose, or draw. Ekyt stuffed a coin bearing the princess in a slot machine and pulled the lever. Lemon, Lemon,... Seven. *Rats*, thought Ekyt. He moved on to a blackjack table. After losing a couple hands, he moved on again to poker.

Ekyt couldn't win. *Not my night*, he thought. He walked toward the bathroom, when he heard a voice from the manager's office. Two, actually. Australian accent.

"So, we kidnap the guardian, steal the emerald, and give it to our employer? Easy. Knuckles and that kid oughta be easy pickings for us. When do we pull it off?" A female voice answered "Tonight." They laughed. Until Ekyt kicked the door open. "You were saying?" Ekyt stared Nic and Nack the weasels in the face. They drew weapons. Ekyt jumped out of the room and hit the dirt. He started to tell the dealers to get out. But they just grinned. He yanked on one. Off came it's mask. Robots! *Aw crap, another long night*. He thought.

To Be continued.

31 - The Next Guardian Issue 31

The Next Guardian Issue 31

Ekyt stood his ground. *Should find a wall, he thought. One direction they couldn't attack from.* “Well, I see the junior guardian decided to hit the town tonight. Glad he picked our place, right sis?” Nack gave his sister a toothy grin. “Yeah, lucky for us we heard you. And lucky for you, we just want to kidnap you, not kill you.”

Ekyt said nothing. *Remember what Knux said, use your instincts.* Ekyt dropped his arms in mock surrender. Then he flipped back behind a table and flipped it onto three of the robots that were after him. Nic and Nack laughed. “I'd expect nothing less from a future guardian. You guys don't do things the easy way, do you?”

Ekyt wasn't armed. Perfect timing. He could give up, but he had already caused too much trouble for the others. Fight? Well, he was outnumbered, but he'd seen worse. He decided to play the waiting game. “So, you're after the emerald? Sorry, not gonna get it. Or me. Or Knuckles. Hate to burst your bubble, but for two top of the line bounty hunters, you leave empty-handed a lot.” Two robots charged. Ekyt slid through their legs and pulled up the carpet, putting them on top of each other.

But he couldn't keep this up. He needed some help. A shout from this far away couldn't be heard. Except by an ultimate life form...

“Shadow!” Ekyt shouted. More robots rushed as Nack and Nic looked panicked. They had planned for normal people, not this. The metal maniacs left their mark on Ekyt. He lay on all fours, breathing. Blood coming from his nose and lip. His forehead was cut. His ribs ached. But he couldn't let up. He threw kick after kick.

A black hedgehog holding a yellow chaos emerald burst through the door. He had Ekyt's staff. Without a word, he threw Ekyt the staff. “Chaos...Blast!” Ekyt took cover behind the table he had overturned earlier. Most of the robots were destroyed. One of those that functioned threw gambling chips at incredible velocities. The emerald was knocked away from Shadow. Nack shot a cord that wrapped around Shadow, leaving him helpless.

“Hang on, Shadow.” Ekyt knocked three robots away and dashed for the emerald. This must have been the spare emerald Knuckles had told him about when he first started training. Nic saw the emerald too. She whacked Ekyt with her tail. He recovered and grabbed hold of the emerald. With the other hand, he tossed his knives into a decorative tree near Shadow. Enough of the blade was sticking out. Shadow cut himself free and joined the three-way fight for the emerald.

Nic whacked them both with her tail and shot a cord at Ekyt. He jumped, but it caught his legs. In

desperation, he threw his staff. The emerald shattered.

“No!” The cry came from all three of them. It split in three pieces.

Swoosh. Something swooped in and scooped up the emeralds. Rouge the Bat stood at Ekyt's head. She dropped two bombs on Shadow and Nic. “Well, if it isn't the human again.” She untied him. “I'm Rouge. Charmed.” She said as she held out her hand. Ekyt shook her hand. “So, you work for Knuckles. Well, we have a choice, don't we.” She said. “Since I have the emerald, I call the shots, so don't get any ideas. I will trade them for one of two things: Knuckles, or an ancient relic. Which is it gonna be, handsome?” She smiled seductively.

Ekyt couldn't risk the emeralds anymore. “Well, I can't get you Knux, but I can get you this relic. What do you want.” Rouge smiled. “Why, I want the fragments of the white comment. You know, the one that almost destroyed Echidnapolis?” “I'm familiar.” Ekyt spat. “Good. So get all your little playmates, and get me the comet. Then this gaudy trinket is yours.”

She dropped one more bomb and flew off.

TO BE CONTINUED

NEXT ISSUE: THE QUEST FOR THE COMMENT.

32 - The Next Guardian Issue # 32

The Next Guardian Issue #32

"You okay, Shadow?" Ekyt asked as the smoke cleared. "Fine." Shadow growled. Ekyt clapped him on the shoulder. "Thanks for the save." Ekyt turned to walk away. "What do you think you're doing. That emerald was mine. I'm coming, too. Plus that blue pest should come."

"Sure, I'll help. I owe you one from that whole robot thing. Let's juice." They moved at a quick pace.

They reached the crater where from which Echidnapolis had broken away from the earth. They searched the crater. Ekyt saw a white, glowing round thing. He dug it out and held it up. That was it. Too easy.

A piercing light shot through the group. Athair stood before them. "That is a sacred piece of Echidna history. What is your reason for taking it from it's resting place." Ekyt stepped toward Athair. "A chaos emerald is being held hostage until we recover and return the pieces of the comet." Athair looked thoughtful.

"Very well. If all of you pass the three tasks required, it is yours. To you, blue one. You must return to the zone of silence and retrieve three toad creatures. You, the other hedgehog, you must successfully protect Knothole village from all attacks. And as for you, human." Athair paused. "A future guardian? Well, Impressive for a human, especially one so young. Your task will be to go to devil's gulag and bring back that traitorous canine. But, be forewarned, Drago is no easy adversary. He has since been roboticized. Begin, all of you, and may the descendents of Steppenwolf watch over you." The ancient creature vanished.

Let's get this over with, they all thought.

Sonic Solo

Sonic raced to the Zone of Silence portal. His mission was definitely the easiest. Those little toad pests were easy pickings. He stepped into the zone. "This'll be cake," he said. An axe chopped the ground in front of him. Sonic gulped.

Spoke to soon, he thought. He ran up the axe's handle and socked it's owner in the face. It was the former warlord, Kodos. "Foolish hedgehog. You shall not pass alive." Sonic dodged another hit, but got caught with a backhanded swat from the giant beast.

Hope the Others are doing better, Sonic thought to himself.

HOW ARE THEY DOING? FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE

33 - The Next Guardian Issue # 33

The Next Guardian Issue # 33

Shadow walked around Knothole, searching for a threat. Without the emerald, this was going to be harder. He saw a lone SWATbot. Shadow ran up and smashed it. He took its weapon. Time to keep moving. "This is easy," Shadow said to himself. "Wrong, hedgehog!" Shadow looked up. "Robotnik?!"

Meanwhile, Ekyt found himself at devil's gulag. Drago must be one of the toughest here, he thought. Some were just returning after Snively broke them out. More like being returned. Most had gone back to their old criminal ways, but they were all pretty much easier to catch, because they had been dealt with before. Ekyt talked with the guard, a strange looking animal. It was orange in color, with multiple arms and legs. The thing seemed to be an evolved spider. *No time to deal with that now. I've gotta find Drago.*

That shouldn't be too hard. Ekyt heard a howl. He moved hurriedly toward it and found Drago. The other prisoners seemed to be serving him. Ekyt pushed past them and walked up to Drago. "Have you food for me, human? Or are you food?" Drago laughed. "Neither. You're gonna come with me." Ekyt looked him straight in the eyes.

"Says you, small fry? Tell you what, you beat me and two of my buddies here, and I'll come along quietly." Two menacing thugs stepped forward, cracking their knuckles. Ekyt stood his ground as the prisoners made a circle around the combatants.

Sonic raced around Kodos until the creature lost him. Sonic jumped, and formed into a spiny ball and cut his axe. He took the stick and ran it into the giant monster's shins. He lost his balance and toppled, hitting his head on a rock, which knocked him out cold. Sonic raced past him. He found a ton of the frog creatures. He quickly grabbed three and raced out of the zone before Kodos came to. His mission was done. What about the others?

34 - The Next Guardian Issue # 34

The Next Guardian Issue # 34

Drago stared down Ekyt. The human didn't blink. He stared straight ahead as though through Drago. "Either move or you're mine, kid," said Drago. Ekyt reached out his hand. Then he smiled. "Shake, boy, shake." Drago's cellmates literally howled with laughter.

Drago snarled and swatted at the human, who jumped aside quickly. Three slash marks appeared in his shirt. *Show no pain, you're a guardian.* Ekyt jumped forward and tackled the bigger animal, and threw punches rapidly. When Drago finally threw him off, he was a mess. His white fur was stained with blood, both his and the humans. "Mangy cur!" he snarled. "Go back to the kennel, pup." Ekyt countered. His eyes danced around the room. He spotted a low pipe. As Drago lunged, he jumped as Drago ran underneath him. Ekyt popped down, taking the pipe with him. CRACK!" Drago fell, unconscious. The guard, the spider looking creature, shot a web that engulfed Drago. "You have earned him. Do with him as you will." Ekyt picked up Drago and carried him back to the hole that was Echidnapolis. Athair would know what to do with the dog.

Shadow stared down Robotnik. "I want answers, doctor. Why was I created. I have to know." Robotnik laughed as a claw grabbed Shadow and lifted him face to face with Robotnik. "Your past won't matter. Because your future ends here!"

At that moment a blue spiny severed the claw. Shadow landed on his feet. "You blue bane of my existence!" Robotnik yelled. "Stuff it, lord lard." Sonic yelled back. "Gladly." Said Robotnik. A hammer had replaced the hook. "I'll stuff it, or more accurately, you, right into the ground! The hammer moved down as Shadow and Sonic raced out of the way. "Chill, Y'all." Bunny came out of the brush. "Ahm afraid Ah'm gonna have to put my foot down, sugah-bot." Bunny extended her robotic leg and stomped at him. Robotnik dodged it. Then something hit his eyes, blinding him.

"Bullseye!" Exclaimed Princess Sally. She had shot a concentrated paintball from her slingshot (From Sonic Super Special #1 In Your Face- N.G.) Antoine used his sword to cut the hammer off. Robotnik raced away, defeated. "Nice work, everyone."

At the crater, Ekyt held the captive wolf. "Athair, show yourself!" he yelled. Athair appeared and walked, or more accurately, glided toward him. "You did well. You have earned the comet." He handed it to Ekyt. Three Crystal parts landed around him. "It's yours, Rouge!" he shouted upward, toward the tree branch where she had been hiding.

She swooped down and took the comment. "Nice work, kid." She flew off. "Thank you, Athair. I hope I will not disappoint you." Athair smiled and disappeared.

Ekyt walked to Mount Fate. A lone figure stood atop it. "I'm back." Linda started to hug him, but he stopped her. "I have this bad habit of getting hurt. What do you think doc?" He shrugged off his shirt, trying not to wince. She did. "Aw, geez. Not deep, but that's gonna hurt. Best to rinse off at the falls." He nodded. "All right. Just let me get outta this and grab my other clothes. And my bathing suit." He walked off. Linda-Su rolled her eyes. "What a whackbag! He keeps going on these goofy missions. One of these days he won't be so lucky."

35 - The Next Guardian Issue # 35 (Request!)

While Knothole celebrated another victory, Ekyt tended to another wound. He jumped in the water and moved around, trying to get the dried blood off him. That little thing bled a lot. He scrubbed at his chest and stomach with his hands as it finally the blood finally flaked off. He dried himself off with a banana tree leaf, since there seemed to be a lack of towels on the island. He used a cave as a barrier to get dressed again. He wore a white shirt, black pants, black and white shoes, and he had his coat, but it was too hot today. He walked out of the cave. Linda-Su helped him bandage his stomach. The pressure helped his ribs immensely.

"Thanks." It was her turn to blush. "Yeah, but take better care of yourself, will ya? I'm gonna run out of bandages, or you'll run out of blood." She tried to keep a straight face, but couldn't. "Yeah. That'll be the day." He looked up at the falls. The water rushing was peaceful. "I wonder if I'm cut out for this hero stuff. I mean, everyone else is, well, special. Sonic has his speed, Tails can fly, Amy hits things with a hammer, which, by the way, hurts. And Shadow can...Mpph!" "Shh!" Linda pointed up. Ekyt looked. She kissed him on the cheek. He turned red, then laughed. "You know, I just can't keep getting embarrassed at that. I like it. Wait, what's that." Linda waited for a kiss, but instead saw a dark thing fly overhead. "What is that?" he jumped up and ran after it. Linda-Su sighed. There he went again. Too busy to show affection. Of course, he was making progress. Still, it was frustrating. One human on the island, and he's the shy type. She ran after him, drawing her pistol.

WHAT'S ATTACKING THE ISLAND? FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE!

To the Readers:

I wanted to describe the fan characters that I own that make an appearance. Feel free to draw them how you picture them, but please leave credit to my fan fic. I would love to see how everyone thinks they look. Just a general request, since I can't draw humans the best. And Echidna's from the back are hard, too.

Ekyt is about 5'8, on the thin side, human, hazel eyes, typically seen in a red or white T-shirt, with a long, black, trench coat (I want to get one!) and original design Adidas shoes. He is a white male.

Linda-Su is Julie-Su's sister. She is a deep pink color, with green eyes. She wears a black vest, similar in design to that of Constable Remington. She either wears jeans or white karate (Gi) pants, with black and red sneakers. When on duty as a police officer, she wears a blue hat with a gold badge in the center, much like a regular policeman's.

Sasha is owned by Texas Luvver.

36 - The Next Guardian Issue # 36

Ekyt and Linda-Su jumped down into the chaos chamber. Knuckles was already waiting. "What's going on? What is that thing?" Ekyt asked. "Might be the Xorda again. I'm not sure yet." Knuckles shook his head. "All I can figure out is it's not someone we consider a friend." "Want me to check out?" asked Ekyt. "Yeah, good idea." Ekyt turned to go. "I'm going with you this time." Yelled Linda as she followed him.

They jogged along the path where that would take them in the direction that the ship landed. Ekyt had his hand on his knives, just in case. Linda was to the side of him, pistol drawn. *She can take care of herself, stop worrying,* he thought to himself.

They reached the crashed vessel and moved cautiously toward it. A figure stirred. Ekyt decided to try to be nice. "Can I help you?" The figure dashed again. "Hey, do you need help?" Again the figure dodged, but it was getting closer. Ekyt took a knife out. "Look, do you need help?" The figure attacked. It was some alien. It reached out with a tentacle which Ekyt slashed with a knife before throwing more into it's body. They just floated inside it. They did do some damage, as the creature roared in pain.

Linda-Su fired at it's tentacles, lopping them off one by one. Ekyt leapt forward and drove his walking stick into it's eye. It screamed and thrashed it's one remaining tentacle. Ekyt took care of that by jamming his staff into the ground on top of it, snapping it off. "Now, can you tell us what the problem is without murdering us?" Ekyt asked. Then he heard a rumble.

He turned around in time to get slapped by a huge tentacle. He reversed his momentum and hit the ground on his feet. He jumped over the next strike and then ducked under another. He grabbed a tentacle and slid underneath the monster. It flipped over while two more moved in. Linda shot them both.

Then she got hit. One of the creatures morphed a hand and took the pistol. "Wait!" Ekyt yelled. "I give. I'm yours. Just don't hurt her. Do whatever you want with me. Just let her go." They snapped some weird restraints on him and led him away.

Linda woke up, the ship gone. Ekyt was too. She had to find Knuckles.

37 - The Next Guardian Issue # 37

Ekyt was led onto the ship. They tied him to a table and stuck a needle in his arm. *Can you understand us, human?*

“Yeah, I hear you. What do you want? *We wish to a chaos emerald. It would greatly benefit our quest to take over the planet known as Mobius.* “And what do you expect from me?” *Cooperation. You will take us to the emerald* “Sorry, I don't know where it is.” *You lie, human.* Ekyt thought for a moment.

“If I knew, wouldn't / have used it for myself? I know as much as you do.” Ekyt kept his mind repeating that sentence, since they could probably read his thoughts. *Do not test us human. Do you want to make this difficult?” *Yes, he thought.* ZAAAAP! Ekyt was right that they could read his thoughts. He just needed to buy time...

Linda ran into the emerald's chamber. “Knuckles, they got him.” “What, who?” “They took Ekyt. These alien things fought us and took him. We gotta get him back!” “Okay, just let me get the Chaotix here and we'll go.”

Meanwhile...

“Still not talking, so you can just zap me all day.” *We are growing tired of your sass, human. Now, where is the emerald.* Ekyt smiled- “Well, it's up your butt(Censored!) and around the corner.” The aliens took turns checking. *Foolish human. You trifle with a superior species.* “If you're so superior, why don't you just let me go and look for the emerald yourself?”

AHHHHHH!

Ekyt fell into a mud puddle. That ship was only about 15 feet up, but that still hurt. He jogged to the stream and washed off the mud. He felt strange. That stuff they shot into him must be affecting him. (Do not do what Ekyt is about to do. This is very bad for you, and is only used in this story as a way of continuing it. N.G.) Ekyt jabbed the tip of his knife into the wound slightly to open it up. He then sucked up and spat out the poison. The strange feeling left him.

He ran back toward the emerald chamber. SMACK! He ran into Knuckles and Linda.

“No time, we gotta get help. There are about twenty of those aliens. I'm fine.” Linda looked down. “What's the matter?” asked Ekyt. “This is my fault. I shouldn't have come with you.” She kicked a stone aimlessly

“Hey, don't say that. I couldn't have tackled one of those things myself.” She began to cry. She didn't often. Ekyt thought for a second, then held her close. “It's okay. I'm fine. You did fine. You're a crackshot.” *Do it, she needs it. Forget your embarrassment. She's been a friend to you.* He lifted her chin and kissed her for a few long seconds. “Everyone's fine. But we might not be if we don't get help. Let's

go.”

They all dashed off to Knothole.

38 - The Next Guardian Issue # 38

Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, Ekyt, Linda-Su, and Sally headed back to the island. The Echidna high command wanted to see them all before they left. Ekyt and Knuckles knelt in front of them. Locke began.

"Knuckles, you are aware of the power a guardian has, when he is in tune with the chaos emerald, are you not?" "Yes Dad, I am." "Is Ekyt aware?" "Yes, but he has not been approved by the command yet." A BOOM!" hit the Grand Conservatorium hard. As things shook, Locke spoke urgently. "We think it time for him to have what is termed as a slight chaos control." He turned to Ekyt. "First, I shall return your ring. I was not myself when I took this away. Secondly, when you are "in tune" with the emerald, that is to say, both it and you are in danger, you can draw from it's power temporarily. Each power is unique to the user, so even I cannot say what you will do."

They left the underground shelter to face the new enemy. They didn't have to wait long. Sonic, Tails, and Sally took the left side while Ekyt, Knuckles, and Linda-Su took the one's on the right.

The battle began. Like days of old, the combat was hand to hand and intense. Sally and Linda-Su held their own. Sonic dashed around one creature. It kept stabbing downward until all it's tentacles were stuck in the ground. Tails then pulled it up, popping off the tentacles. One down.

The battle continued. Tails and Knuckles were taken down. Then Sonic took a shot for Sally, but recovered. Ekyt and Linda-Su took down two, with her shooting off the tentacles. Then Sally and Linda both got taken down. Sonic was still stunned. Him and Ekyt were left. They destroyed two more. Then Sonic took a shot that sent him into a tree.

Ekyt was alone. He kept his head, though. Freaking out would do no good. Then the creatures started attacking all the others but him. He watched them writhe in pain. Watch them struggle to get up, to breathe. They all fell.

Ekyt remembered what the Echidna elders said. He had some kind of power. It was worth a shot. Then Linda took another shot and stopped moving.

Despair. He felt nothing else. *No, useless emotion, think. Anger. That's it, anger. Think Anger.* A scream came forth. It was everything he wanted to say, but couldn't. His ring glowed, then he began to glow. He sped toward s the creatures and began pushing them back. Ekyt stood alone...again. This time, they were playing for keeps.

Ekyt turned again. He could tell the emerald was about to fail. That left time for one more rush. He looked at his hurt friends. Maybe he could...

Ekyt transferred the emerald's power, a little into each of them. They all revived, and fought with renewed vigor. The creatures were pushed back. Ekyt's power left, and he fainted, his wounds bleeding, his ankle twisted, his collarbone swollen, and his cut lip.

The battle was won, but a champion may have fallen. The group stood over their friend. Linda-Su knelt down and stroked his hair, a congealed mass of blood. His eyes flickered briefly, and then...

WHAT NEXT! ISSUE 39 COMING SOON!

39 - The Next Guardian Issue # 39 Death is only the be

The Next Guardian Issue # 40

Ekyt landed crouched in a red area. He immediately identified it as the echidna afterlife. Aurora came toward him. "Welcome, Ekyt. Your last act was unselfish. You have earned the favor of guardians past." She smiled and beckoned him toward a portal. Ekyt shook his head. "Please, Aurora, send me back. I need to help them." Aurora frowned. "You are certainly worthy, human. But do you wish to give up eternal bliss to return to war?" "Yes. I cannot abandon the only people ever to accept me." "Do they, Ekyt?" Through telepathy, she made him relieve the bullying he had once been forced to live through. Even the accusations at Knothole. When they stopped, he stood. *I could stay here...Be happy. No problems...NO!* The last thought came out as a word. "Aurora, with your blessing, I want to return. I know this is not death. I want to go back." Aurora smiled. "You passed your test, Ekyt. You have earned the favor of the guardians past. At first, they believed a human could only be selfish. You have shown them another side. A kind side." She smiled even more. "This is indeed not the end for you. The echidna high command gave you a choice. You passed the test. You are still on earth. All this is in your mind. To go home, just think it." She waved her hand and a portal opened. "Thank you, Aurora. Please thank the past guardians for me." He dove through the portal.

Ekyt woke up, friends crouched around him. "Oh God!" The voice belonged to Princess Sally. "Are you okay?" Ekyt grinned up at her. "Yeah, I'll live. Everyone else okay?" Knuckles answered. "Yeah, we all made it, thanks to you." Linda-Su still cradled his head. He offered her a comical crooked smile. "Dear God..." She couldn't even talk. He blushed when he realized his head was in her lap. He moved it, and turned. She hugged him. A small groan escaped him. "Sorry. Ribs're killing me." She relinquished her hug, embarrassed. Then she kissed him instead. "C'mon, we need to get you cleaned up." Before they left, Ekyt shook hands with all of them, bowed to the Princess with a groan as his ribs protested. Then they walked back to her cottage.

She sat him on the bed. "Get rid of the shirt for now. I grabbed another one for you. But we gotta clean you up first." She wound bandages around his ribs. The pressure felt better. His head had gotten cut. She compressed it to stop the bleeding before getting the blood out of his hair.

This guy is so reckless. When is he gonna settle down. I know I'm only fifteen, and I know he's still young, seventeen, but he's gotta settle down. She put his arm in a sling, then tended to his leg.

"Thanks. Good thing you're so good with this medical stuff." He told her about his "death." She gasped at it. "Dear God. You have a guardian angel, kid."

Ekyt, usually clumsy when it came to being romantic, said just the right words. "Yeah, it's you, isn't it?" They both laughed before she walked him back to the emerald chamber. A guardian never stops being a guardian.

He trained, injuries and all, waiting for the day he would be a full guardian.

ADDITIONAL BONUS! ORIGINAL ENDING TO THE FIRST FIVE ISSUES!

As Ekyt and Linda-Su stood on Mount fate, they talked. When talk turned to his arrest, she said "Sorry I had to arrest you." "No problem, you were just doing your job." Ekyt said, kicking at some dirt aimlessly. He liked her, but a relationship scared him.

She shook her head. "No, I mean this time." He looked confused as she pulled out her handcuffs. "You're under arrest for stealing." He looked shocked. "What did I steal?" He asked. She smiled. "My heart." She said as she moved toward him. "Guilty as charged." He said as they kissed.

NEXT ISSUE: THE KNOTLHOLE STANDOFF!

ISSUE # 40!!!

This series was originally a short story for school. No, this is ***NOT*** the last issue! Just wanted to throw an extra out to my readers. Thanks Everyone. Next Guardian will continue as a regular feature. -

N.G.

40 - The Next Guardian Issue 40 : Knothole under seige!

Sonic the Hedgehog raced along the Great Forest. With Robotnik as a renewed threat, the Freedom Fighters were more militaristic. They wanted to end the threat now. Suddenly, an image of Princess Sally falling to her death (See Original Archie Comic series) came to him. He stopped running and shook his head clear. *Just a bad thought.* Then he thought of when the princess married Antoine (Original Comic.) Then painful memories came flooding back. It took all of Sonic's energy to get back to Knothole before he collapsed.

One by one, all the members of Knothole felt this. Over and over. They were powerless to stop it. They were haunted by failure, and death. The city was defenseless.

In a control room, Robotnik laughed. "I see that you and I have quite a lot to offer each other. Now, let's shake on it..." The evil Ekylt shook hands with Robotnik.

Meanwhile, our Ekylt had heard of the plague and had set off alone to stop it. Knuckles was guarding the emerald. His wounds had healed. Linda-Su was going to come, but he asked her to help Knuckles. She grudgingly agreed. The two had been inseparable as he had healed. Now he walked alone.

His attire today was a white t-shirt, black pants, belt w/ a pouch of throwing knives, his trusty Adidas-like sneakers, and his walking stick. He left his coat with the others. Kind of a last will thing.

He jogged toward Robotropolis and easily dispatched three swatbot guards. He dodged into an open door. It was dark inside. Then bright lights came on him. He shielded his eyes and saw...himself. This wasn't a house of mirrors, so it had to be his alterego. He pretended not to see his counterpart sneaking up. He felt his way around. Then he kicked. "Oof! Lucky shot, weakling." The evil Ekylt snarled. (NOTE: FROM NOW ON, Good Ekylt Red, bad Ekylt will be in black.)

"C'mon, you're me. You should've seen that coming. Just like I see you grabbing that pipe." Ekylt dodged a swipe from the pipe and scrambled up the ladder of a nearby catwalk. His evil counterpart followed.

The two stared, an intense hatred in both their eyes. "Thanks for sending me that sexy yellow hedgehog, jerk." He struck while Ekylt blocked it with his staff. "You're proud of my castoffs? Are you sure we're related. Besides, Linda-Su is much better looking. Much like myself compared to you." The bad Ekylt snarled and moved forward, only to be caught by the staff. Both weapons fell off the catwalk.

It turned into a duel. Time and time again it appeared that one Ekylt had the upper hand, but the other always came back. Finally, bad Ekylt held on with one hand. The catwalk was ten feet tall, not to far, but beneath him was a cement mixer.

Ekylt sighed. He had no choice. The hero in him had to help the guy, no matter how evil. He held out his hand. "Grab on! Hurry!" The Evil Ekylt just shook his head and snarled "I'd rather meet my end that be saved by the likes of you." He let go and fell into the cement mixer.

(Note: Since there is only one Ekyt, Good Ekyt is now in black) He sighed. After a quick prayer for his soul, he moved on toward the heart of Robotropolis. Time to jam up whatever was causing these painful memories.

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Ekyt reached Robotnik's chamber. The machine that was doing the damage was over in a corner. Ekyt started to move toward it, but stopped when he felt a gun to his back. "Don't move, runt," growled Robotnik. "Not if you value your girlfriend's life." Robotnik gestured toward the corner. There was Linda-Su, bound and gagged. Her eyes read urgency and despair.

"Yes, I picked up *this* little prize after going after the chaos emeralds. Those troublesome echidna's gave me trouble, but now that I have her, you will cooperate. *He can't aim that weapon at both of us at the same time.* Ekyt sighed. "Fine. What do you want? Name it, that let her go." Robotnik chuckled. "I want the chaos emerald. Show me where it is." *Now's my chance.* Ekyt turned slightly and grasped his ring. He and the emerald were in tune. He moved a shield around Linda and then turned to Robotnik.

The emerald always drained him off energy, so he had to be quick. He turned and snatched the gun from Robotnik and shot his machine to bits. The shield protected Linda-Su, but he and Robotnik were in the open. He was forced to relieve the years of bullying, his temporary death, all these painful memories. Linda grabbed him and dragged him away. The memories faded the farther away he went.

"Thanks for the save." They both said at the same time. They walked back to Echidnapolis. Ekyt was drained from the use of the emerald, so Linda-Su put him in his bed and stayed near him the whole night. Knuckles checked in and saw everything was fine. He walked out.

Before Ekyt passed out, one last thought went through his head. *Should I ask her?*

42 - The Next Guardian Issue # 42

The Next Guardian Issue # 42

Ekyt rehabbed as quickly as he could. Things were hectic in this section of the world. Robotnik had returned, Drago was on the loose, and that creepy parallel universe... Ekyt changed positions, then looked at Linda-Su on his left and a new friend, Eden the cat, on his right (From Violet_Rose- Thanks for letting me use them. Check out her section for more info on these chars.) Eden had shown up at his hospital bed with some cure that would help him heal faster. Ekyt was skeptical, but it had worked. Some yoga thingy...whatever.

The guardian-in-training sighed and stood normally. "Sorry, this yoga thing just isn't working." Eden removed her foot from behind her head, as Linda-Su stifled her laughter at the goofy position her, um friend, yeah, friend that just happens to be a guy, was in. Eden nodded. "It really isn't for everyone. At least you tried. I know many males of all species who aren't secure enough to try yoga." Ekyt nodded and tried to loosen his busted shoulder. The two girls went off to get acquainted while Ekyt pondered more over popping the question.

An unfamiliar creature flew toward a cave carved into a side of a mountain. This particular cave belonged to Rouge the Bat, who looked shocked upon opening the door to her cousin. "Rouge, how're things?" said the other bat, Roxy. (Another Violet_Rose) Roxy pushed her way into the cozy cave and made herself at home. Rouge stifled her first thought of ripping her cousin apart. Maybe there was some gain to this situation.

"So what brings you here?" Rouge asked, smiling her most charming smile. Like she hadn't seen the jewels in her bag. Roxy smiled back. *She's soooo easy to read.* "Just dropping by. I was just wondering what you were up to these days." "Oh, I'm still in the treasure game. How about you. Are you still charming boys into doing your bidding?" Rouge batted her eyes comically.

Roxy imitated Rouge's gesture. "Yeah, any cute one's around here." Rouge thought for a moment. *If I say Knuckles, she'll zero in on him. So, I'll sic her on that kid,* "Well, there's a human who's not too bad. He's hard to get, though. He's a pretty loyal fellow. He's got his sights on this pink echidna. But she's no match for you, right?" *If I can keep her distracted, those jewels are mine....*

Ekyt walked back and forth in his half of Haven, the home of the guardians of the chaos emerald. *What do I do? I like her, but do I love her? I'm so confused. Back in school, it just seemed people were drawn together. Is this for real?* Ekyt smacked his hand into the wall. He let his head rest as he thought about it. *Should I...What?!*

An alarm sounded throughout Haven. An unauthorized person was in the chamber. He darted down the stairs to the chamber and stopped as he saw a bat. *Rouge? No, she was different. This one had brown*

fur. “Can I help you?” asked Ekyt. *Best not to go in with guns blazing.*

Roxy leaned against the emerald and widened her eyes. She strode forward and held out her hand. “I’m Roxy. I’m sorry, I just got lost. Could you help me find my friend?” *Let’s hope this kid is dumber than he looks.* She had to keep herself from smiling. Ekyt frowned. “Lost in an underground chamber? I’m sorry, but I have to be a little suspicious.” He looked her in the eyes. It was a cautious look. *Best to let Knux sort this out.* “Sure, but we have to wait for my friend to get back. I can’t leave this place alone. I hope you understand.” “Oh, definitely. I don’t want to be a bother.”

Knuckles came into the room, a look of concern on his face. “What? What are you doing here?” Roxy just stared at Knuckles. *Looks like cousin Rouge was holding out on me?* Knuckles inspected the emerald. “She says she got lost, Knuckles. She wants help finding a friend.” Ekyt looked at Knuckles, his eyes indicating that he was suspicious. Knuckles nodded slightly. “Alright. Who’s this friend?” Knuckles asked kindly?

“Well, she’s my cousin, really. Her name is Rouge.” Knuckle stopped short. “Rouge? Rouge the bat? No way, this is a setup. This is…” Roxy sashayed forward and kissed Knuckles, turning the red echidna even redder. Ekyt looked on. *Not this again. Man, this is like a love octogan!*

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Knuckles turned red as Ekyt stood there, befuddled at what just happened. "Now wait a minute, you jezebel! He's spoken for!" Ekyt pushed the two apart. She put a hand on his chest. "Do you feel left out? I'm sorry." She kissed him on the cheek. Ekyt shook his head. "Sorry, I'm already taken." Knuckles escorted her out. Ekyt couldn't help thinking he was getting a little too cozy.

Eden and Linda were still talking in the workout center in Haven when Ekyt walked in, a troubled look on his face. He sat down and explained the story to the two girls. Both shook their heads. That reminded him... *Should I ask. Is this for real?* "I have to go." He turned suddenly and walked out. Linda-Su shook her head and turned to Eden to explain. Eden smiled. "This is classic. Do you want to try that move again?" "Sure." The two went back to yoga.

Rouge smirked as she rifled through her cousin's bag. Change of clothes... more clothes...Aha! The jewels were definitely legit. Rouge swapped them with some false jewels she kept for some petty crimes. She hid the real ones and sat down. *I wonder how things are going.* She didn't have to wonder long. Knuckles came in with her cousin, both looking smug. Rouge looked close and saw a lipstick print on Knuckles cheek. "What's going on here?" Knuckles looked at Rouge. He wiped the print from his cheek. "I found your cousin here in the emerald chamber. She asked me to help her find you." He turned to Roxy. "See you later." It was almost a question. Knuckles left.

"What was that about?" Rouge snarled as she grabbed her cousin. "Oh, nothing. Listen, Rougey, I gotta run. I think I'm gonna move here. Nice place, nice scenery." She said the last part so snottily Rouge wanted to slap her. Instead, she remembered the jewels. "That's okay. Let me know if I can help." Rouge smiled sweetly, though her expression soured as she hugged her cousin. It took all her willpower not to squeeze the life out of her.

Sonic perked up as the unmistakable kick-up of dust that was Shadow's trademark came closer. He raced out to greet his "cousin," only to meet a yellow and black hedgehog in a purple jumpsuit. Sonic stopped short, as did the stranger.

Star's heart skipped a beat as she met her hero. *No time for that now.* "Sonic, I haven't seen you in a long time, and I'm sorry it isn't under more pleasant circumstances." Sonic cocked his head. "I'm sorry, My name is Star. I am Shadow's sister." Sonic thought for a moment, then smiled. "Good to see you again. Now, what's the rush?" Star lowered her head. "My brother is, well, he's kind of out of control. I think I know why, but we need all the help we can get." Sonic nodded. He lifted her up and raced off to the island to find Knuckles and Ekyt. "Sorry, but it'll go faster this way." Star nodded, trying not to show she was enjoying it.

As introductions were made, and it was decided who would go to control Shadow, questions were running around. Finally, the conversation turned to Ekyt. Star turned to him. "A human? I'm sorry, I just don't know if I can trust you...After what happened to my brother." Ekyt, already under stress, almost snapped at her, but calmed down. "I understand, but ask anyone, they will vouch for me." The whole room piped up and agreed. Star again nodded. "I suppose we need all the help we can get. His claims to being the ultimate life form are true."

Next: What has gotten in to Shadow?

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Shadow skated into the room. He was exhausted, his black fur usually shiny was now coated with dust. "I'm done." *I'm the ultimate life form. But take away my emerald and I'm the world's ultimate slave.* Shadow hung his head. His "captor" looked upset.

"Look, Shadow..." Violet Rose stopped there. She had about to admit affections for him, but that would make her like her goody-two-shoes counterpart, Amy. "Thanks for the help. Now, to get the emerald, I want you to do my one more favor." She held out several pictures. Shadow looked through them. "Sonic, Knuckles, Eden, Ekyt...and Star." He threw the pictures. "No. I am not going to destroy my own sister. Keep the emerald." He strode away. Violet chuckled as he turned around, just like she knew he would. Time for a deal.

"Okay, Shadow. Take out the human in the picture and the emerald is yours." Shadow looked up at that. *I swore I would never become this. But I have no choice.* "Dead or alive?" He asked as he gritted his teeth. "Alive. He holds the secret to greater power. If we strike at him, the echidna will follow, and then so will the master emerald, and all it's little brother's and sisters. Shadow left.

Violet sighed. Then laughed. She shed her skin and it was...Snively! "What a sucker. Now to report back... I have him doing the final task now, master Robotnik." A projected image came onto one of the walls. In the background sat the real Violet Rose. "Excellent. Bring me that meddlesome kid, and all his little friends will follow." The image switched off.

Back at the island.

A force barreled into Ekyt hard. He held the human still. "I'm sorry. I have no choice." Shadow drew back his fist and was about to hit the human before Eden grabbed Shadow and flipped him over. "I don't hold with senseless violence." She and Linda-Su double kicked him in the face. He rebounded and was about to hit them when Sonic and Knuckles flew into him and pinned him to the ground. "What has happened, brother?" "Star!" The female hedgehog smiled sadly. "Yes, Shadow. I overheard what happened. This human has agreed to help you with your problem." Ekyt returned, carrying an emerald. "Shadow, this is for you. I said I owed you one, and now I have a chance to pay you back." Shadow was cautious, but he took the emerald. Then it was snatched away by a brown bat. Knuckles snarled "Roxy!"

Roxy winked at him and blew him a kiss. "Sorry, Knux. It's been fun." She turned to fly away, but hit a white bat. Rouge knocked the emerald away and tackled her cousin. She fell almost fifty feet. Sonic and Knuckles still had a hold of Shadow.

Ekyt kicked up dust as he dove and made a last-second catch. "What are you doing? She just tried to steal from you!" Rouge was looking daggers at Ekyt. "She would have died Rouge. I don't intend to allow death unless I cannot prevent it." She put the bat down gently. Then he tied her up. "I will, however, take prisoners should my job require it." Roxy shook her head hard. "What do you mean, your 'job?'" "I'm a sub-guardian of the chaos emerald." Knuckles escorted Roxy to the edge of the island. She looked at him, trying to make him feel bad for her. Knuckles shook his head and put her into the Mobian Badlands.

Ekyt helped Shadow up and held out the emerald. "Take it, Shadow. If Eden is right, we need your help. Besides, the Shadow I know would want revenge." Shadow took the emerald. "Grab on." He snarled. Everyone held on. "Chaos Control!" He bellowed. This would warp them to a standoff with their enemy.

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Snively just finished putting his costume back on when the door came flying inward. "What's going on?" He said. *Oh no, the voice changer didn't work!* Ekyt, Sonic, and Knuckles stopped and gestured to Linda-Su and Eden. Eden nodded to Linda. She arched her back in what looked like an excruciating position. Then she did up nip-up onto he feet and caught Snively under the chin with a kick.

She and Eden tied "her" up. Knuckles, the more experienced of the two, searched for the emerald. Everyone was about to leave when Ekyt suddenly mentioned "Hey, where's the real Violet Rose?" As if by thought, Robotnik appeared via satellite. "I see you defeated my incompetent assistant. If you want to rescue the real Violet Rose, you will let Shadow come. Alone. Any help and she becomes my robot slave."

"You sleezeball! I'm gonna..." Ekyt smashed the screen. "Shadow, be careful. Take the emerald. Just consider it an interest free loan. Shadow raced off as the rest of the group debated on the next step. Ekyt's thoughts were elsewhere.

He stood by himself on the roof of the small building. Leaning on the chimney. Thinking. *Back in school, the right people always seemed to match up. I like her, but do I love her. Am I good enough?* He shook his head. *If I have doubts, I'm not ready.* Linda checked on him.

"You okay?" She asked. "Yeah, just thinking." He answered quickly. "Yeah? `bout what?" she asked as she sat down and beckoned him to do the same. He did. *Do I tell the truth?* "About you." He said. Then he smacked himself in the forehead. "That was lame. Yeah, I was thinking about you. I mean." He shifted uncomfortably. "About us." She smiled at the human. "Hey, don't worry. No one says we have to settle down, have a family. We're both young. Maybe we're more committed, but that's no reason to rush into something we might both regret. Let's just roll with the punches." She kissed him. For the first time, he returned her embrace without hesitation. "Let's go back in." she said, a few seconds later.

Shadow raced into Robotnik's lair. "Let her go. You have my emerald. I'm alone. That was the deal." Robotnik laughed. "For an ultimate life form, you sure have low intelligence. When have I, the great and powerful Robotnik, kept a promise."

Shadow played catch with the emerald Ekyt gave him. He smiled at Robotnik's surprise. "Chaos blast!" he said. "Chaos Control." He outraced the blast and grabbed the tied up Violet and ran before the place blew."

Back on the island.

The new friends all agreed to keep in touch. They all went their separate ways. Ekyt and Linda-Su both slept soundly for the first time since they met.

46 - The Next Guardian issue # 46 A friend indeed!

The Next Guardian Issue # 46: A friend indeed!

Ekyt jumped, landed, jumped again, flipped, his arms out, his coat slowing his descent off the cliff. Today he and Knuckles were working on new skills. Air-fighting seemed a little far-fetched, until you considered that Robotnik was almost always in a hovercraft.

Knuckles glided toward him and free-fell next to him, dreadlocks slowing his fall. "Good so far kid. Now, duck the attacks!" Knuckles attacked and Ekyt dodged the best he could. Out of ten, he dodged eight punches. He looked down and saw thorn bushes. He swore to himself and grabbed a vine. He hung there, until the vine snapped.

He landed on the edge of the thorn bushes, which tore his arm up. "Man, how am I still alive. With all these injuries, you think I would've just bled to death!" "You're alive because of me, knucklehead!" Linda-Su, who was watching the session, shook her head. She bandaged up his arm. "You go through more bandages...Geez, hold still!" Ekyt was squirming again. You would think after their little heart-to-heart chat he would be a little less goofy around her. No such luck.

"Sorry, I'm still a little...you know. Thanks for your help last night. Calming me down. I was murdering myself because I didn't know how to say the three simple words you said: I Love You!" He looked away, his bright-crimson neck giving away his embarrassment. She sighed inwardly. "Okay, go play some more." She said mockingly. He thanked her and dodged up the cliff at a sharp angle.

"Where ya been?" Knuckles asked jokingly. "Funny, Knux. Let's do this again." Knuckles shook his head. "Slow down. We need to fix your jumps." Ekyt let his hands fall to his sides. "Knux, I'm a human. Unless you can get something to compensate for my poor aerodynamics, then I'm a land creature." Knuckles looked him and down. "The coat helps...Let me see your shoes." Ekyt kicked them off. Knuckles looked at them. "Hmmm...yeah, could work. Gotta ask Rotor. C'mon." Knuckles moved away quickly toward Knothole. "That made sense." Ekyt mumbled to himself.

Rotor looked at the shoes carefully. He took some notes. "Give me two hours." He took them into his lab and closed the door. Ekyt decided to visit Tails. Hadn't seen him in a while...

"Yeah, things are going great..." The little brownish-orange fox looked down. "Something's wrong." Ekyt said. "Amy?" He nodded. "What happened?" "Well, after you rescued her, she kind of developed a crush on you." "Ah. I've got an idea. A friend owes me a favor. You save her, she goes back to you. As for me, you know I'm taken." he said with a wink. "A friend? What do you mean." "We'll stage a fight, with me as the prize. You win, you set me free, Amy goes to you." Tails thought about it. Then he

grinned and said something beyond his eleven years: "For never having a girlfriend, you sure know how to make sure women get what they want!" Ekyt just raised his eyes comically. Then he went to find this "friend" but not before warning the rest of Knothole.

"So you'll do it, Star?" (From Violet_Rose- surprise- toldja they'd appear sooner than you thought! The hedgehog smiled. "Certainly. I owe you. So, I capture you, Tails challenges me, pulls off some brave stunt, wins, and sets you free." She smiled. "Tricky little devil, but what about Linda-Su. I think she should arrest you." "Good idea. Aren't you gonna ask what's in it for you?" Ekyt asked, his face revealing nothing. "Okay, I'll bite," she said, "What." "How about an all expenses paid date with Sonic?" Star's eyes lit up. "That's incentive to lose a fight. You've got a deal.

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The Next Guardian Issue # 47

"You sure about this. Personally, I think you're goofy. You oughta get you own love life straight." Linda was tying Ekyt to a tree. She saw his socks. "And your wardrobe. How did you manage to forget your shoes?" Ekyt laughed outright. "Rotor's working on them. Making them give me some ability to jump. Okay, that's good. Tell Star it's time, then get Amy Rose."

Tails came out of the brush and talked loud. "Ekyt, what happened." Ekyt, complete with fake scrapes and blood, coughed out a reply. "Ambushed...like...Shadow...girl." Then he "fainted." Tails slapped him a little bit, until Star came skating in. "It's to late, kid. You better concentrate on saving yourself." At that moment, Linda walked by with Amy. "Oh my God!" they said together.

Tails and Star fought, pulling their punches. Tails then took Star's feet out from under her and pinned her. "I give, I give." Then she threw something in Tails eyes and darted away. "Oh my God, Tails, are you okay?" Tails coughed. "Yeah. I'm okay. Just a little banged up." Amy helped him back to his house and patched him up. He had gotten a few small cuts in the "fight." Linda-Su untied Ekyt. "I can't believe that worked! Geez, the guardians are coming more sly these days." She began to walk away. "Um. Linda? Can you untie me." She stopped. "Oh, sorry!" she said jokingly.

She walked around him and untied the knot. "Thanks." he snorted. "You're welcome." She said brightly. "Shall we go get your shoes. That is, before I have to bandage your feet too?" He grinned goofily. "Yes, lets."

In Rotor's workshop.

Knuckles was waiting for them. "Okay, Mr. MyAerodynamicssuck, here you go." He handed him his shoes, but their was a clear column and the front and back of each shoe. "Thanks. Now what." "Might as well jump." (Credit to Van Halen's "Jump" song.- N.G.) Ekyt jumped and whacked his head on the ceiling. He had jumped at least a foot higher than before. "Cool, how does this work?" Ekyt asked as he massaged his head. Linda-Su shook her head and muttered something like "Men!"

Rotor answered. "When you crouch to leap, the compressed air in those two "wind tunnels" gives you an extra boost without affecting your running speed." "Good deal. Thanks, Rotor. Let me know if I can do anything for you." "I will."

Back to training...

Linda-Su's solo:

“Okay, we are less than five days away from the three month anniversary of Ekyt's arrival. Should we do something for him?” “No, nothing. Never done nothing for a bloke who's a criminal.” Saint John snarled. “Hey, Geoffrey!” Tails said. “What, ya little pipsqueek?” Saint John chuckled. “Shut up!” Said Tails. Sonic laughed. “He told you, Geoff. Yeah, we should do something. A party, maybe. Just gotta keep him busy.” “I think we'll come up with something. Rotor?” asked Linda-Su.

“Yes?” he answered. “Don't you need some weird chemical from the Mobian Badlands?” Rotor smiled as he got the hint. “Why, yes, I do. Maybe Ekyt could get them for me?” She grinned back. “I'll ask.”

The Buildup to the titanic issue 50!!! 3 issues and counting.

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The Next Guardian issue # 48

"The Mobian Badlands? Sure, I can get you a sample from the pond." Ekyt answered. "Thanks, I'd go myself, but I'm too slow." Ekyt walked out of the room.

The Mobian Badlands? Why does that sound so familiar? Ekyt walked quicker. He kept his coat, just in case. Those goofy jumps were starting to mess with his stomach. He jumped to test the shoes one more time, then began the walk. He checked his map. "Let's see here...Badlands...Badlands...there you are!"

The map told him he had to journey through the Dragon's volcanic home, Vesovious. Then through Robotropolis, and boom.

Ekyt sensed something was amiss as he walked toward the volcano. No activity. The flames that shot out the top were caused by dragons. Ekyt walked in, finding only Dulcy.

"Hey, Dulcy, how are you?" Dulcy looked really sad. "Sorry, Ekyt. It's just...Robotnik captured all of my friends. I really am the last dragon on Mobius!" She began to cry. "Dulcy, I'm going through Robotropolis. How about we pull a jail-break jam? (Credit to old Sonic SatAm) She perked up. "why're you going there? Do you have a death wish? Robotnik has put a bounty on your head." She shook her huge head. "I'm coming with you. I don't want to be alone. I'd rather be captured with the other dragons." "No, you'd rather be free with the other dragons. Because we're gonna bust `em out. I owe you, Dulcy. This is the least I can do." (See The Perilous Journey saga- N.G.)

They flew for about an hour before Dulcy stopped. "Okay, we are ten minutes away. What's your plan?" Ekyt looked at her. "Plan? Okay, I go in there and mess with Robotnik while you turn your friends loose and get to safety. I plan to take out a few buildings." Ekyt grinned wickedly. "Are you sure this is safe. For you, I mean. Why put yourself at risk? You said you were just passing through. Just let me go it alone. I can't cost another life in a war that is already too long, and has claimed too many." Ekyt shook his head. "No way. You're not the only one with scars from this. Here' I'll prove it. Ekyt took off his coat and shirt, and pointed to a spot where his chest met his stomach. "This is from the war. Plus other wounds that have healed. Others that aren't going to heal. Now let's go!"

Ekyt jumped into the room, smashing three robots before tapping Robotnik on the shoulder. He held an explosive device. "Miss me?" he said. Then he dove for cover as Robotnik hit the panic button. All the robots on the city would converge on this room. Ekyt planted the device on the side of a computer as he circled Robotnik. "What a surprise. You meddlesome human, for once, I don't think I want to kill you. No, I'd rather have you serve me. "Gotta take a raincheck, Lardball!" Ekyt said gravely as the Robots headed in. He crouched and sprung. Grabbing a windowsill, he swung himself out as he smashed the detonator. He headed toward the jail as the explosion went off.

“Dulcy, how'd it go?” Her smile answered his question. “All of them are safe, except Romhan. He didn't make it... But everyone else did. We all want to thank you.” Glint came forward and handed him a single ring, but it was gold. “This is a smaller version of a power ring. Please take it. I hope it serves you well. You can go. We'll handle ourselves okay.” Ekyt smiled. “You won't have too. I just took out all the robots in the city. He pointed toward the smoldering remains that was once Robotnik's control room.

He shook hands with Glint and hugged Dulcy. Then he headed toward the Badlands. *Time to finish this. Science isn't my thing, but I never mind doing a favor for a friend.*

Linda-Su Solo:

“Okay, he's out of the way for a while. But we have got to work fast. Where should we put the party? We've got friends coming in from out of town.” There was a lot of shouts, but one caught her attention. “The chaos chamber? Knuckles, will that work?” Knuckles nodded. “Yeah. Perfect, actually. The council has a surprise for him.” Linda gave them all jobs and they set to work.

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Ekyt walked along the badlands, following the map Rotor gave him. A rock smacked him painfully in the knee. "What..!" It was Roxy (Another Violet_Rose Creation!) Ekyt walked over and removed the gag. "Well, miss treasure hunter, what happened here?" He untied her. "Got attacked, wise guy. That thing in the tree over there. Ekyt looked skeptical, but walked toward the tree and looked up. He jumped and grabbed a squirming little furry creature. "You got attacked by a cat." He raised his eyebrows. She shrugged. "Well, big guy, you come to rescue me?" She looked up sweetly.

"No, but I will anyway." He untied her. "Still kinda weak..." Roxy fainted. Ekyt sighed and tossed her over one shoulder. He walked over to the pond and scooped up the mud. There went the new gloves. He tossed them out. He carried both Roxy and the sample back toward Knothole.

Oughta do something special for Linda-Su. Wait, that ring...no that won't work. Unless I make it into something different...

Roxy opened one eye and saw the ground moving. *Sucker... Now, when he carries me back, he'll be up for grabs with because of the rescue. That'll put him out of favor with that bimbo echidna.* She coughed as he shifted her weight. *Just a little longer, kid...*

Ekyt finally reached the dragons' volcano. Dulcy nearly fried Roxy. "It's okay, she's out cold. Dulcy, do you happen to have a small chain?" "I certainly do. I appreciate the help earlier. But be careful. Some robots made it out of the mayhem you caused." She handed him the chain. "Thanks, Dulcy. Give my best to Glint and the others." He walked off.

An hour or so passed before they ran into trouble. About twenty swatbots all had guns aimed at him. *Aw man. How do I deal with this. I may not like her, but I don't want her hurt... What*

Roxy sprang up and stuffed a chaos emerald into his stomach. "Hurry up, bonehead, kill them before they hurt me." Roxy kicked a swatbot that came too close. "Hands off the merchandise, buddy." Ekyt sprang into them and distracted them. They fired at him. He noticed they were darts, mostly. Tranquilizer. He dodged and took out one. He took its rifle and fired into the group of metal slaves. "Aw crap!" *Darts don't work on them. Shoulda guessed. Just not my day.*

He fought normal, ignoring the emerald in his hand and the ring in his pocket. He smacked himself in the forehead and dove behind. Roxy was in the top branches. "Use the emerald, stupid." Ekyt grabbed it and thought about the power he had with it.

His pale skin took on a green glow. His hazel eyes turned green. He had only minutes. Fortunately, with these robots that was all he needed. When the dust cleared, he was still green, and he had a couple darts in him, but otherwise unscathed.

He tossed the emerald back to Roxy and plucked out the emeralds with a curse. *Hopefully the whole*

chaos powers thing won't let whatever is in these sharp little monsters get to me...

"C'mon Roxy, I'll escort you personally to your cousin's place." She was gone. Not again...

Linda-Su's solo

"Okay, this is it." Roxy flew in. "Mission accomplished!" She said happily to Linda before flying off, landing next to Knuckles, Rouge, and an angry Julie-Su. "Knuckles, just who is this." Knuckles rolled his eyes. "Julie, this is Roxy. Roxy, Julie." Julie-Su glared at Roxy, while Roxy just smiled mischievously.

"Everyone got the stuff?" Everyone shouted yes. "Great. Knuckles, is the council coming?" "Yup, they want to be here for the presentation."

Everything was ready, they just needed the guest of honor...

50 - The Next Guardian Issue 50

Credits:

Sonic, Shadow, Knuckles, Sally, Rouge, etc,- SEGA, Archie Comics

Ekyt, Linda-Su- (Next Guardian)

Roxy the bat (Violet_Rose)

Violet Rose (Violet_Rose)

Eden the Cat (Violet_Rose)

Star the hedgehog (Violet_Rose)

Jaide- (Jaideanne)

Lightning- (Sonic Wind)

Kiki- (Tikalgirl52)

Mina- (Tikalgirl52)

Kivi-(Tikalgirl52)

Neeko-(Tikalgirl52)

Ragnarok- SegaMan7

Kirita- Lady_Ayame316

Helen- CurlyFry95

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO HAS MADE ME FEEL WELCOME MY FIRST TWO MONTHS ON FAC! IF YOU'RE NOT ON HERE, I'LL ADD YOU ON MY PROFILE. THANKS AGAIN,

NEXTGUARDIAN

P.S. SORRY THE PARTS ARE SHORT, BUT I WANT TO FIT EVERYONE IN AND I KNOW MORE ABOUT SOME CHARS THAN OTHERS. IF YOU WOULD LIKE YOUR CHAR TO APPEAR AGAIN, NO PROBLEM. LET ME KNOW!

Ekyt walked back into Knothole. "Strange, it's never empty like this." He looked around. No sign of anyone. Rotor's lab was empty too. He slipped the Mobian mud sample under the door and kept walking. The more empty rooms he saw, the more concerned he grew. *This isn't right. Something is messed up here...*

He ran full speed toward the island and scaled the side using a vine. He hit a ledge and the vine ended. Without panicking, he crouched low and used his new shoes to spring up. He grabbed onto the ledge and pulled himself up.

He hit the slide that went into the chaos chamber and landed in a large furry ball- what the heck!

Ragnarok (SegaMan7) grinned down at the shocked human. "Hello, my name is Ragnarok. You must be Ekyt." She laughed at the sight of the human's eyes getting wider. "Wha..." was all Ekyt could manage. He rubbed his eyes. "Nice to meet you...um...who are the rest of these people?" Ekyt's eyes scanned the room. Kiki, Mina, and Neeko (TikalGirl52) walked up next. Neeko shook his hand before introducing the others with him. He had his head down. So did Ekyt, for that matter. He always had a hard time meeting women. Kiki and Mina said hi and giggled. "Boy, humans are weird..." Mina whispered to Kiki. Kiki giggled and answered "Only the males." Then a whoosh came down from the top of the chamber.

Ekyt, shaking off the cobwebs made a diving catch as a girl fell into his arms. "Hi," said Kivi. "Um...Hi." Said Ekyt. Kiki laughed. "Here, I'll take her. She's my daughter. Well, in the future." Kiki turned to Kivi "Just what were you doing up there?" Kivi shrugged- "just `splorin. What a weird place." She went off to climb some more.

Ekyt finally saw a familiar face. "Shadow, what's going on here?" The hedgehog managed a smile. "Party. This is Hope, Star (Violet_Rose), and Kirita (Lady_Ayame316). I guess you could call them my family." "Nice to meet all of you. Um, I, am just a little confused as to how all these people got here." Shadow smiled. "Chaos Control, how else?"

A bright yellow hedgehog raced up. "Shadow, hurry up. Sonic-piñata." Shadow rolled his eyes. "This is Lightning (SonicWind)" Lightning looked the guy up and down and said "Hmmm. Goofy lookin' thing. What are you, anyway?" "I'm a human. I'm guessing you're a hedgehog." Shadow snickered while Lightning frowned. Then he broke into a Sonic-like smile. "Nothing gets past you, braniac." He zipped off to hit the Sonic piñata.

Another hedgehog walked by. "Shadow, this him?" she asked. Shadow nodded. "I'm Helen (CurlyFry95). Charmed." Ekyt shook her hand. "Nice to meet you."

Ekyt walked around. Eden (Violet_Rose) was drinking some weird tea and she waved him over. "Hi Eden, how's it going?" "Oh, great. You have gotta try this. Brand new brew." She handed him a cup. He took a careful sip, and then downed the whole thing. "That's good...what is it... Wait! Don't tell me. Let's just leave it a mystery." Eden laughed.

Another female walked over, this one Ekyt knew from somewhere, but couldn't tell where. So he was totally shocked when she called his name. She looked at his expression, then explained. "I'm Violet Rose (Violet_Rose). The way Shadow tells it, you helped save my life. I never got to thank you." "Really, no trouble." Ekyt said. "Glad to help." She shook his hand again and then walked back to her group.

Roxy (Violet_Rose) and Sasha (Texas_Luver) sauntered up. "Hey babe." Said Sasha, giving him a bump with her hip. Roxy walked over and kissed him on the cheek. "Thanks for the save. Too bad you're taken. You and me could've lived happily ever after. The offer is still open to help me." Roxy said, filing her nails, leaning against a table. Sasha kissed him on the other cheek. "Yeah, I'd almost forgive you for the fact you stuck me with your counterpart. He is way to overprotective. I'll bet you would've let me have some fun..."

Ekyt turned red as the two giggled. Finally, another unfamiliar face came over and rescued him from the embarrassment. "My name is Jade. (Jaidenna) You must be Ekyt. Glad to finally meet you. This guardian thing must be tough. Linda-Su told me some stuff about you. And hey, you have my sympathy. I know what it's like to be alone..." She looked sad for a moment. "Eggman, or, as you call him, Robotnik, separated me from my family and I have never found them. Thanks for sticking it to Robotnik." She went off to see some other people.

Ekyt waded his way through the room. Finally he got to where all the people he knew were. Rotor apologized. "I don't really have any use for Mobian mud. I just wanted to help." "That's alright Rotor." Sally and the Royal family congratulated him on the damage he had done to Robotnik's forces. And on down the line.

"Way past cool, kid. When I first met you, I didn't know what to think. But, man, you put those doubts down." Ekyt managed a tired grin. "Without your help clearing my name, I wouldn't be here. Thank you."

Linda-Su fired her pistol in the air. "Okay, everyone, settle down. First off, Knuckles and the Echidna high council have an announcement. Knuckles..." Knuckles cleared his throat and began- "As you know, this human has lived among us for two months now. After numerous awards, and plenty of setbacks, we have something special for him. But first, roll the clips."

The clips were hilarious, even Ekyt had to admit. It showed all his screw-ups. The time he and Espio were sparring and he flipped himself over after a kick. Sasha, Rouge, and Roxy kissing him. (At this point Linda-Su playfully bounced a cup off his head.) There were about a hundred clips of him blushing. The whole room laughed. Ekyt turned red and someone snapped a picture of that.

Then there was the times Amy Rose had hit him with her hammer. That actually got applause.

Then the clips grew serious. Him fighting with a broken collarbone. Him taking an arrow in his side. (At this point, only Geoffrey Saint John laughed. He got rained on with trash.) The last shot was of him getting arrested." Linda-Su stood up and explained. "This was for the murder of the queen. His counterpart from the Cosmic Interstate caused this. As you can see, the camera adds ten pounds. Especially to the sexy constable slapping the cuffs on him. The crowd roared with laughter at that crack.

"Now, Knuckles, what is the announcement?" Knuckles stood up and began. "The council has decided that Ekyt is no longer a guardian in training. He is now a sub-guardian. And now, my father, Locke, who also heads up the echidna high council, will give him our greatest honor."

Ekyt knelt down as Locke slipped a white stripe on his shirt. "Traditionally, this is attached by a female, but since you are unmarried... Linda-Su, the council asks that you attach this band of citizenship on this human." Linda-Su hurried up and stuck it on. "For bravery, protection of the emerald, and epitomizing what it means to be a guardian, we, the echidna high council, on this twenty-first day of March, the year of two thousand and six, we award you your official citizenship." The crowd erupted with applause as Ekyt bowed to the council. The party resumed.

"Linda, can you meet me on Mount Fate. I need to talk to you." The human slipped quietly out as the party roared around him.

The moon was bright, especially this high up. The glow from the ash from Mount Fate made the human look almost regal. He stood just the same way after he had rescued Linda-Su.

"Thank you." He said to her. He turned to face her. Clearly forcing himself, he locked his hazel eyes on her green eyes. He couldn't help but notice how the moon complimented her eyes. He reached into his pocket. "For everything. I...want you to have this. I had it made, just for you. I hope you like it." He held out a small golden ring on a silver chain.

The echidna's eyes lit up. "Oh my God. It's beautiful." After a couple failed attempts, Ekyt managed to say, "You complement each other then." Linda-Su smiled a half smile and grabbed the human in a tight hug. Her eyes brimmed with unshed tears as she held him tight. "I never thought I would grow to love a human. After the war, and Robotnik...mmm!" Ekyt, for the first time, got the courage up to give her a kiss.

After the seconds passed, the two gazed at each other. Linda could sense his embarrassment and thanked him again. "welcom..." he mumbled.

A shout went up from the chamber. "What... Not now..." Ekyt turned to Linda. "Grab my belt and hold on." She did and he crouched and jumped. They both floated through the air, courtesy of her dreadlocks and his coat. They hit the dirt running.

Guests were scared. Sonic, Shadow, Tails, and a few others were fighting with some robots. Ekyt saw himself and Robotnik in the background. "Go get that projectile weapon." He told Linda. "I'll handle them for now, but we're gonna need the fire power.

Ekyt first thought of all the people that came to congratulate him.

"Hey, you two ugly creeps! You wanna go? You guys can leave all these fine people in peace, or we can do this the hard way, which involves a lot of pain. You've got three seconds before I rush you.

His evil self walked forward as the robots released most of the guests. "It's only you and your friends we want. I mean, your close friends." His evil self smiled. The good Ekyt punched and split his Knuckles on his "twin's" teeth, knocking them loose before tacking him through a table. Robotnik had a claw on the

end of his hovercraft, which he used to grab the human. "Run for it!" Ekyt yelled. They all stopped. "Go! I'll handle them!" There was no lack of bravery in the room. "I'm sorry, but leave! This is an emergency! Get weapons!" They all ran to comply.

TO BE CONTINUED.

THANKS AGAIN TO EVERYONE WHO LET ME USE THEIR CHARS!

ALSO, THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO HAS DONE REQUESTS, LOOKED

AT MY PICS, READ MY FANFIC. THANK YOU!

HERE'S TO THE FIRST 50 OF THE NEXT GUARDIAN.

MORE TO COME!

51 - The Next Guardian issue # 51

The guests scrambled for weapons. Robotnik lowered the human face to face with his evil counterpart, who reared back and punched the human in the face. Ekyt took it on the side, keeping his teeth in the process. The evil him grinned.

A blue. Metallic looking hedgehog came in through the hole in the wall with a pistol and shot the cable holding Ekyt who threw his counterpart into a punch bowl. Ekyt bounded next to the newcomer. "Thanks for the save...um, who, or what, are you?" "My name is 43 (MechaSonic 43)." He pointed to the two villains who were recovering in the center of the room. "But you two can call me your worst nightmare." He fired the pistol into Robotnik's hovercraft. It damaged it only superficially. Robotnik fired a missile that exploded near 43, and shook him up.

Before Ekyt could check on him, a hedgehog ran over. "43?" He didn't answer. She turned to him. "Why didn't you help him?" "I was just about to...say, who are you again?" "Danielle," (Sabrinat14) she said coldly. "Next time, do something, you lazy excuse for a...human? Sleaze ball." Ekyt sighed. *Not my night.* He was tackled by himself. The two wrestled until Robotnik pointed a weapon at Ekyt.

"Give up, and maybe I'll let all your little friends live." He fired up the weapon, a laser by the looks of it. "No. I'm tired of being your prisoner. If you want them..." He gestured toward the guests that had since taken cover. "...Then you're going to have to get through me." Robotnik fired at his feet. "That should be a relatively easy task." THUDDWUSSSHH! Linda-Su had returned and fired the projectile weapon Ekyt had given her. (See previous issues) It caused Robotnik's metal minions to fall apart.

Ekyt took the opportunity to grab onto the hovercraft with his throwing knives. He wrestled the weapon from Robotnik but got hit from behind by his evil twin.

The weapon skittered across the room to the feet of 43. "43! Glad you could make it! Blast them!" "Linda! If you keep talking to 43 like he's yours, I will kill you!" Linda-Su rolled her eyes and loaded in another shot. She scattered more. 43 destroyed more with the weapon. Daniel took the pistol 43 had before and fired some shots until it was empty. Then she threw the useless weapon at the evil Ekyt. It bounced off his head. As he turned toward her, the good Ekyt threw him into Robotnik. "Curses. Foiled again..." He retreated, leaving the evil Ekyt. By himself. Or so he thought.

Sasha (Texas_Luver) kicked him in the face with her high heel. He turned to nail her, but stopped. "Sasha? I thought you hated him? Oh, forget it." He heard the whoosh behind him and ducked and Linda-Su sailed into the hedgehog and floored her. They hit the ground and exchanged punches. Ekyt went to his counterpart. "It's over. Take your little friend and leave."

The bad him shook his head. "No. This isn't over. Never. The problem with you is you won't kill me." (NOTE: THE GOOD EKYT WILL BE IN CAPS, THE BAD IN LOWER CASE-N.G.) "NO. I WON'T KILL YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE ME. I DON'T HOLD WITH KILLING. ESPECIALLY DUMB ANIMALS LIKE YOU!" "well, I do. I'd say you've foiled me for the last time." He pointed a gun at the human. Sasha did

the same with Linda-Su. "back up. up against the wall. now!"

They both were hit from behind. Shadow and Star (Violet Rose) both fought the two. At one point, Roxy tried to jump in, but was thwarted by Kirita (Lady Ayame316)

Ekyt, Sonic, and Knuckles went to get rid of the last robots as the fight raged on. Lightning (SonicWind) flew into the battle two, this time holding a thick tree branch. "If I didn't want a fight, I wouldn't waste my time with you pathetic creatures." Then he grinned and nailed one robot after another until the branch broke.

Sonic dispatched two with his figure eight move, while Knuckles glided into another. Ekyt, exhausted already, fought off one robot who grabbed him and flipped himself over the robot and pushed it forward.

At last it was over. Ekyt's lip was bleeding, his eyes were black, and he ached from exhaustion. Everyone else seemed unscathed. Sonic helped him to his feet. "Thanks everyone. Sorry I didn't get to say that before the party got crashed. Take care on your way home." They turned to leave. "Oh, wait. Let me know if I can do anything for any of you." They all shouted approval.

"Way to go, buddy. You stuffed those skuzzy robots." Sonic patted him on the back. He could tell his friendly gesture accidentally hurt the human. "No problem. Thanks for the save." Knuckles shook his head. "Welcome to the species, kid." Linda-Su was banged up, too. "She was bruised. "What happened?" Ekyt asked. "Sasha got a few lucky shots in." Ekyt sighed mockingly. "Geez, when are you gonna learn to take care of yourself?" he said to her, mocking the lecture she had once given him. "Oh, shut up. Let's get cleaned up." They walked, or rather, limped off, to get ready for the next fight.

52 - The Next Guardian issue 52

Ekyt and Linda-Su both got cleaned up. She had to work the next day. Ekyt always worked. He walked into the chaos chamber and sighed at the hole in the wall. "Geez, it smells awful in here. Those stupid explosions." He had a bag of gas masks. The chemicals could be hazardous. "How am I gonna fix this?"

"Perhaps I can help." Ekyt spun around, hand on his staff, ready for a fight. "Relax. I just want to help. Great party, by the way." "Uh, thanks..." "I'm Blain. (Mr_Gimp) Shadow's my dad." Ekyt coughed on the water he was drinking when he heard that. "Oh, Shadow never mentioned he had kids. Um, okay, so, how should we fix this?"

"Chaos control," he answered simply as he warped time and finished the wall in seconds. Ekyt had gotten used to chaos control by now, since it had saved his life. But he'd never seen anyone but Shadow or Star (Violet_Rose) do it.

"Blain, how old are you, if you don't mind my asking." "I'm twelve. But dad says I act older. I dunno if that's good or not." Ekyt shook his head. "Coming from your dad, I'd say that's a good thing. Thanks for your help." "No problem. Okay if I hang around? Dad says I don't get out enough." Blain just shrugged. "Um, sure."

Knuckles came in. "Nice job on the wall." he said to Ekyt. "Thank him," he cocked his head toward Blain. Blain explained who he was to Knuckles. Knuckles shook his head. "Shadow has a son...man! I thought I would have kids before him."

At that moment, Ragnarok (Sega_Man7) walked in with two others. He introduced them as Gaia (Sega_Man7) and Mariic (Sega_Man7). Mariic gave Ragnarok a fond look. So did Gaia. Then they gave each other a look that said *She's mine!*

"We came to help with the damage from last night. Wasn't there a hole over there?" Ragnarok asked. "There was, but Blain fixed it." Linda-Su walked in next.

Around her neck was the pendant that Ekyt had given her. They exchanged fond glances before getting to work cleaning up. Sonic zoomed in next, with Tails in tow.

"Hey group, what's the word?" he asked. Ekyt handed him a gas mask. "what' this for?" Before anyone could answer, Gaia began to glow strangely. "What the..."

They all began to glow. They all blacked out.

When they woke up, they were on a weird planet. "What is this place?" asked Knuckles. Ragnarok sighed. "Gaia, you really need to control this goofy power of yours." She turned to Knuckles: "Welcome to Zoness."

“Zones” was a world full of water. They had somehow landed in a village. The inhabitants seem to be scared of their surroundings and kept in their houses. “Whatever you do, keep those masks on. Everything here is polluted. So, until Gaia transports us back, we're stuck here.” She didn't look overly enthused to be back on her home planet.

Next Issue: Trouble in...Well, not paradise.

53 - The Next Guardian issue # 53

Why Ragnarok (Sega_Man7) wasn't happy to be back on Zoness (Sega_Man7) soon became clear. Linda-Su spotted it first. A wanted poster. "Um, pardon me, Ragnarok?" she asked. "Yes?" "Um, why didn't you tell us you are wanted for trying to slay the Eel monster?" Ragnarok, Mariic (Sega_Man7), and Gaia (Sega_Man7) all turned pale. "You mean..." She snatched the paper from Linda. "Aw no." she threw the paper down. "I thought this would have blown over." She shook her head. "I'll explain, but first we need to get to high ground."

Ekyt, more than a little angry after being transported to this wacky place, caught up to Gaia. "Why do we have to go somewhere high?" "So we don't get killed by the tidal wave that's about to hit this place." Mariic snarled back.

"Aw crap, I can't swim that great..." Ekyt's shoulder was still soar from the fight. He started to get rid of his mask, but was stopped by Ragnarok. "Don't take it off! It's poisonous here! Gaia, Mariic, and myself are native and have adapted to the pollution. That's why we don't need any. But I don't know what it would do to a human..."

Gaia walked quickly to catch up to Ragnarok. "Shame we didn't finish that Eel monster off... You look cute." The comment had just blurted forward. "No, you look beautiful" Mariic said as he moved on Ragnarok's other side. Ekyt jumped in between all of them. "Enough. Settle your love problems later. We need to get shelter, not to mention get off this goofy planet. How do we do that anyway?"

Mariic answered. He really didn't like this human. He was too close to Ragnarok... "Gaia can transport us back. Unfortunately jerk can't control the power, so you're stuck here." Gaia turned at that "YOU...insulting ME! That's a good one. Who's idiotic idea was it to try to kill that thing-let me think...um...hold on, I'll get it...YOURS!" The two fought until Ragnarok broke it up. "I'm not going to pick either of you until you settle down! Right now, we've got bigger problems than you two having a macho-off to get my attention! Wait, what was that..."

A huge, grey colored thing jumped at them. Mariic and Gaia dove for cover. Ekyt got Ragnarok out of the way and then dove with Linda-Su. The huge thing went limp upon impact. "What was that thing?" Ekyt asked. "Dust devil. They are the product of the pollution here." Mariic didn't seem as hostile after Ekyt saved Ragnarok.

"It's not dead!" Gaia yelled as Linda-Su fired her crossbow (See issue 10- N.G.) into it. It didn't affect the creature, except make it madder. It snatched Linda-Su as she fired determinedly into its huge fuzzy body. "Hey, let go of my girlfriend!" *That* made Linda-Su stop firing. *Aw man, that didn't come out loud, did it?* He crouched and jumped and threw a kick into the creature. "Aim for its face!" Yelled the three others. Blaine (Mr_Gimp), who had been relaxing, finally had enough. "Chaos Blast!" He fired it at the creature. It singed Ekyt and Linda-Su too. The creature set on fire.

Ekyt freed Linda from its grasp as his coat and her dreadlocks slowed his descent. Ekyt turned to

Blaine. "Thanks for the save, but next time wait until I'm out of the way." Blaine frowned. "This isn't my problem. It's yours." *Stupid human.*

"The way I see it, it's your problem, too. You're stuck here." The hedgehog glared back at him. "Chaos control!" Nothing happened. "What? I can't get out of here." He turned back to Ekyt. "We'll do this your way." The group ran for cover.

The wave was coming...

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The Next Guardian Issue # 54

The group raced for the highest point on the island. "Ekyl, me and Knuckles can glide over to it. We'll meet you there!" They jumped and soared gracefully toward Mount Aquas. Blaine raced ahead.

That left the four normal creatures. They reached the base of the mountain. "We'll never make it!" Mariic shouted. The wave was rushing behind them. "Grab on to me!" Ekyl shouted over the roar of the oceanic menace. They did. "Crouch, then jump on three...1...2...3! Jump!" They jumped to the top of the mountain.

"What exactly causes these waves?" asked Knuckles. "The eel monster. Tonight we're going to finish it!" The eel monster was riding on the waves, cruising closer.

Gaia, Ragnarok, and Mariic became one huge being. Ekyl didn't bother asking how they did it. "Ragnaraik (Sega Man7) is gonna smash you!" The eel monster dove toward the two echidnas first. Knuckles pushed Linda away. Both guardians jumped. Ekyl compacted himself and then threw a kick while Knuckles used his knuckles to take a hunk out of the eel. Linda-Su meanwhile fired an arrow into it's side. That distracted it long enough for Blain to hit it with a chaos blast.

The monster swayed, but didn't fall. Ragnaraik used the combined power of three to launch the eel off the building. It landed on the now-bare ground on the city. It was finally over.

Then, with one sweep, something else knocked all of them off their feet. They were doomed. "The dust banshee!" Ragnaraik dissipated and became separate again. Gaia immediately fell over. "It's too late...for me...the poison has got to me...the ell...got me the last time...finish it..." Gaia died on top of Mount Aquas.

"Noooo!" Ragnarok cradled his head. "Let's win this one for Gaia!"

The dust banshee had other ideas. It knocked the emerald away from Blaine, who was about to hit it with a chaos blast. The two echidnas jumped and tried to attack but got knocked out of the air. Both rebounded and hit the creature while a rainbow flash hit it from behind.

Ekyl dove around to the back and kicked it's leg out from under it. "We've gotta knock this meatball off the building!" "I can help." Said the rainbow creature. "I'm Sega the hedgehog (Sega_Man7). We need to kill this thing before it kills us. Human, when I give the word, kick it's leg. Other creatures, push it's front! Go!"

The dust banshee made one last swipe after Ekyl kicked it's leg. It caught Linda-Su and she fell off the

cliff. Ekyt wasted no time. He grabbed her hand and pulled her back up. She gave him a fond look and jumped back into the fray. *A woman after my own heart*, Ekyt thought with a grin.

The creature was on one leg, falling backward. "Allow me." Sega dove shoulder-first into it, knocking it off the mountain.

"Thanks for the save...it's Sega, right?" Knuckles asked. "Yes, and you are...Knuckles the echidna. This is Blaine the hedgehog, Linda-Su, she's also an echidna, and this is Ekyt, he's a human." The hedgehog nodded. "Thanks to all of you. But you better hurry off of here. The air in those masks won't last long."

They got off the Mountain, but were still stranded.

In Knothole

Prince Elias and Princess Sally, along with Archimedes, were studying the book of Acorns (Retrieved by Ekyt and Knuckles a while back in the series- N.G.) Sonic had informed them that the guardians as well as a couple others had disappeared. This book should have the power to bring them back.

"Ahh, here it is. Andiche no mortis!" The incantation opened a portal.

Back on Zoness

"Thanks aga..." Ekyt was cutoff in midsentence. Sega looked on curiously as his new friends disappeared. "Strange. Hope they'll be back someday..."

(WILL THEY MEET UP AGAIN? THAT'S UP TO YOU, READERS! LET ME KNOW- N.G.)

Knuckled landed first, and got to his feet. "ohhh...that hurt. Where're the others..." his question was soon answered. Ragnarok and Marik came crashing down. Next came Blaine, who hovered his way down with his shoes. Then Ekyt and Linda-Su.

Ekyt landed hard but rebounded to catch Linda. He put her down quickly but gently. "Don't ask. Waaay to long to explain." Ekyt said to the approaching Royal family.

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The Next Guardian special 2

It's only a test...For now

"We need to check his morals." "Agreed, Locke," said Merlin Prower. "What tests shall we use." "We need the girl. We need to test his morals first and foremost, and we need to see if he knows when to break the law. For that, we need Constable Remington.

The two constables were summoned before the command. "Remington, you are to arrest the human for charges of theft. Linda-Su, we need you to "disappear." You both understand your rolls?" Linda-Su knew better than to disagree with the council. "Yes," they both said.

Ekyt, who was nursing his wounds in Haven, where he lived in one half and Knuckles lived in the other. The door was kicked in and Ekyt immediately sprang to his feet. "Oh, it's you Constable. What can I do for you." "You can stay quiet, and come with me." He slapped on the cuffs. "What are the charges?" Ekyt asked calmly. "You stole the spare emerald, that's what. We recovered it last night, under your bed. Now come along."

He tossed the stunned human in the jail cell. Ekyt hadn't been there long when Knuckle came in. "Constable, Linda-Su and the emerald have gone missing." "What?!!" Ekyt raced to the bars. Knuckles walked over. "You didn't do it. You couldn't have. You've been here. Linda-Su was kidnapped by the Dark Legion. For treason. She used to support them. Julie-Su is gone to." Ekyt turned to the constable. "Let me out." The constable shook his head. "Can't do that, you're guilty." Ekyt sighed as Knuckles gave him a slight nod. "Sorry, Remington." Ekyt concentrated on the emerald The door popped open. Remington drew his gun. Ekyt kicked his hand and pulled the gun on him. "I'm going with Knuckles. Now don't move until I'm gone." Ekyt backed out and then tossed the gun away.

"This started out as a test. But this is the real deal. The Dark Legion hates the guardians. They've captured me in the past. This time they're after both of us. And they don't spare the torture." They raced along deep into the lush jungles. A stabbing pain hit Ekyt. "I'm...fine...". He got a telepathic message. **This is Sega, Ekyt. You have been poised by the dust banshee. The eel as well as Mount Aquas will soon be in your world. Hurry and accomplish what you can, for even I can't say if you will live or die...** Ekyt gulped, but they kept moving. *It felt like my ribs were going to crack. What was that?* He kept moving. He couldn't bear the thought of Linda-Su being tortured. She was tough, but it tore him apart to think of her in pain. They had grown close.

They arrived at the central location for the Dark Legion. After taking out two guards, Ekyt told Knuckles

to go incognito, while he would provide the distraction.

Ekyt walked quietly inside to see Linda-Su and Julie-Su tied up. He forgot all else and tore down the aisle, punching out guards left and right. He reached them and had them untied before he heard a gun click behind him. It was Lien-Da. "Drop the ropes guardian." Ekyt did and then asked. "Please, you can have me, but let them go." "Sure." Ekyt braced himself for the biggest sacrifice of his life. "I love you Linda-Su." He whispered. "Go!" The gun barked. Ekyt didn't feel it hit him though.

Lien-Da stared down at the human she had just shot. Dead. "Good riddance." They could perform tests on him without resistance now.

Ekyt was greeted by Aurora. "Well, human, welcome to the afterlife." She said. "Wha...I'm dead?" Ekyt stammered. "That depends on your outlook, Ekyt. Death is only the beginning, remember? You died a valiant death. Do you know what killed you. It wasn't the gun. The dust banshee poisoned you. The gun simply sped up the process. Now, please step through the portal..." "No! Wait! Is the poison out of me?" Ekyt said. "Yes, the emerald you protect cleansed you upon death. Now, please, do not make this hard..." "I am not going to leave my friends. And for that matter, this death isn't real." Aurora smiled sadly. "I know you wish this to be a test, guardian. You do not lack courage. But you really have died. At least temporarily. You have earned another life. You are only the third to achieve this. You can go, but we will meet again." She kissed him on the head. "Take care, human." Ekyt dove back down to the Island.

"Aurora, I trust the guardian has passed his test?" Locke asked. "Yes, he has Locke. He has the heart of many past guardians put together. I only hope his life is a long one..." "As do I Aurora, we have fallen on hard times here and require his services. Thank you for your trouble."

Ekyt woke up. Lien-Da had the two girls, plus Knuckles. All looked saddened. He got to his feet. The startled looks made Lien-Da turn around. "No...you were dead. You can't be here... Kragok!" The other Echidna leader came rushing in. "So human, you live still? We can fix that." Ekyt rushed the side of the gun and snatched it. "Let them go, and we'll settle this. You have your guardians, what use have you for the women? Let them go, and you may escape bruise-free." Ekyt snarled. He handed the gun To Linda-Su and motioned to her and Julie-Su to escape.

He sat in the chair, but then slid it between his legs and cracked it over Kragok's head. With him out cold, Ekyt and Knuckles tied Lien-Da up. "Your mistake was going after our girls." Knuckles snarled.

When they returned to the island, all of them were summoned down to the Grand Conservatory. "Ekyt, as you may have guessed, your "death" was once again a test, as was your arrest. Both guardians acted bravely. Ekyt, you still show reckless disregard for yourself. We need you. Please, be careful." The Locke smiled. "Aurora has never seen a human before, so she is tempted to keep you. Also, I think it's time for your permanent stripe of citizenship. This one will curve like Knuckles' does, to show you are a guardian."

Ekyt knelt down and took off his shirt. Linda-Su stuck it on, taking her time. She couldn't help but laugh at the human turning red. She also couldn't help but notice his muscular frame. She finished and let him up.

Knuckles and Julie-Su kissed. "Top that!" said Knuckles. Linda-Su grinned at the human and grabbed him and kissed him. "That's for the save." She kissed him more passionately. "That's for the contest!" Ekyt grinned, and said. "Looks like it's a tie!"

NEXT ISSUE: LOVE DOES STRANGE THINGS- NEXT GUARDIAN SPECIAL 3

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The Next Guardian Issue # 56

Knuckles and Ekyt went over the dark legion's history. Julie-Su and Linda-Su were once supporters. Now they were both "With" guardians, the very kind they set out to kill. Next they discussed what to do about them. They didn't have to wait long, as Sonic came zipping in.

"Thought you guys should know, there's an army of Robots marching towards Knothole. With them are those cloaked-echidna losers." Knuckles and Ekyt looked at each other before Knuckles said "Okay, hold them off. We'll warn the others on the island and meet you."

Ekyt and Knuckles warned the others and met at Knothole. Linda-Su rode up on her motorcycle. "Dark Legion again? They've gotta go." She said. Julie-Su, who had been riding shotgun, agreed. "Lowlife scum." Linda spoke up. "Ekyt, take my bike. I've got range weapons. Be careful." Without thinking, he kissed her and jumped on.

He sped towards the battle. He didn't waste time with words. He and the others who protected this place jumped into the fray. With their combined strength, they drove them back. Then the all pulled out guns. The Dark Legion had weapons, and had them outnumbered.

Lien-Da strode to the front, with Kragok near her. "If you two guardians surrender yourselves, we will leave. We don't control the robots." Knuckles and Ekyt, upon assuming the mantle of guardian, agreed to protect other creatures as well as the emerald. Lien-Da smiled and snapped her fingers. The two guardians were arrested.

"So, guardians, you both have come back from the dead. This time, you won't. But, let's dispense with the pleasantries, shall we. Just tell me what I want to know, and everyone will be happy. Where is the chaos chamber." "I don't know," said Knuckles. Lien-Da sighed. "Let's try you, human. Where is the chaos chamber?" "Beats me." Said Ekyt. "Very well, I'll do just that. Beat them." She said to the guards as she left the room. The guards swooped down and pounded the two shackled creatures.

"Let us go, you freak!" Linda and Julie were brought in next. They were seated across from the two guardians. "Now, let's try again. Where is the emerald?" "I don't know," they both said. The door burst in and in came...

"Not you again!" Dmitri (Formerly Enerjak) "Yes, human, me. This time I brought some persuasion with me." He held up the chaos syphon (For those who don't know, it drains emeralds of their power and was going to be used to restore Echidnapolis to it's place on Mobius.-N.G.) "Since through your veins runs the energy of the emerald itself, let's drain you! Who's first? You've both caused me so much trouble...Ahhh, both of you."

He switched it on for a few seconds as the guardians felt a searing pain. "Had enough?" Ekyt had

He concentrated on his ring (Forged from fifty power rings and a chaos emerald) and felt the power in his body grow. He then transferred it to Knuckles.

Hyper Knuckles snapped out of his bindings and rushed the stunned echidnas. He freed Ekyt as they started to clean house:

Next Issue: What's happening on Mobius?

57 - The Next Guardian Issue # 57

As soon as he was free, Ekyt charged at the group of evil echidnas. He flipped over the table on them, pinning some of them. Hyper Knuckles kept at Kragok. Ekyt watched as Dmitri fumbled with the chaos syphon. It wasn't going to end that way.

Ekyt hopped over the table, and charged. He collided into the echidna with his shoulder., sending both sprawling. "Knuckles, you make a break for it before the power wears off. I'll finish here!" Knuckles nodded and took the members of the Dark Legion out.

Ekyt turned back to Dmitri. "Traitor! I knew you couldn't be trusted!" Dmitri grinned wickedly. "This from a human? Huh! You'd like to believe your species is tops, wouldn't you? They're not, not even in intellect. You against me is a joke!"

Ekyt kept his stoic expression in place. "Check the track record. It's 1-0, my favor. That's not gonna change now!" The two charged simultaneously.

Knuckles felt the power wear off and glided down to Mobius his normal red self. "Knux! Good to see ya! We need all the help we can get!" Sonic had been fighting for the better part of an hour nonstop, and he was starting to tire. The robots kept on coming. "Glad to be of service!" shouted Knuckles as he jumped into the ruckus.

Ekyt and Dmitri's battle had raged on for twenty minutes. Ekyt had taken more punishment, but he scored a crucial hit by kicking the chaos syphon. It started to hum with energy. "Dmitri! Look, we can continue this senseless fight, or we can both escape. There's no time." "You forget, human. I'm immortal. 11 broken emeralds run through my veins! I cannot be killed by something as simple as a roof collapsing.

"Don't you know what happens when chaos energy hits chaos energy? The explosion would kill even you!" Ekyt tried to reason with the echidna. Finally, he gave up. He kicked the glowing syphon to himself and caught it handily. He dashed outside and threw it as far away as he could. It exploded, knocking both combatants off their feet. A tree fell on Dmirti. Ekyt was about to run off, but he couldn't leave the struggling echidna. Ekyt held out his hand. "Come on. That shockwave might have caused a chain reaction." Ekyt pulled the echidna up and ran off without waiting for an answer.

Ekyt landed in the fray and took out two SWATbots. The Knothole gang shouted it's approval. He, Knuckles, Sonic, Shadow, and Tails pushed their way forward. Tails went down at one point, causing Amy to smack the SWATbots responsible with the special gold and diamond hammer Ekyt had made her (Check the first big battle issue. I think it was around # 10-12- N.G.) Shadow got hit, but didn't miss a step, as Violet Rose (Violet_Rose) swung a club she took from a downed SWATbot.

"Ekyt! Heads up!" Linda-Su shouted. Her bike came toward him. He jumped on and shouted to the others. "Get Robotnik!" Sonic, Shadow, and Ekyt rushed forward. Robotnik, seeing this, ordered a

retreat. Knuckles and Tails fought the last of the robots.

It was over.

Sonic had sprained a quill. Sally grabbed chief medical officer Quack and told him to perform a check-up on all participants. Sonic came first. Shadow had gotten a bad cut on his elbow, which was being healed by Violet Rose. For the first time in a long while, Shadow actually smiled. *I like the whole "a kiss will make it better thing,* he thought. Tails had caught one of his Tails in between a SWATbots and a rock. Amy pounded the SWATbots to pieces and freed Tails. They raced off to Tails' treehouse. "Cookies!" they both yelled. Knuckles was exhausted from being his Hyper version. Julie-Su was kneeling by him, talking to him. Mariic (Sega_Man7) had caught a piece of metal in the leg. Ragnarok was talking to him. He seemed to be in less pain. They were all tended to. Ekyt, however, got on the bike and roared to some destination. Linda-Su watched him go. She saw the bike bounce and could just about feel his pain.

Now I'm done. Dmitri struggled to a vertical base on a tree trunk. *Broken leg. That chaos syphon exploding all but took away my power That human was right about it's power...* He heard the sound of a motorcycle come closer. "Stay back, guardian!" Ekyt sighed. "I came to help, Dmitri." "I told y- what?" Dmitri stuttered. "Let me help you on the bike. There is medical personnel that can help you." Dmitri was stunned. "Why, guardian. Why help me? I tried to kill you and all you stood for." In all the years he had lived, he had never seen something like this.

Ekyt found a tree branch and gave it to Dmitri to use as a crutch. When he was on the bike, Ekyt gunned it.

Linda-Su, Knuckles, and Sonic all looked shocked. "Get Dr. Quack! This guy is hurt!" Ekyt shouted. "Are you kidding? This guy tried to kill all of us!" Knuckles shouted. "I couldn't leave him Knuckles. He's your relative. He may be scum, but no one deserves death." They all agreed. Sonic went after Doctor Quack.

Ekyt left him. "Go get him, Linda." Julie-Su sent him after the human.

Ekyt had climbed a tree and sat on a branch looking away from Knothole. Linda-Su sighed. *Geez, they say girls are moody...* (Sorry, had to say it! J/K- N.G.) "Do you think I was right?" He shifted to face her, well kind of. "I don't know. I just..." "I know. You were right. You couldn't leave him to die. You're such a sweet heart." She kissed him on the cheek. "C'mon, let's get you cleaned up. Again..."

Ragnarok Solo (Gift For Sega_Man7)

Mariic walked. He had to sort out his feelings. *I feel guilty about Gaia dying (see previous Issues) Should I? I didn't cause it, did I? It's all because we fought over Ragnarok.* As if by telepathy, Ragnarok came to him.

"Mariic, we need to talk. I know how you feel about me and I want you to know that I..." Mariic kissed

her. She kissed back. "I guess that means you feel the same as me." Mariic paused before continuing. "So you don't blame me for Gaia?" "Of course not, Mariic. She died a natural death." They walked off, hand in hand.

Violet_Rose Solo (Gift for Violet_Rose)

Violet Rose watched the moody hedgehog. "Hey, Shadow, thanks for the save." The black and red hedgehog gave her a look. "Well, Maria, I..."

Oh crap, they both thought. "Sorry. I mean Violet. I'm just a little tired..."

Violet sighed. *He's never said that much to me in all the time I've known him*

"Well, Shadow, I need to know how you feel.? Do you care for me?" Shadow sighed. "I don't know if I'm over Maria...I'm just confused. Who Am I?" Violet kissed him. "You are who you are Shadow. Just remember I like you for who you *are*, not *were*. Get my drift?" "Yeah, I get you."

58 - The Next Guardian

Linda-Su got to play doctor...again. "My God, do you get beat up for fun?" She asked. *This guy likes me...I know it. What next?* "Yeah, call it a weakness." He winced as she cleaned a particularly nasty scrape on his back. "So, you saved Dmitri?" He stopped and turned around, wincing as the movement hurt.

"I had to. I couldn't leave him to die. When I became a guardian in training, I swore to protect all echidnas as well as the emerald. I couldn't let him die..." She soaked a washcloth and put it on his forehead. He held it in place as she wrapped his ankle. "You were right, you know. You're brave, Ekyt." *Courage, girl*, she told herself. "Maybe that's why I fell for you." She had said it. It was her turn to blush.

"Well, it's not everyday a beautiful girl like you, well, arrests me." He had turned red, too. They both dropped their heads. "Um, sorry, I meant it, though." He hopped down from the table he had been sitting on and limped to the door. He stopped and turned. He cocked his head at her, then, all the while wincing, threw his hair, just the way he had when he had met her after being arrested. Great way to meet girls. Better than a puppy...

"Linda, can I ask you something? What do you think people say about...us. I mean, they know we're together, but is it okay by them." She raised her eyes, rolled them and walked toward him. *Oh no, I made her mad...*

She fixed the collar on his coat and kissed him on the forehead. "Who cares? If it's all right by us, does it matter?" "No, not at all, just curious." He limped off. *He's gotta keep that mystery in place.* She checked the time. *Aw crap, I'm late for work. And today the day I patrol with Remington. He always hits on me...*

Ekyt ran into a star-struck Mariic (Sega_Man7) on his way. "She loves me." He said simply. "Hey, good for you. Well, good luck with that."

Ekyt walked on. *All the world loves a lover...What now?...!* A cat laid face down on the path. "Mariic, help me out!" Mariic came running and helped the thing to it's feet.

"You!" it said before punching Mariic. Ekyt stood between the two. "May I ask who you are?" he asked the cat. "My name is Cosmic (Sega_Man7). And that jerk killed my father!" Ekyt held back the angry female cat. "Now hold on!"

Mariic got to his feet and shook out the cobwebs. "I've never killed anyone!" "Liar! You killed my father Gaia!" Ekyt let go accidentally. "Wait, Gaia? Kid, she died of poisoning! He had nothing to do with it!" Too late. The cat tackled the hedgehog and began to attack with her claws.

Ragnarok grabbed the cat by the scruff of it's neck. "Mommy!" the cat squealed. She threw her arms around the shocked Ragnarok. "Um, sorry, you have me confused with some else..."

“Mom, please, there's no time! Mt. Aquas is coming here! The Dark Legion of this time has it under control.” Ekyt shivered. “Wait, it's not cold out.” Cosmic sighed. “Mt. Aquas has already taken it's effect on your world. If you are to save it, you had better hurry!”

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Ekyt ran off to the Dark Legion area, where he met Knuckles. He gave Knuckles the story. "We've gotta stop these nut jobs before the damage becomes irreversible." Knuckles started off. Ekyt said "Wait. They're after me, right? Let them have me and think they've won. Get to the top of Mt. Aquas (Sega_Man7) and talk to Sega (Sega_Man7). He can help. Oh, and tell Linda-Su..." he paused, "Tell her I stashed some emergency supplies in my old hideout in the jungle where I went after I was banished. (Issue 15, or around there somewhere- N.G.) If I don't make it, take care of her. And my parents." The human walked off.

The story spread through Mobius and Echidnapolis. People tried to stop Ekyt, but he wouldn't. *I have to do this. I swore I would protect them, and I will.* He approached the Dark Legion.

He pushed past the guards. "Kragok! Stop this madness! If it's me you want, I won't put up a fight. No one will rescue me." Ekyt showed he was unarmed. "Well, this is pleasant." Kragok smiled. The guards had shackled the seventeen year old. Three sets of handcuffs, done behind the back, three sets of ankle shackles, and rope wrapped around his torso. "Time to take your medicine, punk." Lien-Da decked the helpless human. "Now, Now, Lien-Da, let's let him live...He can tell us where the emerald is."

Lien-Da looked at the human, who was pulled up by the guards. "Fine, Kragok, I'll finish here..."

"Well, kid, you blew it. You could've had me. Instead, you took my bimbo step sister." Ekyt thought hard. "Oh, you mean the *BEATIFUL ECHIDNA I LOVE? PERISH THE THOUGHT THAT I'D PICK AN ATTRACTIVE GIRL INSTEAD OF YOU!*" Ekyt shouted the last part. The stunned echidna smacked him again.

His eye was black, and his lip was bleeding, but he smiled. "Too bad. For you, anyway." Lien-Da smiled at him. "Guards, leave him here." She pulled the human close. "Well, then, if what you say is true, this should be torture: you will serve as my personal slave." She grabbed him and kissed him hard. He spit and wiped his mouth. She slapped him and left the room.

Sonic and Sally had been gazing at the stars when Knuckles told them what happened. Sonic and Sally were both furious. "He asked us not to rescue him. He has some idea." Knuckles didn't look thrilled with the thought of his protégé being tortured, but they had to go along with it.

Linda-Su, Julie-Su, and Eden the cat (Violet_Rose) were talking about different things when they heard the news. Knuckles told her what Ekyt had said. All three took Julie-Su's hover-car. (Seen in the comics, not my idea-N.G.)

"This was his hideout? The poor guy..." Eden looked around. "normally, I'm not a fan of humans, but anyone who goes after the Dark Legion is okay by me." Julie-Su said.

Linda-Su didn't answer. She dug at the ground. "Bingo!" she said softly. She pulled out five packages.

All were labeled for emergency. The first one contained medical supplies; bandages, hydrogen peroxide, gauze. The second held clothes. Linda-Su passed out two jackets to the other girls who had started to shiver. The third and fourth held weapons. There were spears, crossbows, pistols, clubs, and then one big missile launcher.

The fifth was labeled Linda-Su. She opened it when the others weren't looking. She started with the note.

Linda,

Please use this in case of emergency.

I know I never said "I love you"

Enough, but you know I mean it.

Please take care of yourself.

In the event of my death, My stuff belongs

To you, Knuckles, Sonic, and my

Parents.

Take care of yourself,

Ekyt

"My God..." she said as she rooted through the box. She pulled out a handsome leather jacket. She shrugged it on and continued through the box. There was a belt in there, with a holster and a hunting knife. A hatchet, a pistol, a locket with a chain made of power rings.- Huh! "When did he do this?" She asked as the others came over. "Man, this guy's got the hots for you!" Julie-Su said and playfully hit her sister on the arm. Eden looked through it. "Aw, that's so sweet! He cares for you a lot Linda." Said Eden.

"Yeah, I guess he does. It's about time I returned the favor!" Linda pulled out the pistol full of tranquilizer darts. "I know you don't like violence Eden, so I'll keep this mild."

WHAT IS SHE UP TO?

FIND OUT IN ISSUE 60!

MORE BELOW!

Ragnarok (Sega_Man7) dropped the cat, startled. "What? Wait, first of all, I'm not your mother. Second, Mariic (Sega_Man7) did not kill Gaia (Sega_Man7. He died of poisoning." Cosmic dusted herself off with a dark look at Mariic. There was no time to argue.

"Hey, where did Ekyt go?" Mariic asked. "Oh, something about the Dark Legion." Ragnarok answered. Cosmic gasped. "Oh no, this is why he's not in the future. They're gonna kill him!"

MORE TO COME, EVERYONE!

60 - The Next Guardian Issue # 60

ALL THE CHARS WHO WERE GOING TO APPEAR IN THIS ISSUE WILL APPEAR SHORTLY.
SORRY ABOUT ANY TROUBLE THIS HAS CAUSED.

nextguardian

Linda-Su had snapped. Her boyfriend was in trouble. A kid so brave he was willing to sacrifice himself so she and everyone else could continue to live. She cocked the gun. It didn't have to end that way.

On her way, she ran into Mariic (Sega_Man7), Ragnarok (Sega_man7) and Cosmic (Sega_Man7). After explanations, Cosmic spoke up. "This human is not in the future world. And neither are you. In my world, Mt. Aquas still stands. I know you died, but I don't know how." She shook her head sadly. "As for Ekyt, he gets killed by the Dark Legion. It happens today."

Linda-Su blew by them.

She shot the guards from a distance and made her way in. It wasn't long before she encountered more enemies. She shot them, but they kept coming, finally overpowering her.

Lien-Da strolled over. "Well sister, your attempts to save your boyfriend failed. Too bad. Let's you and I go watch him suffer." Linda was marched from the room to a glass-enclosed viewing area. She watched in horror as the only guy she loved was being beaten to a pulp.

The guards had him in a chair. "The emerald isn't here. That's all you'll get from me." The guard smacked Ekyt with the butt of his rifle. "I'm going to ask one more time- Where is the emerald?" Ekyt just stayed silent. The guard slapped him.

Linda-Su pressed up against the glass.

"He's not gonna tell us. Kill him!" Kragok ordered.

"Nooooo!" The two pendants Ekyt had given Linda-Su glowed. Since they were made from power rings, they gave her a boost of power. Linda threw her captors through the glass and jumped down. She landed in front of the stunned Ekyt. She punched the guard hard enough to send him flying 10 feet. She released Ekyt. He took it in stride.

Together, they battled out of the complex.

Once they were away, Ekyt looked into her eyes. Then he passed out. Linda-Su checked him out. All the wounds. They had hit the back of his legs, punched him everywhere, the cut lip, the broken collarbone, the hurt shoulder, the two black eyes.

Linda-Su didn't cry. This human was willing to give up everything. She slung him on the back of her bike and rode as fast as she dared to Knothole.

She burst into the Royal Palace. "Get me Dr. Quack!" Elias tried to calm her down. "What's the matter? What happened." She took him outside and showed him the battered human. "Oh Dear God." He exclaimed. "The Dark Legion did this?" Linda-Su explained the story. Elias went off to tell Sonic to spread the word.

Linda-Su sat down and stroked the human's coarse hair. It was full of blood from the abuse he had taken. She cradled his head in her arms as he lay in the grass. She cleaned his face as best she could. She kissed him. It wasn't the same as when he was awake to enjoy it.

Doctor Quack came and checked out the human right there. "My God...In all my years...Never...Let's get him in a nutrient tank."

NEXT ISSUE: A HERO'S WELCOME

AND FAN CHARS GALORE 2

61 - The Next Guardian Issue # 61- Chars galore 2

With Ekyt floating in the green stuff in the background, Dr. Quack, Linda-Su, Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles were talking. They stopped as a gunshot was heard. "We've gotta get back to the battle. The boys raced off, except Tails.

"He was the only one to treat me like I belonged." He turned to Linda and told her "When you and the others got kidnapped, I almost cried when they took Amy, but he talked me out of it." "He'll be fine Tails. Would you do me a favor?" Tails nodded eagerly. "Would you keep an eye on him?" She cocked her pistol. "I have a score to settle with the rats that did this to him."

Outside, the battle raged on. Robotnik's metal troops and the Dark Legion's followers clashed with the freedom fighters. The battle was a stalemate.

For each robots our heroes destroyed, some were cut down. The loss on both sides was staggering. No freedom fighter deaths, but lots of trouble.

43 (MechaSonic43) fired his pistol incredibly fast into the congregated robots. He himself, along with Danielle (Sabrinat14), destroyed ten robots and took out 5 Dark Legion members.

Eden and Star (Both Violet_Rose) gave out the coats from Ekyt to help battle the cold weather.

"How's he doing, Tails?" asked Amy, concerned. "He's okay, I think." "Good, we owe him a lot Tails." She said. "Yeah, I forgot, he got us together." Amy kissed him. He kissed her. This went on for a while.

Blain dodged fire and threw a series of punches and kicks, taking out 20 enemies before he got hit with a punch that sent him spinning off course.

Lightning (SonicWind) and Breeze (Violet_Rose), though normally bad, fought for the good side today. Neither wanted to be roboticized. They dove into the fray with whatever weapons they could find, and sometimes none at all. Together, they took out a dozen enemies before they were both shot with a magnetic ray.

Ragnarok, Mariic, and Cosmic (All Sega_Man7) all fought violently. "We've gotta find Sega!" They fought their way to the base of the mountain and began the climb up.

Sonic, Knuckles, Shadow, Violet Rose (Violet_Rose) and Kirita were on the front line. Jaide (Jaidenna) eventually pushed her way forward, though, joining them in holding back the invasion. The robots were already at the great forest.

But they all got tired or wounded. No one could fight for hours on hand.

Eden got back to the medical center. "A-HEM!" she said as she shamed Tails and Amy into

relinquishing their lip lock. "How is he?" Eden asked, running her hand down the tube as the human floated. "I don't know for sure. I." Tails said before he was interrupted. Ekyt had drained the liquid out of the tube and jumped out.

He assured them all he was all right. "I have an idea that can turn the tide of the war. Tails, you take my coat and go to the top of Mt. Aquas. You'll find a hedgehog named Sega (Sega_Man7). He can help us. Ask him how to get the mountain out of here. Eden, you get one of the chaos emeralds. And Amy...I hate to ask this, but will you get Dmitri? He may be our only chance at turning this war around." They all rushed off.

Ekyt took the motorcycle Linda-Su had left. He roared through the forest. He saw tails soaring as all the robots turned their attention toward him. Ekyt gunned the bike to drown out Eden and Amy running. He roared into the battlefield, dodging fire before intentionally skidding the bike into a series of robots. He tossed medical supplies from the saddlebag before moving on.

Linda-Su, who had fought harder than anyone, had her back to the wall. The robots and echidna's closed in. She gritted her teeth in anger. "You'll all pay for what you did to...Ekyt!" He roared the bike toward them and jumped off in mid air, fighting them off. "You okay?" he asked her. "Never better."

Eden found the emerald and grabbed it quickly.

Amy convinced Dmitri to help.

Tails landed on Mt. Aquas and began the search for the hedgehog. He searched for a while, but he was caught by something he never even saw. It's only footprints were burnmarks.

Ekyt, with renewed vigor, fought his way toward Kragok and Robotnik. Linda-Su fought her half-sister, Lien-Da. Ekyt reached them both and grabbed Kragok.

"You and me are gonna settle this-one on one!" Ekyt snarled as he reared back and punched the echidna. Then an arrow just grazed him. "To bad, mate. We could've been friends." Geoffrey Saint John loaded another arrow and pointed it at Ekyt.

TO BE CONTINUED!

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“Saint John, have you lost it?” Ekyt yelled. This gave Kragok an opening for a hit from behind. Or it would have, if Ekyt hadn't flipped over him and tackled him in such a way he fell into Saint John. Sonic ran up. “Allow me to deal with this royal guard waste!” he said with a half-smile. “Geoff, old boy, you have no idea how long I've been waiting for a reason to do this!” The two fought it out.

In the back, Linda-Su and her half-sister, Lien-Da exchanged shots. Julie-Su came and cracked a Dark Legion member who was going to interfere.

Ekyt and Kragok circled. “Foolish mortal! Do you really think you handle the likes of me? I have been alive more than twice as long, and have studied under the best. This time, you have no chaos syphon to help you escape!” The two rushed each other at the same time.

Amy Rose ran toward the medical recovery center. She pushed past an irritated Doctor Quack and ran into Dmitri's room. She explained the story to him. “...So please, Mr. Dmitri, we need your help. The war is lost, even for you. Unless you help.” Amy let a few tears flow. Dmitri, who had been about to turn the thirteen year old away, felt his heart soften. “I will help, young hedgehog. But I am not fully recovered...”

Eden(Violet Rose), along with Shadow and Violet Rose (Violet Rose). She held the chaos emerald in her hand. “Ekyt gave me instructions to lend this to you.” Dmitri, who had lost his abilities after the chaos syphon exploded, looked on curiously. “The human trusts me with such a powerful tool? Very well.” Dmitri clutched the emerald and led the others on to the battle field.

Linda-Su fought her way out of a choke hold and bashed Lien-Da hard enough to send her spinning into a tree. She pulled out her pistol and shot a branch, causing it to fall and break over the evil echidna's head.

On the battlefield, Dmitri had single handedly taken care of most of the enemies. The emerald was shot from his grasp, only to be caught by Violet, who in turn passed it Shadow. He actually smiled as he shouted “Chaos Spear!”

The tide had turned. Bravery rushed through all the participants like no other force. Even Antoine had drawn his sword and had hacked his way over to help Bunnie. “Thanks Sugah! Ah owe yah!” “Eet was my pleasure, Mademoiselle Bunnie.” The two finished off their set of enemies before taking a rest.

Sonic had beaten Geoffrey all over. He dealt with interfering SWATbots with Sonic spins, before finally finishing Geoffrey. Before Sonic got the last punch in, however, he took an arrow in the shoulder. Geoffrey had been defeated, but Sonic was wounded.

Ekyt and Kragok fought their way up a steep cliff. The echidna kept firing punches and kicks, but Ekyt blocked them all. He set off on his offense, backing the echidna up onto the ledge. Ekyt was thrown off.

But he didn't want to travel alone. He grabbed Kragok's leg as they both fell. Ekyt and Kragok both righted themselves, Ekyt using his coat and Kragok using his dreadlocks. They continued their fight in the air. Then Ekyt scored the winner with a leg sweep as Kragok fell into the trees below. Ekyt landed on the top of one, using it as a springboard back to the top. He rushed back toward the fray, briefly taking the time to strip off his shirt and tie it around the shoulder that Geoffrey St. John shot.

But Ekyt had done it this time. About 30 of what remained of the enemies had surrounded him. He took a fighting stance before an echidna pushed her way in.

"Linda, are you crazy? Escape, warn the others!" She shook her head. "Not his time, Ekyt. You've saved me more than once and I intent to return the favor!" "But you might be killed." "If we die, we die together!" They stood, back to back, as the enemies rushed.

Ekyt took another beating, but Linda's words motivated him more. Ekyt finally had enough. He shrugged off his coat and tossed it to Linda. "Use the knives on the robots! I'll keep these clowns off your back!" She couldn't help but notice his back was perfect. *Not now, dummy! Fanaticize later!* She threw the knives, then fired her pistol, taking out the twenty-five robots.

One Dark Legion member slashed Ekyt across his bare chest with a knife. Ekyt had jumped back, but not far enough. He shrugged off the pain and continued the fight. It ended with him cracking an echidna under the chin with an uppercut.

Linda tossed him back his coat. "We've gotta get to that mountain!" he exclaimed to her as they both climbed on the bike. Ekyt noticed she held him tighter than she needed too. He tried not to blush, but he knew he failed. *If she only knew what she means to me...*

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The two climbed Mount Aquas (Sega_Man7). At one point, Linda-Su mentioned "I haven't seen Knuckles or Sonic around" Ekyt didn't bother to answer. He climbed faster. Then his foot slipped. He fell a short distance before Linda caught his hand. "Showoff." She said to him as she rolled her eyes.

They reached the top at last. The two scanned the top of the huge mountain. They had taken only a short walk before a huge monster confronted them. "Not Again!" The dust banshee (Sega_Man7) had returned. He pushed Linda-Su behind him. "I'm not taking any chances. I can't afford to get killed now...not again." (He doesn't know both times he died it was a test- N.G.) He held the clasp of the belt for his coat, which was actually a miniature power ring. The dust banshee bit him, but between the emerald's protection and the power ring, he was unharmed.

Dust banshee. Hmm. The air column of his shoes acted like a miniature vacuum. But the way they worked required a huge risk on his part. He retreated into a crevice. Linda had ducked in there for cover. She did not lack bravery, but she didn't lack brains either. "What's the plan?" she asked him. "I'll distract him, you get the others free." He ran out of the cave first, drawing the banshee's attention. It spit venom at him, which he dodged narrowly. Once he saw Linda was safely out of the way, he crouched and jumped straight into the monster. He landed inside it and crouched. The dust got sucked into his shoes, trapped in the air columns. That was one monster down. But if this one had survived, then that stupid eel...!

He tossed his shoes off the cliff and ran after Linda. She had already met the eel. She fired her crossbow into it, and followed up with a flying kick that sent the eel monster falling into a rock. Linda then got a running start and punted it like a football.

Ekyt stood, amazed. "What...how...huh?" was all he could manage. She laughed at his expression. She held up her boot and tapped it. A **clang** sound came out. "Metal plate." She said by way of explanation. "So that's why you always K.O. me when we spar..." He shook his head. "Never mind. Let's rescue the others and get out of here."

They sprinted toward the others and had barely untied them when a giant stomp shook them. Sega (Sega_Man7), Ragnarok (Sega_Man7), and Mariic (Sega_Man7) all turned a ghostly white. Sega pointed. Ekyt and Linda turned around. Then they gasped in unison.

Without exaggeration, the thing was at least ten feet tall. It held a staff in one enormous hand, which had humongous claws protruding. It slashed down as all of them dove for cover. Sonic sped into it with a punch, while Knuckles glided into its midsection. Linda-Su and Ekyt tried to take out the legs. It swatted them all away, scattering them in different directions. They all landed, unhurt, and regrouped.

"What is that monstrosity?" asked Sonic. "That would be the Fire Dust Mage." (Sega_Man7) answered Sega. "And how do we get rid of it?" asked Knuckles. Cosmic (Sega_Man7) answered this time. "In my world, it still lives. Its power is only matched by that of the chaos emerald and five heroes. If only we

could fuse. I know myself, mom, and this sleeze bag,” she motioned toward Mariic “are compatible, as is Sonic, but the human...” (Ragnarok is not really her Mom, but she doesn't know- thanks Sega Man7-N.G.).

Ekyt, eyes half-lidded, took a deep breath. “I have access to the emerald's power in emergencies. If this is the only chance, we have to try.” Ekyt drew a symbol on the ground

“Knuckles, if I remember correctly, I have to redraw the image, and then set it on fire...” Knuckles nodded. “Yeah, that's right. But we need fire.” Cosmic smiled mysteriously. “The Fire Dust mage can help.” At that moment, the monster plaguing them used it's staff to shoot fire at the group. They all dodged, though Ekyt's coat was set ablaze. Quickly, he redrew the image and set the coat on the image. It set ablaze, but now it glowed green.

The five fused together. Their new being did not have a name. It didn't Knuckles used all his energy to hold them together. The emerald used the guardian as a conductor.

The next fire blast hit dead on, but the five combined formed an ultimate being that remained untouched. Ekyt, with his body floating behind a rock, used his mind to shoot a green blast at the creature. It struck dead on, driving the mage backward. It tottered on the cliff. Cosmic used some power to break seclude the piece of the cliff it was on.

Knuckles finally fainted after exerting all his energy holding them together. As they fell apart, back to their own bodies, the piece of the cliff the mage was on plummeted. It was over.

After tending to Knuckles, Ekyt walked over to Sega, Ragnarok, Cosmic, and Mariic. “Thanks for the help.” After shaking hands with all of them, he turned to walk away. Something held him back. It was Comsic. She pulled him back into a hug. “I hope we meet again, guardian...” She turned and walked back to the her “family”

“I think someone's got a crush on you...” Linda-Su laughed. Ekyt rolled his eyes. “So what else is new? Every girl I meet...” Linda gave him a comical look. “You know what I mean!” Ekyt said, exasperated.

A rumble came beneath their feet as the mountain moved. Sega shouted over the rumble. “Hurry, Mount Aquas is going back to Zoness (Sega_Man7). We'll meet again. You have rid our world of three great evils!”

Knuckles and Linda glided off the mountain. Sonic sped down it. That left Ekyt, Ragnarok, Mariic, and Cosmic. “Godbye, guardian. I must return to my own time.” Cosmic disappeared. Ragnarok, being a cat, shimmied down the mountain quickly. Ekyt spotted a tree. “Mariic, jump for the tree!” He did.

Ekyt concentrated on his ring, as it flashed a majestic gold. He himself glided back down.

NEXT ISSUE: SOUL TOUCH

64 - Message for readers

FOR NEXT GUARDIAN ISSUE 64, PLEASE SEE THE "LOVE DOES STRANGE THINGS SPECIAL!

NEXTGUARDIAN

65 - The Next Guardian Issue 65

OKAY EVERYONE, WE ARE BACK TO THE ORIGINAL NEXT GUARDIAN SERIES, LOOK HERE UNTIL THE NEXT SPECIAL!

To those who haven't read the special, what went down was a lot of guest fan chars, and Linda-Su's roboticization, recovery, and derobitization. She must carry some of Ekyt's blood in a jar because of how the book of Acorns deroboticized her. She doesn't have to carry it for long, but if something should happen to it... Not to mention Ekyt now hunting Constable Remington for pestering Linda!

Ekyt strode angrily to the police station and rapped on the door. An older echidna watchman answered. "Can I help you, guardian?" (Ekyt is not a full guardian yet, but this man doesn't know.) "Yes, please, I need to speak with Constable Remington." The watchman led Ekyt to the constable's desk, not knowing the two hated each other. "I'll leave you two, now." He bowed and left the room.

"Remington, you know why I'm here." Ekyt's hazel eyes had gone hard, staring down the constable's black eyes. Remington leaned back in his chair. "All I'm trying to do is save that girl from making a mistake. With..." Ekyt's hand knocked Remington's desk free of papers. "Are you calling me a mistake, constable?" Ekyt snarled coldly.

Remington shrugged. "If the shoe fits...Now, as I was saying, it doesn't look right, a human and a normal creature, like an echidna. If you really want what's best for her, you'll step down." Ekyt narrowed his eyes. "If she wanted to date a low-life scumbag, she could've picked a high-profile villain, not some idiot cop!" Ekyt left the room to meet Knuckles.

Unfortunately for Knuckles, sparring was on the agenda for today. The human was furious, he could tell. He finally stopped him. "Before you stomp a hole in me, tell me what's wrong." Ekyt tossed his helmet off into a corner. "Remington is going after Linda." Knuckles shook his head. "That's bad." "Yeah, it gets worse. The creep made some valid points." Ekyt paused. "How do you think a human and an echidna look walking down the street?" Knuckles shrugged. "I've seen stranger. Soultouch never lies. (Soultouch is the ability echidnas and guardians have to see their true soulmate)" "Well, Remington called me a mistake, and..." Ekyt kicked the wall so hard it dented. "Maybe he's right. I do want what's best for Linda. If that means me out of the picture..." Knuckles took off his sparring gear. "Let's go see her right now."

At that point, Linda was hacking her way through the jungle, back toward a supplies cache. She carried a bundle of firewood with her. She dropped it in the the large chamber and sealed it. "That's enough for today." She wiped the sweat off her forehead, then headed back to her cabin.

Remington was sitting there, making himself at home. "Remington? Is there trouble?" she asked. He put down the paper he had been reading and talked to her. "Well, yes. You, with that trash. He's trouble, Linda." "If you're talking about Ekyt, you'd better leave. I don't care what you think. He has done nothing but good since he came here and he loves me. And you know what...I love him back!" Remington walked up and grabbed her. He tried to kiss her. Linda gave him a kick.

Ekyt and Knuckles crashed the door. "Remington? I should've known!" Ekyt strode forward. "She did it! She tried to kiss me!" he yelled, pointing at Linda as he lay on the floor. Ekyt kept walking, silently. The constable kept yelling. Knuckles held the human back. "Take it easy." Knuckles said calmly. Remington ran for it.

Linda, still shocked, just stood there. "I would never...You know...Soultouch..." Ekyt forgot Remington and looked after her. "It's okay. I saw what happened. But..." he hesitated, then said the painful words quickly before he could change his mind. "Maybe he's right about me. I don't want you to have any trouble on my account. I want what's best for you..." He ran out of words. He turned and walked away.

Knuckles and Linda sorted things out, while Ekyt walked. He climbed Mount Fate. His own thoughts tortured him, stung him like bees. *Is he right? I love her, but is that good for her?* He kicked at a rock, giving his attacker the momentum he needed to push the human off the cliff.

Ekyt held on. It was Remington. He unholstered his gun. "Sorry. Can't have trash like you in my town." He cocked the gun. Ekyt flipped up onto the ledge, hands at his sides. "If you want me gone, Remington, fine. I will leave. But before I go, I need to do something for Linda." He cold-cocked the echidna before he could move. The gun fell off the cliff.

Remington charged. The two battled atop the mountain. Ekyt was the superior fighter without weapons. Then Remington's friend came. "Drago!" He hit the seventeen year old in the chest, sending him backwards. He grabbed him by the lapels and snarled. "You set me free, then left me to rot." He punched him again, then put out his claws and slashed him across the chest, opening the knife wound. He dropped Ekyt.

Ekyt landed hard on his side as the two closed in. He lay still. Then sprang up and caught both by surprise. With unleashed fury, he took out Remington first. Then Drago slashed him in the back. Ekyt turned, eyes lit with adrenaline. "Back to the kennel, puppy!" He knocked Drago and Remington down the cliff.

They were bruised, but not hurt. Ekyt jumped down. "I won't kill you. But that's not to say I won't make you pay!"

"Ekyt, wait!" Linda-Su came bounding over the two downed creatures. She looked at them, then saw Ekyt. He was totally in tatters. His white shirt stained with blood and slashed to pieces. His pants were shredded at the bottom. His coat was unharmed, thanks to the power ring attached. "They did this?" she asked quietly. His shyness kicked in and he nodded. Linda-Su walked over Drago to Remington.

"I told you, please leave him alone. Please don't hurt him. Please this, please that. Well, Remington, you've done it. First, you're fired (Linda-Su is his commanding officer in the police force). Secondly, you and this beast are under arrest for assault. You will not do this again." She turned to Ekyt. "I'm sorry you

had to go through this.” Ekyt shook his head. “No problem. I guess the mistake here was considering he was right.” Ekyt dropped his head. Linda-Su hugged him gently. “C'mon, Eden (Violet_Rose) can help fix you up.

66 - The Next Guardian Issue # 66: Meet the new guy

Eden (Violet_Rose) opened the door to find a nearly-unconscious Ekyt propped under Linda-Su's arm. "Eden, you were closest. Remington and Drago jumped him a few minutes ago. Can you help?" Eden opened the door wider as Linda let him slide on the couch. Eden made tea of some sort as Linda patched Ekyt up. He was fully awake now. "Those two? But Drago was in Devil's Gulag and Remington..." She shook her head, disgusted. Ekyt got up suddenly and walked toward the door. "Hey, where are you going!" both women shouted. "To check on the others. I can't let anything happen. If Drago is loose, others might be. A guardian..." "Never stops being a guardian." They both finished his sentence. "Can you two keep a secret?" When they both nodded, he yanked the ring off his coat. He held it to his bruised flesh, and the cut closed quickly. "That's better." Then he turned red as he realized the two women were still watching him. He quickly threw his shirt back on and turned away. Linda and Eden giggled as he jogged out the door. "Some things never change." Eden nodded in agreement with Linda-Su.

Robotnik (A.K.A. Eggman.) watched the monitor from his underground base. He studied past clips of Sonic foiling his plots. He watched Ekyt stop him. The two were totally different, yet they accomplished the same goal. "I can't kidnap their girlfriends...That only made them madder. But if I take them out of the picture...but how?" he asked himself.

A knock came at the door on that moment. A dog, blind in one eye, bigger than Drago (Drago's a wolf, in case anyone forgot), came hobbling in. He walked on two legs, and was white and black in color. He had a black patch over his blind eye, but the rest of his head was white. His paws were white, while his body and legs were black. "Listen tubby, I can get you those two." The dog snarled. "And just who are you?" asked Robotnik. "Call me Moonshine (Credit to nextguardian (That's me) Let me know what you think of him!). Now, you get me those two weasels, and anyone else that hates those two, and I'll bring you them." The dog walked over to the wall. A piece of Ekyt's shirt and some of Sonic's fur hung. He took a deep whiff. "Human and hedgehog. Little gamey for my taste, so I'll bring `em back alive." The dog laughed as Robotnik called Nack, Nic, the robo-Ekyt, Drago, and a team of swatbots. "Do what he says. He has promised to deliver those two banes of my existence back alive."

Everyone but Nack and Nic nodded. "Hold it blubber bottom, what's in it for me?" Nack and Nic said in unison. "Money, and lots of it. But only if you do what Moonshine says. Understand?" He pointed his finger at the two bounty hunters. "All right, Chubsy-Ubsy. We usually work without any partners, but...okay."

Ekyt checked the Island and then got down to Knothole. Sonic, who had heard about the breakout, raced up along side him. "Hey, Ekyt, how's it going?" Then he saw the blood. "Don't ask. Look, Drago escaped and..." A net flew down as Sonic pushed Ekyt out of the way. The net landed harmlessly. Ekyt spied the hunter first. Then the others. "Oh man." Sonic gritted his teeth. "Run for it..." Ekyt stood back in a relaxed stance. "No way! Sonic the Hedgehog does not abandon a friend!" Ekyt handed Sonic the ring. "Let's go..." A whizzing knife knocked the ring away into the darkness. Another net hit them both. "This is not good..." As the bounty hunters plus the robots closed in. After what felt like a few tree

branches hitting them, the two were finally beaten into submission.

Moonshine tossed the net at Robotnik's feet. Pay up, fatso." He growled. Robotnik laughed at the two struggling in the net. "Indeed. You did very good, Moonshine. With your help, you and I can own this wretched planet." "Whatever, just give me the money." The dog refused to smile. He took the money and left. After everyone was paid, Robotnik kicked at the net. Unfortunately for him, He didn't see Ekyt use his throwing knives to destroy the roboticizer. Robotnik's metal minions put the freed Sonic in, but he spun out and destroyed them. Robotnik summoned more help.

Ekyt, still caught in the net, called to Sonic. "Run for it! Get help!" "I'm not gonna leave you!" "Go, before we both get killed!" Sonic didn't like it, but he couldn't do anything else here. He sped off.

Robotnik moved the net closer. Ekyt stared him down. "You'll pay for that. I don't have him, but with you out of the way, things might just go better. Oh, and just for fun, I think I'll have Crabmeat, Catterkiller, and Buzzbomber (All classic badniks) have a little fun with you..."

Sonic raced to Knuckles first, then to Eden's house. "Eden, Linda, look, Ekyt's in trouble, we need help." "That's awful! How did you escape?" Eden asked as she handed Linda-Su a package. "He threw his knives into the roboticizer once Robotnik let me out. I didn't want to leave, but he insisted on getting help." "Thanks Sonic, I owe ya!" Linda ran off with the package. "Where are you going?" Sonic called as he sped after her. "To rescue Ekyt. You and Eden get the others!"

67 - The Next Guardian issue 67

Sonic raced through Knothole. Tails could help, Bunnie could help, Sally could... He couldn't ask her. But he could ask...

"Star! (Violet_Rose- surprise!) Ekyt's been kidnapped! I just escaped. We need help!" Sonic was tired. He had asked Tails, Bunnie, even Shadow. "Lead the way, Sonic." She said.

Eden (Violet_Rose) knocked frantically on the door of Shadow's house. Shadow was gone, but Kirita (Lady_Ayame316) answered the door. Eden explained the situation quickly. Kirita frowned. "Ekyt? The kid from the party? Aw man. Yeah, let's bail him out."

Ekyt paced around the cell. "Hey, Robotnik, toss me a pen." Ekyt had been bothering Robotnik non-stop for the last three hours. Robotnik gritted his teeth and threw the pen as hard as he could at the human. Ekyt caught it with a grin. *Boy, this bites.* He thought to himself. "Paper, tubby?" he asked. Robotnik threw a bunch of paper at him. "Am I bothering you, bright boy?" Ekyt asked with as much sarcasm as he could. "Yes, you insolent little pest. You are. If you don't be quiet, I'll ..." "You'll what? I just broke your happy little machine over there." Robotnik gave up and left the room. Ekyt sat down in the cell and leaned his head back against the cool concrete. *Gotta think this out. But if I can't...* He took the pen and paper and sketched the way he had been brought here, and the layout of certain things. He had just finished when a crash came from overhead.

Star and Kirita had kicked a hole through the ceiling. Quickly, Star opened the door (She's another ultimate life form, everyone, and another Violet_Rose creation) and threw it, barricading the other door. Kirita stuffed the drawing in her pocket and yanked the human to his feet. "What the...how did you two get here?" Ekyt asked. A blue blur, followed closely by a black and red blur, came in the room. "That answer your question? Let's go!" Star whistled and Tails flew down. "Grab on, one at a time." Star went first, and then Kirita was about to when the room was flooded with Robots.

The small group broke off and fought. Ekyt found a pipe and used that as a weapon. Kirita, who was especially good with kicks, broke through the robots. Sonic and Shadow were their normal destructive selves. Another person fell through the ceiling. This time, it was Linda. Ekyt was shocked as the pipe got away from him and landed at Linda-Su's feet. "Catch!" She threw the long package Eden had given her to him. He caught it. It was his staff, but now it was fire hardened (A real practice in ancient Japan and even today, one way to make swords.) and looked cooler than before.

Everyone fought as Robotnik watched on a monitor. "Blast! Those hedgehogs and that human...Moonshine!" The huge dog knocked the door off its hinges. "Yeah, what do you want?" Robotnik tapped the monitor. Moonshine snarled. "Okay, tubby, piece of cake. Now, before I go in there, you should know my real name is Cring. Why? I'm wanted pretty much everywhere under the name Moonshine. So get the hint, oil can."

The fight was going in their favor. But unlike the robots, they couldn't fight forever. Eventually, only Ekyt

was left. He deepened his stance. With sweat running down his head, he turned to Kirita. "Kirita, you have the blueprints I drew. Take them to Locke and Princess Sally! Tails, you escort her, along with Star! I'll cover your escape!" Tails put the plan into action as Ekyt leapt across the room, fighting all the way. Until the door crashed open. "Not you again!" Ekyt shouted.

"Me again." Moonshine (also known as Cring). He swiped at the human, who dodged backward at the last second. "What do you have against me?" he asked. Cring/Moonshine smiled. Not a comforting gesture in the least. "Nothing at all human. My employer, Doctor Robotnik, does. So clam up and come with me." "No. I have a thing against cruelty to animals, so if you even lay one paw on my buddies here, I will turn you into one giant, walking, talking, tail-between-his-legs-bruise. Comprene?" The dog answered by trying to bite Sonic, which was thwarted by Ekyt's staff. "I warned you." THWACK! The dog flew backward, but landed on his feet, claws digging in. Ekyt followed up and took the dog's legs out. The others were getting up now. Cring/Moonshine, flashed his wolf-like teeth. "So, all of you against me, is it, fine!" "No, it's not."

Ekyt spoke, eyes half-lidded. "Let everyone but me and Sonic go. We're the one's with the price on our heads. Go for it. Take your best shot." The whole group, minus Sonic, complained. "No, he's right." Sonic zoomed next to him. "All of you, get Kirita to Knothole. This clown is ours." "Time to go back to the kennel puppy." Ekyt snarled.

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While Sonic and Ekyt faced off against Moonshine/Cring, Kirita (Lady Ayame316) and the rest were having troubles of their own. The SWATbots had ambushed them. The blueprints Ekyt had drawn out needed to get to Knothole. Shadow and Star (Violet_Rose) were cleaning house, but there was just too many. Tails and Bunnie were holding their own, but mechanical bodies feel no pain. Kirita, much like her "father" Shadow (Hope I got that right!), got impatient with how things were going and decided to help herself. She threw kicks amazingly quick and accurate and had soon cleared out the area around her, giving the others a rest. Shadow, now to his feet, pointed at Kirita and shouted "Chaos Control!" This would speed up the journey to Knothole.

Sonic zoomed forward as Cring/Moonshine knocked him away. Ekyt had been sent sprawling, too. He sprang to his feet in time to thwart a potentially-deadly strike. He and the huge dog grappled, jockeying for position. Sonic's added strength, got the dog down, but not for long. Ekyt passed his ring to Sonic. "Take it! We need the help!" Ekyt got thrown back, and it took a lot of his strength to stop himself from flying into the wall. Sonic had the ring on, and was turning yellow quickly. Cring, seeing what was happening, knocked the ring away. Ekyt tackled the huge dog and threw him back out the door. "Live to fight another day. I don't want to run, but in this case..." Ekyt, with huge chew marks in him, grabbed Sonic and yelled "Hold on." As he crouched and let his souped up shoes carry them up to the relative-safety of the grass. "Sonic, you help Kirita and the others. Those papers have got to get to Knothole! I'll catch up."

Sonic zoomed fast as he saw a SWATbot try to jump Kirita from behind. He flew into it full force, sending the metal maniac soaring. "Sorry about this." Sonic said as he picked Kirita and ran back to Knothole. He left Kirita outside the door and rushed back to the battle.

Ekyt dove back down the hole to retrieve his ring. The huge dog had recovered and gnashed his at Ekyt, who dove aside.

Princess Sally looked over the blue prints and nodded to the team of Royal Guards she had assembled. "Demolish the building." She gave the order and told them to carry it out immediately.

Ekyt and the dog exchanged shots when Ekyt first heard the sound of huge hammers and dynamite outside. "Moonshine, Cring, whoever you are, we've gotta get out of here! The Freedom Fighters know this place!" Ekyt tried to reason with the vicious animal, but to no avail. He jumped up and out and held his staff out to the huge dog. "Grab on!" he called down. The dog refused. "No, I would rather die than be saved by you!" That was the last Ekyt saw of him before the hole caved in.

Ekyt grabbed the head wrecker by the shirt. "You nutcase! There is a living creature down there!" Ekyt told him. "Sorry, we have our orders." The guardsman said snottily. "Ekyt slugged him and tossed his dynamite stick away. "Knock it off, before you kill him!" They kept hammering. One by one, Ekyt clocked them, blocking strikes with staff, from hammers. *This isn't right... The Princess wouldn't order this...*

Then it hit him. The breakup with Sonic. The strange behavior. Another imposter. He was distracted with his own thought long enough to get hit with what felt like a tree branch. Cring growled over his prey. Then a hard force hit from behind.

Linda-Su, furious, nailed the dog. She yanked her stunned boyfriend to his feet. His instinct to protect kicked in again, and he caught the dog with a shoulder that sent him back into a tree. The tree started to topple. It cracked the dog on the head. It was a small tree, but it managed to knock the dog out as the two escaped. "The princess is a robot!" they both said at the same time.

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CORRECTION: KIRITA IS SHADOW'S SISTER. SMALL MEMORY LAPSE ON MY PART, SORRY LADY_AYAME316.

"Yeah, I figured out she was a robot when she order the demolition team. We gotta stop this." Ekyt, scraping some blood off his forehead, went to move, But Linda-Su stopped him. "Ekyt, she's got everyone but you and me. We've gotta think this out. And get you fixed up first." Ekyt had to agree with the logic. "How did she get everyone? Or "it" rather." Linda-Su sighed.

"First she caught Sonic off-guard. He thought she was just annoyed, but... Then, the others tried to fight back, but an army of swatbots took them prisoner. Now it's just us." She didn't look thrilled, but not scared either. She was tougher than that. "Where do we go?" She asked. "My old place. As far as I know, only a couple of us know that spot. We're gonna need help, but we can talk about that later." Ekyt, trying to walk normally, was slowed by a bite on his leg. Linda's heart went out to him. *He can't show weakness. Or emotions. It must be hard...* She shook her head. *How he's going to try to liberate a village by himself. Well, except for me. Who else is there?*

Ekyt was having thoughts about that last part. The two rushed through the jungle. The arrived at the place. She put a supportive hand on his shoulder. They were shocked to find Knuckles and Julie-Su, along with Eden (Violet_Rose), already there.

After greetings were exchanged, the group decided to see what they could scrounge for supplies. Some wood for a fire, weapons, and who would do what. Being the most experienced in the field, Linda and Julie-Su took that. Eden gathered the wood, while Ekyt and Knuckles planned. At one point, Ekyt actually slammed his foot through a tree. "What we need is some stealth. Let's face it, that's not me. Not you, no offense. Julie...no. Linda-Su..." "Yeah, that police training must have helped." Knuckles said, excited for the breakthrough. Ekyt looked troubled. "I know, you don't want her to go it alone, but she's our only choice." Ekyt nodded firmly. "Yeah, I know. But we need a distraction. If she can release just a few others, this fight will be less lopsided. Especially if that stupid mutt wakes up."

After talking it over with Linda, they agreed it was the best option available. The two took a walk. Maybe the last.

Ekyt tried to say something, but turned it into a cough or a hiccup. She turned to him as they looked at the captive village from a distance. "I hate to ask this of you." Ekyt finally spoke. "It has to be done. I'll be fine." She couldn't look him in the eye either. He caught her off guard with a kiss. It was too long, but not long enough. "I am going to do everything to keep you safe. You mean the world to me. I ...wish there was some other way." She kissed him back. "It's okay. A guardian never stops being a guardian, and a police officer never stops being a police officer." They hugged, neither managing the words they really wanted to say.

70 - The Next Guardian Issue 70 !!!

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO HAS READ MY FANFIC. LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN UPCOMING ISSUES. I CAN PUT IN FAN CHARS (WITH PERMISSION AND CREDIT), HANDLE LOVE SITUATIONS, WHATEVER. THANKS TO EVERYONE. THIS IS MY THREE MONTH ANNIVERSARY ON FAC! THANKS FOR MAKING IT THREE GREAT MONTHS EVERYONE!

Focus, girl. Nothing big... Yeah, just freeing a village... She looked over at Ekyt. He was absently carving at a stick. She was dressed totally in black. He wore his usual clothes. But his normally alert eyes were glassy, staring.

He thought back. (Insert dream sequence)

"What not, shrimp, huh?" the bully taunted. He probably had a name.

Then Ekyt remembered the next part, his fall down the stairs.

Right after math class, the kid pushed him down the stairs.

The fight in the gym. Not again...

The thud as his head hit the gum floor.

He laid there. Then he sat up.

The gym was silent, he remembered.
They couldn't believe he had sat up.

Ekyt watched himself take the fall, slowly, repeatedly,

Then impossibly fast.

He walked over and punched the kid blocking the door.

The memories ate at him.

The anxiety. No, he couldn't go back...

But his mind forced him to relive it all.

It was painful.

Linda-Su had only seen this once before. “Knuckles!” Knuckles came running, and saw his protégé. “Not again...” he punched Ekylt just hard enough to snap him out of it.

“Huh? Oh, sorry.” The seventeen year old looked normal again. Younger. But pale. Even more pale than usual. Knuckles left him and Linda to talk, to say goodbye.

They had been over the plan. Ekylt was going to create the ultimate distraction. Linda-Su was going to bust out anyone she could. Ekylt sat at the table, focused. “You’ll have to explain what that whole thing was about later. Right now, we’ve got lives to save.” Linda talked to him. “I...yeah, you’re right. I wish you didn’t have to do this...” “Well, I do. I’ll be fine, I always am.”

In the Grand Conservatorium

Archimedes was questioning Locke. “Are you sure this is necessary, Locke? Hasn’t he been through enough? Why test him further?” Locke stroked his beard. “You know it’s been our way since Steppenwolf.” “Yes, but you know of his past. He is emotionally tougher than anyone before him.” He shook his head. “Fate dealt him a cruel hand, and he has come through handily. He finally has some stability. A girlfriend. A job. A purpose. Why jeopardize it?” Archimedes had practically spat the last part. “Archimedes, you know a guardian must be honed physically and mentally. We cannot allow a mental lapse. Not with things as they are.” Locke gave Archimedes a rare, pained look. “I have seen my own son killed, Archimedes. It was always intended. He was reborn. Yes, the young man has handled a lot, but we must be sure.” Archimedes gave Locke a look. “I’m going to keep an eye on him.” “Do what you will.” Locke privately agreed with the fire ant.

Just outside of Knothole, they peered through the brush. Linda was inside the Knothole “Complex”, as they referred to it. Robot guards swarmed the perimeter. Ekylt, Knuckles, Julie-Su, and Eden (Violet_Rose) were about to take a huge gamble. But not as big as Linda’s.

Linda dropped off the tree branch and glided silently down the small entrance to Knothole. The tree stump cover popped open when she pulled a vine. She swung in.

She walked over to a console, arranged with a variety of buttons. She pushed the all as an alarm sounded. The cell doors open as people ran. “Get out of the village!” She shouted. Then she blacked out. Cring/Moonshine stood over her, a light, dented pipe in his hand. He dragged the unconscious echidna to a cell and locked her up.

Ekyt's band of citizenship glowed. He knew something was wrong on Linda-Su's end. Soultouch did that, too. Ekyt's mind flashed back.

"Give it back!" a small child shouted

Normally, Ekyt would have been the child.

Not this time.

This time, his real figure stepped out of the shadows, menacingly.

Do as she he says.

Ekyt gave warning to the thief.

Then his world turned red.

Ekyt shook his head. "Knux, if it's alright, you and Julie get the others out of here. Take them someplace safe." Ekyt walked forward, drawing his knife. He dashed forward (Don't try this at home!) he slashed two robots apart. Then a third. Then a fourth.

I said, give me your purse!

A man was threatening an elderly lady.

Ekyt stepped out from the bushes and wrecked the man.

The woman turned into Linda-Su.

Not much time, Ekyt.

I love you.

Then she vanished.

Ekyt's blind rage at the thought caused him to destroy robots. He was almost a machine himself. He could think only of the past. The present. The future. A future without Linda. Not another loss...No.

He broke into the complex. The newly metallic corridors didn't faze him. A robot came from behind. Ekyt turned to face it, finding Archimedes standing in a puddle of melted lave.

“Archimedes?” he began. “No time. Linda's in trouble. We have to get to her. Kid, use the ring. I know, I know, you're not supposed to. But in this case, you have my permission. Hurry! I'll start a small covering fire!” He did just that as Ekyt ran ahead with a vague “Thanks” over his shoulder.

He got to the cell she was in. She lay, unconscious, in a dark corner. Her head was a congealed mass of blood. He kicked open the door, thanks to added power from his ring.

He felt her pulse and breathing. She was okay, but head wounds were scary.

Ekyt rolled to the side as a pipe slashed down. There stood Cring (Formerly Moonshine). Ekyt didn't waste words. He and the dog grappled. Punches were exchanged. The dog even bit him, tearing his shirt.

But Ekyt was lost. In anger. In frustration. The taunts rained down on him. He hadn't been this way in a long time. He remembered it all.

The end came. Ekyt, a mass of mangled flesh, let the dog charge. He hit the dirt and stuck out his foot and flipped the huge dog onto the console.

No time to waste. He wiped blood away from his eyes and put Linda in a fireman's carry.

Flames licked his shoes. He took no notice. The ring's power was still in him, so Ekyt kicked a support beam near the door, caving in part of the ceiling. He ran to the floating island. Linda had been there for him. He couldn't let anything happen to her...

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The whole of Knothole gathered around. Waiting. Hoping. Had yet more heroes fallen? The fire roared and seemed to kill the hope.

Some people cried. Some couldn't move. No one dared go near the building. Then a cough was heard.

Ekyt, carrying Linda-Su, walked forcefully out of the building. He barely noticed as it exploded behind him. Sonic raced up, along with Shadow, Kirita (Lady_Ayame316) and Star (Violet_Rose). "Let me take her, Ekyt. I'll get her there quicker." Ekyt handed her over gently to Sonic, his face stoic, giving nothing away. Star went with Sonic, but Shadow stayed behind. "She'll be fine." He skated away. It barely registered with Ekyt.

But Shadow had been there before. He knew what it was like. He could see the pained look in the kid's eyes. He was struggling with the past. Shadow had been there. He finally reached his hut. Violet Rose (Violet_Rose- surprise, still working on the *real* gift!) was waiting. She had been one of those fighting the blaze. "Did everyone get out, Shadow?" she asked. She was exhausted. "Yeah. But Linda-Su's hurt." Shadow looked away again, this time anger showing through. "It's not fair, is it?" Shadow turned back toward Violet, who had her head bowed. She raised it, eyes angry. "You know what I mean. The past haunting people. The loss. You know, Shadow. You know better than anyone. I just hope this story has a happy ending. The kid deserves it." Shadow nodded slightly.

Elsewhere, Locke stroked his beard. "Interesting, the path fate takes. No more need to check his constitution. He wants to be good at what he does." Archimedes returned. "I hear that, Locke. He's been through enough for now. Let's just let him train normally." "Agreed."

For most, this was a success. Ekyt, however, was already planning. They needed to rescue the real princess. But Ekyt was distracted. The doctor had barred him from the exam room, to be on the safe side. He was worried. He tried to concentrate, but finally swore and gave up for the time being.

Tails and Amy were sitting by the power ring pond. Ekyt walked by. "Ekyt!" Tails called to him. "Oh, hey buddy." Ekyt jogged over to the two. Amy Rose hopped up and hugged him, drawing a jealous look from Tails. Ekyt and Amy both laughed. "Relax, just friends." They both said. Amy giggled, then frowned. "I'm sorry about Linda." She said. "Yeah, me too." Tails chimed in. "Thanks. It means a lot. I wish I could do more... Wait, not for her, but, if you two are game, how about a mission?" Tails and Amy jumped at the chance. "Wait, what is it?" The two youngsters asked eagerly. "Rescue the princess." "I'm in!" "Me too!"

Dr. Quack took notes as Rotor performed the tests. "Concussion...no fracture, though." Rotor called out. "Thank you, Rotor." Dr. Quack filled a needle with a sedative, and was about to put it in the echidna when she woke up. After a slurred attempt, she managed a "what happened?". "You have a concussion, Linda. You'll be fine." "Ekyt?" she asked. "Right here. Are you all right?" His eyes showed only concern. "Peachy." She said. She got out of bed. "Hold it!" Both Ekyt and Doctor Quack called.

“Where are you going?” the frustrated Doctor asked. “On a mission. You heard him.” The doctor sputtered, he was furious. “Fine, what do I know, I’m just a doctor.”

Ekyt walked Linda-Su to her home. “Are you sure? You can rest, if you want. I mean...” She laughed, then punched him playfully. “Ekyt, with your track record, I can’t take a day off.” He frowned, then chuckled. “Point taken.” She hugged him around the neck. He returned her embrace gingerly. She kissed his cheek. God, the kid was blushing so much he was practically smoking. “What is it you always say? I’ll be fine, I always am.” Ekyt rolled his eyes. “Alright. I’ll get Tails and Amy and we’ll go.”

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Ekyt closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. The meditation seemed stupid to him. Maybe it was because he couldn't concentrate. He sighed and got up. Knuckles and Locke were talking about the past, and were in the process of welcoming Lara-Le back into their lives. Knuckles hadn't seen his mother in a long time.

Ekyt turned to Archimedes. "You'll get it soon. It takes time, kid." Archimedes tried to reassure his pupil. But Ekyt was frustrated. "Tell me, Archimedes, how do I protect people who despise me? They don't want me here, no matter how much I want to be here." "Relax; you've more than proven yourself. Your few skeptics are mostly Dark Legion supporters. And you know how they are. You can't please everyone. No one can." Ekyt stroked his chin as he thought that over. He finally smiled, defeated. "Okay, you're right. How's Linda?" Archimedes grinned at that. "She's fine, but not enough to go on some crazy mission. But Knuckles..." Knuckles interrupted. "But Knuckles will give you two of the Chaotix." "Just...keep an eye on her..." Ekyt had to find Tails and Amy.

Amy elected to stay and help Linda-Su, as did Julie-Su and Eden (Violet_Rose). This might have been a blessing in disguise.

The group peered through the bushes, watching Robotnik's sentries. Tails pulled out the slingshot Sally had given him (Soon I'll have the lost issues of Next Guardian up, and you'll know when this happened.) and fired two shots, hitting the guards with rocks. They turned and fired on each other.

Ekyt felt a hand on his shoulder and turned, ready to fight, when he found himself face to face with Mighty the Armadillo and Espio the Chameleon, both of Chaotix fame. "Need some help?" Espio asked. "Always." Ekyt pointed with two fingers toward the camouflaged entrance. "Metal door. Painted to match the background." Espio frowned. "Not a chameleon's work." He joked.

Mighty tore the door of it's hinges. Espio disappeared. Ekyt and Mighty peered cautiously through the door. They dove back as two fireballs came flying out at them. The two guns were firing rapidly, until their wires snapped off, courtesy of Espio.

The three moved in quietly, stealthily. Mighty liberally destroyed things throughout the complex. Ekyt heard a noise behind them. "You guys go on and finish, I'll handle this...OOF!" Ekyt was shot backward, but he rebounded and flew into his attacker. "Wha- you again!" He was staring down the robot version of himself. With a clang, the robot sent his counterpart flying. Ekyt rubbed his jaw. "You know, for being me, you really are an annoying little twerp." The robot version goaded. Ekyt threw a kick into it, sending it into a console. The fire guns started firing again. It was strange.

- The old robot parts melted away, revealing flesh. Ekyt stared into his own face. evil version of him, got a hold of a weapon, a piece of metal. He cracked it down on his counterpart's skull. Once. Twice. Three times the metal flashed, finally leaving Ekyt face down on the steel corridor,

his head crimson.

Espio and Mighty found Sally in a cell. "Am I glad to see you guys!" Mighty threw the door aside as Sally bounded out. "Ekyl's back there." The three raced back to where the human was down, struggling to his feet, as someone that looked just like him pounded on him with a piece of sheet metal. Then a screw came flying in and hit his hand, causing the evil duplicate to drop the metal.

Tails soared in and tackled the human, fighting for all he was worth, but getting thrown off. Might picked up the piece of metal as Espio tapped the human on the shoulder.

CLANG!"

Mighty put Ekyl in a fireman's carry as the group ran out. Espio set some timed charges, giving them thirty seconds to escape. The explosion was movie-violent. "Mission accomplished." Espio said softly.

Back on the island, Ekyl awoke. Linda-Su was peering down at him, concerned. "Wha..." Ekyl sprang up. "I'll rip that cheap imitation apart!" Linda pushed him back down gently. "Easy, tiger. You're not going anywhere until we get you a new shirt." Ekyl looked down at his chest, then blushed instantly. "Did everything else work out?" He asked. She nodded. Ekyl sighed. He leaned back momentarily, exhausted. "You're a tough kid, ya know that?" Linda asked him. He shrugged. She tickled him under the chin, and had to stifle her laughter as he turned progressively redder. She stroked his hair. "How's your head?" he asked her. "Never better." He again tried to get to his feet.

She pushed him back down. "I've got orders from Archimedes, Locke, *and* Knuckles not to let you get out of this bed. Now, c'mon, relax." "I can't. That cheap knockoff is..." She kissed him. "Now, Chill." She said. He was stiff as a board.

Knuckles came in. "How ya doing, kid?" "N-N-never better he stammered."

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"Amazing recovery, Ekyt." Espio and Mighty were watching him spar with Knuckles and Linda-Su. He ducked both strikes and returned with two of his own, flipping back. "Nice work today." Ekyt nodded, winded.

Ekyt thanked everyone and left for a waterfall. Only he and a couple others knew about it. He stripped off his clothes and let the water fall over his body. *Focus. Try the meditation. That's it.* He stifled his pain as the water hit his bloodied bicep. *Stupid-huh?* Someone coming. He ducked behind the rocks, swearing to himself as he stubbed his toe. *Bad time to be naked. I never get caught with my pants down...*

He watched as a weathered old echidna came by, facing the other way.

"I know you're here, boy! Just listen." Familiar voice. Dmitri...yeah, that was it. "You are in grave danger. I don't know why I care, but the Dark Legion has aligned with..." He never finished the sentence. Ekyt ducked into the cave where he stored his clothes and towel and threw them back on. He dove out to check on Dmitri. A fist to the jaw met him. He turned to attack and found himself staring at a little echidna girl. She stopped her attack and looked at him. "By Edmund...Can it be? The prophecy..." She shook her head. "Listen, human. I know your post, guardian of course, but there's no time to explain. Follow me." She ran off full speed. Ekyt, for some reason, followed her.

Ekyt caught up. "Do you have a name?" he called to her. "Never mind. Not now. When we get to safety, all will be explained." "Okay, where's safety?" "Just trust me." He chased after her, finally reaching an entrance to the Grand Conservatory. "Guardian, you have to open it." Ekyt, still skeptical, pressed his temporary guardian band to the door, then ran his hand over a series of ancient carvings.

The door slid open. "The place is booby trapped, so watch your step." Ekyt warned her. Lasers fired from every direction. She glided across. "Neat trick." Ekyt said, ticked off. He vaulted across, one laser singeing his already hurt arm.

The girl was off again. He followed quickly. She finally stopped at another door. "This is the one, guardian." "You do know I'm not a full guardian yet, right?" Ekyt asked. "Yeah, yeah, open the door." The girl looked anxious.

Ekyt did, and froze at what he saw. Locke and Grandfather Hawking (remember, from issues 6 and 7 of Knuckles series?) Locke looked up. "Ekyt, this is my Grandfather. You may call him Hawking. He needs your help." "Of course, how can I be of service?" Ekyt asked. Locke looked down at his unconscious Grandfather. "Take care of him. The Dark Legion has aligned with a team of Bounty Hunters. They are taking hostages. They have discovered this place, and we cannot allow them to take a valued member of my family." Locke gave him a sideways glance. "A member of our history. Ekyt, we now number you among our own. I place my full trust in you." Ekyt nodded stupidly. "I'll do it. But please," he hesitated. "What do I call you, for starters?" Locke smiled at the question. "Respect. Admirable. You may call me

Locke, for now. There will come a day when you will call me something else. And your question?"

Ekyt looked at the bored-looking echidna girl. "Who is this?" he asked. She stepped up. "My name is Laura-Le. I am the adopted daughter of Locke. There was no time to explain earlier."

A rumble shook the ceiling above them. Locke ushered them out of the room. "Go, now. Both of you. It is up to me to defend this place to the last." Ekyt shook his head. "I won't leave you to die, Locke." Locke nodded. "Loyalty. Admirable guardian. But go!" Ekyt and Hawking were both surrounded by green. Chaos control had sent them away. Locke sent away Laura-Le as well. It was his time to die, he guessed. But his life would be sold at a high price.

Elsewhere, On Mobius.

Ekyt landed hard, but Hawking's wheelchair landed softly in the grass. Ekyt ran as fast as he dared. A rope shot out at him. "Tough luck mate." Geoffrey Saint John cracked the seventeen year old so hard he flew into someone's hut...

Shadow, furious, ripped his punching bag in half. Violet (Violet_Rose) watched quietly. "What's on your mind, Shads?" she asked him. Shadow's quills flicked at that. "I've never owed anyone anything before. It burns me up that I do now?" He went back to massacring what was left of the heavy bag. "Huh? Who do you owe?" "Stupid human. He just *had* to give me that emerald." Violet rolled her eyes. "Shads, he said you don't owe him anything. Remember? You saved his life, he saved yours, you trade. Calm down." Violet shook her head. "I mean, really. It's stu-" A wall of the hut came crashing in. Ekyt dusted himself off and sprung up. "What?" Shadow raced after the human. "What happened?" Ekyt gave him a look. "Trouble. Big time. Dark Legion, bounty hunters, the whole deal." Ekyt tripped over another rope. "Shadow, stop that guy! Whatever happens, don't let him touch the echidna in the wheelchair!" "Fine, this'll pay off my debt." Ekyt had no clue what he was talking about. "Go get Violet." Shadow called over his shoulder. "Chaos chamber! Take him to the chaos chamber, I'll meet you there!"

Shadow flew into the skunk at full speed, sending the rogue animal flying into a tree branch. "Chaos Control!" He and the old echidna were now in the chaos chamber.

"Ekyt, what's going on!" Violet looked ticked. "I'll explain later, come with me!" The two ran to the chaos chamber.

When the group met up, Hawking was in trouble. His health was failing. Ekyt was faced with a choice.

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"I'll do it." The group stared at Ekyt. "Stand back, I'm about to break every rule in the book." Ekyt held his hands out to the side, concentrating. What he was doing was incredibly dangerous. And illegal. Using the emerald to heal. He let the power flow through him into Hawking.

Ekyt fell, drained and dazed. Knuckles and Linda-Su came in. Knuckles knew what happened. He recognized the individual. "G-Grandfather Hawking? I thought you were..." his voice trailed off. Hawking smiled. "I've never felt better." "Hey Knux, how do I wake him up?" Linda called to him. Hawking took his cane and hit the kid in the shin.

"Ow! What the!" Ekyt got himself together, and started to leave. "Hold it!" Knuckles caught up quickly. "Where are you going now?" "Knux, your dad's in trouble. I'm going to save him." "I'm coming too, not going to let my father die."

Locke knew it was over. Nack, Nic, and a no less than 25 robots had him cornered. He couldn't go on. He sensed the presence of others. He was too dazed to tell friend or foe. His question was answered as his son flew into the bounty hunters, while that human-Ekyt, that was the name, Ekyt, jumped into the middle of the robots. Even Wynmacher (From Knuckles Issue 6), who Locke had a dislike for, was there to help.

Knuckles took out the three flesh creatures before turning to the robots. The anger registered on his face as he flew forward. The complex began to shatter around them. Ekyt left Knuckles and Wynmacher and ran to Locke's side. "You'll kill me for this Locke, but it must be done." Ekyt concentrated. The emerald's power went through him. The complex's rumblings lessened, then ceased. The human's knees began to buckle.

No, musn't give in. Got to focus. Last chance to survive. Not going to let them perish. Ekyt sank to his knees, but felt the pressure lessen. Locke was up again, doing the same as Ekyt, trying to stop the complex from falling. For his son. That was it. He watched the human beside him. He was fading. The battle was over, in favor of Knuckles and Wynmacher. "Son, take Wynmacher and go, go to Hawking! Ekyt, leave me. It's my time." Ekyt, for once, did not do what he was told. He fought his way back to his feet. "I refuse to let you die, Locke." Locke, was almost angry, but he couldn't chastise the human. Later. Locke used his last bit of energy to transport him and Ekyt to the chaos chamber.

Shadow tapped his foot impatiently. He had sent violet to get Sonic. The air in front of him opened, and Knuckles and Wynmacher fell, followed by Ekyt and Locke. Locke was unconscious. Ekyt was barely conscious.

Knuckles checked Locke's vitals. Not good. "What are we gonna do?" Ekyt, near the base of the emerald, answered the question with his actions. Once more the energy flowed through him, into Locke this time. Locke was stable now, but Ekyt...

The emerald was up on a small altar-type thing. Ekyt finally had to let go of the power, and he fell down the steps. Linda-Su caught him. "Not like this!" She refused to believe he was gone. His eyes fluttered. Linda-Su thought quickly. Shadow had the answer. "Chaos heal!" A new trick, but maybe.

Ekyt sat up. He found himself face to face with Linda-Su. "Oh thank God!" She hugged him tightly. He hugged back, too groggy to be embarrassed.

The fight was just beginning.

75 - The Next Guardian Issue # 75- Ekyt's second arrest

Ekyt struggled to his feet, with some help from Linda-Su. Laura-Le was helping Locke up. The Dark Legion chose this moment to break into the chamber. Both sides wasted no time in fighting.

Ekyt, still woozy, fought, standing in front of Hawking. But the Dark Legion had the strength in numbers, even though the “guardians” were the better fighters. Hawking awoke, seeing what was happening, contacted Locke telepathically. *It must be done now, Locke.* Hawking concentrated as the emerald began to glow violently, then disappeared all together.

This stunned Ekyt and Knuckles long enough to both be hit from behind. Kragok, Nic, Nack, and the Dark Legion soldiers fought violently, twenty each diving diving on the two downed guardians. Linda-Su held her own next to her sister, Julie-Su. They both caught a hit to the face and were also dived on. One by one, Sonic, Shadow, Violet, and Laura-Le went down. That left Locke and Hawking. The Dark Legion closed in.

Ekyt flew into the one's nearest, a rush of adrenaline carrying him. Before him, enemies fell. But the edge in numbers soon left him lying again. Held before Kragok, Ekyt took a huge risk. ^Locke, can you hear me?^ (^ means telepathic communication, Ekyt can't do this all the time, it's illegal in fact.) ^Yes^ ^Good. You and Hawking escape, do whatever it takes. I know this is it, but not for you two^ ^Ekyt, this is illegal, I^ ^Please, Locke, there's no time! Go, hurry!^

Locke and Hawking disappeared. Kragok knew a guardian's powers as well as anyone, and he knew what happened. He snatched a taser from one of his followers and zapped Knuckles and Ekyt. “Take them and the other echidnas prisoner. Leave the rest.”

Ekyt, Knuckles, Linda-Su, Laura-Le, and Julie-Su were stuffed in the back of a truck. The others talked. Ekyt, however was silent. His eye black, his nose bloodied, he kept his face stoic. Only Linda-Su could read it. It was shame, disappointment. She edged closer to him.

“It's not your fault, you know.” She told him firmly. “I know. I just let everyone down. I broke every rule in the book. My days as a guardian are numbered. I lost everything I've worked for. Almost everything. Gone.” “What kind of attitude is that?” she asked him sternly. He looked up, startled. “I...” “No. You did exactly what a guardian does. Big deal, you broke some rules. Being with me is practically illegal and you stay with me, right? You're not gonna drop me, right? Snap out of it!” She put her head on his shoulder. He let his head fall near hers. Linda knew she did it. All it took to motivate her boyfriend was some anger. Now, what would he do with it?

Shadow woke first. He shook Violet awake. She instinctively swung her hammer, it narrowly missed him and cracked the wall. “Easy, Violet (Violet_Rose).” “Shadow, did we win?” she asked him. “No idea. Let's get the others.” They woke Sonic and Star (Violet_Rose). Sonic was furious. “I let them down!” He kicked the wall. “Sonic, calm down. We need to think this through, and then act quickly.” She turned to her brother (sorry if I got the connection wrong, Violet_Rose) Shadow. “There's no doubt they need

rescuing. I know it goes against all your beliefs, but we need help.” Shadow nodded grudgingly. “I’ll leave that to you and Sonic, Star.” They raced off to Knothole. Wymacher was just stirring. After some explanation, he decided to seek help as well. Help of a different kind.

Ekyt and Knuckles were being interrogated elsewhere. Kragok questioned them. Knuckles and Ekyt remained silent. Kragok then went after Julie and Linda. Knuckles and Ekyt stirred, but two henchmen brought the butts of their rifles down between their shoulder blades. Ekyt was furious, his mind racing. He began to saw at his ropes using his ring, then cut Knuckles ropes.

As soon as they were free, they charged, knocking soldiers left and right, finally reaching Kragok. Ekyt freed the two women while Knuckles dove across his desk, sending a flying fist into Kragok’s jaw. Linda and Julie, both former supporters of the Dark Legion, were determined to leave their mark. They did just that, with fists flying. Kragok sounded the alarm.

Soldiers came rushing in, but the cavalry arrived too. Wymacher led the charge, followed by Sonic, Shadow, Star, Amy Rose, Tails, and Violet Rose. Violet and Amy’s two hammers laid waste to countless soldiers. Tails yelled “Bomb’s away!” and dropped Sonic and Star down into the middle of the fray. They both spun forward into the middle of the clustered enemy. They flew like bowling pins. Shadow, the only one carrying a weapon, a pipe in this case, sent the enemies flying. Hastily, the Dark Legion retreated.

Ekyt finally breathed, but he knew the worst was yet to come.

Locke sat in Haven, with the newly alert Hawking. He replayed the day’s actions in his head as well as the tapes. Archimedes was giving his input. “Really, Locke, he acted accordingly. Hawking did the same when he was the guardian.” “Times have changed, Archimedes. His actions were inexcusable.” A crack sounded the arrival of another fireant. “Grandfather Deo! To what do I owe the pleasure?” Archimedes greeted his Grandfather.

Deo looked grave. “No pleasure, grandson. I’ve come with a message from Christopheles.” (Christopheles was the first guardian’s advisor. Steppenwolf and Edmund to be exact. Man, I’m a dork!) “This...Ekyt...Christopheles tell me to remind you not to be hasty when judging him.” “Deo, you must understand his actions were admirable, but inexcusable. He will face court, jail time maybe. That is up to the chief magistrate.” “Do as you will, Locke.” With a crack, he was gone.

Later...

In the office the next morning, Ekyt’s picture greeted Linda-Su. *Hmm, I don’t recall putting his picture up- no, not again!* She yanked the picture down. He was under the arrest pile.

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With a heavy heart, Linda-Su, in uniform (She's a police officer) now, made her way Mount Fate. Ekyt was there, and wasn't surprised to see her. "You know the drill," she said. "I sure do." Ekyt struggled to his feet, grabbing a crutch. "What happened to you now!" Linda-Su exclaimed. This wasn't there the other day... "Just a small injury. Go ahead, slap `em on. It's just like old times, huh?" The fifteen-year-old echidna did just that. "I'm sorry about this, Ekyt. This isn't right..." Ekyt gave her a rare smile, albeit a grave one. "You're just doing your job, no hard feelings."

She escorted him before the chief magistrate and the echidna high council. "And what, pray tell, are your reasons for such reckless disregard for the age old rules set by your predecessors?" The chief magistrate gave Ekyt a stern look. Ekyt sighed. "No disrespect intended, chief magistrate, but what I was always taught to protect." Ekyt shifted, then continued. "Before all else, protect the citizens, then protect the emerald. My defense is just that, your honor. I did what the situation called for." "Can anyone confirm that?" one elder asked. "A roomful of people witnessed it, your honor. Two of which are in our presence." Ekyt answered.

"And they are?" the same one asked. "Locke, father of the current guardian, and Linda-Su, constable of the EPD (Echidna police department). The chief magistrate motioned for Locke to come forward.

Locke explained what happened, showing no favoritism to either side. "I see, and constable?" Linda-Su's story matched up. "Protocol traditionally calls for at least three witnesses. However, we can determine that you did indeed act in a manner suiting of a guardian. However..." Ekyt froze. *Here it comes...* "...However, you are to do community service. Perhaps the constable can suggest something?"

Linda-Su whispered something to the chief magistrate. "Police work? Highly irregular, but suitable." The chief magistrate turned to Ekyt. "You are to serve as the constable's assistant when you are not in training, or sent on a mission. Clear?" "Yes, your honor." The elders rose as one and started to file out.

Ekyt let his shoulders drop. Locke put his hand on his shoulder. "You have earned my respect, Ekyt. I believe your actions were noble." "Thank you Locke. Higher praise I could scarcely imagine." He shook Locke's hand, then left with Linda-Su.

"Slick move." He muttered, a smile on his face. "Yeah, I'm gonna work you like a dog." The two walked on. Ekyt put a hand out to stop her. "Hold it. I heard something..." He pointed his crutch toward the bushes. The two crept cautiously over.

"My God..." Ekyt dove down and untied the two figures. It was Lara-Le (Knuckles' mother) and Luara-Le (Fan char, in this case Locke's adopted daughter.) The two looked weak. Ekyt helped up Lara while Linda assisted Laura. "A human!" Lara-Le, not knowing Ekyt, immediately kicked his good leg out from under him. He tucked his head and rolled back. "Yup, you are definitely related to Knuckles." "You know my son?" she asked defensively. "Yes, he trains me. I'm working with Knuckles to be the next

guardian, along side him.” He brushed himself off, then hobbled over to his crutch. “I’m sorry, I thought you might be another Dark Legion supporter.” “Far from it, ma’am.” He helped her up again, this time staying on his feet. Linda-Su had the unconscious Laura-Le in a fireman’s carry. “I think we should go see Knuckles.” Ekyt said. He exchanged glances with Linda; she nodded her approval.

The group walked toward the chaos chamber. On the way, they got a surprise visitor. Three actually. “So, what happened to your leg?” asked Laura-Le. “I saw you just before and you were fine.” “You were unconscious by the time this happened. I tried a new trick with the emerald, channeling power into the others who were hurt severely. No thanks for it. Just community service.” Ekyt looked over at his girlfriend, who bounced a rock off his head. “He has to be my personal aide. Poor him.” Linda joked. “Um, if I could speak to you, constable?” “Certainly.”

Lara-Le took her aside. “A beautiful young echidna like you with a human?” “Ah, I know what you’re gonna say.” She watched Ekyt play with Laura-Le. “Well, I had to arrest him one day, he rescued me, and...that was it.” Linda shrugged. “Hasn’t any echidna struck your fancy? Not to criticize, but you offer so much...It seems a waste. Humans and dingoes are echidna’s natural enemies.” “I understand. You have to know him. He’s not like the others.” “Well, just watch you back.” Linda-Su tapped her. “Watch this. He tries this all the time. It blows up in his face.” Ekyt was showing Laura-Le a self-defense move. She turned it on him. He brushed himself off as she helped him up. The whole group laughed. Including a laugh that was less pleasant.

Lien-Da (sister of Kragok, half-sister of Julie-Su and Linda-Su. Dark Legion supporters.) laughed. “What’s the matter, junior? Did this cutie flip you? Too bad. Would’ve happened if you had chosen me.” She made a false sad face. “Yeah, too bad. Shame you look like a pig instead of an echidna. Then you might’ve had a shot at me.” She slapped his so hard he hit the dirt. “Now, which leg, I’ll...” “No way sis!” Linda-Su flew into her, sending the two sprawling. Lien-Da reached for her pistol, only to find it missing. “That’s enough!” Shadow had snapped the gun in two.

“Shadow! Man, am I glad to see you.” Shadow gave a rare grin. “Likewise. Thought you were dead.” Ekyt shrugged. “I live right, what can I say? Hey, where’s Violet.” Shadow pointed.

Violet (Violet_Rose) was separating the two fighting females. Lien-Da took a swipe at her, ticking her off in the process. She sent Lien-Da flying with a shot from her hammer. “Man, she doesn’t fool around, does she?” Ekyt said admiringly. “Hmmp. Don’t get any ideas, junior.” Ekyt shook his head, chuckling. “No worries, Shadow. I belong to the pretty echidna.” “Keep it that way.”

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“No offense Linda, but I feel stupid.” Ekyt holding his arms out, looking at his new uniform. “Aw, c'mon, you look cute.” “Well, yeah I do look like your twin.” “Suckin' up to your boss, eh? Now go to work.” “Geez, for once I say something close to what a boyfriend would say, and you think it's a joke? Man, I really can't catch a break.”

Ekyt had to check out the jail, then a quick patrol. He was about to call it quits, when he saw a group of strange looking...things. He couldn't really tell what they were. But they had weapons. And he didn't. And they were closing in.

A kick, followed by a flip dispatched the first wave of goons. He grabbed one by his shirt and flipped him. The assailants kept on piling on. Ekyt threw two into each other, and tried to find a spot where they couldn't attack from behind. Too late. One had a club, and the next thing the seventeen year old heard was the sickening thud of the club hitting him in the head. He went down briefly, but some instinct kicked in, and he fought, grabbed the club, and cleaned house. Until finally one of the thugs managed to land a blow to the ribs that left the human facedown.

The group looked on as one, before reaching for the communication device they carried. “Mission accomplished.” The leader said, as he held up the bloody club for proof. “The guardian has been neutralized. Out.” They picked up the nearly-unconscious Ekyt, and dragged, rolled, and kicked him into the police station.

Linda-Su came out. She swore when she saw her bloody-mess of a boyfriend lying facedown, trying to get up.

Chief medical officer Horatio Quack (Man, that name sucks, glad I didn't invent it!) had to find a blood donor quick. It so happened that the only one who matched was Sonic. “Let er rip doc.”

When Ekyt awoke, he saw a small group of concerned faces. “Got-jumped. Feel-different-fast-what?” Ekyt sprung off the bed and ran incredibly fast. Sonic caught up. That was a first for both of them. “Guess my blood works wonders.” “Huh? I was that out of it?” “Yeah, you were awake, but, nobody home. So Quack gave you a blood transfusion. I matched, so...” “Thanks, I owe you. While I have the speed, I wanna find the morons that did this.” Sonic gave him a grin. “Works for me.”

The cloaked group didn't rest. They saw a cloud of dust approaching. “Sonic Approaching.” One shouted into his communicator. “One unknown figure-no, it can't be!” They spotted Ekyt, looking more vicious than before. They tried to run, but were overtaken. In their haste to get away, one of them dropped a communicator. Sonic picked it up and turned it over. “Dark Legion or Robotnik?” he asked. “Maybe both. We should ask Rotor.” The two raced back to Knothole.

Amy Rose and Tails, who were playing on the outskirts of the village, saw this and ran to greet their hero Sonic. They were totally shocked to see Ekyt with Sonic. Amy had taken to hugging the human, but she

was to stunned to even to that. "Long story." Ekyt said to them. "Good to see you Amy. Talk to you later, Tails!"

When the door to his lab burst open, Rotor expected Sonic, but not Ekyt. "Hey Rotor, where's this from?"

TO BE CONTINUED...

PLEASE CHECK OUT MY SONIC X VERSION OF NEXT GUARDIAN, AND PLEASE CHECK MY PROFILE FOR KIND OF A CONTEST! THIS ISSUE WILL CONTINUE IN THE MINI-SERIES *FUTURE SHOCK!*

78 - The Next Guardian Issue 78- Ekyt snaps!

"C'mon. Up and at `em>" Linda-Su's voice was pulling Ekyt from his sleep. "Where we goin'?" he asked groggily. "Eden's. She good with this kind of medical stuff." (Eden belongs to Violet_Rose).

His shirt had been singed pretty good, and his trench coat was being repaired by Amy Rose. His pants were okay, though. He got up, and immediately felt one side of his ribs groan. He walked, trying to hide the limp, but Linda knew him too well. She half-dragged him to Eden's house. Linda told her the story before showing her Ekyt.

"Ohhhhh." She sucked in a breath. "That must've hurt. Well, we'll get you fixed up." She put some stuff on his burns, gave Linda some bandages (You'll have to help him, she said.) and told him to drink some purified water. Lastly she handed him a cane. "Not broken or sprained, but bruised pretty bad. You'll have to take it easy for a while." Ekyt nodded. "Thank you Eden. I'm glad you know this stuff. I need all the help I can get." Linda helped him down to the Grand Conservatory, where Locke was waiting.

"Well Ekyt, I'm afraid we'll have to relieve you of any guardian duties." "For how long, Locke?" Locke lowered his eyes. "Well, indefinitely. That doesn't mean." WHAM! Ekyt overturned a table. "Now take it easy, you'll" "Save it. You just yanked half my world, everything I've worked for out from under me, and you want me to be calm. Fine. I'm gone." He turned and hobbled away, a broken man.

He met Linda on the outside, and gave her the grave explanation. "I'm going to go somewhere for a while. I need to sort things out." He hugged and kissed his stunned girlfriend goodbye, left a note for her to read later, walked the best he could away from the shattered pieces of his world.

He stopped only to inform the Chaotix. They agreed that it was wrong, and offered to help him. Ekyt declined, and continued. Movement was life.

Eventually, his walk brought him Mobius, where there was turmoil. Sonic and Sally had another fight. Ekyt walked past the huts, ignoring the glances he received. Tails and Amy were sitting around by the pond near the edge of Knothole, when they saw his battered form coming. Amy was going to hug him like usual, but stopped. His head was down. Blood stained his body under his bandages. He told his two young friends what had happened. Amy gasped and Tails sat, shocked. "They can't do that!" Amy exclaimed. "They can and have. Take it easy, you two." He gave Amy a one-armed hug and shook Tails hand.

On the outskirts of Knothole, Shadow and Violet were watching the sun set. They both got up as they saw him hobbling by. "Hmmp. That's a shame." Said Shadow. Violet looked concerned. "You okay?" she asked. He grinned, as he knew that a few days ago she would've laughed instead. "No. I won't be for a long time. If you and Shadow need me, ever, I'll be there. But for now, I'm going... I don't know where."

Leaning heavily on his cane, he continued along. Then he heard a cry for help. A robot was robbing a

young fox. Ekyt limped forward. "Hey! Pick on someone your own size, rust pot!" The robot turned in time to get cracked with Ekyt's cane. He put the cane on the robot's "neck" and thrust down, "killing" it. The young fox looked up at him. "Are you okay?" he asked her. She nodded. "Who are you." "Name's Ekyt. What's your name." The girl looked to be about six years old, so he knelt down to be closer to her size. "My name's Aurreen. I'm okay. Thanks mister." "Not a problem. Take care of yourself." Ekyt walked along, occasionally massaging his ribs.

He thought of what he had left behind. But it hurt. He made the decision to start back. Good thing too.

Cring grabbed Linda by the shirt. "Tell me where he is, and you'll live." He slashed her shirt around waist level. "Not a chance, mutt." He threw her, but she glided back into him, sending him back. "Brave little girl." He snarled, then drew back his fist. Ekyt grabbed it.

"Were you raised in a kennel? Silly question." He cracked the dog with the cane, then yanked his legs out from under him. He charged Ekyt, who's ankle gave. Linda tackled the dog, furious. She peppered him with everything she had. He ran away with his tail between his legs. "You came back." She asked, questioningly. "Yeah. I missed you. My job is lost, but I hope you're not." "Not a chance. C'mon, we're going to my house, it's closest." "I don't know if I should. I'm a mess, Linda. Mentally and physically." She raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, I've seen you worse. You're worried. Worried I'm gonna ask you to do something you're afraid to do. Ekyt, you know I'm not like that. I'm in love with you, not lusting over what you look like. Not that I don't like how you look, but...you get my point. Wait, what's that? My God, did you get in another fight?" She ducked down to his side, on his hip, where a bruise that wasn't there before. "Okay, we've got to get you to my place. We need to figure out where we are in this relationship. And what we can do to get you back in the action." At that moment, both their bands glowed, but not green from soul touch. This was a magenta color.

Their daughter, Paula-Su, stood before them.

79 - The Next Guardian issue 79 temporary quarters

Only Ekyt's cane held him up. "Paula?" The young echidna looked up at him, a smile across her face. "The one and only dad. This must be my mom!" She ran over to Linda-Su and hugged her. "So this is what my daughter looks like!" she exclaimed. "As beautiful as her mother." Ekyt said with a smile.

Paula-Su looked around like she couldn't believe what trees and grass were. In her time, war had ruined the once pleasant landscape of the floating island. It was all roads and craters from bombs. She bent down and ran her hand across the grass, then picked a leaf off a tree. Ekyt and Linda exchanged glances. "Let me show you where I live..." Ekyt's voice trailed off. He had no home. Haven had been his home, and only guardians live there. Linda caught this quick. "Let's go to my house instead. It's closer."

Paula explained to Linda about the future she was from. She told the war stories. For being twelve, she certainly could act older. Ekyt leaned against a counter, letting his shoulder's drop. He sighed before he walked back in.

"So how have you been?" he asked. "I'm okay, it's nice having daddy back. But Mom and Dad are so busy now-a-days, fighting in the war, organizing. I needed a break. So I came here. This place is paradise!" "You sound just like him." Linda-Su pointed at Ekyt.

Paula-Su shifted, suddenly uncomfortable. "Mom said that you'd be having a hard time, dad. Can I help?" Ekyt's eyes widened. So much for keeping it quiet. "Well, I've been relieved of my duties as a guardian in training, and now I don't live anywhere, have no job, and I'm pretty banged up." He pointed to the bandages across his torso and the cane. The twelve-year-old smiled at him. "Geez, Mom said you were a reckless idiot." He stifled a laugh and turned to look at Linda, who was practically choking back tears she was laughing so hard.

"Yeah, Uncle Espio says hi." She said importantly. Linda walked out, leaving the two alone.

"So the war is getting better?" Ekyt asked after small talk had been made. "Yes, we're on the verge of total victory." She looked away, uncomfortable. "Do you like it here?" he asked her. "Yeah, but I'm a little homesick." Ekyt totally understood. "I don't blame you at all." He sighed again. "So I'm an okay dad in your time?" "Yeah, of course! Why do you ask?" she said, concerned.

"Well, about 10 years ago, back on earth, I had anxiety problems. I couldn't go to school, I would be sick on and off. It never ended. Then I came here. I just hoped that you didn't get my anxiety. My...Curse." He turned whiter than normal, thinking of the memories. She shook her head. "Nope, I didn't get any of that. I guess I'm mostly like mom. You must be disappointed." "Not at all! You're lucky to look like your mother. Trust me on that, you're both beautiful."

A knock came on the door. Linda answered it. Violet (Violet_Rose) and Shadow entered. "Who's this?" Shadow asked, immediately going on the defense. Ekyt stepped in front. "Shadow and Violet. Good to see you again. This is my daughter, Paula-Su. She's from the future." Shadow relaxed. Violet raised an

eyebrow. "When did you get a daughter." "Aunt Violet?" Paula said. "What? You know me?" "Of course. In my future you and Shadow are two of my best friends." Violet had to think about that for a second. Shadow bent down and stared at the echidna. She stared back. "Um, Shadow, take it easy." "Relax. I'm just curious to see what the byproduct of an echidna and a human looks like." Paula rolled her eyes and then said with exaggeration "Cool, an ultimate life form! Woah! I've never seen one! Can we keep him dad?" Ekyt stifled a laugh. "He's not the type you keep, Paula." Shadow gave Ekyt an evil look, before Violet punched him on the arm. "Relax Shads, he's kidding. I think." "Yeah, human humor. It so broad." He said with a goofy look.

They left. Paula looked at a futuristic-looking watch. "I'd better go." Ekyt got up suddenly. "Wait, I nearly forgot." He handed her a chain with a shard of emerald on it. "This is like the one I gave your mother. If you ever need it's power, talk to my future self." She nodded, then hugged her future parents goodbye. With a whoosh, she was gone.

Ekyt walked to the kitchen again, massaging his temples. Linda put her hands on his bare shoulders. He flinched slightly, but kept still. "I don't know what to do Linda. What do you think I should do." Linda smiled at him. "Well, I was gonna ask last night, but you were in no condition to talk. Why don't you stay with me until you find your own place? And as for a job, what about the Chaotix? You'll be in the loop. You'll get your job back, kid." Ekyt stared into space. "I don't know Linda. I don't want to impose on you, and I don't know if I'd feel comfortable...you know." She rolled her eyes. "I'm not saying we'd sleep in the same bed. You'd have a room of your own. Besides, it's temporary." She waited. He finally nodded. "Thank you. I'm just sorry that I can't do more." She kissed him, right there, with them both leaning back on the counter. When they broke apart, they smiled at each other, both of their cheeks turning red. "I'll get my stuff then." With a swish of his coat, he was gone. But he'd be back.

80 - The Next Guardian Issue 80- No holds barred!

Ekyt moved in the next day and started work on his own place. If he was going to live there, he was going to make sure not to be a burden.

On the first day, he had his stuff stashed away neatly. He got up before her, made her breakfast, cleaned up, and was off, training and building his new place. She shook her head, amazed. *Goofy kid. But he's nice. He must know I had work today. What a sweetheart.*

Ekyt, jobless, wandered aimlessly around. He visited his friends, still down on himself, and still in pain. His leg was still hurt, forcing him to use a cane, and his ribs were still hurt, and his shirts were all shredded, so he could only walk around with bandages wrapped around his torso. He was still depressed, though.

He talked to Knuckles. "I think my dad made a bogus call, but don't worry, me and Archimedes are working on it. Heck, you've even rubbed off on Julie-Su, and that ain't easy." "Why'd I get the shaft, Knux?" Ekyt asked. Knuckles raised his eyebrows. "Dad didn't tell you?" Ekyt shook his head. "No, what happened?"

"Well, it's partly because of the last injury you took. The Brotherhood didn't feel that you would recover quick enough. My dad voted to keep you on, but he was outnumbered and he got the task of delivering the news. The other half was some resented a human being a guardian. It's nothing that's your fault." Ekyt let his eyes sink. "I see. Give your father my best. Between you and me Knux, I'll be in the loop." He walked out, leaving Knuckles to his training.

On the way out, he kicked over a dead tree, ignoring his protesting ribs. *Not good enough? That's the problem? Well, we'll see about that.* He finally made it up the mountain to Mighty's place. Mighty was lifting weights, but he stopped when he saw his friend's face.

"Hey, you okay?" he asked. Ekyt recounted the tale while he absently lifted Mighty's weights. When he finished, Mighty asked what he could do. "Well, I'd like to get in with the Chaotix."

So Ekyt began his training with the Chaotix. He and Espio were technical fighters, while Vector and Mighty fought with pure power. Charmy was in a class by himself.

Ekyt, tired and sore, returned to Linda's after getting cleaned up. She was already home and out of uniform, relaxing in jeans and a white t-shirt when her battered boyfriend limped in. "God, did you get in *another* fight?" He shook his head. "No, I was training with the Chaotix, my new employers. At least until the guardians relent." He told her what Knuckles had to told him. She nodded. "Yeah, that sounds like some of the brotherhoods outdated rules. Congratulations." "Thanks," he offered, "How was your day?" Linda stopped. He actually seemed to care...That wasn't something she had gotten before.

Her parents had been killed when she was young, and in her blind fury, joined with the dark legion,

along with her sister, Julie-Su. The two had stayed close. But never close enough to be parent figures to each other. Not that Ekyt was, but he seemed concerned for her well being in more that a friendly way. It was new to her. And to him, she was willing to bet.

So she told him, and he listened. He then told her about the new job with the Chaotix. He was just about to tell her how Vector had ran into a tree when a knock came at the door. Knuckles stood there, a grim look on his face.

He asked to talk to Ekyt privately. Ekyt left shortly, then came back, furious. "They picked a new guardian!" He let his head drop, then laughed. "I'm, going to say hello." She put her hand on his shoulder. "Just don't do anything you'll regret." "Don't worry, how bad could it be?"

It was bad.

"Remington? You?" Ekyt stared down his rival, the former constable Remington. "The one and only, punk. Boy, the hits just keep on coming, don't they kid? I get your job, I get your girl!" "Say that again!" Ekyt stood low, menacing. "Your...Girl..." Ekyt charged him, the two tussled, Ekyt winning in blind fury. Remington snarled "Do you know what the sentence is for assaulting a guardian?" Ekyt narrowed his eyes, then answered. "Do you know the price for imitating a guardian?" Remington kicked him in his hurt leg, then followed with a shot to the ribs. Ekyt, still injured, rolled as he went down and swept his opponents legs. Knuckles and Linda burst in. The two kept fighting. "Aw Snap!" Knuckles shouted. "It'll take more than us to get those two apart. Linda, call Sonic and Shadow." "No need."

Sonic, Shadow, and Violet stood there. "We heard the fight. What happened." Shadow asked. Violet pushed him aside gently and whacked the two with her hammer. "Behave, both of you! Linda, cuff one of them, would ya?" Linda handcuffed Ekyt, while the others restrained Remington.

Locke saw the whole thing via monitor. "I knew Remington was a bad idea." His ex-wife, Lara-Le, stood behind him. "It was for the best, Locke. You can't trust those filthy humans." Locke gave her a firm look. "You can trust this one." *I do, in fact.*

The human didn't struggle, he stood there, staring down Remington. Shadow would've let them handle it themselves, but rules were rules to these inferior creatures.

"Okay, what brought this on?" asked Linda. Remington told a lie that was so obvious no one believed it. Locke burst into the room. "Linda, let the human go. He's innocent. Defending your honor as well as the honor of the title of guardian is his only crime." Linda released him, bit kept her hand on him. Locke recounted what was said via a recording.

Linda-Su's thoughts were going a mile a minute. She let her guard down, and Remington who was a seasoned cop, zeroed in and kissed her. "Come with me instead." Ekyt was held back by Locke and Knuckles. Linda smiled. She opened her mouth. "Nope." "Huh." She slugged Remington in the jaw. "That's for killing Knuckles (He died once in the comic, but came back.)" She hit him again. "That's for kissing me." And she tossed him across the room. "That was for insulting my boyfriend!" She walked calmly over to Ekyt.

Good or Bad, for better or worse, these are the actions that were taken. Athair studied the group closer. Hmmm. Perhaps the Ancient Walkers could assist in the matter...

81 - The Next Guardian Issue 81 The Power's back!

Locke heard the alarm, signaling a breach of his home, Haven. He already knew who it was. Athair.

It was indeed Athair. Neither had much love for the other. But Athair's appearance always meant urgency. "Locke, the human. The Ancient Walkers have plans for him. He needs to be reinstated as guardian immediately." "You know as well as I that I have no more power that you to do so. I agree Ekyt has shown immense loyalty, but the committee" "The committee is unaware of his importance. Who brought forth the charges?" "Lara-Le. What has she to do with it?" Athair recounted her words to Linda-Su. Locke stroked his beard. "What do the ancient walkers have in mind?" "Your guess is as good as mine, Locke." "Well, I just can't tell Remington he's fired." "A duel is the only way, Locke." "Very well."

Espio and Vector were holding up a frame as Espio pounded it in and Ekyt worked on the roof. His house was coming along nicely. His ribs creaked with the effort, so he stopped momentarily as Knuckles gliding over. "Kid, you've got a duel, you win, you're a guardian again. When do you want to schedule it?" "Now." He climbed down the ladder. Espio, Mighty, Vector, and Charmy joined him. "I want these guys in my corner...and Linda." "Are you sure? Kid, you can't walk without a cane, you're ribs...You're crazy!" "Yup. What's crazier is when I win, I'm sticking with the Chaotix as well as being a guardian. Where's he want to fight?" "Emerald Beach, near the gully." "I'm there."

Ekyt pulled on his black pants, tossing aside his shirt and coat, as per the custom. Linda took them, a worried look on her face. He tossed her his cane and limped to the center of the markings that served as the boundaries. Remington stood across from him, menacingly. Ekyt didn't flinch.

The two charged. Remington went low. Ekyt expected this, and jumped, shifting positions in the air as he leapfrogged Remington. He stuck downward with an open hand. "Just a little heads up, I *am* the game, and I want to play! (Motorhead words for WWE's Triple H, thought it fit the situation." Ekyt snarled. Remington rebounded with a shot to the chin, with which Ekyt rolled with the punch and caught the echidna with a hook kick high up in the side. Remington spun, Ekyt caught him and slammed his down on the sand.

Remington pretended to struggle. He grabbed a handful of sand while yelling "Now!" Geoffrey St. John hit Ekyt from behind. Ekyt clocked him, and turned into Remington, who tossed the sand in his eyes. Remington scored a throw on the blinded Ekyt. Geoffrey jumped on too. Things looked bad.

Linda shouted to Locke. "This isn't legal! Locke, you need to stop this!" Locke shook his head. "This is how things are settled." Two new voices spoke up. "Fine, we'll just even the odds." Shadow jumped forward, grabbing Remington and throwing him into a nearby tree. Violet (Violet_Rose) whacked Geoffrey with her hammer. Eden (Violet_Rose) helped Ekyt up. "Hold still." Ekyt trusted Eden. She tossed something on his face, whatever it was cleared the sand. Ekyt, furious, tore the bandages off his ribs. "Thanks, but these two are mine!" Ekyt charged forward, his shoulders hitting Remington and Saint John. Geoffrey, for his interference, earned a dip in the drink. Remington, grabbing a coconut for a

weapon, went to strike, but a hammer fist strike from Ekyt broke it in half. He stared down Remington. The two exchanged hits, neither playing defense. Remington had one last trick. He pushed away and held up a chaos emerald. "I'll smash it! Surrender, or I'll smash it!" Ekyt paused, then stared to kneel, a sign of defeat. Once Remington's guard was down, Ekyt took out his legs, caught the emerald, tossed it to Knuckles and went back to the fight. He held the echidna by his dreadlocks, when Remington yelled "I give!" Ekyt tossed him anyway, but not into the tree he was aiming for originally.

The Chaotix escorted Geoffrey and Remington away, while Linda ran up to Ekyt. "You did! Man, that was awesome!" Ekyt spat blood away from him. He smiled at her, before he started to feel weak. Linda propped him up, then helped him walk away. There would be time for celebration later. For now, he needed rest.

82 - Issue 82: Getting closer to destiny

Ekyt recovered, while Linda-Su went to work with the police. He was well enough to do his share around the house, as well as build his own. The Chaotix were very helpful. But there was no such thing as a day off on the floating island.

A week later Ekyt at 100 percent. Unfortunately, fate chose this time to attack Linda. It started off as a typical day, quiet in fact. Poile, Remington's replacement on the force, started to make comments. She ignored them at first, then gave him a warning to stop. She was concerned about Ekyt enough without someone insulting him. She finally had enough and clocked him after he said "If I knew you were so easy to please, I would've been after you a long time ago." She stormed out, angry, but sad as well.

She walked by herself when she was jumped. Her assailant wore a mask, and left her lying after a brutal beating with a club. She fought back, managing to land a few strikes, but the hit from behind threw her off. Eventually, the masked figure knocked her unconscious. Her attacker walked away, unconcerned.

Ekyt's training brought him that way. He and Knuckles had been scouring the island when he saw her. He picked her up as Knuckles charged through the quickest path to Ekyt's finished house.

Ekyt laid her gently on the couch, and lifted one eyelid. "Concussion for sure. Her pupils are dilated." He checked her pulse, which was fine. Knuckles offered to get a doctor, but Ekyt was sure she was okay. It was her decision to see a doctor after. Knuckles told him to take it easy and to keep an eye on her.

Since his stuff wasn't unpacked yet, he laid his coat over her. Locke visited at one point. He knew medical stuff very well, and said she'd be fine, but until she recovered she needed protection twenty-four hours a day. For two days Ekyt stayed awake, by her side. He jumped, and at one point almost attacked Sonic.

She was awake, and the first thing she saw was her concerned friend's face. He relaxed and immediately hugged her. He kissed her gently, as she smiled. "What happened?" she asked, getting up, woozy. "You got jumped. We don't know who did it. But when I find them..." "Where am I anyway?" "My house." He answered. "Do you have running water? I want to get cleaned up." "Sure. Down the hall, second door on the right." He paused, scratched his head, then continued. "Um, I put an extra room in, if you'd be more comfortable here, I mean..." His voice trailed off. Was that too much. "I'd love that! You have a towel?" she asked, as he steadied her. "Yeah, they're in the bathroom." She looked up at him.

"You know, I think Poile, that new guy, did it. He was insulting you. I mean, you and me being together." "They'll accept it eventually. But I hate putting you in danger." "Relax, I'm just as tough as my sister." "I know, I just don't" She tickled him under the chin before grabbing him around the waist, pulling him closer by the waistband on his pants. She kissed him, and he kissed back. They broke their embrace after a few seconds. She blinked. "I'm gonna go get cleaned up." She left, walking gingerly.

He stood there, wishing that had lasted longer. It was times like those that made him consider marrying her. They were too young, of course. He gave that thought, then Athair came.

“It is time for you to fulfill what the Ancient Walkers proficized all those years ago.” “Athair? What do they ask?” “They need you to go to the Forbidden zone, and rescue the lost scripts that could tell how to dispel the threat of the dark legion.” “Of course. But, Please, let me say goodbye to Linda.” “Of course.” Though it had been a long time since he had been seventeen, Athair could remember what it was like to care for someone.

Ekyt knocked on the bathroom door. Linda's head poked out. He explained quickly. He wanted to kiss her goodbye, but with her being in just a towel it didn't seem right to him.

But apparently it seemed right to her as she kissed him, a deep kiss, somehow keeping her towel in place. “I'll be back soon.” “I know. I love you.” “I love you too.”

83 - Issue 83: Retrival and Revival

Ekyt waited behind the rock, as the SWATbots sentries went by. When the coast was clear, he hopped over the rocks and ran toward the forbidden zone entrance. He pushed his way forward. His progress was slow, mostly due to thickets of vines. He dodged around trees, wondering what exactly was so hard about this assignment. Sonic and company had been here before, disabling most of the traps.

Then he saw himself, only in a white coat, pop out of the bushes and swing what looked like a baseball bat. Ekyt stopped dead and the figure disappeared. *Must be my mind...* Then another figure was there. Lien-Da. She shot a gun of some sort at him, and he ducked, but those images faded too. He got up and moved, faster. Robotnik stood in his way. He threw a grenade. Ekyt went to kick at it, but it disappeared. Then one more vision appeared. It was the twenty-two year old him, dead. Eyes blank, a knife in his ribs, body torn apart by the explosion. Then he saw himself being tortured by Dark Legion. Then he saw his first "death"

Ekyt finally knew what was going on. He charged forward as images of all sorts flashed around him. He finally reached a cave that appeared to be man made. "The forest was playing tricks on me. Someone knows I'm here." He made a mental note to make sure not to tick off whoever it was.

The absence of traps disturbed him. He cautiously tapped a stone with his staff. Nothing. He jogged down the long corridor, half expecting a big rock to come rolling out. He reached the end and saw the scripts. It was too easy.

He was right.

All of a sudden, all these weird animals jumped him. They seemed more curious than anything. He didn't attack. One of them put a collar around his neck. <You understand us human? > The lead creature asked. The collar must have been something to make him understand them

The creatures were small, black in color. They had wide red eyes with yellow pupils, and long tails. They all seemed to wear the collars that they had placed on him.

"Yes, I do. I have come for the ancient echidna scripts." He said. <Those are false human, you waste your time. The scripts you seek are in the swamp.> "Thank you, but how do I get them? I can't live underwater." The oldest of the creatures beckoned to his servant, who brought him a circular object, about a pill size.

<Take this, and you can breath underwater for a short amount of time. Sufficient enough to find what you seek. > Ekyt thanked them, but stopped. "What would have happened if I had taken those papers?" he asked, indicating ones on the pedestal he had seen earlier." One creature demonstrated, and then disappeared. He reappeared, appearing to be okay.

"So why did you help me?" Ekyt asked. <Because you faced fear head-on in the forest. We value

bravery here. Go now, if you need us, we'll be there." Ekyt thanked them and ran. A stone door rolled closed behind him.

He found the swamp and dove in after taking the pill. He swam down a ways before he realized he wasn't getting wet. He grabbed the scripts and swam upward, only to be grabbed immediately. His evil self stood there.

Ekyt flipped him into the drink, before realizing that his counterpart couldn't swim. He held his staff down in the water and pulled him up. "Thanks." Then he pulled out a gun and some rope. "We're gonna go see some friends of mine." "Why would "we" do that?" "Because I'm holding the gun sport. Now don't move." Ekyt pocketed the papers, unseen by the evil him.

"Walk. No false moves, or I kill you." Ekyt swallowed. This was bad.

Linda-Su solo:

Linda came out of the bathroom, towel wrapped around her. She went to her room, where she had a change of clothes. They were a white shirt, one that didn't quite reach her jeans. She sat down. She realized both she and Ekyt were older than they really were in terms of years.

She laid back, his coat serving as a pillow. The doctor she had seen said to take it easy. That left her time to think. The thoughts were always of the future she and Ekyt could have together. If he didn't get killed. That was always the X factor.

Were they moving too fast? Too slow? It was love, not lust. There was no real way to prove that. She loved him, he loved her. What was the problem?

BONUS: LOST NEXT GUARDIAN SCENE FROM THE ORIGINAL FIVE!

Ekyt caught the power ring Sonic had lost, and he felt the power go through him. Being a human, a power ring had a different effect on him. He took on the powers of the last animal he had been in contact with, without channeling their appearance. That meant an echidna.

He glided toward a combot and flew into it, making a clang sound that echoed through the great forest. His knuckles, now protruding from his gloves, connected with the combot, shattering it.

He wondered whether he had a "super" form.

84 - Issue 84: Execution

The bad Ekyt had changed his name. "You can refer to me as Zenith." He said. "Why would I do that, you're not the top of anything. That earned Ekyt a smart crack between the shoulder blades. He kept walking. Right into a tent where Robotnik sat with Kragok and Lien-Da.

"Reconsider my proposal cutey?" Lien-Da asked him. "Hardly, ya mutt." He shot back. Robotnik chuckled at that. He really didn't like these dark legion types, but they had power. Ekyt was forced into a chair, with at least three guns pointed at him. The ones he could see. The goons searched him, taking the papers he had retrieved. "Well, what have we here?" Kragok taunted. "Love letters. What do you think? You know echidna history as well as I do." Kragok glanced at the papers. "Yes I do. Better, I daresay. Now that I have the papers, we can do away with you. The only question is, how. Shoot you? No, too quick. Stabbing? No, too messy. Well hang you." Lien-Da hugged her brother. "I owe you." "Yes, yes, just alert the executioners. Sundown today." That left Ekyt three hours to plan how to survive this. He remembered the promise those weird creatures had made him.

Flashback

<We value bravery above all else. You have proven this. When you need us, we will be there.>

End Flashback.

He concentrated on those creatures, hoping they got the message. Three hours came and went. Nothing. They didn't get the message, but someone else did. They put Ekyt on the podium. Kragok gave Ekyt precious time by giving a speech.

"Today is a great day for the Dark Legion. We are about to be rid of a large thorn in our side." He gestured to Ekyt. The crowd threw things and spit at him. "Any last words? *Guardian?*" He asked sarcastically, knowing Ekyt wasn't a full guardian. Ekyt nodded. "You all are misguided. Go ahead, kill me. But you see, guardians don't die so easy. You know that full well Lien-Da. You shot me. And yet...here I am. About to be killed. Think about that." *Chaos emeralds, lend me power.* He started to glow green. "Do it now!" Kragok yelled. The executioner threw back his hood. It was Linda-Su. She cut Ekyt down. His insides were filled with power. He let loose a yell as he and Linda charged.

Bodies went flying. In his "mega" form, no one could touch him. One landed a hit on Linda, and Ekyt

punted him. He was losing energy fast. They needed a vehicle. Ekyt spotted one. "Go for the car." He told Linda. It was a hover car. The two raced toward it. "Linda, can you drive? I'm drained..." He slumped unconscious in the passenger seat. She gunned it.

The chase was on.

85 - Issue 85: The most shocking issue yet!

Linda-Su piloted the best she could. Ekyt was starting to stir, but she had to buy more time for him. She dodged into a forest and zigzagged at top speed. Several Dark Legion members crashed, but there were still a lot more. Ekyt, now awake, took her pistol from its holster and fired shots at the bottom of the opposing hover cars. One by one they dropped off, engine trouble dogging them.

"We're okay for now." Then he looked back. "Aw snap!" (I know, I know, but I gotta keep this PG) Kragok's personal vehicle was back in the chase, followed by Lien-Da's vehicle. Robotnik was at the lead in his hovercraft. Ekyt stood up. For a few crucial seconds he was a target for lasers. He jumped and swung around a tree branch, connecting with Robotnik. Robotnik fell down to the ground, only to be picked up by Kragok's men.

Ekyt dropped into the hovercraft and put it directly behind Linda's car, to keep some distance. He stood to jump, then cut the engines. He jumped as Lien-Da's car hit the hovercraft. That left one more vehicle.

This car was heavily armored, reinforced in front and back. The sides held gun pods (Like World War II railroad guns, if you've ever played Medal of Honor), so no side was easy. It was better in this case to make a run for it. Their vehicle was the faster one. Linda had an idea, though.

"Drive!" she called to Ekyt, who obediently took the wheel. Linda leaned out the side of the car and fired several shots from her pistol, cracking a tree. Ekyt threw a knife into the wedge she had made, causing the tree to topple. It blocked Kragok's car. They were safe. For the moment.

Until they saw all of Kragok's men who had cut them off, aiming rifles and other nasty looking weapons at them. "What do we do?" Linda-Su asked. She looked ready to fight. If he was alone, Ekyt might have done that. Instead, he raised his arms and got down on his knees. Linda followed suit. The Dark Legion rushed forward, seizing the two.

Things look bad. I've gotta do something. I'm too weak to pull off a chaos control trick. Ekyt sighed, and finally gave in. He wasn't going to talk, so he might as well prepare to die.

He and Linda were in a jail cell. She didn't look angry, but you could tell she was underneath it all. "We'll get through it." She told him. "Yeah, we always do." Then the guards came. Execution by hanging was the word. With Ekyt too weak to pull the same trick he had before, he was led to the podium, in front of the jeering enemy. "Any last requests, pig?" asked the executioner. "Yeah, loosen the knot and let me go." Ekyt snarled. The executioner looked to Kragok, who swore at him. "Of course you don't let him go! Geez!" (Dialogue taken from the Mummy. Great movie) "I do have one last request." "And that is, guardian?" the executioner snickered. Ekyt got down on one knee the best he could with his hands behind his back. "Linda-Su, will you marry me?" The crowd gasped.

She got up on the stage. "If I'm going to die, I want to know that I love you. I just could never say it. Not the way I should have." She kissed him, earning a mock "Awww" from the crowd. "Of course I will."

Kragok stood up and applauded. "A valiant move, guardian. Get a magistrate and let the two lovebirds die in wedlock!"

TO BE CONTINUED: THE "I DO'S?"

86 - Issue 86: What goes up...

Ekyt and Linda. It had a nice ring to it. The two knew death was near. They cared for each other so selflessly that death was in the back of their mind. "Yes, I'll marry you! I love you too! You don't know what this means to me!" "Well, if I could give you life, I would do that first. But since that's out of the question..." Then he realized how that sounded. "Oh boy. That sucked. Um, forget I said that. I love you." She laughed. "I knew what you meant!" The judge started the ceremony. But before it could be completed, a red thing flew into him. Knuckles cut the two free from their ropes. Sonic came bursting in, clearing a path. "Let's go!"

The four ran for it, to where Shadow stood. He had used Chaos Control to warp time past a certain point. "We have 60 seconds! We've gotta make time." Tails and Linda flew away. Sonic and Shadow ran, leaving Knuckles and Ekyt. "Grab on!" Knuckles told Ekyt. They glided off as Kragok and his henchmen froze. They had escaped.

After thanking the others, Ekyt and Linda walked home together. Ekyt was still his bashful self, and even Linda was more careful than usual. "I'm sorry I got you into this mess, Linda." He sat climbed up into the roof loft he had the Chaotix install on his place. She followed him up. "It's alright. Shame we never got married though." She said, a smile coming across her lips. "To be honest, I wouldn't know what to do after the "I do" part." He said, shaking his head. "Maybe it's for the best. We're both young. We've got time, Ekyt. At least until you screw up again." He rolled his eyes. "Thanks Linda." She hugged him and pulled him closer to her. He smiled a half smile and tossed his hair, the way he had when they had first fell for each other. For once, shy was in the background. They kissed. Then broke apart from the embrace, him awkwardly, her only slightly more smooth. "Good night Linda." "Good Night Ekyt." Tomorrow was another day.

Another day for training. Ekyt got right back into it. Of course, Knuckles and Sonic had heard about his sappy near-ending, and kidded him about it. He laughed with them, but thanked them for the save.

Linda was grilled for details by Eden (Violet_Rose- Surprise!). She told her, and Eden thought it was romantic. "He really cares for you. I wasn't sure about him, at first." Eden handed Linda a cup of tea. "Yeah, I know. But that clinched it. He cares. But he's so selfconciuous. He apologized for every little romantic blunder." She blushed and said into her cup. "It's kinda cute." Eden shrugged. "You were always a sucker for the underdog, Linda." "Yeah. I was one my self." "True."

TO BE CONTINUED- THE RETURN OF ZONESS!

87 - Issue 87: ...Must Come Down

Eventually, Linda got back to doing her job. Not that she didn't have her share of problems. Eventually, after about three weeks, she was stressed. Her supervisor called her into his office.

"Linda, you need a rest. I want you to go home, and take it easy for a while." "Are you sure, Dylan? I mean..." "Linda, we won't fall apart without you for a week. Go home and relax." "Well, okay."

She did. It was kind of nice. But soon she got restless.

Ekyt, sweat dripping off his forehead, had been incredibly busy. Despite the whole near-death thing, he was feeling pretty good. There. "Okay, Amy, there's the refrigerator. He and Tails had been moving Amy's refrigerator. She had been driving them nuts, changing her mind every 3 seconds. Ekyt would've laughed, but he was tired.

"Thanks so much! I owe ya!" she hugged him and kissed Tails. He walked out the door, only to meet Sonic. "Glad I ran into ya! Listen, we've got some trouble." Ekyt narrowed his eyes. "What kind of trouble?" "The fat kind. Robotnik's at it again. He's got a new roboticizer. It moves. Fast." "Since speed is your area of expertise, what do you suggest to gum up the works?" Ekyt asked. "I'm thinking you distract it while Amy, Violet, me, and Shadow demolish that thing!" "Okay, But why Amy and Violet (Violet_Rose)?" "They have hammers." "Ah."

Linda-Su decided to drop in to see her sister. Julie-Su was pretty happy to see her. "So, this guy is for real?" she said, as the two sisters sat near the mountain they used to play by. "Yeah. Definitely. You've probably heard the whole "proposing story" Julie coughed, violently from shock. "Huh? When did that happen?" She asked. Linda laughed. "Ummm, just before they were going to hang him." Julie-Su' eyes widened. "The Dark Legion? I thought they were out of commission." "Nope. And that rotten sister of ours, Lien-Da, and Kragok are back in charge." Julie punched a tree nearby. "I hate those people! I can't believe you and I were ever with them!" "Me either. But we got straightened out." "Yeah. It took me a while. Glad you and Knuckles were there to bring me around."

Ekyt stood directly in the machines path. Snively spotted him on the monitor. "Master, there's that human!" Robotnik looked at the monitor. "Cure him! Get the machine on him."

Ekyt heard the wheels grinding and grabbed onto a tree branch and pulled himself up into the leaves. *Okay. So far so good. Now to take my shot...* Ekyt took out the flare gun he had in his pocket, took aim at the machines sensors.

The machine itself was a weird design. It had tank-like treads, a long, metallic, refrigerator-looking thing for a body, and a TV for a head.

Snively saw the incoming flare. The machine's sensors were clogged. Then over the speakers came a pounding sound, followed by a shriek of hedgehog's meeting metal.

The sensors came back online, revealing the severely damaging machine collapsing. "Snively, activate the self destruct!" Snively did, and the machine started explode.

Ekyt and Sonic saw this, and went into action. Shadow was already gone, with Violet, but Amy was still there. Sonic streaked toward Amy and grabbed her as the machine toppled. Ekyt tossed his coat over her to shield her eyes and they sped away.

The machine exploded.

Aside from some trees getting cut down, little damage was done. That infuriated Robotnik, who pounded his control panel.

Ekyt, who had been in the open, got knocked over by the blast. He got up, unharmed.

Linda was back at the house when Ekyt walked in. "How was your day?" he asked her. "I'm on vacation. Boring. How was your- Oh God, Not Again!" She pointed at his leg. Ekyt noticed blood coming off his leg. Linda got down and looked at the wound. "Good Lord, how did you manage to get metal in your leg? Get in the bathroom and get the scissors. And tweezers." He did as he was told. It hadn't really hurt.

She cut of his the lower part of his pant leg, then pulled the metal out with the tweezers. He gave no indication that he felt it other than his muscles tightened. She cleaned it and stuck a bandage over it, then wrapped that with medical tape.

He looked down at her while she worked on his leg. *I can't believe this! I've really got to learn to be careful. Nah. That's not my job. My job is to guard.* He looked down at her head again. *Guard...*

She patched his leg up, then went to her room. She changed her shirt. It figured she had been wearing white when he comes in with the busted leg. As she did, she thought about him. *How do you not notice something like that? When I got shot, I felt it, but good! He's got a good head on his shoulders. But he always winds up getting hurt protecting others. Why does he get it and not the others?* She answered her own question. *Probably the same reason he keeps to himself, that whole Sonic can run, Knuckles can glide, Shadow can...do whatever he wants. Maybe he feels left out without a "super power" Whatever. I'm gonna figure out what's bugging him and get it out of him.*

88 - Issue 88: Dark Horizons

bsp; After getting back from Zoness (See last special, Zoness used Courtesy of Sega_man7) Ekyt and Linda were closer than ever. Knuckles mother, Lara-le is viciously against the couple. She finally found a way to pry the two apart. Linda-Su made the short trip to Echidnapolis, walking to Lara-le's home. Wymacher answered the door, then called for her. She came to the door, and pretended to be delighted to see Linda. "Come in, my dear. I thought that since you are so close with a guardian, you should know what goes along with marrying a guardian. For example, if you have children by him, they will be destined to be guardians. You won't get to raise them. He'll be training them. Most likely not thinking of actually raising the children. Not even children. Guardians. You'll have guardians, not kids. And then, when he gets called to Haven, it means you'll be alone." She watched the fifteen year old's face fell slightly. "I-I guess I better go. Thank you ma'am." Lara-Le watched her go, satisfied that she would drop the kid like a hot potato. Ekyt dodged Espio attack and struck back with his fist, while Espio jumped up and flipped on him. Ekyt dodged and rolled, but Espio held on. Ekyt threw himself on his back, pinning Espio. With him eliminated, Mighty and Knuckles went at it as Ekyt towed himself off. He tossed on clean clothes, complete with trench coat. He watched Mighty throw Knuckles, and Knuckles gliding to return the blow. Linda-su stood outside the door. This was hard to do. The kid is so...fragile. Emotionally. He has done nothing but care for me...But what Lara-le said made sense...But him and I have come so far. No, I have to. She sighed heavily and walked in, and tapped him on the shoulder. She could sense his discomfort immediately. "Can we talk?" she asked. "Sure." "Knuckles, be right back." "Take your time." Knuckles called back. They walked to Mount Fate. They climbed the slope and stood up on top. The view was panoramic. But neither of them noticed. Linda-Su sighed heavily. "I-I'm sorry Ekyt. I don't think we should be...you know...together." She tried to gage his reaction. But his expression gave nothing away. "I assume you have a reason." He said. It wasn't a question. They had come to far together to give false notions. "I-I just don't feel it's right." She said. It was vague, and she knew he deserved better. But he didn't pry. "I understand Linda." His voice was low, solemn. He closed his eyes. "Just take care of yourself." He turned and jumped down the slope, landing on the ledges. He had been here before. Linda-Su had never felt worse. He took it well. But that doesn't mean much. Guardians are mysterious by nature. She sighed again, letting herself sink onto the ash below. Her thoughts were with her human friend. Ekyt walked. He hadn't seen this coming. Things had seemed so right...Obviously he was off. It wasn't that he was human, he was as human as he was last week. Not that it mattered. He made a decision. He got to Haven, and was greeted amiably by Locke. "What brings you here guardian?" he asked. Ekyt looked up. "I-I want to retire from active duty as a guardian." Locke's eyes widened with Shock. Stroking his beard, he called for the other members of Haven. The brotherhood consisted of an elite few guardians. They were older, but they still served their purposes well. Sabre, Hawking, Sojourner, and Thunderhawk came immediately. "It appears Ekyt wishes to retire from active guardian duty." Thunderhawk immediately snarled. "A human backing down? Huh, just like your kind." "Thunderhawk, stand down." Sabre spoke up. "Something influenced your decision lad. Hawking, you have the most experience with emotional...never mind. You know what to do." Hawking concentrated for a few seconds, then opened his eyes again. "His mind is too young, too fresh. It will not reveal the issue without further probing. And that endangers his subconscious." Thunderhawk voted to probe his mind, but the others turned it down. "You may have your wish, guardian, whatever caused this. The door shall remain open to you." Hawking said.

“Hawking, you are our oldest member.” Locke said, starting to gain momentum. “Yes, Locke. What of it?” “I move that Ekyt, rather than retire, be allowed to learn from us in Haven.” “An excellent idea, Locke. Granted.” To Be Continued...

89 - Issue 89: Digging Deeper

bsp; Locke, Sojourner, Hawking, and Sabre welcomed him. Thunderhawk didn't trust him. Not that Ekyt cared. Not anymore. Locke seemed to have taken personal control over Ekyt's situation. He showed the kid his part of Haven, a large room with some video monitors, a library with Echidna history, and a side room for training privately. The seventeen year old sat down on his bed. "She'll come back." Locke said to him, smiling slightly. "How did you know." "Lad, I've had my girl trouble too. Chances are Linda realized what it means to be married to a guardian, and she balked. Give her time." "Locke, I've come to realize trust is a rare commodity. One that should be called upon sparingly, lest it buckle when you really can't afford it." Locke was impressed by the statement, but saddened at the same time. He was older, him thinking like that was one thing. He had years of knowledge to call upon. But from a young man, it was profound. Locke sighed, and handed him a package. "Most of the brotherhood have chosen to wear masks. This one is different. Plainer, but chilling in it's simplicity. You can wear it if you wish. You can certainly say no." Locke got up. "I'll leave you to get settled. Let me know if you need anything." "I'm gonna get my stuff, then come back." "That's okay." Ekyt walked back to the house that was...no longer his. He had decided it was Linda-Su's now. He had no use for it, and, as bitter as he felt, he still loved her. Unfortunately, she was home when he came to get his stuff. "I suppose you want me out." She said. "No. This house is yours." "But what about you?" He stopped and pulled the mask out of his pocket. He put it on. "I've retired from active guardian duty. I live in Haven now, with the brotherhood." Linda was choked up, and jumbled her words, but he heard "mask" in that sentence. "The mask is kind of ceremonial. But more importantly, it disguises the past. It hides the scars." "What scars, Ekyt." "Not the kind you can see. Emotional. Deep. I don't understand..." He stopped. "The house is yours. I'm not angry with you, if that's what you're worried about. I care for you. It's just not the same as before. But that's the price you pay...When you give in to desire, primal urges. You trust, you hope. To me, that's gone Linda. All gone." He paused. "It's not your fault. Just, take care of yourself." He left. Linda stared at the door, hoping against her better judgment that he would come back. He didn't. Ekyt carried his stuff, declining help from everyone. Everyone but Tails and Amy. Tails was smart, and he called Ekyt on the mask, as well as why he didn't trust anyone. Ekyt, feeling like an older brother, told him what happened, and then used a quote. Not one he used often. "Better to have loved and lost, that to have never loved at all. Just remember that." Amy, being sensitive, caught up to his pace. "What about you? You don't miss her." "I miss her. It tears me up. But the choice is hers. I love her Amy. Love isn't something that comes and goes. I do miss her. More than you could know. But I've made my decision, and, for better or worse, this is how it has to be. Unless she changes her mind." Ekyt thanked them for their help, and entered to Haven. The mask itself was black, with red slashed going through the eyes. Thunderhawk had warmed to him since he started to wear the mask. Locke trained Ekyt almost exclusively. Archimedes also helped, spending hours with the human, helping him learn history. Ekyt himself spent hours alone in the gym. He was in good shape. Physically. Kragok, who could see guardians through his staff's emerald, watched the human. "Hmmm. Interesting. It seems he's been broken emotionally. Perfect time to strike. Prepare a force. And keep it quiet this time. We don't want any surprise help this time. Lien-Da!" He called to his sister. "Yes, brother?" "The human will be yours. If he refuses, he dies. Not right away, mind you. But slowly. Painfully." Lien-Da laughed cruelly with her brother. Things weren't looking good...

90 - Issue 90: Answers

bsp; Ekyt was learning from the best in Haven. His mind and body grew as the days went on. He knew echidna history as well as any guardian before him, and he was in great shape. He had also kept his duties with the Chaotix. That meant running into Julie-Su, Linda-Su's sister. Julie didn't seem to hate him. In fact, at one point, she asked to talk to him privately. "Look, I know it's tough, but my sister went nuts over the thought of her children becoming guardians. Lara-Le had gotten to her and..." "Wait, wait, Knuckles mother? She's been trying to ruin our relationship from day one!" Julie-Su's eyes widened. "Really? She liked me and Knuckles..." "Yeah, But I'm human... That explains it. Oh man! How do I talk to her without insulting my mentor's mother?" "Let me do it." Julie told him. "I owe you one for the help." *Julie is referring to the first issues of Next Guardian- N.G* "Thanks." CRASH! "What the...!" Dark Legion soldiers poured in. Lien-Da saw her sister, Julie-Su. Ekyt turned to her. "Run for it! Me and the Chaotix will deal with this! Talk to Linda!" At that point both sides were fully engaged. Mighty was cleaning house, throwing the Dark Legion members around easy. Espio disappeared and re-appeared. Vector and Charmy were working together, with Vector throwing a fastball with Charmy. Ekyt bashed his share of skulls too. That was when things got out of hand. Lien-Da, as skilled a fighter as any, head straight for Ekyt. He turned to punch, but stopped. "It's against my principles to hit girls." He said offhandedly. She slapped him, and then punched him. "Nuh-uh, that ain't gonna do it. You may be a witch and a cow. But you're still a girl, though appearances may be deceiving. Kragok couldn't handle his sister being insulted anymore. He brought his metal hand down on the kid, then picked him up with it. "You're coming with us. If you don't do what she says, you die. Understand?" "Yeah, I understand. Let me ask you this though: If you get me, will you go away?" "If you wish... guardian." "Yeah. I do. Guys! Lay off and get out of here! I'm the bargaining price. Trust me! Go!" The Chaotix bailed. Julie-Su got to her sister's place. She was tired but unhurt. Linda helped her into a chair. "Look sis, your ex-boyfriend is in trouble. And as for the talk Lara gave you, she's hated Ekyt from day one! Don't believe her." "But she's right Julie. I would end up alone. I" "Has he left you alone yet? When you arrested him, did he fight? When the dark legion had us, didn't he take a bullet for you? Hasn't he defended your honor? Think about it! The kid came here to escape bullying and deceit, and this is what happens?" "I know Julie, I felt awful about it. I still do. But maybe echidnas belong with echidnas. And humans with humans." "Then why is he here? Why does the Dark Legion have him and not the rest of the Chaotix?" Julie was shouting by now. "Don't you get it?! You two are tailor-made for each other! The same as me and Knuckles!" "Oh My God, you're right Julie! I can't believe I ever thought otherwise! We've gotta go get him!" Ekyt was shackled to the table. They had taken a blood sample, trying to figure out what gave him a guardians powers. Lien-Da ran the test. She tried to kiss him, but he turned his head. Finally she held his head still and kissed him. Then she bounced his head off the table. He looked at her, opened his mouth, and spat on Kragok's clothes. "Feisty. I like that in a man." "Nice of you to say." He snarled. "It's a shame, really. I don't like ugly echidnas with an ego problem. And that takes care of your good points." Lien-Da pulled out her pistol. She grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him close. "Listen to me carefully. We can be friends, or we can be enemies. Maybe we could be more than friends. But understand this: If we're enemies, You are going to die. Not right away. It will be slow. And painful. And my face will be the last thing you see." "I'm taken." He spat. "Valiant guardian, but you lie. I know of you and my sister breaking up. Yes I do. You can't have her. Why don't you take me instead?" "I would never betray her. Unlike you, I have my pride. And I care for hers. I will defend her, and all the

others, with every breath, every drop of blood. I will not join you or your scuzzbucket Dmitri knockoff of a brother.”“You mentioned my name, guardian?” Dmitri walked in, smiling unpleasantly. “Dmirti? You traitor!” Dmitri punched him. “Talk is cheap guardian. It’s action that matters. I chose my path. You chose yours. And look where it landed you. You’re a lab rat, a guinea pig, a little white mouse. That is, until we decide to get rid of you. You see, guardian, this room is a chaos syphon. Just like the one Ixus Naugus used on me. But I was immortal then. You are not. So if I hit this button, all the chaos crystals that run through your veins with your blood, will be scrambled. And it will hurt, guardian. And I will enjoy it.” “Good for you. Watch me suffer. You don’t scare me Dmitri. You’re a failed scientist, a failed genius, a failed traitor, forced to crawl back to his followers. You’re low.” “I would advise you to stop, Ekyt.” Ekyt looked him in the eyes. “No.” “Fine. You’ve forced me to use the syphon. Lien-Da, leave the room. No need for you to get hurt.”

91 - Retribution

bsp; Ekyt heard the crash before Kragok. He sensed Espio untying the ropes that were holding him to the table. Then Lien-Da came crashing through the plate glass window. Unconscious. Kragok had his attention diverted, so Ekyt took the opportunity. The needle that held his blood sample was nearby. He threw it at Kragok's head, it bounced off and smashed on the floor. There went their data. Kragok opened up a dimensional portal and jumped through. Ekyt swung but missed him narrowly. Then he decided to get out of there before things got worse. He kicked open the duct for air conditioning and climbed in. After a few minutes, he kicked the outside panel out. He took a few gulps of fresh air before he heard a fight. Linda-Su, outnumbered 20-1, was holding her own. Ekyt, without thinking about their breakup, raced down the hill to help her. The weeks he had spent with the brotherhood, training, had paid off. He dodged and rolled and punched. His speed in short ranges was peak human. He landed an elbow to one unlucky enemy's face while kicking another. He kned yet another. He saw Linda take out her share with a few throws and some impressive strikes. The last few enemies ran from the duo. Ekyt turned to Linda, who had taken a hard hit to the stomach which knocked the wind out of her. "You okay?" he asked. "Yeah, fine." She said, then shook her head. "I'm sorry." She whispered. "What?" He said, disbelieving. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left you. I listened to Lara-Le. I should have known better. Her first marriage is in shambles. I love you for you. If we ever have kids, I know you won't leave me alone." Ekyt was kind of taken aback, but said "Of course not. My loyalty lies with you. In fact, I kind of retired as an active guardian. But I'll go back." They hugged right there. She went to kiss him, but met the mask instead. She pulled the mask off gingerly. She didn't care that he was bleeding. They kissed and they both knew it was right. "C'mon, we better get back, the others will worry." She finally said. "Yeah. I'm sorry too. I'll try to be better and..." "Oh, stuff it. You're shy. But it's kind of cute it a goofy way. Maybe even sexy in a quiet way." She laughed as her boyfriend blushed. "Relax, it's me remember? I'm your girlfriend!" "Yeah, that makes it easier!" She rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Boys!" she said. They got back. She hadn't seen his injuries yet. She would though, he knew. The Brotherhood asked him to go back to active duty. Locke had been right about what would happen. Ekyt took some time to thank him. "You accepted me when I needed it most Locke. I owe a lot to you. Let me know if you ever need me. And please thank the others for me. Learning from them was awesome!" Locke said he would and watched the kid walk away. Locke hoped that he could salvage his relationship with his son, Knuckles. Ekyt took the night off to heal. It had been Knuckles suggestion. Linda had her bandages with her as they sat on the hill. She had noticed his cuts and scrapes, black eye, stab wound, and others when she went to hug him. "Are you serious! How do you do this!" she said. "Take that shirt off! God, you have got to take care of yourself!" She wrapped bandages around his torso. The his lower leg. But when she went to check his collarbone, he stopped her. "Hold it. What's that? You have a huge bump on your head and you cut your leg. Gimme that!" he said, taking the bandages and fixing her up. "My job is to take care of others." He said. "Yeah, but don't neglect yourself." "I'm not. I'm with you, aren't I?" he said. Smooth, kid, real smooth! You just wanna tattoo your lame lines on your arm? He scolded himself. Linda-Su gave him one of those smiles, eyes half-lidded. "How about a goodnight kiss before we turn in for the night?" she asked him. He kissed her. ON ZONESS (For Sega_Man7- quicker that you expected?) Ragnarok and Mariic (Both Sega_Man7) were happily married. Ekyt and Linda-Su had helped out. They were lying together one night when they heard a weird sound and saw the opening to another zone outside. It sucked them

in. "Where are we?" Ragnarok said out loud. "Couldn't tell you. From the looks of things, it's the floating island. But more futuristic." They heard a voice: "Mom? Dad?" They both turned around, and their eyes widened. "My God..." Mariic uttered. Ragnarok was speechless. Before them stood their son.

92 - Tails Time

Sonic and Sally had made up. They were closer than ever. So when Sonic recommended Ekyt for a mission, Sally agreed. Ekyt was on his way when he saw Tails alone for a change. He stopped to talk. "How's it going, Tails?" he asked. "Okay, Ekyt. But it bites being 11, when everyone else is older." Ekyt sat down. "And what brought that on?" Ekyt asked, eyebrows raised. "Sally used to read me stories, and Sonic would let me tag along on adventures when I was younger. But after I was ten, it was like they forgot about me." "Being too young for one group and too old for another is always awkward Tails. Believe me, I've been there. At parties, I couldn't play with the younger kids, but I couldn't talk with the adults when I was your age. Heck, I still don't fit in. Why do you think I wear this mask?" Tails still looked downcast. "Tell you what, I'm doing a mission now for Sally. You wanna come?" Tails brightened. "You sure I can?" "Yeah. Let's go get the info."

"No way is Tails going!" Sally yelled at Ekyt. "You ignore him here! He needs someone to give him attention. You're too busy with everything else to give him attention. He doesn't have parents to raise him. You don't expect him to want independence?" Ekyt shouted back. "You're questioning me?" Sally said. "Yeah, I am. My job is to protect people, whether that is physically or mentally." "What goes on here is none of your business!" "I'm making it my business! Why don't you let him decide? He's old enough! Hey, Tails!" Tails came into the room, eagerly. Sonic, who privately agreed with Ekyt, said "Little snag, bud. Ekyt here thinks you should go with him, and have some independence. Sally doesn't agree. What do you pick?" Tails looked shocked at being asked. "I want to go with him. Nobody has time for me here. But every time he comes, Ekyt talks to me, gives me advice, teaches me stuff. You guys haven't done that in a long time."

"Fine! But Ekyt, he is your responsibility. If anything happens to him I'll" "You'll what? Relax, your royal worry wart, I'll keep an eye on him, not that he needs it." Sonic was busting a gut trying not to laugh. "Go then. If I'm so incompetent." "You don't want me to answer that, right? That was a trick question, right?" Ekyt sneered. Sonic finally laughed. "And what's so funny, hedgehog?" Sally snapped. "Sorry Sal, but he made some good points. We have been ignoring Tails. If this is what Tails wants, I'm all for it. And I know you're just being like this 'cause you care." Sally realized he was right. "Just go and get the scrolls. They're in the forbidden zone. Be careful, both of you." "Okay princess!" Tails said eagerly. "Let's go Ekyt!" "Right with ya, pal."

They made it to the forbidden zone within a half hour. Tails flew up above, making sure the coast was clear. Ekyt ran below him. So far, so... "OOF!"

Ekyt had gotten hit by a huge bird. "No one passes!" it squaked. "Says you! I'm here on behalf of the Kingdom of Acorn to retrieve" "No one passes! Unless you defeat me!" "Bring it!" Ekyt said.

"Bombs Awaaaay!" Tails yelled, dropping a rock on the bird. It sizzled, then exploded. "(cough) Nice call Tails! (cough) Let's (cough) keep moving!"

There were the scrolls sitting there. "Tails, you take 'em." "huh?" Tails said. "Sure. But watch out for traps. This is about you, not me. I don't need the glory." He gave a half grin. "I just get in trouble. Besides, this is your chance to prove you're as tough as they come." Ekyt figured Tails needed the confidence. Tails grabbed the papers as the walls around them started to crumble.

Ekyt ran for it, but something caught his legs. "Take the scrolls to Sally!" Ekyt called to Tails. Tails swooped down and helped the human up. Some blocks had caught his leg. "Sonic taught me to never leave anyone behind."

They got back to the palace, where Ekyt told Sonic and Sally how Tails had made everything work.

“Guess we owe you an apology, bud.” Sonic said. “Yeah, he’s right Tails.” Sally smiled at him and kissed him on the nose. Tails blushed, but said “No you don’t. You both taught me things that came in handy in this mission. And Ekyt taught me that if you don’t seize the moment, you have no one to blame but yourself!”

The three older kids exchanged glances. Ekyt finally said “Tails, you’re going to deep.” He shot a glance at Sally with a grin that let her know he was joking. “You see, you might confuse Sally. And she doesn’t need the help!”

The Moral: Seize the Moment, Don’t hold back! If you don’t take the oppourtunity, you have no one to blame but yourself.

(Sappy, huh, but good advice!)

93 - Tails Snaps!

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Sonic zoomed through the great forest. Tails had new found respect for his hero and did his best to keep
up. Sonic screeched to a halt. Tails flew above him, looking to see what stopped his hero.
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Sally. "Sonic, we've got some problems." "I'm all ears Sal." Tails was younger than them, but he wasn't
stupid. He didn't like Sally like he used to. She had treated him like a kid to often. But what could he
do?<br> Ekyt and Linda-Su were walking. Back together, Ekyt seemed to have some new-found
confidence. Lara-Le, Knuckles mother, tried to break them up. Ekyt finally stood up to her.
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“Now you listen to me. I have all the respect in the world for your son, but this has to stop. You don't like because I'm human? Tough. I'm here to stay. Hate me all you want. But you know, picking on me because I'm human is like the dingoes picking on you because you're an echidna. Think about that.” Linda-Su grabbed his arm and dragged him away.

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<i>That</i> was food for thought. Lara hadn't considered that. Was she no better than those rotten dingoes? She had to clear her head.

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Meanwhile, Tails was getting angrier. Sally had been talking to Sonic for an hour now. Finally, she turned him. “Tails, did you brush your teeth today.” Tails looked at her, his head cocked to one side. “Yes, I did <i>princess. </i>Your Highness. YOUR MAJESTY!” At the end he was shouting. Sally was taken aback. “Tails, what go into you?” she said. “I'm tired of you bullying me and treating me like I'm two. The only two people who are my friends are Sonic and Ekyt.” Sonic had to call Tails on this one.

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“Bud, listen to yourself. Take it easy. I think you should apologize.” Tails turned to Sonic and snarled. “Well. <i>I</i> think I shouldn't. I've had it. I'm going to Angel Island until you two come to your senses.” Sally shook her head. “Tails, maybe you should think about this. You can't live there alone.” “I won't be alone. And besides, I can take care of myself!” Tails flew upward.

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Ekyt stood, lowering his stance. The robot moved forward, but Ekyt moved quicker, slashing it to bits with his staff. He had a knife put in it, courtesy of Rotor. Ekyt heard a click-whirr behind him. Linda flew into the robots, mangling it before snapping it's head back. She leaned back against a tree. "That stupid bullet wound." (Linda had gotten shot in a previous issue.- N.G.) Ekyt was next to her. "Maybe you'd better change that bandage." Linda rolled her eyes. "Geez, you don't bandage up your own cuts, but you're looking at mine?" Ekyt blushed, then spouted "Well, you're a lot more interesting to look at." "That's my boyfriend. Subtle as a bag of hammers." Ekyt shrugged, his neck turning red to match his face. "Subtle isn't my style." He heard a whirr. Ekyt turned, staff at the ready, to face Tails.

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"Hey man, what's up?" Ekyt asked. Tails looked at Linda. "Uh, I need to talk to you, it's kind of a secret." Ekyt turned to Linda. "Uh, could we have a sec, Linda? Guy talk, you understand." "I'm gone!" Linda said, laughing. "I'll catch up." Once she was out of ear shot, Ekyt turned back to Tails.

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"What's the problem, man?" Tails looked around him, then answered. "It's Sonic and Sally. I can't stand it anymore! Did you brush your teeth, did you wash your hands? I'm ten years old! I feel like I'm fifteen." Ekyt ran a hand through his hair. "Well, they care about you. Personally, I think you're right. You can make your own choices, you've fought as hard as any of us." "That's why I'm here. I just want your help to get settled. I want to live here until they apologize." Ekyt winced. <i>Oh boy. There's no right answer to this one. Unless...</i> "Why don't you stay with me until we get you a place of your own?" "Sure! Wait, will I disrupt you and Linda?" "Nah. Let's get you a room with a view."

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Linda agreed with Ekyt. "Yeah, we'd better keep an eye on him." They had already talked to Sonic and Sally about it. Tails was feeling left out, and last time that happened, trouble got stirred up. (Reference to the Tails Mini-series by Archie Comics- N.G)

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94 - The Past Returns

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Tails fit right in. He was determined to take responsibility of himself. So he started to train. Mighty helped
him with the weights. Espio showed him a variety of martial arts. Vector started to teach him how to be
gangsta, but Ekyt told him that if he didn't knock it off, he'd turn Vector into a purse for Linda. Vector
knew better that to keep going.
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But Tails enjoyed Linda-Su and Julie-Su's company. They taught him how to fend for himself in terms of
food and survival. The two treated him like a son. Ekyt wasn't exactly a father figure, but more of a
mentor. He was Tails sparring partner, as well as his friend. But something was eating at Tails...
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Amy Rose looked off into the distance, letting her shoulders drop. "I-I can't believe he's gone" she whispered to herself. She wished he'd come back. But he wouldn't. She knew. He had told her, and even said he'd come get her when he found a place of his own. That couldn't be soon enough. Even Princess Sally was colder to her.

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Tails looked around his new home, satisfied. He felt older. But something was missing...Amy. He couldn't wait to get her. He told Linda where he was going and flew off. Ekyt, for his part, was kind of proud. Linda was to, but more worried. Ekyt tried to calm her, telling her "He's fine. Once he has a taste of living like this, he'll either never want to leave, or he'll run a mile screaming." It was then that an echidna barreled into Ekyt from behind. He took a chair from the table they were at and hit the kid hard in the side. Ekyt rolled a little to stop the ribs from breaking, but he knew right away that they were bruised, at least. Linda wasted no time. Before the intruder could go for the kill, she had him around the neck.

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"Y-You?" She let him go and he ran for it. Ekyt pulled himself up, spitting out blood from his cut lip. "You okay?" he asked her. She nodded vaguely. "I'm going to lay down for a while." She was really shaken up, Ekyt could tell that much. He decided that when she was ready, she would tell him. For now, he had to keep an eye on her. That guy obviously knew her. From where, or when, he didn't know. But he would find out.

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Amy felt like a million pounds of pressure were lifted off her shoulders as she soared through the air with Tails. He felt a lot better too. They got back to his place. She saw that he had built a place for her too. "I missed you Amy." "I missed you to- hey, what was that?!"

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Ekyt had heard it too. It came from Linda's room. He dropped the roll of medical tape he had been putting around his ribs and kicked the door open to find that echidna again. Ekyt rushed in and tackled him. But the echidna was deceptively quick. In a flash, he put Ekyt up in a fireman's carry and tossed him out the window. That was when Tails and Amy entered the picture.

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Amy helped Ekyt up, while Tails confronted the echidna. He laughed at Tails, until Tails flipped him over with the martial arts precision that Espio had instilled in him. Ekyt who had recovered and was running on pure adrenaline, threw the guy through the splintered remains of the door and was about to strike down when Linda stopped him.

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"Ekyt, listen, don't hurt him! Please, don't hurt him!" Ekyt stopped. "I know the guy. He-he's my ex-boyfriend." She watched as her current boyfriend's eyes widened. He started to say something, then shook his head as if he thought better of it. "What's his name." The echidna was starting to come to. "His name is Staph. I should have told you about him." Ekyt didn't answer as the echidna, Staph, as he now knew him, grabbed his legs in a takedown. "Staph, stop!" Linda said. "Why should I? You chose him over me? Over the Dark Legion? I'm going to show you that *I* am now, and always was, the right choice for you!" He started to go after Ekyt's ribs. Tails flew into him at top speed, putting him through a wall. Linda helped Ekyt up. But she could tell he was furious. He turned to her, the anger gone from his face. "Well, so much for not keeping secrets from each other." She shook her head. "I honestly didn't think he was worth mentioning." Ekyt nodded, but she could tell this was a blow to him. And he was about to get another.

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95 - I See the line in the Sand

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Staph tackled Ekyt again, but Ekyt grabbed him around the waist and threw him backward. "Stop it, both of you!" Linda-su yelled, stepping between them. "Now look Staph, Ekyt is my boyfriend. I got tired of your overbearing ways. I'm not with the dark legion anymore. I'm not coming back. Now leave, or you'll get hurt." He smiled unpleasantly. "You will come with me, or *you* will be hurt." Ekyt let loose a deep, guttural, growl. "That's it! I've had it with your cheap shots! I am *not* going to let you standby and insult the women I love. Unlike *you*, I give her freedom. And I'm loyal. If she told me she had to arrest me just for the heck of it, I wouldn't give her a fight! And if you even so much as *look* her one more time, you will be eating out of an I.V., because I will kick your teeth down your throat."

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Staph snarled back. "You listen to me, you past tub of crap! She was mine before she was yours, and I will get her back!" Ekyt snapped, worse than before. "Olive grove! Now!" Linda put her hand on his shoulder. "You're injured! And you know what the olive grove does." (Linda is referring to Ekyt's battle with his evil self back in the early issues- N.G.) He turned to her. "I can't let him insult your honor, Linda. I care for you. You know I do. I've been killed for you, I took a bullet for you (Previous issues- N.G.) And

I'm not about to let this second-rate jerk destroy our relationship. If you told me you were in love with him, I'd let you go. So tell me now: Do you love him?" She sighed. "I...I used to." Ekyt nodded firmly. "Olive Grove. This time it's for my honor. Linda is the referee. She can choose between us." "Fine. But you'd better say goodbye now." He left.

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Tails followed Ekyt to the Olive Grove. "Are you sure your up to this?" he asked. Amy agreed. "Yeah, is it worth dying for?" Ekyt turned to them both. He sighed, knowing that they were too young to fully comprehend what his next words were. "If I die out there, I'm leaving you the house. But please, take care of Linda, no matter what her decision is." The two youngsters stared on in amazement as Ekyt tore off his shirt and pulled on the traditional black duel pants. He wrapped his ribs and his wrist. "Good luck buddy." Tails said solemnly. "And to you."

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Staph was already out there. He rushed Ekyt immediately. Ekyt tossed him into a bush. "Loser leaves the island. Agreed?" Ekyt said. "Fine by me." Staph answered. The squared off again. Staph threw punch after punch, aiming for the ribs. Ekyt, already in pain, fought defensively. At the hour mark, both Ekyt and Staph were bleeding. Linda stopped the match. "Look, why don't we stop this right now, neither of you has to leave!" Linda said desperately. She turned to her frazzled boyfriend. "I'm sorry. I just keep thinking of the good times I've had with both of you." Staph tossed a handful of sand in Ekyt's eyes, then kicked him in the face. Ekyt was down for the ten seconds.

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He had lost the match. But Staph wasn't satisfied. He tore the bandages off his ribs and stomped at them, punched at them. Ekyt couldn't even defend himself. Linda pulled Staph off, but the damage had been done.

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Tails watched as Ekyt, heartbroken, walked by. Ekyt stopped and knelt down next to the fox and the little pink hedgehog. "Listen, you guys take care of yourself. If you need me, I'll..." he ran a hand through his hair. "I don't know where I'll be. But take care." He left without another word. He turned back for a second, looking at Linda. Then he walked away.

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Linda tried to catch up with him and apologize. But he didn't hear her. He didn't know anything anymore. Locke already knew, so he sent Archimedes to inform Ekyt of his suspension. Ekyt looked at one of his mentors, and said "Arch, I don't think I'll *ever* come back." "Kid, you've got a great job! People who care. A great girl...friend. Aw crap. Point is, you're like royalty here." "Doesn't matter. I'm always getting kicked off the island for stuff that isn't my fault. I've had it!" He pulled off the mask and gave it to Archimedes. "Give it to Linda." "Where ya gonna go, kid?" "Who knows? Somewhere off the radar. I've lost it all Archimedes." "You're alive." "Could've fooled me. Just tell Locke thanks for everything, and tell Knuckles thanks for being a great friend and mentor. Maybe I'll change my mind. But for now, it's time to find out who I am."

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96 - Who I Am (and What I'm Made of)

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No turning back. Where had he gone wrong? NO! Ekyt hit himself in the head. "I'm tired of feeling sorry for myself. I'm tired of being bent to the will of others. It's never been about who I *was* it's about who I become. And starting now, that's gonna be someone else." Ekyt knew two people who could help him, though he hated to ask. Heck, he hated having to ask *anyone* for help. But he couldn't put it off anymore. He stood up so suddenly, that Tails, who had been following him, flew forward, right into his path. "Huh? Tails?" Ekyt helped him up. "What are you doing here." "Ekyt, I felt. Me and Amy. You shouldn't have lost that fight. I'm going back, but this is from Locke. He says to open it only when you have a clear mind." "Thanks." Ekyt responded. "No, thank you for what you've done for me." Tails flew back toward the island. Ekyt decided to read the note later.

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Linda stood, stunned, in the referee's area. Had she really done that? She knew Ekyt should have won. Instead, she herself, had raised Staph's arm. And Ekyt left? She knew he was a man of his word, but to just leave? It wasn't like him. Then again, it wasn't like her to do something she knew was wrong. She turned to Staph. "Fine. I did it. Now let them go!" Staph smiled cruelly. "All in due time. For now, I have more for you to do..."

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“You want us to what?” Shadow and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog), his sister, said in unison. “I’m tired of caring. I have an idea. If you both chaos blast me at the same time, I might get enough power to be an “ultimate life form”, even if it’s for a short time.” “And if it doesn’t work?” Shadow asked. “Then I’m in for a world of hurt.” “Fine.” Tiffany agreed. “Let us know when.” Ekyt nodded. “I’ll be right back.”

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Ekyt tossed off his old clothes. The shirt, the shoes, the socks, the pants. The coat was harder to get rid of. He decided he could be an ultimate life form with it. He donned a red shirt, decorated with black slashes like his mask. He didn’t have that anymore, it belonged to Linda. He pulled on black pants, already torn. His shoes were red and black, again similar to his mask. He stepped back out to Tiffany and Shadow. “Do it.” He said quietly. He tossed them each an emerald. Shadow made one last effort to reason with him. “Being an ultimate life form is lonely. Just look at me. You’ll be part of an elite breed, if it works. Which it might not.” “Just do it Shadow. I’ve had the tragedy, the pain, just like you. But I’ve lost my girl twice. Yours is gone and won’t belong to anyone else, while the love of my life is in the hands of my enemy. It’s more painful than anything anyone could do to me.” Tiffany was touched, in a way. “Let’s do it Shadow. On three.” One...(Ekyt bowed his head) Two... (The memories came flooding back...THREE (he accepted the pain.

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The two hedgehog’s watched as the red blasts struck the human, burning him. He was down to one knee. But then he got up as the burns started to fade. He glowed red from the insurgence of energy, but that was temporary. Shadow took a good look at him.

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He was changed.
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Tiffany looked too, not believing that a far-fetched plan like that could have worked. Suddenly Ekyt smiled. "Shadow, let me have a pair of shoes like yours..."
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The three blasted at top speed. Shadow couldn't help but wonder what the strange look was for. The it hit him. "That look was pain, wasn't it? You remembered everything." Shadow shouted, while skating. Ekyt kept up with both of them. "That's about it. But more than that. Those attacks took the caring out of me. The only thing I feel is anger." "And what are you going to do with this anger?" Tiffany asked. She glanced at her brother Shadow, who smiled knowingly. "What I'm going to do..." Ekyt said, a malicious smile playing across his lips "...Is get revenge!" "This I gotta see." Tiffany said. "Me too."
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Ekyt got back up on the island, managing to stop the red glowing. He was confronted by the Chaotix. His old friends.
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<i>Old</i> Friends.

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Espio spoke up "Look, we know you're upset, but you can't be back here. Your suspension isn't long and...HEY!" Ekyt punched him in the face. Charmy started to attack, but Ekyt sent him sailing in mid-flight. He didn't wait for an attack from vector. He used chaos control to get behind him and throw him by the tail. That left Mighty. For his part, Mighty grabbed Ekyt. "I know you're angry, but this isn't right." "By you? I'm not here to fight you or the rest of them, but if you get in my way..." Ekyt smiled "Chaos Blast!" The shockwave sent the Chaotix, except for Julie-Su, flying.

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She stepped in his way. "Ekyt, please listen. My sister is having a hard time. She loved that guy for a while and now" "Shoot me." "What?" "Shoot me. I see your finger tensing on the trigger. Go ahead. I mean you no harm, but you're in my way. Fire." Julie-Su set the pistol to stun. "I don't want to do this, but you forced me." She said quietly, apolgeticly. She fired, hitting him square in the chest.

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Ekyt laughed. "Get your sister to safety. My fury is only for Staph." "Ekyt, he's a guardian!" "What!" Ekyt yelled. Julie-Su nodded. "They made him a guardian. It's a tradition. If you beat the old guardian in combat, you replace him." Ekyt squeezed his eyes shut. "Oh well. They can try to put me in jail." He skated off, finding Staph being trained by Knuckles. "Oh, so you came back? What, I've taken your home, your job, your woman, and even your pride." Ekyt stood deep, a hand in front of him. "If you think I'm so pathetic, attack. Go ahead."

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Knuckles knew this would happen, sooner or later. And he knew at what point he would step in. For now he turned a blind eye to the fight.

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Staph did as Ekyt chaos controlled above him, laughing. "What's the matter? Didn't see that coming?" Ekyt punched him, sending him skidding. "The nice thing about SoulTouch (The echidna/ Ekyt's ability to know your soul mate- N.G.) is that it let's you know when your mate is in trouble. Besides, I can sense it. You have something on Linda. Now unless you want...Ha!" Staph swiped at Ekyt. He flipped backwards and charged into the echidna, sending him into a wall. He threw him in to the wall again, the held him there around the neck. "Where is she? What have you got on her?" He snarled, squeezing. "Screw...You!" the echidna choked out. Ekyt let him fall, then yelled "Chaos Spear!" Red and black spears appeared from no where and landed on the echidna. No where vital, but it hurt. "You're trying my patience. Now tell me!"

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"I kidnapped her friends! They're being killed by the Dark Legion as we speak! I made her help me win that fight!" Ekyt's eyes widened. He turned to Shadow and Tiffany. "I need your help." "It's not my problem. But fine." Shadow said. "I'm in." said Tiffany. "Good. Let's end this!"

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97 - What a Rush!

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Ekyt, Shadow, and Tiffany skated furiously toward the Dark Legion outpost. It had been crafted in HydroCity (Just like your old Sonic games- those darn underwater levels!- N.G.). Ekyt stopped suddenly. "Hold on a second..." He opened the note Locke had given him (Last issue- N.G.). It read:
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Ekyt,
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I am hereby welcoming you back to the island.

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The fight will be redone under a tworeferee system.

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Staph's unscrupulous tactics should not go

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Unpunished. That's where you come in.

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May Steppenwolf guide you,

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Locke

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Ekyt pocketed the note, and resumed the frantic race to HydroCity. If anything happened to Linda.

Without realizing it, he let his mind wander. Then he hit a tree. "Ow! Son of a—" Shadow yanked him to

his feet while Tiffany said "Will you focus? It's *your* girlfriend that we're saving! If you kill yourself

before we get there, a lot of good that does her!" "Right, Right. Let's finish this."

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But all Ekyt could think of was what would happen if he failed. Finally they got to the entrance to the source of power on the island.

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Ekyt dropped in and immediately had 200 rifles pointed at him. Then Shadow and Tiffany followed. The three mowed them down, some shooting each other. Fortunately, their rifles were on stun. Ekyt saw Staph, trying to run for it with Linda. "Chaos Blast!" he shouted, as his body expended more energy than he thought possible, knocking half the soldiers down. Tiffany shouted to him "You go after them! Shadow and I will finish this!"

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Ekyt did, but he felt himself start to weaken. Staph was cornered, however. "End of the line. I knew something was up, but I didn't know what. Now let her go, and I might let you leave in one piece." "Forget it guardian!" he growled, pulling a pistol to Linda-Su's head. "You take one more step, she dies."

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Ekyt laughed, hoping this would work. "Why don't you be a man for once in your life. Kill me instead. If you let her go, you'll have my head as a trophy. Then you can tell Kragok you killed me, he'll reward you if I know him." Staph considered it, then let Linda go. "Run for it. I'll handle him." Then Ekyt knew something was wrong. His "ultimate" form was gone. If he shot, Ekyt was dead.

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“Fine guardian. You have your wish. Now say goodnight!” The pistol barked once. Twice. Three times. Ekyt felt himself fall. There was little blood. He knew it had to be the end. It didn't hurt. Staph stood over him laughing. Ekyt looked at his hand. His ring was glowing, healing him.

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Ekyt got up, with Staph shocked. “I want a rematch Staph. This time, you're mine!” Staph couldn't turn it down. The rules of the olive grove, the ancient traditions, and his pride stopped him. “Fine guardian. But this time it's to the death!”

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98 - The Gamble

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Ekyt was almost at peace with himself. He knew he could win hands down. He had apologized to the
Chaotix for his behavior, and he had his job back. But did he love Linda-Su back? It drove him nuts to
think about that.
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It also drove Lara-Le, Knuckles mother, nuts. Linda was such a pretty young girl. So why did she want
some snot-nosed human kid as her boyfriend? Lara decided to put an end to this. "Wynmacher!" she
called out. (She divorced Locke and married Wynmacher) "Yes, darling?" he answered. "I need your
help..."
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So Ekyt started the walk to the olive grove. He had Mighty, Espio, Charmy, Julie-Su, Knuckles, Sonic, Shadow, Violet (Violet_Rose), Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) and Tails in his corner. He had asked them all to come because he knew Staph would have the Dark Legion on his side. Ray the squirrel was going to be there too, with his friend Mighty (We haven't seen Ray the squirrel since Knuckles' series was canceled, and haven't seen him in a game since Sonic's only arcade game, SEGASONIC the Arcade game. Ahhh, the good old days!- N.G.)

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He turned a corner in Echidnapolis and only had time to say "What the!" before Wynmacher tackled him and Lara-Le jumped on with a chain wrapped around her fist. The group was so stunned it took them a moment to pill them off the nearly-unconscious human. Ekyt got up and turned toward Wynmacher. Walking like a zombie, he backed Wynmacher across the street into a hospital. How suiting. Ekyt grabbed him by his collar and snarled "that was a mistake." He threw Wynmacher onto a stretcher and strapped him in, then sent him sailing down a hallway. Ekyt had been at peace. Now he was just ticked off.

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Tiffany had a grip on Lara-Le, who was struggling until she saw the bloody mess that was Ekyt walk back out of the hospital. "I asked you nicely not to do this Lara. I have given you nothing but respect. And this is how you repay me." Sonic tried to stop him, but Ekyt pushed him aside. "You think I'm scum? Huh? Because I'm human. Well, I don't think you're scum because you're an echidna." He paused and moved closer. "I think you're scum because you're racist. And now you try to kill me? Let her go Tiffany." Tiffany gave Lara a shove. Knuckles, who had just witnessed his mother attack his best friend, just had his head down. "How could you?" was all he could say. "Knuckles, honey, I." Knuckles was furious. "Don't "honey" me! You treat this poor guy the same way you treated Dad! I can't believe you! C'mon guys, Ekyt's got a fight to win!"

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Ekyt was slightly dizzy from the blood loss when he showed up. Violet and Tiffany sat with Shadow on one side of the ring, while Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles took another. The Chaotix stood away from the action, as they were the enforcers. Ray the squirrel, who was recovering from unknown injuries, sat alone. He didn't really know anyone.

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Ekyt started to see through the red haze. He let himself drift a little as the Locke and Archimedes, the referees, explained the rules. That cheap attack might have done him in, if there wasn't so much on the line. But the stakes were about to get higher.

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"...And because Linda-Su broke our ancient code, we hereby banish her from the island." Locke said regretfully. "What? I protest!" Ekyt shouted. "How so, guardian?" asked Locke. "She was blackmailed into doing that!" "Have you any proof?" "Locke, history has taught many generations the dark legion can't be trusted! They kidnapped Linda's friends and forced her into doing their bidding!" "Be that as it may, guardian, the ancient bylaws set by our ancestors dictate that this action must be taken." Locke said, sorrowfully. *I hate to force the lad to make such a choice, but my hands are tied. Curse you, Kragok!*" This left Ekyt with a choice. He took off his ring, the one that had saved his life so many times. "Locke, I wish to disqualify myself from this fight. I was to fight for Linda's honor. But if she isn't here, I shouldn't be." "Don't be hasty guardian..." Locke began

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"*I'm* being hasty. Look, I have nothing but respect for you Locke, you know that! But you're asking me to make a choice between my home and my job, or the first person to care for me since I came here?" "If you surrender, you surrender everything." "Locke, listen to reason! Look at me!" Ekyt pointed to his head. "I came to fight, and I'll fight, believe me! Whether it's sanctioned or not doesn't matter to me! If I lose, I'll give myself up to the Dark Legion. If I win, Linda comes back like nothing ever happened." "Fine guardian. But should you lose, Linda is banished and you are property of the Dark Legion." "Fine."

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Ekyt rushed Staph. He was out to do damage.

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99 - To the Victor the Spoils

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With so much on the line, Ekyt couldn't afford mistakes. Despite his sickening blood loss at the hands of
Lara-Le (See last issue- N.G.) he was feeling good. Confident. It was rare for him, really. He was
normally the akward, shy, semi-goofy kid who happened to have the most coveted job on his place of
domicile. This time, he had more than honor to fight for. It was there, but that took a back seat to doing
the right thing. Linda-Su didn't deserve this, and he would be darned if he was going to stand by and let
it happen. She had done so much for him. He was going to help her if it was the last thing he would do.
And because of the blood loss, it might very well be. But it was a worthwhile risk.
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Linda-Su couldn't believe it. She sat in a dormant state, stunned. <i>It wasn't my fault! This isn't fair! I
had no choice.</i> She packed up the last of her things. But at that moment her sister, Julie-Su, came
rushing in. "Linda, Ekyt's in trouble. He's at the olive grove again, but he got attacked before and...oh,
come see!" They ran full speed.
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Ekyt staggered with each punch, refusing to go down. Staph went for a huge punch that Ekyt dodged. But Staph's next shot hit his head, causing the blood to pour down even more. His face a mask of crimson, Ekyt could feel himself losing consciousness. Locke asked him if he wanted to stop the bout. Ekyt shook his head. There was so much more at stake than victory.
 Linda saw this: Her boyfriend, Ekyt, his bare chest covered with his own blood, staggering with each shot. She saw him fight back, but there wasn't much behind his punches. She knew the only thing he could do that was legal, but it would cost him: He had to force Staph to "concede" That meant Staph would give up the fight of his own accord. But that would leave Ekyt open to a beating. Linda would have no part of that. But for now, she could do nothing but watch.

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Ekyt made one last real decision before he could run purely on instinct. He hated the thought of it, but he had to do it. He grabbed Staph around the neck, arms locked, yanked him down, and wrapped his legs around Staph's stomach, pulling on his neck and crushing his stomach. This move (an actually amateur wrestling move I thought would fit- N.G.) cut off the air flow to the lungs, and the blood flow to the brain at the same time. With his punches and kicks effectively out of the picture, Ekyt had to hope this would do it.

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Staph began to grow desperate. He clawed backward at Ekyt, aiming for eyes, hair, anything that could break the grip. Ekyt held on. Locke and Archimedes started to check Staph, but before that could happen, the Dark Legion rushed the ring. One hit Ekyt in the face while the others kicked and punched at the rest of his body. Ekyt couldn't even fight back, he was too weak. Immediately, all the people he had brought with him to the grove jumped in.

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The blood flow brought a rush of adrenaline. Ekyt charged into the middle of the echidna mass, bent of doing as much destruction as he could. He took three out by throwing himself across them. They fought back, only to be knocked unconscious for their troubles.

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Knuckles turned to Shadow. "They're killing him. Shadow, use chaos control to slow down time. Linda and I will get him out of there." "I missed the part where that's my problem." Shadow said, turning away. Knuckles, in his rage, forgot his own powers and accidentally used a different version of the chaos blast. Linda was already in the middle of the fight.

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Ekyt felt arms around him, pinning his arms down. He turned to headbutt or kick his attacker, only to find Linda. "Linda? Thank God you're alright!" he said, elbowing someone in the face. Linda dragged him away. "I'm fine, and I'll explain things later. Right now, you're not okay. We've got to get you away from here!" "I can't leave until I've won." Ekyt said. "You did win!" she exclaimed. "He didn't give up." "No, he was disqualified when his friends attacked you. I don't have to leave. Neither do you. But we do need to get out of here." She said urgently, punching one assailant in the face. "I can't leave them." Linda swore to herself and pulled out her handcuffs. She cuffed him and yanked him away. "Let's go! You're half dead! The dark legion is on the run!"

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They got back to their house. She laid Ekyt on the couch, not caring that he was bleeding all over it. "We've got to close that gash up. Both of them." Ekyt realized that he had somehow gotten his chest cut open. She wrapped bandages around him, then held a towel to his forehead. "Julie told me what happened." She said as she held the towel down. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have been so hasty to judge." He began to sit up. "No, no, no, you're not going anywhere!" "I've gotta help them!" he said. She sat down on his bare chest, pinning his shoulders down, causing him to blush. She wiped more blood from

his face as she lowered her face to his. She looked him directly in the eye. "You're already a hero. Now take it easy. You're always doing the right thing for someone else. But this time, you're going to do the right thing for yourself." She wrapped him in a tight hug. She kissed his neck and ear, the two places on his face that weren't marred by the blood.

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"Okay." He gave up. "You're right. I shouldn't have let myself get like this. But I couldn't let them just kick you off the island for something that wasn't your fault. I've been there." He wiped his eyes as they stung. "I couldn't let that happen. Even if you were still with Staph. I guess I'm just a goofy son of a gun." Linda smiled, the blood flow finally stopping. "Yeah, but you're my goofy son of a gun!"

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100 - Reposted- Issue 100

WELL, THIS IS IT! ISSUE 100! THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO READS THIS, PAST, PRESENT, OR FUTURE! NO, THIS IS NOT, REPEAT, NOT THE LAST ISSUE! HERE'S TO 100 MORE ISSUES! THANKS AGAIN TO ALL MY SUPPORTERS! WISH I HAD YOUR TALENT!
NEXT GUARDIAN

Linda sat with, or more accurately, on Ekyt, to make sure he was awake. He managed to avoid a concussion, but the doctor's orders were to keep him awake for the rest of the day. He struggled to get up, but he wasn't about to throw her off. He had just worked to protect her. Now she was returning the favor. But a cry for help was something neither of them could ignore. She got up and, much to her chagrin, so did he. "I know that voice! That's Paula-Su!" Linda exclaimed. She should know the voice, it belonged to her daughter. "Yeah, but what about the other voice? Never mind, first we'll put an end to this problem." "You're in no condition to fight!" she said, trying to reason with him. "Since when has that ever stopped me?" he said with a wink. "I guess your stubbornness always kept me infatuated with you. Let's go!"

They charged outside, finding three members of the Dark Legion baring down on their daughter and some hedgehog they didn't know. Ekyt threw a knife at their feet, a warning as well as a distraction. They turned to him, one of their primary targets, as Linda prepared to pounce. She came flying off the roof, taking out two of the bad guys while Ekyt leveled a third, then cursed as his ribs protested. The three ran for it, hightailing it into the woods.

"Paula, you okay?" Ekyt asked. "Yeah, dad, I'm fine! Look this is..." But Linda had a hug for her daughter first (Paula is from the future, well, one possible one where Ekyt and Linda are married and are leading a final charge against a more evil and more powerful Robotnik. See Next Guardian: Future Shock for more: N.G.). "Now, who is this?" Linda asked. Paula, just like her mother, chose a bad time not to be subtle. "That's your son!" she said brightly. Ekyt's eyes widened. "Um, no offense, to anyone here, but I'm a human and she's an echidna...and you're a hedgehog." Ekyt shook his head. "How does that add up?" Paula hugged her "father" "He's adopted silly!" Ekyt breathed a sigh of relief.

Linda took the time to finally look the hedgehog over. He appeared to be about 10 years old. He was emerald green, but had red quills on his head. They brought the two into the house, where both finally let their nerves get the better of them. Linda wanted to talk to her mother, so that left Ekyt alone with... "So, what's your name?" Ekyt asked, trying to be friendly in spite of the shock and the psychical pain he was feeling. The hedgehog mumbled something, so Ekyt asked him to repeat it. "I'm Kurt. Sorry to barge in like this." "It's okay. My job is to help. So what's your story?" Ekyt asked.

Flashback:

Paul and Clover, with Kurt in tow, ran for cover as the bombs fell again. They heard the two in charge, some human and echidna, shouting instructions to take cover. No problem. They watched as he put his wife and daughter to safety, before pulling out his weapon. A staff, of all things. In this technologically advanced world, he chose a simple stick. Some cracks later, and Clover saw why. His graying hair and face, decorated with five o'clock shadow as well as scars, was grim with determination. Twice he escaped death and dealt a punishing blow to his foes. His job was to hold off the attackers while the last of the non-roboticized species prepared to fight back. He was one of the main targets of the enemy. He

was only thirty-two, but he looked older, but moved like he was younger.

Paul was a hedgehog, blood red in color. He looked a lot like his hero, Sonic, except for the color and the fact that he wore black shoes with white stripes. He glanced at his wife, Clover. She was a lighter red, and her once beautiful clothes were torn from war. She, unlike others, had not shied away from fighting. Even though she was rich, she jumped into the fray. Her high heels had long been replaced by boots, which was standard nowadays.

They ducked behind a crevice in a wall. Their son, Kurt, was a red hedgehog, a deeper shade than his mother, but slightly lighter than his father. He trained every chance he got, and even worked with that human who was leading the resistance movement (Ekyl to us). He had learned a lot, and was eager to fight. He jumped away from them to foil a robot who was attacking his friend, Paula. Paul put aside his feelings of an echidna and a human mating long enough to see a bomb coming toward them. He tried to save his wife, knowing his life was forfeit. But it was too late. They were both dead before they knew what happened. Kurt himself was hurt very badly.

Ekyl saw this and called to Linda. "Honey, get them out of here! Take them to the chamber! I handle this and meet you there!" She shouted in the affirmative, getting Paula and some soldier type to help her.

Ekyl finished the fight and got back to the chaos chamber. Knuckles and the brotherhood, all of them older, stood around. "I'm sorry Ekyl. These two are gone." Knuckles said, indicating Paul and Clover. "This one is alive, but barely. I don't think we can save him." Ekyl looked into his daughter and his wife's eyes, both saddled with sadness and anger. Death was nothing new to them. But somehow, the younger the target, the worse the impact on the remaining members. "Stand aside." Ekyl said. "You're not going to pull that again, are you? Are you?! Last time you did that you couldn't fight for a whole day!" Linda protested. "I can't let this one die."

Ekyl and Knuckles concentrated. "Knuckles, you control the emerald. Give me ten minutes to enter his subconscious. That's all we can afford." "Right. Good luck kid." "One more thing. Have the Knothole group on standby in case this goes wrong..." Ekyl let himself slip into the young hedgehog's subconscious.

"Kurt. Kurt!" he said. The young hedgehog's subconscious image looked up at him. Ekyl knelt down to help him up. "Are we dead?" Kurt asked. "No. This is a level below consciousness. I'm here to make sure you don't give in and let yourself die." Kurt was confused, but had a more important question for him. "What about my parents?" he asked urgently, ignoring the burning he felt. Ekyl lowered his head. "They're gone Kurt." "I should be dead too." He said. "That's not what they would want. They would want you to continue on in their memory." Kurt let himself cry. "Ekyl, I have no one. I'm ten! I shouldn't be an orphan!" Ekyl couldn't help but admire the tenacity the youngster displayed. "Kurt, you can always come to me. I can't let you die. And you can't let your parents die in vain. I have to go now. Think about what I said." Ekyl's mind reentered his body.

"How'd it go?" his wife asked solemnly. "I'm not sure. Locke?" "Vital signs are stable, but...They're falling!" Ekyl swore. "Move aside, all of you! Cover your eyes! Knux, you with me?" "Yeah, let's do it!" The power of the chaos emerald went through them into the fading young hedgehog, reviving him...

End Flashback.

“...So you and Knuckles saved my life, and then you and Linda took me in. Paula and I came back to see you guys, but then we got ambushed.” Ekyt nodded slowly. “You’re green because of the emerald, aren’t you?” Ekyt asked. “Yes.” “That’s never happened before.” Kurt sighed. “Basically, I am the emerald.” “Say what?” Kurt nodded again. “I was so hurt, you and Knuckles had put almost half of the emerald’s power into me.” Linda returned, having heard the story from Paula.

“We have to go. We’re only supposed to leave for a half hour.” Linda hugged her “mother and father.” Kurt shook hands with each. “Good luck.” A brilliant flash and they were gone. Ekyt looked at Linda. “Um, tell me what the heck just happened.” He said. “First, you sit back down.” “But” “Sit!” He sat. “Good boy!” she said jokingly. “What, no treat?” he said with a grin. She tossed him something. He caught it like a dog, then spit it out- “This is celery! I wanted a cookie!” Ekyt was in high spirits. It was to this strange scene that Tails walked in, wide awake after a nap. He looked at them both, shook his, head turned around, and walked away muttering. “Hey, come back here!” Ekyt called to him. “You just missed meeting my son and daughter!” Tails had confusion written all over him, so Linda explained everything to Tails. Tails looked on, wide-eyed.

Sonic raced along at breakneck speed, like usual. The unmistakable feeling of worry was in the air. He was racing to inform friends on the floating island that they needed help on Mobius. Sonic hated to ask, but he had no choice. “Hey Knuckles!” “What’s up blue?” Knuckles called back. “Trouble, red. Lots of it. Dark Legion and Robotnik joining forces.” Knuckles looked mad at the thought. “Good, I can finally get rid of some of this pent-up anger! I can’t believe my own mother would do that!” (Knuckles is referring to last issue’s surprise beat-down on Ekyt- N.G.) “Yeah, that was pretty low. Junk like that is what we don’t need. I don’t care if he’s dating a hedgehog, he’s one of us!” Sonic exclaimed. “Well, he’s hurt pretty bad, but we’d better go get him and get ready for this. We’re gonna need all the help we can get!”

They knocked on the door. Sonic cringed at the sight of Ekyt. “What’s up?” he asked. “Trouble. ‘Buttnik and the Dark Legion together.” Ekyt grabbed his coat. Linda grabbed him. “You can’t do that! You’ll get killed!” He looked her in the eyes. “One sec, guys.” he said.

He turned back to her. She was kind of mad at him, but understood at the same time. “It’s my job to protect. I’m not doing it to spite you.” He said, stroking her hair. “I’ll live, I always do. But I’ve got to do my job, there’s much more at stake than just one life.” She let her head drop, but he had his hand under her chin, his eyes searching hers. “You know what’s right. We’ve come too far to lie to each other Linda-Su. If Robotnik wins on Mobius, he’ll come here next, and we’ll be tops on his list. I can’t let that happen.” She nodded, understanding. Before him stood the Linda-Su of old. She had detested herself for going soft. Now she had a reason to harden up. “You’re right. I’m going with you, and we’re going to crush them! I’ve had enough of them trying to kill us, separate us, or hurt us! I’m tired of it! If they can’t accept us for who we are, then they have no business here!” She said. She had fire in her eyes. Their intensity matched. Ekyt had one more thing to do. He pulled her gently toward him. Blushing as always, their mouths met, embracing in a way that could only mean love. The kiss ended, and he handed her the leather jacket he had given her all those months ago. “Let’s give it to ‘em!” “Yeah! Oops!” Tails fell down from the ceiling. He waved sheepishly “Hi. Um, am I interrupting something?” “Not at all, let’s go get ‘em!” Ekyt said.

“Fall back! Fall back!” the order came from the secret service commander, John the Raccoon. He

aimed to take away momentum from the enemy. Each side had taken it's losses, but for now it was best to regroup. They had the home turf advantage. The soldiers, professional and volunteer, poured into Knothole Village, the last stronghold. King Maximillian Acorn (Now acting ruler, Elias is a prince again) asked everyone to sit. "Calm down now! Yes, we are at war again, with the Over-Landers and a new echidna menace. The second Great War has indeed begun. I ask that all remain calm and...what's this?" Princess Sally had whispered something to him. "I don't care! Stop him at all costs!"

The crowd mumbled, wondering what was going on. The huge doors leading to the assembly hall were kicked open. Ekyt strode in, Linda-Su on one side, Knuckles and Sonic on the other. The King drew his sword. "You! You, boy! I ordered my guards to stop you! How did you get past them?" Ekyt ignored the question and bowed down to the royal family. "I am here simply to pledge my services, sire. My loyalty lies with the Kingdom of Acorn in this war." Ekyt said, head down. The hall murmured. "Silence!" the king snarled. Ekyt knew something was up. "Yes, your majesty. I do pledge my services to the kingdom of Acorn and it's rightful ruler.- WHICH YOU ARE NOT!" The king's guards were stunned as Ekyt charged the king, taking the sword. He plunged it into King Acorn, while a stunned silence echoed throughout the room. "This is not King Acorn!" Ekyt shouted. Sally and Elias were stunned as a robot duplicate of their father sat up, throwing the human into the crowd.

"Fools! All of you! So easy to trick! Well, now I- oof!" Ekyt had thrown a chair that cracked the robot in the mouth. "Oh, you're going down! What, you throw shot-put your senior year? You threw all 120 lbs. of me five rows back! I thought you robots were supposed to be super strong?" ZOOM and BLAM! were the next to things heard. Sonic rammed the robot and Linda shot it, then they both kicked and punched at it until it was "dead". "Knothole Village! Find the King and Put these guys away!" Ekyt shouted! A chant of "Way past cool" started by Sonic filled the room before the warriors, newly energized, charge the playing field, bent on the destruction of their enemies.

Robotnik saw this from his satellite, and cursed. "Oh, how they'll pay. They'll all pay! Snively! Release the Chaos Bots!" "Yes sir!" Snively said. Kragok, standing next to Robotnik, laughed and gave orders to his troops. "Shoot to stun. I want the guardians and their friends alive!"

101 - Issue 101- More than lives...

Knothole was in ruins. Fire fighters tried to put out the flames. But it was a lost cause. A few of our heroes, Sonic, Knuckles, Tails, and Ekyt have gotten the survivors to the safety of the floating island. For now. A desperate plan was being formed. What hung in the balance was more than a few lives. It was beyond comprehension to most. But the group of heroes head one last trick. The chaos emerald works two ways. In the hands of someone evil, it grants unlimited power. But in the hands of someone good, it unlocks their ultimate potential, ultimate power. It was decided to gamble. The four heroes who were going into combat had a few minutes to say goodbye, in case things went awry.

Sonic hugged Uncle Chuck, Muttski, his mother and father, and Princess Sally. Here we go, Sal gal. He said with a hint of the famous Sonic smirk. Sally nodded, brushing tears from her eyes.

Tails, who only had his uncle, Merlin Prower, hugged him goodbye, then turned to Amy Rose. Amy looked troubled, and Tails could understand why. His life was almost certainly forfeit. He kissed, his first *real* kiss.

Knuckles had no one except Julie-Su. His mother was their, but she couldn't be trusted. His father was in Haven, unable to leave. So he kissed Julie-Su goodbye.

That left Ekyt. Linda-Su, along with her friend Eden (Violet_Rose) were tending to some of those who had been hurt in combat. He shrugged off his coat, and handed it to her. After a kiss, he was off. She watched him go, almost falling over from the effects of the blood loss. (See previous 3 issues- N.G)

200 power rings, or 50 each, along with the seven chaos emeralds, were put in a chamber, the one marred by Dmitri's accident so long ago. The power hit them full blast. Sonic turned a yellow color, Knuckles turned magenta. Tails stayed his normal color. Ekyt turned a pale, but somehow vibrant, shade of green. The four blasted out, passing Shadow. Ekyt stopped and handed him his ring. If things go wrong, get everyone out of here. Shadow nodded at the gesture. Violet (Violet_Rose), who was at his side, even dropped her contempt toward Ekyt. Good Luck Thank you. He said simply, before joining the others.

The chaos bots had all the powers of combots and SWATbots, but magnified 10 fold. Kragok's forces were the same echidnas, but armed with guns. The fight had taken a toll on both sides. As Eden and Linda worked feverishly on the wounded, they began to talk to get their mind off the violence. To their surprise, Violet started to help, while Shadow stood silently by the door. I'm not doing this for you, I'm doing so me and Shadow can go back to our normal life. Violet said. (Hope I got that right Violet!- N.G.) Linda and Eden didn't bother answering. I hope that Sonic doesn't endanger the rest of them. He's so impulsive, never thinks! Eden said suddenly. Trust him Eden. He and the others will come through, they always have. Linda answered. *Dear God I hope so&*

Thirty ruined chaos bots and forty of Kragok's soldiers lay ruined in the lush jungles of the floating island. With Super Sonic and Hyper Knuckles leading, and Hyper Tails and Ultimate Ekyt (Boy, that's lame!- N.G.), they had taken out a good portion of the troops. But they couldn't sustain their super forms forever. Ekyt had lost a ton of blood, and was exhausted to begin. Tails was younger and less experienced, and he was starting to fade. Knuckles and Sonic were good for the time being. But if they were going to make a move, they had to make it quick.

BOOM! Robotnik and Kragok pounded into the floating island, along with hundreds of troops. Surrender now, and we will take pity on you! Your foolish heroes may have defeated the others, but if they want all of you to make it, they'd better give it up! The two cackled. Shadow had the ring Ekyt had given him, but now wasn't the time. Okay doctor, we give up. Do what you will. Shadow said. Linda tossed down her weapon. They were defeated.

Hey, I heard something! Sonic called to the others. Me too. Ekyt said. It came from the chaos chamber! They raced back at the speed of sound. But it was too late. The only thing in the room was a folded piece of paper, and six empty pods. The emeralds were gone.

102 - Close Quarters of the Enemy

The power drained out of them, leaving all of them in a heap. Sonic was the first to recover. Everyone okay? he choked out with a cough. Tails, the youngest, rebounded fairly quickly. He felt he had something to prove to Sonic and Sally. Knuckles got to one knee and then pulled himself up, while Ekyt grabbed a bed and pulled himself up. Yeah, I m good. Wait, what s that? He grabbed the paper and cursed. Listen to this:

You have a choice heroes. Do you save your friends, or the emeralds? A bomb is set to detonate both. Oh, what will you do? If you all give up, we ll spare everyone and the emeralds. I await your answer. Ekyt tossed the paper down. Well, I say we give up. Not totally. Sonic added, at the defiant looks the small group had. I can cut through the cages or whatever with my Sonic Spin, and&Hey, what s that! Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) came out of the shadows, bashing a lamp over Knuckles. Hey! Easy! Sonic restrained her. Relax, we re the good guys! Tiffany stopped. Oh, sorry. Look, I want to help. Ekyt spoke up. Let her. She s one of those ultimate life forms. He was trying to wake Knuckles up. Knuckles finally came to, and he was furious. It would take a while for him to calm down.

Linda-Su, Violet, and Eden (Violet_Rose) took charge of the situation. Those who were injured got the best care they could, while the others were instructed to disrupt operations as much as possible. Eden wasn t the confrontational type. Violet was, and Linda was more angry than anything. The thing they had in common was they all cared for few things. Eden was different in the way that she was more accepting quicker. It took Linda a while, and Violet pretty much kept to herself. In this case all differences were put aside. One by one, the group started to disappear, returning as robots. Families were being broken apart. It made them all angry, but there was nothing they could do.

Okay, here s how this works. Knuckles and Ekyt give up. You guys get inside and do some damage, as well as damage control. The emeralds are nearby, so maybe we can use that to out advantage. Tails,

you get power rings, maybe ten, to heal the others with so they can run for it with us. And Tiffany, while I cut through the floor, you smuggle the prisoners out. Then I'll look for the royal family.

Ekyt had put his coat and mask in Haven, so they wouldn't be stolen. The two were frisked before being put in the cell. Ekyt passed out bandages he had smuggled in. He watched a young girl fight as a boy her age was taken away. It was Paula and Kurt! Hold it rustpot! Ekyt shouted before smashing the robot to pieces. You two get back to the cell! Get the others under control! Dad, take this! Paula said. (Paula-Su is Ekyt and Linda-Su's daughter in one possible future, and Kurt is Ekyt's adopted son, ah, see issue 100 special!- N.G.) He took the emerald shard from his daughter. It was a pendant he had given her. The robots would be coming any second&Time for one more order of business.

Linda& he said quietly. He told of the desperate plan they had formed. Trust the others. I'll be fine, you just worry about yourself. She flung herself into him, her head buried in his chest, actually crying. He stroked her hair and back. He saw the robots coming. Okay, I've got to go. Take it easy, I'll be fine. Linda handed him something small and black. The robots grabbed him and hauled him into a chamber. He was about to be roboticized.

The floor beneath the cell quivered, and finally cut. Sonic motioned the others to jump down the hole. Tiffany ran groups of ten out of there, alternating that duty with Knuckles. Linda was the last to jump down, wondering what was happening to her boyfriend.

Robotnik saw the others escape on the monitor. Blast! Well, I still have one& he turned menacingly toward Ekyt, who stiffened up, as per guardian customs. What, chubby? Gonna roboticize me? That's the plan, you pest. Ekyt smiled darkly. Yeah, I'm a pest, but it's about to get even worse. He planted the little black thing Linda had given him on the side on the roboticizer. That's a bomb. You have five minutes to figure out how to disarm it. Or, you can give me the chaos emeralds. Because that thing will take out this whole lab. And no, I'm not bluffing. I'd die for the others, so don't screw with me! Ekyt laughed. Fine. Take them. Kragok shoved them into Ekyt's chest. Now, how do I disarm this? Robotnik asked desperately. Search me, I don't know. Good luck fatty! Ekyt ran for it. Tails was floating up ahead. Tails, we've gotta run for it! That bomb is gonna go off anytime now! Take the emeralds and fly out of here! I'll cover your escape! Ekyt kicked a robot into two others, starting a fire, which, in turn,

set off the sprinkler system. The end of the complex was in sight. But he heard a cry for help. It was a small girl echidna. Ekyt ran back to help her, but heard the telltale beep of the bomb he had set. Stay close, close your eyes and cover your ears! Ekyt called to her. The place blew up. The girl was fine, but Ekyt killed by the blast. However, the two of the new Ancient Walkers, Athair and Aurora, were smiling down on him that day. His death is premature Athair. And he would only ask to be sent back. Aurora told Athair. Athair nodded sagely. I agree. Give the human back his life. And call back my daughter, Itara (another next guardian creation). He gave a rare smile. You set him up Athair? I suppose Haven requested it? Aurora said. Only partly.

Ekyt sat up, looking to check on the girl. She was gone. The complex was in ruins. He ran for it, wondering how he managed to escape. That was a mystery for another day.

103 - Ekyt's Rage

Unfortunately, the mystery would have to wait. Shadow was now missing. Sonic was injured from the blast, and Tails had to take care of his uncle Merlin Prower. Knuckles had to sit this one out. So this meant that Ekyt, Linda-Su, Violet Rose (Violet_Rose) and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) would have to find Shadow.

Shadow wasn't lost. He wasn't where he wanted to be either. You won't get away with this doctor. Shadow sneered at Robotnik. Oh, no Shadow? You don't have too many friends around here, so I'd wager that without a chaos emerald you're in trouble. So just sit tight, you'll make a fine robot slave! Robotnik cackled as Shadow stewed, furious that he had gotten himself into this.

Okay, when did he go missing? Ekyt asked. I was unconscious or something, so I really don't remember. The others exchanged glances. Linda gripped his arm. Y-you were dead? You didn't know? she asked him, eyes wide. Huh? What? Shouldn't I still be de- They did it again! Ekyt said, furious. What? asked Linda, alarmed. The group in heaven or the ancient walkers keep killing me and bringing me back to life! It's to test my loyalty. I wish they'd stop that! He punched a tree nearby, as the others looked on. You know it goes with the job. Linda said, trying to calm him. I know. It just means that they don't trust me though. Knuckles has died once. And me, it's been, what, seven times. It sucks being human sometimes. He looked around at the paradise that was the floating island. I don't belong here. I know it, and I get reminders from everyone who doesn't like me. Linda wasn't quite sure what to think of her boyfriend's attitude, but they all had to put that aside for the moment. We've gotta get to Shadow.

Ekyt was wound up by the time they got to Robotropolis. He punched the huge sign that had Robotnik's face on it. He threw a rock so hard it went clear through a SWATbot. This restless burst of energy had been building for a long time. Anger, frustration. *What would happen if I left? It's obvious there are only a*

couple exceptions, only a couple folks who want me here? Maybe I ll just take a break&

Robotnik watched as the small group entered. This is what they send after me? A human half-dead from the last battle, and three girls? This is the best those miserable mobians can do? Well, I m feeling sporting today&Snively! Yes, master? Release a small number of bots. Snively released five as they watched in dismay.

Ekyt, still furious, and Linda, worried, split off from Tiffany and Violet. The bots all seemed to be gunning for Ekyt, making them easy targets for Violet s hammer and Tiffany s fighting skills. Ekyt, however, wasn t through. Spotting the camera Robotnik was watching them with, he threw a swatbots head at it, knocking the picture out temporarily. When it came back, the group was gone, and a mangle group of swatbots filled the view. Robotnik smiled as he concocted his next plan. Put Shadow out where they can see him. I want them to fall right into my trap! What trap would that be? Ekyt stood beside Robotnik.

How did you get here? Robotnik asked, furious. You left a key under the doormat. How do you think? Robotnik made a move. CLICK! Uh uh uh! Linda exclaimed, wagging her finger. We re gonna play nice. You let Shadow go or else& Robnotnik looked at the pistol that was trained on him. That s your cue, Tiffany! Ekyt called out. She released her brother. Get him out of here, get some medical attention. Ekyt turned back to Robotnik. The look on his face was not pleasant. Okay Linda, he s got the point. BANG! BANG! BANG! And so on. Linda had destroyed the equipment in the lab. I wouldn t waste a bullet on your worthless butt. She snarled at him. She and Ekyt left a scared Robotnik to contemplate revenge.

Afterword, a tired Ekyt returned to Knothole Village. The war was over, for now. Linda s bullets had destroyed everything, including cell door controls, freeing prisoners. Sally thanked Ekyt, but Ekyt waved it off. He pushed his way through the crowd, looking at the sky, and the trees. Looking through them might be more accurate. He didn t really notice anything. He was too upset. He ached all over, and was tired of tests and politics. *Why does being a guardian have to be so&political. I ve done more than my share, yet I m still despised.* He sat down hard, angry. Linda-Su joined him after a while.

I don't blame you. She said simply. huh? I mean about being frustrated and feeling unwelcome& It's not even you&Ah! You've made me feel welcome Linda, it's not you at all. I know. I just kinda feel for you&I mean, after my time with the dark legion, it took a long time for me to be accepted. Yeah, but look at it this way, you could have been a human with the dark legion. They probably would've lynched you on site. She laughed, all the while knowing he was totally serious.

Shadow resisted Doctor Quack's attention until Tiffany finally forced him. Just humor me Shadow! For once in your life, do what you're told! We need you! Shadow had to admit it was nice to be needed. Doctor Quack completed his analysis, stating that Shadow was fine, except for a tiny robotic piece on him. (This isn't the end, readers! What's gonna happen to Shadow?- N.G.)

Ekyt stood up, reaching a decision. Linda, I'm going to take a break, clear my head. The next part was hard for him to say. Y-you can come with me, if you want. His cheeks turned a deep red. I'd love too! After today, we both deserve a break!

104 - Betrayl

Locke caught up with Ekyt before he left. A troubled look on the echidna's face stopped Ekyt and Linda. You okay Locke? Ekyt asked. Locke nodded. It's you I worry for. This was given to Knuckles today, with your name on it. The note was a death threat. Ekyt didn't need to think long and hard about it. Lara-Le! Locke stopped. What? Lara-Le! She and Wymacher tried to kill me! I thought you knew! Locke shook his head. I had no idea! Perhaps it's time I had a talk with her! But please, for your own safety, and Linda's too, head to Haven. You don't have to come back until you're ready. I understand your frustration entirely. Tell Grandfather Hawking I sent you. Ekyt nodded. A knife flew by him and stuck in a tree. Go Go Go! Ekyt shouted to Linda and Locke while running himself. A knife caught him near his ankle, but his shoes took most of the blow. He had every intention of flinging the knife back. This couldn't go on!

Before Violet, Eden, (Violet_Rose) and Tiffany's (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) eyes, shadow began to turn metallic. Well, half of him did anyway. Ekyt's ring was still on his left hand, keeping half of him flesh. He was clearly in pain while fighting for control of his body. The ring glowed brilliantly, and the roboticization process slowed, and eventually stopped. But his robotic half was still fighting for control. The only one in the room who could match him move for move was Tiffany; if it came to that. They all hoped it wouldn't &

Another knife came down, this one close to Linda. One near Locke. Ekyt had seen enough. He flung the knife back where it came from, heard its distinctive THUK! Noise as it stuck in a tree. Three knives answered his. He motioned for Linda to shoot the tree branch above the source of the knives. She did, and the branch fell down, pinning their assailants. The assailants were wearing masks, and there were two of them. Ekyt couldn't help but gasp as he ripped the masks off. Lara-le, as he had expected. But next to her was not her husband, Wymacher. No, not even someone who could pass for Wymacher.

It was Vector.

Shadow continued to fight for control. No one had any idea what to do. But then, the ring stopped glowing. It looked like the robotic part had won.

Vector? You? Ekyt couldn't help but be astonished at the betrayal. I s never stupid enough to trust you, dawg! Vector declared. You is gonna bring the ruin of me crib! Ekyt had to be restrained by Linda-Su and Locke. I worked with you! I trusted you! And this is how you, and everyone else repays me? Locke and Linda had to hold tight because Ekyt was bucking like a bronco. He was beyond furious.

(For this rapid-fire exchange of dialogue, I m going to use colors. Green is Vector, red is Ekyt, purple is Linda, orange is Locke.

Stupid human kid!

You walking belt!

Sticks and Stones dawg, sticks and stones.

Fight like a man, or crocodile, or whatever!

Calm down! Calm down!

Don't let your emotions get the better of you guardian& Linda, cuff Vector. Ekyt too, before this gets too out of hand.

(Wasn't that fun? Back to normal dialogue!- N.G.)

Locke looked at Lara-Le, a look of great sadness on his normally stoic face. I never thought it would come to this Lara. I never knew how far your contempt for me had gone&

Shadow was now fully robotic. He overturned a table, startling everyone. The next shocking thing happened immediately. Shadow spoke. It was his voice, though slightly digitized. What happened to me? he asked. The harsh mechanical voice that came out startled him as well. But- why aren't I a mindless slave? He looked at the ring on his left hand.

105 - Unforgiven, Unforseen

Vector, you are under arrest for treason. And Ekyl, you are under arrest for disturbing the peace and assault. The chief magistrate (Judge to most people- N.G.) stopped. Vector was in a cage, surrounded by the chaotix. Ekyl was handcuffed, held by Linda. And your sentences are& Not again! The crowd gasped. Ekyl strode to the bench. How is saving lives a crime? Is that now what I am a guardian for? Be that as it may, I sen No. I m not going along with it. I ve done more than my fair share of time. Why do I get blamed for everything! It s because I m human, isn t it! All of you are all red, and you gotta pick on me because I m different. Being a guardian was my dream, and you ruined it for me! Ekyl, calm down! Linda-Su said urgently. But he wasn t listening.

I have done nothing but what my job asks of me! And you re punishing me for it? You will come to order! the magistrate yelled. But Linda had heard enough. You lock him up, you lock me up. Officer, stand down! the magistrate ordered. Two guards came forward to restrain Linda. Ekyl, however, told them that if you so much as touch her, you will be prying those night sticks out from down your throat. Lock them both up! The judge yelled. Before you do, your honor, I have one thing to ask the congregated jurors. Ekyl turned to the others. What will it take for me to get your respect?

Ekyl was greeted with lots of shouts, but one stood out to his ears: Kill yourself, your skanky girl, and your family! Ekyl saw red. He flew away from the guards holding him and began to pummel the guy. Take it back! Take it back! It took five guards to restrain Ekyl. He broke away one more time and threw the offending echidna through a wall. He managed a maniacal grin as he was led away. They tossed him in a cell, followed by Linda, where they were shackled by their arms, suspended a couple feet above the ground. Sorry I got you into this. Ekyl said, downcast. Are you kidding me? That jerk had it coming. I m just sorry I didn t get a shot at him. Linda crowed, her beautiful emerald green eyes shining. Her eyes met Ekyl s dark, hazel eyes. It was then Ekyl knew he had made the right decision.

Violet (Violet_Rose), being closest to Shadow, tried to calm him. Easy Shads. Calm down. We'll fix this. There's been worse. I feel more out of place than usual Violet. She could understand that, given their similar pasts. She held his hand for a while, until Eden (Violet_Rose), Rotor, and Doctor Quack studied the results. We'll find a cure Shadow. Rotor told him. Eden, who had noticed the ring, told him Whatever you do, don't take that ring off. It's the only thing that's keeping you under control. She showed him a diagram. See, this is your body below the robotic structure. It's still normal. So don't give up hope, okay? Eden was kindhearted, and even though she disdained some of Shadow's violent actions, she thought that, as a person, he could be as good as anyone. Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog), who had been observing this whole thing, decided that what Shadow needed was to get out of the medical center. ^C mon bro, let's go for a walk^ she communicated telepathically. When he didn't respond, she dragged him away.

The clanking sound Shadow made when he walked unnerved Tiffany, as well as himself. His robotic face gleamed in the moonlight. You okay Shads? Tiffany asked him, not bothering to ask him telepathically. He didn't respond right away. When he finally did speak, it was a sad tone. I don't like this. At all. It's like being imprisoned all over again. (You all know Shadow's history, right?- N.G) It's torture. Tiffany didn't know quite what to say. Let's head back, the others are going to start to worry. Besides, maybe they have a cure. The prospect was still bleak

The two who were literally imprisoned had begun to plead with the guard. C mon, let her go. She hasn't done anything. Ekyt said to him. The guard was friendly. I'm really sorry guardian. If I had my way, you would both be back to your normal lives. Ekyt nodded, understanding. One last chance before we take matters into our own hands. She nodded gravely. Ekyt concentrated. *Archimedes!* With a pop, Archimedes appeared. Arch, no time to explain, you've got to get Linda and me off the hook! Archimedes quickly used his fire-breathing powers (He's a fire any, he can spit fire- N.G.) to melt the chains. I'll talk to Locke!

The cell was dark. Ekyt looked to Linda. She looked mad enough to spit lightning, but softened her expression when she saw him looking. Sorry, I was just thinking about that jerk back there. Ekyt nodded, then laid his coat on the floor and wadded up his shirt. Why don't you get some rest? I'll keep watch. Sure, but lay next to me for a minute. He sat down next to her. She put her head in his chest for a few moments. It was then he noticed she was shaking. You okay? he asked quietly. Yeah, it's just from anger. I want to rip that guy apart! He stroked her hair and back. When I get out of here, they better keep the cell warm for us, because I plan to teach that guy a lesson he'll never forget. Linda smiled, then laid her head down, exhausted. He kissed her, then got up and stared out the bar-covered

window. I ve got to fix this. Two words came to his mind: Unforiven&Unforseen

106 - Last Resort

The guard let Ekylt out in the morning. He turned to help Linda-Su up, but the guard said no. What? Why? Ekylt asked, shocked. Her crime was different. She stays. I m very sorry guardian. Ekylt bent down and whispered something to her, which made her laugh. Ekylt left, and the guard asked her what he said. She smiled. He said to keep the cell warm for him.

Luke, a red echidna, about 18, laughed at the comments he had made. In his stupid attempt to impress his friends, he had gotten thrown into a wall, but it threw that stupid kid in jail. As he was laughing, he felt a tap on the shoulder. He jumped back upon seeing who it was. Ekylt grabbed him by his jean vest and snarled Your mouth is so big you could whisper in your own ear. Ekylt dragged him to toward the city. Luke took a swipe at Ekylt.

Ekylt had enough, and floored him, punching for all he was worth. Luke landed a few shots, but there was no discrepancy over who won when Ekylt was finally pulled off the unconscious, instigating echidna. They handcuffed Ekylt, who shouted to the stirring Luke You should ve thought twice before insulting my family and my girlfriend! Keep talking and you can look forward to more! The guards pushed Ekylt away. One of them said personally, I think you were right. Ekylt thanked him as they put him back in the cell. Linda, who had been sitting by the window waiting, got up as the guards put him in the cell. Ekylt smiled comically, though he was blushing feverishly. Miss me? She smiled back and answered with a hug before saying You betcha!

Eden, Rotor, and Doctor Quack worked for hours on end, trying to find a cure for Shadow s plight. Nothing worked. Eden (Violet_Rose) was thinking about that ring. Maybe it s properties could reverse the effect if there was more power&But who would take the risk? The risk being drained of all energy for a full day. The only two she could think of who had that power might not go for it. Well, one would, but he was in jail. Eden knew Ekylt s heart was in the right place. But Knuckles had a legitmate beef with

Shadow. Still, something had to be done. She decided to ask Tails to find Knuckles and get Ekyt. Yes ma'am! Tails replied happily.

As Tails flew over the island, he couldn't help thinking how much he had matured, living with Ekyt and Linda. He was only ten, but after all he'd been through, he felt older. He had a beautiful girl. His life was coming together. Princess Sally was just about to apologize for the way she treated him. He found Knuckles, talking to Mighty the Armadillo. He swooped down. Knuckles! Knuckles turned around. Hold on Mighty. What's up? Tails explained. Knuckles nodded to Mighty, then said okay, you get Ekyt. He's in jail. Just tell them this: The Guardian is needed urgently, with full pardon. Oh, and spring Linda, too, tell the guards you have my blessing.

Violet (Violet_Rose) sat, holding Shadow's hand. Eden can fix anything. She said. He stared straight ahead. Eden came out of the lab they had been in. Shadow, you're going to have to trust Ekyt and Knuckles. They're going to try to use the chaos emerald to help you. I don't trust them! Shadow said. I know, but we have no choice. That ring can only keep you from being a mindless slave. The emerald's full power can restore you to normal. He nodded and entered the room.

107 - I Knight Thee...

Ekyt and Knuckles concentrated. The emerald glowed, and eventually Shadow did too. His body slowly became flesh once again. But then something green struck Ekyt and Knuckles across the back, breaking their concentration. Vector was on the weakened Ekyt, pounding him. Knuckles was too dazed to fight back, so Violet (Violet_Rose) and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) took matters into their own hands. After a few violent attacks, Vector lay unconscious across the room. Tiffany had Chaos Blasted him in the air, and then Violet used her hammer like a bat and cracked Vector. Linda was in front of Eden (Violet_Rose) and Shadow.

Shadow looked at himself, smiling, until he saw his left hand. It was still robotic. Give them a minute to recover Shadow, then they'll finish. Eden said calmly. Rotor and Tails nodded in agreement. Tails had an idea. My Uncle, Merlin Prower, says he knows someone who can keep an eye on everyone until we're all recovered. After a few minutes, a man, strange looking for the times, entered their midst.

Greetings, I'm Sir Tiffy Cashien (SegatheHedgehog) and I'm supposed to perform guard duties&Is that correct? He had long white robes and hair, with a full beard and moustache. Yes Sir. Tails said eagerly. Is it true you fought for Mobius in the Great War? Ah yes, lad, back in my prime. But that's another story for another time. Good gosh, what happened here? The walking luggage jumped me and Knuckles. Ekyt called out. Vector crawled out of the chamber, leaving a trail of blood behind him.

C'mon Knux, let's finish this. Ekyt told him. A few seconds later Shadow was normal. Thanks. He said, and dashed off, Violet in tow. Friendlier than usual. Ekyt muttered. Is that lad always that disturbed? Tiffy asked. No, today's a good day. Linda-Su commented. Well, for now&Halt Varlet! Sir Tiffy ran outside. The others exchanged glances and then followed him.

108 - Real Deal

State thy name, lad! Sir Cashien (SegatheHedgehog) shouted to the intruder. Geoffrey St. John of his majesty's secret service. And who are you, bloke? Geoffrey snarled back. Easy, Sir, I know this guy. Ekyt said calmly. What do you want St. John? Ekyt asked calmly. Unfortunately, I'm here to enlist your aid. St. John responded to Ekyt. What for? His majesty requires a bodyguard, and seeing as how I'm guarding the princess and the prince, the king is vulnerable. Sonic recommended you, so here I am. Geoffrey stated. Uh huh. So how long is this for? My job is still to guard the emeralds. Ekyt said/asked. Just for a day, while the king makes his trip to the Island here. Fine. Ekyt said. Sir Tiffy watched him leave. That lad has quite the attitude. He commented. Sonic said To know him is to hate him.

A human. Being nice. This guy is different. Shadow looked over at Violet. Violet gave him a quick smile before returning to her own thoughts. *That guy is a little off. No, maybe it's a nice human for a change.* That got her thinking about her own past. When she shook her head, Shadow figured out what was going on. We can't fix the past Violet. But we can change the future. Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) caught up with them. Hey, we've got a problem! Devil Gulag (Prison-like island) just had a huge break-out! Drago escaped, and he's got some powerful friends now, he's gunning for the king! The three looked at each other and collectively nodded. Let's go!

Ekyt was walking with Linda-Su. Someone threw a tomato at him. He hit it like a baseball with his staff, but it still splattered him. Someone threw a rock at Linda. She took the rock and threw it back (It left a softball-sized lump on the offender's forehead) Why do we do it? Ekyt asked suddenly. He turned to Linda, his eyes all around. Why do we risk ourselves for those who shun us anyway. I came here to escape, and I know you did too. When do we get to belong? he snarled the last part. Linda thought for a moment, then answered. It's the jobs we're best qualified for. You've got the instinct to protect, and I've got the grit and determination. It'll take time. But things will get better. She said soothingly. Then a hand covered her mouth. You're gonna pay dearie!

Ekyt stopped and turned. Remington! (Former Constable) Staph! (Linda's ex-boyfriend). Let her go! He said. Not a chance! This little beauty is mine! Staph taunted. You harm one hair on her head, and I will kick seven different kinds of Shut up! You're outnumbered, you haven't a chance. That, Ekyt said, has never stopped me before.

109 - Protect the Package

Ekyt, not feeling merciful, rushed the Remington. Linda kicked backward into Staph, then punched him, finally adding the end of the combo by punting him into a tree. Ekyt punched Remington in the stomach. Then in the head. Then the stomach. Then the head. This went on until Ekyt finally threw him into a nearby tree and tied up him and Staph in the vines. The two continued their walk, finally getting back to the Chaos Chamber.

Sir Tiffy Cashien (SegatheHedgehog) was still questioning Geoffrey St. John. And what business have you had with the sprout (Referring to Ekyt) St John was getting frustrated. Listen mate, I m just trying to help the royal family. I don t like the bloke, but if the princess thinks he c n do the job, then I ve gotta agree, so back off! It s cool sir. He s making sense- for once. Ekyt said. Sonic snickered.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog), Shadow, and Violet (Violet_Rose) were the next in. Big trouble. Yeah, Drago s escaped. Shadow started and Tiffany finished. Violet continued. Yeah, he and two echidnas escaped. Ekyt laughed. Well, the two echidnas are in the jungle trying to untangle themselves from vines. I wonder where Drago is, though? Doesn t matter. Knuckles is guarding the emerald, along with Sir Tiffy, which means that St. John and I need to get to Knothole-fast! Shadow and Tiffany, with a little prompting from Violet, used Chaos control to get them there.

110 - The King's Decree

I still don't see why Sonic recommended you. King Acorn commented. Sally put a hand to her head, while Elias spoke up. Father, he's helped us a countless number of times, and has asked for nothing in return. King Acorn stroked his beard as he looked Ekyt over. Still don't trust an overlander. They mean trouble. Always have. King Acorn commented. I have nothing to hide. Ekyt said quietly. No? Then why do you wear a mask? And why doesn't anyone know anything about you? The King asked nastily. Because I choose not to tell them and relive what I consider to be a trying past. Ekyt responded. That says nothing except you aren't to be trusted. The King said with a wave of his hand. Well, *sire*, if you don't want my help, that's fine. Considering how well *your* regime has been going, I'd say we were better off battling Robotnik. Ekyt snarled. What! You question my authority. No, I question the fact that you don't trust me. I've done nothing but good for your kingdom. You don't trust your daughter, your son, your warriors, nobody that I'm okay. If even Geoffrey over there is vouching for me, shouldn't you do what a king does? Listen to advisement? King Acorn was furious. You insolent little miscreant! I'll have you locked up! For what? Telling the truth to someone who's in denial? And I'll tell you something else. Either your son or your daughter would tell you that what I'm saying is true. If you don't want to trust me, don't! I don't need the aggravation. But keep in mind that- Oh forget it! Ekyt shot out. You know what? I've had it with you bluebloods who don't want to listen to someone who might know more than you! I have lived my life in fear for ten years, part of me burning, forcing me to give up all I hold dear. But no more. I- duck! He pushed the king and prince down while St. John grabbed Sally.

You again? Ekyt snarled. Sonic had just gotten back and, seeing the royal palace in shreds, immediately saw the problem. Metal Sonic? This outdated knockoff is always ready for another round! Sonic chuckled and spun fast in a ball shooting at metal.

Meanwhile on the island, Sir Cashien was guarding the emerald in a militaristic style. Knuckles was sitting back, reading some book that was ancient. The Chaotix and Julie-Su were relaxing, talking about Vector losing it (See previous issues- N.G.) Linda-Su was still working with the police force. Slow day though. A burning building was the problem. It seemed to be arson, but you couldn't tell for sure. The fire-echidnas were handling it&Then a cry for help came from the building. Linda dove in after it.

The smoke made it difficult to see and breathe. Keep shouting and stay low! Linda-su yelled. She had to hurry, she couldn't stay in here for another minute&

111 - Changing of the Guard

This issues theme song: Twisted Transistor (By Korn or the version by Twisted Sister)

With Robotnik's plans ruined, Ekyt and Sonic smiled satisfactorily. Then Ekyt felt a pain in his chest. What's wrong? You okay? Sonic asked urgently. Soul touch. Linda's in trouble. Ekyt concentrated on his ring. Sonic, knowing what was going on, warned him. You know that pulling that chaos control stuff is gonna get you in trouble. Ekyt, still concentrated, hoping he wouldn't be too late. Linda-Su found the young boy, an echidna, red in color, with a touch of white in his dreadlocks. He looked to be twelve years old. Climb on me piggyback, okay? Linda told the frightened young echidna. He jumped on and she ran from the building. A doorway collapsed. They were trapped. A flash and buzz. Ekyt? How did you- Never mind! We're trapped. Ekyt grabbed his staff and pried the beam up, holding it. Go, quick! What about you? I'll be fine, hurry! he shouted over the roaring flames. He kicked the beam, opening a narrow passage. He dove through, rolling out into the street. Linda was helping the echidna breathe, yelling for an ambulance. Ekyt watched, and when he tried to help, a knife was pulled on him. Back up, human. I have no doubt you started that fire. The echidna was maybe thirty. Ekyt backed off, furious that he was being accused of it. An ambulance came, and the EMT's (Emergency Medical Team) told Linda he would live. Thanks to you while warning her about Ekyt. At this point, a group of echidnas gave Ekyt a dirty look. The firefighters and policemen told him not to leave the country. Linda-Su, seeing her boyfriend getting angry, pulled him away.

Those ungrateful jerks! he snarled. Linda agreed with him. Knuckles glided to them, telling them they were wanted by the brotherhood right away. Ekyt shook his head and swore. The chaos control and the accusations& relax, I'm with you. Whatever they say. What they said turned out to be interesting, if nothing else.

Locke, Sabre, Hawking, Sojourner, and Thunderhawk were there to greet the three. Locke got straight to the point. Ekyt, we think it's time you disappeared. Your duties will be taken over by Linda-Su. You are dismissed. This saddened Ekyt, but he was glad his girlfriend was getting the job. I have one request, if the council will allow it. Locke raised an eyebrow, then invited Ekyt to proceed. I want to be the one to give her the guardian stripe.

Interesting turn of events Locke thought. *He seems to have seen this coming&taking the chance with the chaos control&unfortunate, despite all his problems.* Ekyt raised a question: What do you mean by disappear? Locke allowed Hawking to field that. That is up to you. We ask that you return the mask, and the ring. Locke watched the lad nod. His face was stoic. But he could tell through the young man's eyes that he was feeling anger and despair. He sympathized, he really did. But he didn't have any say. And he had broken the rules.

The ceremony was set to begin in a few minutes. Ekyt was holding the mask when they were called. First, Ekyt took off his ring and gave it to her. Then he handed her the mask. Finally, taking the white strip from his own chest, he, carefully, put it across her upper chest. If it pleases the council& He took off his coat and handed it to her. She stood up and hugged him. I'm sorry Ekyt. She said. He smiled back. Hey, no sweat. Just take care of yourself. But what are you gonna do? I have some friends I'm going to train for a war, build a new place to live, probably on Mobius, and&well, miss you. If you ever need me&Soultouch will connect us. Linda looked in his eyes, seeing the pain behind his facial stoicism. Besides, he added, If anyone should take my place, it's you. I trust Knuckles, and& he finally let his emotion get the better of him, but choked it back. Just keep in mind&I love you. Ekyt turned to the

council. Did you hear that? Let your age-old records show I love her! Thunderhawk told him to shut up, but Ekyt ignored him. At least you showed *some* good judgment in choosing an excellent replacement! You can stop me from guarding the emeralds, but I will guard her, defend her with my life! Do you hear me? My life! And if you do anything to her, I swear&! Ekyt left, his footsteps echoing his anger.

112 - The New Freedom Fighter Outcast Group

Tails saw Ekyt coming. He had never forgotten the way Ekyt treated him like he belonged. What s up Ekyt? Tails asked. Ekyt shook his head. oh, hey Tails. Sorry, just a little distracted. Nothing I can do though. Tails saw Ekyt s guardian crest was missing. Again? he asked. Yeah, but at least Linda-Su got it this time. Ekyt explained what happened. That s rough. Tails commented. Ekyt got an idea.

Tails, can you get Amy Rose for me? Meet me at the edge of the Mobian Badlands, okay? I ve got to get one more person&

Ekyt barged into the hospital, pushing aside anyone who got in his way to see the echidna he and Linda-Su had saved the other day. How are you doing? he asked the young echidna. After a cough, he answered Fine. Thanks to you and that girl. He shook his head. I m sorry about how those people blamed you. That fire was an accident, mom started it. How come they blamed you. *A thirst for knowledge and responsibility- a definite plus* Ekyt noted. It s because I m human. They don t trust me because of that. I used to guard the emeralds and, You were a guardian? the kid asked, his eyes widening. That s awesome! I wanted to be a guardian! Ekyt cocked his head at the kid. How would you like to be a guardian of something else? Sure! What do I have to do? he answered eagerly. Come with me. Wait, how s your breathing? Ekyt asked. I m fine. Mom made them keep me here. But I m gonna leave. What do you have in mind? Ekyt looked around. Can t say, not here. You know the Mobian Badlands? When the kid nodded, Ekyt continued. Meet me there. Ekyt got up and left.

Tails and Amy Rose were waiting for him. So why d you call us here, of all places? Amy asked. Ekyt responded by kicking at some dirt, then yanking a tree root, pulling a cover of a deep hole. Welcome to my house&and the operations center of the Freedom Fighters Outcast Group. Ekyt led them down, past his bedroom, to a room that was stocked with weapons, overlander and mobian, food, water, and a CB and HAM Radio. As the two looked around in astonishment, Ekyt watched the door. He saw an echidna glide down. Hey, glad you made it& Uh, stupid question, what s your name? Colin. Oh, and this is Mitch, my techno-geek brother. Ekyt shook hands and led them down. Well, Mitch is our brain trust, Tails, you re the most experienced freedom fighter, Amy, you re the best with your hands, and that leaves the grunt work to me and Colin. Ekyt looked around, glad he was getting a bit of a vindictive swipe at those who didn t trust them. They all exchanged greetings, then Ekyt spoke up again. The one thing we all have in common is we all don t fit in for a reason. We re off the radar so to speak, which means we can do plenty before anyone gets hip to us. Wait, Tails asked, Where s Linda-Su? Oops& he said, realizing his mistake. Ekyt, pulling the top back over them and letting the artificial light take over. She s a guardian now. She has been forbidden to associate with me. Oh, that reminds me, we have two other members, who can only come periodically. My daughter and adopted son from the future, Paula-Su and Kurt. *But how is Linda doing?* Ekyt wondered.

Linda was talking to Knuckles. I m sorry you have to train me. Linda said. Not your fault, and I don t mind it, you re a fast learner. What bothers me is what happened to Ekyt. Linda agreed. I m forbidden to associate with him, and that s killing both of us. He yelled at the brotherhood, professing his love for me, then claimed he was going to disappear. Whatever that means. Knuckles felt her pain. I know. My dad and I argued last night, and he threatened to kick me off guardian duties. He won t and he knows it. But I did manage to get a glimpse of a monitor (they have lots where the brotherhood lives, haven), and it showed him talking to a kid in a hospital. Let me get the audio& (Plays the tape) Linda-Su narrowed her eyes. I know where he s talking about. He took me there once. If I know him, he s getting ready to do something&He hasn t made a lot of friends. But there s Tails, Amy, that kid in the hospital, not to

mention our kids&Duh! He practically yelled it, but so only I could understand: He s making his own band of freedom fighters. She shook her head. I need to take a walk. She walked to Mount Fate. Ekyt, by chance, was already there, dressed in all black. *This is where I got my first kiss* he said aloud. Linda, delighted to see him, kissed him. I know what s going on. Any equipment you need I ll give you through Paula. I can connect with her if needed. Ekyt nodded sadly. I guess I d better go. I don t want you to get in trouble. I love you. Before she could respond, he was down the mountain and halfway off the island. *He needs my help* she thought. And he s gonna get it.

113 - Shot Down in the Tundra

Ekyt, Paula-Su, Kurt, Tails, Amy, Colin, Mitch. Wow. The Mistfits in Action? Yeah, that was accurate. Ekyt looked around the shelter. Tails was working with Colin on some basic training. Amy was preparing food. Mitch was experimenting with some security measure. Paula-Su and Kurt weren't around. They had their hands busy in the future. And the eighteen year old leader, Ekyt, was plotting out their next course of action.

They all had their weapons of choice. Ekyt's perennial favorite was his staff. Mitch had a taser-type thing, but with a longer range. Tails had the Bi-Plane, but it was extended to seat all of them. Not Winged Victory, this one was labeled D.O.F.- Disciples of Freedom. Amy had her trademark hammer. And Colin had a magnetic generator that no one could figure out why it was a weapon. They were getting ready to attack a supply line from the Mobian Tundra. Ekyt stepped outside to check that they weren't going to be bothered. Tails and the others went to the hidden runway in the Mobian badlands, just waiting for Ekyt to return. He ran into Violet on the way. She was looking for Shadow. Ekyt shrugged, then walked briskly forward. Sonic didn't know what Ekyt was up to, but he let him alone, feeling that the kid had taken enough crap. Ekyt made his way toward the airstrip, fastening his coat.

Okay, whenever you're ready Tails. The Bi-Plane took off. They flew for only about twenty minutes, when something hit them, hard. Not good! We've gotta land! Tails shouted. Hang on! he yelled as they plummeted toward the ground. This was gonna hurt.

114 - The Tundra Missions

It was cold. The gray and white atmosphere did nothing to improve the crew's mood. Tails, is that bird gonna fly? Ekyt asked. It should, but there's nothing else I can do until we raid that factory and destroy the assembly line. The part I need is on Robotnik's itinerary, so we should be able to get it. Alright. Ekyt turned to the others. Everyone was okay; they had all bailed out before the crash. Let's crash `Butnik's party and get back home. Mitch, Colin, and Amy have the tools, right? They all held up the various wrenches and hammers they would need to disrupt the assembly line as quickly and quietly as possible. Tails, you go with them, and get the part you need to fix the plane. I'll buy you the time.

Sonic and Violet met along the path to the Acorn Palace. Hey Vi, you seen Ekyt around? Sonic asked. Yeah, just a little while ago. How about Tails and Amy? No, can't say I have. Sonic entered to find Princess Sally puzzled. What's cookin' Sal? he asked. Sally looked up. It's these recon reports from Uncle Chuck in Robotropolis. It seems we have some friends who have been sabotaging Robotnik's supply lines. Sonic pumped a fist in the air, then stopped. So what's the problem? Robotnik's probably blowing a gasket! Sally looked troubled still. We should know who they are at least. Wait. Wait. We haven't seen Tails or Amy around. Or Ekyt. With all due respect Princess, Violet began, How could three people cause that much destruction? You should just be thankful for the help. Violet had a feeling Ekyt was the cause of all this, but he obviously didn't want anyone to know.

Hey ho fatso! Ekyt popped in. Shots from SWATbots greeted him. Thanks for the hospitality! Ekyt muttered before leading the SWATbots, and Robotnik, away from the fortress so his crew could go to work. You're losin' your step chubby! I'm barely moving! Ekyt taunted, zigzagging through the trees.

Let's work fast guys. Mitch, you get the computers crashed. Colin, you and I are gonna take apart the assembly lines. Amy, you pound the roboticizers into dust. Then we get out of here. 5 minutes later they were done. Tails fixed the plane in seconds, then saw Ekyt wasn't back. We're gonna pick him up, I know where he got them too.

Ekyt ran them through the tundra, dodging between rocks and the odd clump of trees. He heard the plane start to swoop and jumped out from behind the rock he was on. Sorry Chubby, that's my ride! Ekyt called as he jumped up onto the plane. Tails flew them back to the Mobian Badlands. But a small tracer on the plane meant they wouldn't be alone.

115 - Sally's Discovery

Ekyt! Tails said urgently, jarring Ekyt from a nap. What's up Tails? The Princess wants to see you! Is that good or bad? Tails shrugged. Well, she hasn't been in a great mood& I'm on my way. If Mitch or Colin come by, tell them that we've got the day off. Ekyt ran for the palace. He arrived, talked past the guards, and was escorted to Sally's private chamber. She was sporting a smile. You called Princess? Ekyt asked, kneeling. Don't bother. I've just got something to say to you. *Crap, banished again*, Ekyt thought. I know what you're up to, and it's great! she exclaimed. Huh?! Ekyt managed. I know you've been sabotaging Robotnik. And I'm sorry I misjudged you. That's okay ma'am, but how did&Never mind. Anything else? No, that's it. Keep it up, okay? she said with a smile. Ekyt nodded.

(Warning: Next Guardian Rant: C'mon, quit bullying Sally. Any of you who read the issues before fifty in the original comics know what I mean. I like SonAmy- but in Sonic X. For the Original Sonic, I'm stickin with Sonic/Sally!)

On the floating island, it had been quiet. Linda-Su and Knuckles were just sitting around a lot. Linda missed Ekyt. It was like Romeo and Juliet with all the secret meetings, and it sucked. Knuckles could see Julie-Su pretty much whenever he wanted, so he was less upset. But he still didn't agree with Ekyt's punishment. He didn't deserve it, and don't even consider blaming yourself. Knuckles had told her after training one day. I know, it's just unfair. She had said. Yeah. I'm still trying to reason with them, but they're not budging. They just have it in their heads that somehow a human isn't good enough for this job or, apparently, the island. So Linda-Su had an idea: Talk by messenger. And who better than the fastest guy around. Sonic agreed with them, and he would help. She was about to contact him, but he came to her. Ekyt's been discovered, but it's cool. Was all Sonic said. Linda thanked him. Give him this, okay? I owe you a chili-dog or something.

SO, WHAT DOES THE LETTER SAY? AND THE BANISHMENT? KEEP READING!!!

116 - Two More into the Fray

So we've been discovered? Mitch asked anxiously. Colin, Tails, Amy, and Mitch were all sitting down in the shelter that Ekyt had built. Yeah. We have the Princess blessing to continue operations. I don't know how that makes everyone feel, so I want to know. Any opinions?

Tails spoke up first. I'm young, but I'm not ready to rush back to her side (See issue 92) like that. We're all equal here, but with the others, I get treated like a three-year-old. Amy Rose agreed for a different reason. She didn't like me when I first came and didn't take me seriously, just because I was younger. Mitch offered his opinion next. I'm fine as long as we can still do the work without being hindered by them. We've done fine on our own. Ekyt turned to Colin, the twelve-year-old echidna he and Linda had saved from that fire. I've never met her, so I can't say anything personally, but I think we've done enough damage to stay around. But I think we should disappear. *That* statement earned him some looks. Ekyt was interested, partly because it sounded like something he would say. I mean, we should take a couple new members, get a new hideout, because, to be honest, we're all younger, and we could use more firepower in battle. Nobody could argue with that statement. Who did you have in mind?

Ekyt and Colin, as the two founders of the group, met the two girls on the edge of Knothole. So *that's* what you were up to. Tiffany commented. Pretty slick. Eden nodded in agreement. So how does that involve us, though? she asked. Ekyt and Colin exchanged glances, then Ekyt answered. Well, Tiffany, you're an ultimate life form, which could help us tremendously when we can't avoid conflict. And Eden, you've got a cool head, and medical knowledge. So you can stop us from doing something stupid, and then patch us up when we do. Ekyt reasoned. The two girls exchanged glances. I'm in. Me too. Awesome! Colin exclaimed. Ekyt had to stop himself from snickering. It was pretty obvious that Colin had something of a crush on Tiffany. He was still in his girls-are-gross faze, or so he thought.

King Acorn rapped on Sally's door. Sally? Sally, I-hmm? What's this? King Acorn read the paper. It was basically a summary of Ekyt and his group's actions. My daughter planned to support this&How do I handle it. I think I have other plans for those misfits&

So we need a new hiding spot, and we can't have anyone else in, or we risk discovery again. Any suggestions? Ekyt asked. Nobody had any ideas. Okay, first thing is to get out of Knothole, out of our old shelter, and go somewhere else. Of Course! Robotropolis! Ekyt snapped his fingers. The group looked shocked. That's our enemy's headquarters! Why would we-, Tails started. Ekyt cut him off. Because who would suspect it. We've got just the contact through Sonic's Uncle Chuck. He's working undercover there. Besides, I'm banished from just about everywhere else. Ekyt said, rolling his eyes. I've got to get the message to Linda-Su&But how. Sonic stopped just short of Ekyt, who jumped. No coffee for me, thanks! Ekyt called to Sonic. Sonic grinned proudly. Gotta letter for ya from your girlfriend on the island. She wants to correspond with you via the hedgehog express-meaning me, of course! Works for me. Watcha got? Ekyt opened the letter.

Ekyt,
Be careful, I read a little farther into the
Bylaws of the guardians, and if you're caught

Doing this, things get worse.
I can't say what in case someone gets this,
But meet me at our usual spot.

Linda-Su

I'm gonna go handle this. You guys go ahead and rendezvous with Chuck. This is private. The group made an ohhhh! Sound. Yes, yes, she is my girlfriend! Ekyt answered, amused.

TO BE CONTINUED

117 - King Acorn's Wrath

Ekyt made the solitary trek to Mt. Fate. Where he had met Linda-Su&had been arrested&good times. But from the way she wrote the note, she sounded urgent. Something was up. Ekyt got to the top and found himself staring down the barrel of five rifles. Paul the raccoon, Geoffrey Saint John, Heavy, Bomb, and Wombat Stu all stood in front of him. Linda-Su had a rifle pressed to her head too. The king wishes to speak with you Ekyt. Paul informed him. Oh yeah? Well, let s go. Oh, and Geoff? Ekyt said. Yeah mate? St. John answered sarcastically. If you don t take that rifle away from her head, I will make sure they never find your remains. Geoffrey put down the rifle.

King Acorn paced back and forth. The trench-coat clad scoundrel strolled through the door, bowing before approaching. I want you gone. I know what you ve done, and while your intentions have been good, you are still breaking the law, and working on my last nerve. King Acorn commented. Ekyt said nothing. You have been disgracing the Kingdom of Acorn, and now I want you gone. At this point, Sally and Elias ran into the room. Dad, don t do it! I gave him permission! I told him he was helping! Sally exclaimed. Dad, it s true! He served me well when I was king. Silence! the King thundered. You may be my children, but I m still King. And I say he s banished! Ekyt s heart leapt into his throat, but he kept his composure as the King continued to abuse him verbally. I will lift the sentence if you tell me one thing- *who else has been working with you?!* Ekyt looked him in the eye. No one. I did it all.

Nonsense! You couldn t have. If I found out you ve been lying, I will have you executed. Now tell me who helped you! I work alone. Ask anyone. Ekyt answered. The King bent closer to Ekyt. Fine. Say your goodbyes. I know you re not welcome on the floating island, and you re not welcome here. So where will you go? the King taunted. Robotropolis to continue my work. Ekyt answered. He turned to leave, kneeling before Elias and Sally. He made a show of kissing her hand and whispering to her Have Sonic meet me outside Robotropolis. He left.

Mitch, Colin, Tails, Tiffany, and Eden were the rest of the group. Sonic zipped up to them and gave them Ekyt s message. Colin and Tails are in charge. I ll clear the path, head to rendezvous point, ensure no one follows. Colin spoke up for the first time as leader. We should go in pairs. Mitch, you go with Eden. Tails, you fly the plane with Amy. Tiffany and I will go last. The whole group agreed. Tiffany was starting to sense that maybe Colin was interested in being friends. Maybe more than friends. Now wasn t the time to think about that, though.

Linda-Su shook her head. I knew it. I ve got to do something about this. He s banned everywhere but Robotropolis. But there s no way he would be crazy enough to live there. She was talking with Knuckles and Julie-Su. They exchanged glances before Julie voiced her opinion. Sis&how to put this&your boyfriend there has been killed for you, he proposed to you as the Dark Legion was going to hang him. To get to the point, he s nuts! He s going to Robotropolis. Knuckles agreed. Yeah, but you know, he s smart enough not to walk into Robotnik s clutches. But, you do what you need to do. You know him better than us. Linda had two pistols, along with a folding-stock shotgun across her back, and a combat knife at her waist. I ll be back. I think I ve got a way he can be back on the island.

118 - Next Stop: Robotropolis

Sonic was tapping his foot, waiting for Ekyt. What's up? He asked. Okay, I'm banned from Knothole too, and the King knows about my group, but not that we're in Robotropolis. And he doesn't know who's in it. That's where you come in, Sonic. How's that. Everything we do, you take credit for if it gets noticed. You sure? Yeah, it's the only way this will work. If you're sure. Sally and Elias know, and they're cool with us helping, so you can keep them informed. And Linda-Su too.

Mitch, Colin, Tails, Amy, Tiffany, and Eden all met Ekyt at the spot he mentioned. They were joined by Uncle Chuck, who led them down into a bunked full of electronic equipment, weapons, everything they would need. Ekyt looked around and decided that if he had to live in Robotropolis, this was *the* place.

And here you're under the wire, so to speak. Uncle Chuck told them. I'll stop in. But right now I've got to get back to Robotnik's assembly lines.

Mitch was immediately enthralled by the technology. Eden looked somewhat uncomfortable. Tiffany was playing with the weapons. Colin was watching Tiffany. Tails and Amy were exploring. That left Ekyt guarding the door. Four other people could get here. Sally, Sonic, Elias, and Linda-Su. He hoped that he wouldn't get banished from here too, he was running out of options.

Linda ran from rock to rock, out of sight of the guard bots. Her pistols barked and the buzzbombers flying around fell in a flaming heap. She crawled forward, seeing a lone swatbot. Its legs fell prey to her knife, then its head was severed. Inch by inch, she crawled to the place Sonic told her about. She got to the door, and, not knowing what to expect, she held the shotgun at the ready.

Ekyt heard the knock and signaled for everyone to take cover. He counted to five and opened the door, his knife ready to thrust. He was facing a shotgun. He knew that pink arm and white glove though.

Linda? Ekyt? Oh thank God! He let her in and closed the door. She wasted no time showing her affection. KISS! Hey, there are kids in the room! Tails yelled. Shut up Tails! Isn't it romantic? Amy said, tickling him under the chin. Colin was still staring at Tiffany. Eden made a show of looking away, a smile on her face. Mitch gave the two a look, shrugged, and went back to his keyboard. I'm glad you made it! Ekyt said to her. A horde of swatbots couldn't stop me. I think that's how many I took out. she said, smiling, eyes twinkling. And best of all, I don't need to be back right away! And when I do, you can come with me! I know how to get you back on the island! Ekyt's eyes widened. Really? That's great! But that'll have to wait, I'm still getting settled here. He looked around. Well, it's not Haven, but it'll do.

What mischief are you up to first? Linda asked. Amy answered Robotnik's cafeteria! I'm starving! The whole group agreed. That's my group. Food first. Ekyt said, shaking his head. I've never seen you eat. Linda commented. That's why I'm 115 pounds soaking wet.

Colin had been watching Tiffany the whole time, trying to get the courage up to talk to her. But he was the one of the youngest here, and was nervous. To him, Tiffany was, like, the ultimate girl. The most approachable one here, Ekyt, was kinda busy. So he went over to Eden. Eden, can I talk to you for a sec? he asked. Eden smiled kindly. Sure. He led her away from the group. I think I have a crush on Tiffany, but, well, I, he stuttered. You don't know how to tell her? Eden asked him gently. He nodded shyly, looking down at his blue and white sneakers. Have you tried talking to her? What, no! I've never felt like this, I don't know what to do. He said quietly, blushing. Don't worry. I bet she notices you first.

Really? What have I done? I'm not a techno-geek like Mitch, and I'm not, well, whatever Ekyt is? That would be a tossup between crazy and heroic. I don't know which. Eden chuckled. But don't worry, she'll notice you, you're as much of a hero as anyone here.

Tiffany waited until Colin was busy before she went over to Eden. Let me guess, he wants my attention,

right? she said with a half-smile. I think he's got it bad for you Tiff. He can't even talk straight when he was describing you. I have that effect, Tiffany said with a grin. I see your modest is in full force. Eden said. Anyway, I told him you would probably notice him before he got courageous enough to talk to you. I'll just make that prophecy ring true. Tiffany answered. Eden had one other question. Wait, how do you feel about him? Tiffany didn't have an answer.

119 - OHHH WHAT A RUSH!

Robotnik's minion saw the human, and fired. It watched as the missile sailed true. Then, through the dust, came Ekyt and Colin, ripping it to shreds. Nice one! Now let's finish this up and get out of here! Wait, where are the others? Ekyt saw them now, surrounded by SWATbots.

Surrender-or-they-will-perish! A SWATbot declared. Fine. Ekyt said, but his voice wasn't alone. Linda-Su was next to him. Let the others go, and don't follow them, and you'll have us. Linda called out. A-Fair-trade. You-two-are-high-on-master-Robotnik's-to-do-list. Well, you've got us. Maybe you'll be promoted to senior moron. Linda snarled. They were handcuffed and led away. Colin, you and Tails are in charge! Do not rescue us!

Colin led the others back. Things looked grim. Colin finally realized that if he was ever going to be a leader, he had to, well, take the lead. That meant talking to Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) first. Tiff, I've got a confession to make. He told her. She looked surprised. I-I think I have a crush on you. Tiffany was stunned he'd admit it. That's so sweet! But I don't know&You're a little young for me. But you know what, in a couple of years, maybe it'll be different. She kissed him on the forehead. Well, that was awkward. He commented. No time to enjoy that now. Gang, we've gotta rescue Linda and Ekyt.

But they said not to. Well, by rescue I mean we let them free themselves, we just cause the diversion they need. I think blowing a factory would do it. That means Mitch, you make the bombs. Tails, you get the O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA, I liked the name.) aircraft ready to fly. Tiffany, you, me, and Tails have weapon duty. That means Eden and Amy have supplies. Everyone okay with that? He asked. No one objected. Alright, let's get to work.

Alright, chubby, you've got us, now what. What's that, ex-guardian? I thought you said something. I guess it was just the wind. It's not you so much I need as her. Ekyt followed his finger to Linda. And why do you need her. She can tell me where the chaos emeralds are. No she can't. Ekyt laughed. Eh? Why not. She doesn't know. *I'm* the guardian. A blatant lie, but he couldn't let Linda suffer for something he had started. Heck, he didn't have it in him to let her suffer. I think I'll just torture you both until one of you talks. The SWATbots tied Linda to a chair, while chaining Ekyt up by his arms. Where are the emeralds? Have you tried checking inside your stomach? You've eaten everything else. WHAP! That little comment earned Ekyt a stiff punch to the face. Linda winced. Robotnik charged up a taser. This is at 25000 volts. It can go higher, depending on whether you talk or not. Not. ZAP! Ekyt went limp, his lip bleeding, his side burned from the taser. Linda couldn't take it anymore. I'll tell you where the emeralds are! He told me! They're... They're in the Zone of Silence! Ekyt blurted out. He was backhanded by Robotnik. He's right. Linda said. *Please let this lie pay off!* If that's true, perhaps you two wouldn't mind retrieving them for me? Robotnik cackled. Problem, el fatso. If we get the emeralds, what would stop us from using them to escape? Or worse? Did your 300 IQ genius mind consider that? Ekyt shot at Robotnik. Hmmm... you make a good point Ekyt. I'll simply send my minions to retrieve them. In the meantime, you two can share my deluxe cell. I hope the accommodations are to your favor.

The cell had one bed, a window, toilet, sink, and bars. Ekyt shrugged off his coat and handed it to Linda. So you don't get cold tonight. He said by way of explanation. No, you're at least sitting next to me! (No, not sleeping together! Next to each other. Ahh, why am I explaining this, you know my stuff is G (well, PG) rated!- N.G.) Ekyt did as he was told. Linda huddled up close to him, genuinely scared. Ekyt

was too, but he couldn't show it. For her sake. She closed her eyes, head on his chest, and tried to sleep. Ekyt stared ahead angrily. Angry for getting her into this mess. Angry about being in this mess at all. Angry that he let his team down. Angry about the past. He sighed deeply enough that Linda stirred. The next sound they heard woke her up.

Tails piloted the plane while Mitch prepared to release the bombs over the factory. Drop 'em! Tiffany, you and Eden have 5 minutes to find and extract them while the rest of us keep the SWATbots occupied! GO! Tiffany jumped off the plane, landed on her feet, and hit the ground running.

Cover your ears! Ekyt shouted to Linda. He followed suit. *That's my team. I hope they can do this.* At that point, the wall nearest Linda gave way. Tiffany crawled through, followed by Eden. Miss us? You bet! But I thought I said don't rescue us? You were a side mission. Eden said with a smile. Fair enough. Let's get out of here. Chaos Control to the site? Ekyt asked Tiffany. You betcha. Good to have ya back in action boss. Aw, that's nice Tiff. I try. You've had a hard enough day, by the looks of it. Oh, not too bad. Ekyt commented, remembering the few hours Linda had been napping next to him. Eden rolled her eyes. Sorry. Maybe I'll write a book or something. CHAOS CONTROL!

Next Issue: The Big Fight, and the Welcome Back (Not saying if it's a good welcome or a bad welcome, though!)

120 - Sacrifices Must be Made

The fight wasn't much. Ekyt and his team had it down. Until the arrival of Ekyt's chief enemy showed. The Dark Legion had returned. And Kragok and Lien-Da had decided it was time to end Ekyt's tenure. Instantly, hundreds, maybe thousands of Echidnas, all armed surrounded the small group. Linda-Su was safely hidden, but the others were caught. Ekyt stepped forward. We meet again. Kragok sneered.

Yeah, you know me, resilient. Ekyt commented coolly. Stuff it. Kragok snarled. You know, you're like a turd that just won't flush Kragok. As for your sister there, she's, well.. how do I put this nicely.. She's kinda like a mosquitoes, ugly, annoying, probably serves some purpose but nobody knows. Anyway, let's deal, like usual. As you can see, the guardian isn't here. Just me. So, you let my crew go, you get me. You think I'll fall for that? You'll get rescued at the last minute, like always. Lien-Da spoke up.

Since all my friends, save for these, are dead, then that would be unlikely. How did my sister meet her fate? Kragok asked, interested. She was killed by the brotherhood. Too bad. Oh well. Your time is up. No last requests this time. Kragok pulled out his proton gun. Ekyt stepped forward, so only he would get hit. Noble to the end? Very well.. Perhaps I'll help you lose some of that attitude.. I don't have attitude Kragok. I wish I did. People with attitude always seem to get away. But I get ostracized for everything. So go ahead, shoot. You know I won't move, you might shoot one of my few remaining friends. Give me ten seconds to say goodbye, then you can take your shot, then they leave. Keep in mind, you've killed me before, and I've come back. So you'd better live up to your end of the bargain.

You're not gonna do it are you? Eden asked anxiously. I have no choice. Listen, all of you. Colin is the official leader. My last order is bring Linda-Su back to the floating Island alive. And do not come back for me. I don't want any of you to see what they do with their dead.. Ekyt steered Colin away. It's all up to you bud. Keep the group together. What's gonna happen to you? Colin asked. You don't wanna know. Ekyt, my parents are dead. They died from inhaling the smoke from the fire. I only lived because of you and Linda. I can handle it. Tell me! Ekyt sighed, but guessed Colin was old enough to know.

They're gonna shoot me, hang me, then leave. I know what you're thinking, and I don't want you to come back here and give me a proper burial or anything like that. Just notify King Acorn of my death. Ekyt paused for a moment, letting the twelve-year-old hug him. You're like the brother I never had Colin. Or the son I'll never get to raise. He gave him a brief smile, shook hands with the Tails and Mitch, hugged Amy and Eden, and paused before Tiffany. Thanks for the save. He told her. A lot of good it did you. She said somberly. Hey, you think I'm not gonna go out with a bang? Relax. As soon as he pulls the trigger, chaos control everyone out of here. With what? They took my emerald! Ekyt handed her his ring. Get them out of here. He hugged her, then walked back. Alright. Take your shot. I assume you're going to hang me after? No, we're not taking any chances, we're gonna kill you. Ekyt punched him in the face. So, I'm not worth the extra effort? Hey, check this out! He kissed Lien-Da, then tossed her into a group of soldiers. So take your shot wise guy! Ekyt taunted. Kragok aimed. You've been a formidable enemy. Kragok sneered. BANG! But not formidable enough. Good Riddance.

Crying slightly, Tiffany mumbled Chaos Control and the group disappeared. As for Ekyt, no miracles were to be found. The bullet had pierced him between the eyes. Dead on impact. It was a picture Colin could scarcely forget. To him, it was the passing of a mentor, a brother, a leader, a friend. He swore that he would get revenge.

Sire, a Master Colin here to see you. The guard, Paul the raccoon informed him. A fan? Let him in.

The King stood up to greet his subject. Colin walked firmly in the room. Ah, young Colin, what brings you here? King Acorn asked. A death notice sire. The child sounded lifeless, he noted. But cold. It happened with death. And whose death is it? the King asked kindly. You might know him *sire*. Watch your tone lad. I understand you re upset. Now, tell me who died, and how. Ekyt, murdered by the Dark Legion. The King sat down hard. What on Mobius happened. I m not going to say sir. I will tell you that the bullet he took was your kingdom. Nonsense! He hated me! Wrong sire. You hated him. He wanted to help, and you shunned it. WATCH YOUR TONE! King Acorn roared. YOU AS GOOD AS KILLED HIM! Colin snarled back. He told me to tell you. And this is how you receive the news, how you react. Thought for you to consider, your majesty: How will your kids take the news? Or Sonic? Colin stamped out of the room.

Linda-Su was inconsolable. I can t believe it! Some guardian I am, I can t even guard the love of my life! she openly cried. Tiffany tried to comfort her. It s not your fault! Linda got up, but was forced to sit back down because of her leg. Tiffany s right. You had nothing to do with it. Eden said calmly, reassuring her. Curse the brotherhood! They as good as pulled that trigger! When they banished him, they tore his heart out!

Ekyt sat up. The familiar red area of the echidna after life greeted him. Welcome back! Aurora said, kissing his cheek. Yeah. I know I m not going anywhere this time. Well, brother Athair and Grandfather Hawking wish to see you before you make any rash decisions. She smiled. I lost this one Aurora. Maybe not. They might have a solution for you. Indeed we do Ekyt. Grandfather Hawking and Athair, strode forward. I have talked with my grandson, you know him as Locke. Yeah, what about him. Ekyt asked angrily. Then stopped. I m sorry. You were saying. You have merit. Our solution is unorthodox to say the least, but you have at least earned the chance. You just have to agree to one thing..

NEXT ISSUE: WHAT S THE SOLUTION? AND HOW IS KING ACORN GOING TO DEAL WITH COLIN? STAY TUNED!

IF YOU ENJOY NEXT GUARDIAN, RECOMMEND IT TO A FRIEND!

121 - A Coffin or a Casket?

Colin gulped before beginning. As you have all heard by now, Ekyt fell yesterday. He sacrificed himself to keep us alive. Now, it's up to all of you, but I feel it would be a poor way to repay his sacrifice if we just gave up because some so-called monarch said so. King Acorn as good as pulled that trigger. But that's the past, and there's nothing we can do. He gave me specific instructions *not* to find his body. That was his last wish, and I'm going to honor that. We need to stay strong and support each other. Linda-Su was torn between anger and grief. Tiffany tried to stay strong for the group. Mitch, Tails, Amy, and Eden were all openly sad, but staying firm. And Colin was the leader. Colin looked at the group, instantly deciding on their next action. I saw we openly secede from Knothole Village and King Acorn's reign. The group gapsed. You can't be serious! That would be suicide! Mitch exclaimed. He's right. But what choice do we have? Tails asked. Amy agreed. There's no peaceful solution, is there? Eden said to no one in particular. No. The single word uttered from the twelve year old lingered in the bunker. Not for a long time. This is something I can't forgive or forget. At that moment the hatch opened, revealing Sonic and Uncle Chuck.

Hey, why so glum guys? Sonic asked. Ekyt's dead. The first time Linda-Su had spoken. What?! Sonic had to sit down for a second. Robuttnik! If I ever-.. No. The Dark Legion killed him. Tiffany said, patting Linda's shoulder sympathetically. Eden, who seemed to dislike Sonic, put it aside. He made a deal where they got him in exchange for us. He stepped forward and they..they..pulled the trigger. Tails filled in next. Right between the eyes. Tiffany got us out of there before he even hit the ground. But he was already dead. Nothing we could have done. Colin's anger flared up suddenly. This is King Acorn's fault! He as good as killed him! I will never be a part of his kingdom! Uncle Chuck took Colin to the back. I know how you must feel. I mean, I built the original roboticizer, and watched my brother become a mindless metal monster. This is in no way your fault. But you shouldn't blame the King either. He's only doing what he feels is best. We may not agree, but refusal is.. Refusal is respect to Ekyt's memory! Imagine being banished from your home world- twice! Uncle Chuck nodded. Most people see my robotic skin, and that's it. They don't care to learn anything else. But you know, it's not the outside that counts.. Oh yeah? Then why is the only human in the kingdom or the floating island always blamed. Too late, he's dead now, and there's nothing I can do. Chuck sighed. You've got the makings of a great leader Colin. But don't do anything rash.

Now, with that pest out of my way, I can concentrate on my next target. Lien-Da, if you please.. Certainly Kragok. A slideshow was shown to the Dark Legion supporters of their next target and all they knew about him. Knuckles was next on their list. Have we any volunteers to face the valiant guardian. Kragok snickered. One hooded echidna stood up. I'll take the job. And you are? Kragok asked. My name isn't important. What I can offer you is. Fine. Bring me the guardian. As you wish Master. Give me six months. I have no patience for.. My plan takes time, Kragok. It will not fail. The hooded echidna left.

The bunker was still somber. It didn't help they couldn't properly bury Ekyt. And Linda never got to say goodbye. But somehow she knew exactly what happened, replaying the gruesome image over and over. She could just see him, standing in front of the others, daring Kragok. Taunting him. Buying them time. Then taking his execution like a man. It was in slow motion, the bullet hitting him, folding to his knees,

laying face down. Then nothing. It was so unfair. She sat down at the desk that been his. It felt awkward, empty, disturbing. But at the same time, she felt like she belonged.

Sirens went off in the bunker. They were under attack. The little group was outnumbered horribly, but fought on. Injuries on both sides piled up. The hooded echidna (From before, don't forget him!) pushed his way through the crowd. The guardian is my task alone. Be gone, all of you, or you face Kragok's wrath! For emphasis, he bashed the nearest soldier in the face. As you wish. The commander said hesitantly. Good. Don't ever intrude on one of my jobs, or it will be your head next. That goes for all of YOU! he yelled at the stunned soldiers, who scrambled for the exit. When he turned back, the whole group surrounded him. Bad move scum! Linda snarled. You're mine! The likes of you have no place in this world. The hooded echidna's voice softened. I sent them away for a reason, please, give me a chance to explain. Or at least make myself a little more familiar.. He tore off the hood, the front, and shortened the hem. No mistake about it. That was Ekyt. My God.. Tiffany uttered. It's you! In the flesh. Well, not the original, but it's only temporary. Ekyt said, forcing a smile. Turning to Colin, he whispered How do you walk around naked like that? This feels weird! Colin smiled. You get used to it. I'm just glad you're back! Thanks. But right now, I'd better go to the back. I'm guessing Linda's at my desk. At Colin's nod, Ekyt knocked. Come in. Answered a somber voice.

NEXT ISSUE: LINDA-SU'S REACTION TO THE NEW EKYT. PLUS, I'M REVEALING THE TITLE: MAKING AMENDS! SEE YOU NEXT ISSUE GANG. SO, CHECK IT OUT, CAUSE NG DOES WHAT OTHERS WON'T!

122 - Making Amends

Linda-Su ran woke with a start. She was still at Ekyt's desk. She had woken in a cold sweat, the dream she had startling her.

Dream sequence:

Linda stood on the stage next to Ekyt. She couldn't move or speak, but she could see. And think. That was the hard part. She watched the noose tighten around his neck. Any last requests? The executioner asked the human. More pale than usual, Ekyt answered. Linda could just barely hear his response, as if he were a mile away. I want to marry her. He got down on one knee. She tried to respond, but couldn't. As if as X-ray, she could see his heart break as he somberly stood up again. He fell through the stage, the hundreds congregated laughing. His neck hadn't broken, so he was to strangle to death. She tried to help him, but couldn't. Finally, the life left his eyes. He never struggled. Because she broke his heart. She. Broke. His. Heart. She didn't know how to live with herself. That wasn't a problem, because the noose was around her neck. Even though the scene made no sense, seeing as though he was dead, Linda saw Ekyt kissing Lien-Da. Her evil half sister. She began to sob, when the executioner leaned close to tell her. It's okay. You're already dead. Linda had wings. She was dead and didn't even know it. Ekyt smiled at her and kissed Lien-Da as a force pulled Linda-Su upward. She tried to scream, but no sound came out.

Then she awoke.

End Dream sequence.

As she was trying to collect herself, a light rap came on the door. Come in. She answered somberly. Her heart was beating a mile a minute. She pulled a gun on the echidna that walked in, but then immediately could tell who it was. It was Ekyt. *Her* Ekyt. She didn't question it, she got up, shaking, and reached a hand out, not daring to believe that he was alive in front of her. He reached out a hand of his own. Though it wasn't like before. His hand had pointed knuckles, similar to a certain red echidna, but with a full set of fingers. And his gloves were black. Linda actually had to step back and look at him. I can't believe it. She said, not daring to believe it yet. She did when he hugged her. I'm real. And this is temporary; he said, referring to his new body, , unless you like it. I have to be like this for six months. After that, I'm free to be human again. Linda looked frazzled. Is something wrong? Ekyt asked, already knowing the answer. I-I just had this awful dream, and I know it's silly, I'm fifteen years old, but for a minute, I thought..maybe it was.. Did I.. It's not your fault. Ekyt told her firmly. What matters is I'm alive, and I intend to make them pay for hurting you. And killing me. He looked at himself, for the second time. What do you think? Be honest. Linda looked him up and down. Give me time to adjust. Besides, it's who you are that matters, not what you look like. I wish everyone else had that attitude. Ekyt said. Maybe me being one of them will change that. Linda nodded, then bit her lip as she had something else on her mind. Ekyt.. I'm having some trouble.. And I need your help.. As she was about to elaborate, Ekyt perked up. Hold on. He said quietly, going to the door, past the others. Violet (Violet_Rose) was at the door, escorted by a wary-looking Sonic.

I need to speak with the echidna in charge. That'd be me, Blue. Ekyt said with a grin. *Man, having*

fangs is cool! And these knuckles rock! Wha? I thought you were dead man. Oh, after you've died seven times, it's not so bad anymore. What's up? Violet's having some trouble with Shadow, and she needs your help. Shadow? But I thought you two were.. Ekyt gestured vaguely. Not anymore. I met someone else (Sega, Segathehedgehog's char, for the record. He'll be in soon Sega!) and Shadow was a tad jealous.. A tad? Ekyt asked, eyes widened. Okay, he threatened to chaos blast me to kingdom come. Can your group keep an eye on her? Yeah, no problem. Oh, by the way, would you do me a favor? What's that bud? It's the least I can do as a Welcome back from the dead present. Will you ask King Acorn and Locke to grant me an audience (Meaning to meet them- N.G.). It's time to make amends.

123 - I'm Amazed

King Acorn was surprised to hear that he was alive. Purposely, Sonic didn't tell him that Ekyt was now an echidna. As much contempt as I hold for the lad, tell him my ear is open. King Acorn said after some thought. When the blood-red echidna walked in with the shock of dark brown hair bouncing merrily, in contrast to its owner's face. I'm here to apologize for any wrong-doing, and problems I have caused you. When your trust is limited, you go to extremes, and that is no doubt what I did. Ekyt answered. I feel I have burned a bridge I should never have bothered looking at. King Acorn was genuinely moved by Ekyt's words. Perhaps I was hasty in my judgment of you, seeing only the outside. You're one of us, and I'm sorry I ever said otherwise. I hereby grant you your knighthood back, and welcome you to the realm. The banishment is lifted.

Locke was more difficult. You broke many of our time-honored traditions. Locke began. Was I not right to do what the people needed? Yes, but when feasible, you should have stayed within our parameters. It wasn't always feasible, and the course of action I chose to take in each situation was not detrimental to the island or to the credibility of the guardian. Are you saying there was an outside circumstance? Locke countered. Ekyt answered with a prompt Yes. When Locke wanted to know why, Ekyt answered him with was directly on his chest, er, fur. I was ostracized because I was human, and the long in-bred distrust of my former kind was a black mark against me from the start. Locke couldn't deny it. Linda-Su has expressed her wish to go back to police work, so perhaps you can be reinstated. But I need 3 of five votes..

In the room to vote, Thunderhawk, Sojourner, Locke, Athair, and Archimedes cast their votes. Thunderhawk and Sojourner were against his return. Athair and Archimedes wanted his reinstatement. Locke's vote would decide it.

Ekyt waited nervously outside. Linda-Su went in and told her version of Ekyt's actions. Eden (Violet_Rose) and Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) did the same. While their accounts were positive, Locke wasn't sure he was convinced. When he called his son, Knuckles, in to testify, his son gave him advice as though he were the less experienced. Dad, you once told me that how hard someone works and what they have to show for it were the two most important traits you could look for. I've since added loyalty to that list, with the betrayals (Knuckles is referring to his mother trying to kill Ekyt) in our own family, wouldn't loyalty be more important? Locke adjourned to Haven to ponder the question. Hours later, almost a full day since Ekyt had asked his audience, Locke answered. Welcome back.

Ekyt's world had fallen into place. He was a guardian again. His group was alive, and would continue to operate with him leading when possible. Colin was responsible to handle the day-to-day problems. He could relax, and he couldn't wait to tell Linda.

You're okay with this Linda? Ekyt asked, worried. Are you kidding? I hated being a guardian, I just didn't want someone else to get it. You didn't stop guarding, title or not. Ekyt still looked grim. This feels weird. I mean, talking to you normally but standing in front of you, a totally different species of animal. It's fascinating, but disturbing at the same time. He said, looking at his body. Linda gave him a concerned look. You're still you. Just a different body. You're fine either way. If you're like this for six

months, try to get comfortable. It's amazing. I wanted to fit in, and now that I can.. I know. I've been meaning to say something too. Linda-Su looked away. I-I..? A whip cracked near them. Touching. Too bad you didn't stay dead. Maybe this way I'll get some fun out of it.

WHO'S THE ATTACKER? AND KURT AND TIFFANY? WHO SAW THAT COMING?!

IT'S LIKE I SAID, NG DOES WHAT OTHERS WON'T!

124 - Hectic

Ekyt knew who had the whip. Lien-Da. What is it this-.. Ekyt stopped. She hadn't come alone. Thirty echidnas with guns. Not good, not when you consider they're facing two echidnas with no guns. Where do all of you come from? Is there a moron factory churning you out? From all sides, the hooded echidnas rushed. Seems we've struck a chord. Linda said with a laugh. So it would seem. Uppercut, back fist, kick, back kick. You guys are so predictable. Ekyt said with a shake of his head. Then he got zapped with a cattle prod. Didn't see that coming! he choked out. Linda-Su disposed of the echidna with the cattle prod. Ekyt got up, fought, before he realized that it was pointless. Linda? I think it's time to leave. She looked at him questioningly. I can glide now. Yeah, but leaving a fight? It's pointless, these losers just keep coming! A smart crack with the whip brought him back to his normal self. Scratch that. He yanked the whip away, and with it the wench wielding it went wildly through the air. (Say that 5 times fast- NG) Without Lien-Da directing them, they were easy pickings for two skilled fighters. Just the grunts. Ekyt looked down at the whip, then smiled wickedly and cracked it at the horde of echidnas. Wimps! Linda-Su exclaimed. Light workout. Ekyt commented. Then they heard frantic footsteps.

Colin looked up from his desk. Being in charge, he tried to keep everyone happy and working together. How are you holding up Violet? (Violet_Rose) he asked her. She looked a little shaken up. How would you feel if a jealous ex-boyfriend, genocidal, ultimate life form was hunting you? she asked quietly. You'll be safe here. He assured her. Tails, Amy, and Mitch were working on some new weapons. Mitch was working on a way to hack Robotnik's computer system undetected. Tails and Amy were making actual weapons. Between Tails' designs and Amy's talented hands, they had quite a batch coming. Eden (Violet_Rose) was talking to Sunny (Violet_Rose) about what happened. Sunny's golden eyes were wide at the details. Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) was taking a break after a lot of chaos controlling, collecting parts and whatnot. Suddenly, with a crack, the now-familiar green hedgehog landed gracefully in front of them. Hey Kurt! they all called. Sorry about that.. Kurt started to say, but stopped, realizing he didn't know her name. I'm Tiffany. It's nice to meet you! *Really nice*, he thought. Shaking his head, he asked Are my parents around? Colin called out They should be back anytime. A knock came at the door. Suddenly, it burst open. A certain irate ultimate life form scattered the freedom fighters. Where is she?! Shadow snarled at Tails. Forget it! Tails responded. Shadow threw him into the wall, chaos controlled him back, and did it again. Colin got up quickly, ducked a chaos spear attack, and jumped over Shadow. As Shadow turned to swat him out of the air, Amy took him down with a hammer to the knee. C'mon bro, enough is enough! Tiffany tried to reason with Shadow. Shadow shoved her. Kurt roared forward in a spindash, except for the fact he glowed green from chaos powers. Shadow's powers wouldn't affect him. Kurt blasted into Shadow at top speed.

Ekyt and Linda-Su heard the commotion and raced toward the bunker. Ekyt kicked the door in and grabbed Shadow. What on earth are you doing? Shadow punched Ekyt. Since his fist was so close, Ekyt decided to try out his fangs. He bit down hard. Shadow tried to shake him off, but Ekyt's new spiky knuckles cracked Shadow's face again and again. Shadow pulled out a gun. I didn't want it to come to this, but I will kill each and everyone one of you. He hit Colin and started toward Violet. She stared defiantly ahead, almost daring Shadow to try something. Ekyt charged into Shadow, but Shadow hit him with a homing attack. Once. Twice. Three Times. Four times. Those spikes on him hurt like heck. Kurt recovered from his blast. I got him Dad! Kurt used a strange version of Chaos control. Shadow

disappeared. Everyone slumped back. Ekyt's chest was bleeding from the spikes, but no one else was hurt. Unfortunately, all that fighting revealed their position to some unwanted guests.

126 - Silver's Quest

Co-Author Credit to Shadowthe_Hedgehog

Tiffany. Shadow's solemn voice greeted Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) and Kurt. What do you want? Kurt snarled, stepping forward. Relax Kurt. I'll deal with him. Kurt stepped back, glaring at Shadow. What is it you want? I want you to be back on the right side Tiffany. You're siding with humans and hedgehogs, and they..- won't be around much longer. Tiffany took a deep breath. Forget it Shadow. You're my brother, but if you think for one second I'll let you kill of my friends, you're wrong. Dead Wrong. I guess you leave me no choice sister. He took a swipe at Tiffany, who stepped back. The professor must have given me all the common sense. Tiffany kept dodging, not willing to hit her brother. He landed a shot to her temple, prompting Kurt to charge. Shadow tangled with Kurt. Tiffany had seen enough. Okay Bro, you brought this on yourself.

Silver stared at the four unconscious forms. *This is wrong and you know it Silver.* His conscience again. *No, it's not. They must be stopped. **No, you're wrong.*** Silver angrily rubbed his temples. He watched the echidna stir. That one was Ekyt. The others awoke seconds later. I'm killing the girl first. He said simply. Linda-Su stepped forward, willing to take it for the rest, but Ekyt stepped in front of her. Silver, if you have any shred of dignity, take me first. That seemed to strike home with the hedgehog. Fine. Unapologetically, Silver attacked. It didn't seem to do anything to Ekyt. But then, slowly, his skin peeled off. Ekyt collapsed on the floor. Linda-Su choked back tears of sadness and anger. You monster. Was all she could manage. You're next. Silver told her. Not quite. Ekyt?! It was, but he was human again, and holding one of the chaos emeralds.

Tiffany started out the fight losing because of her unwillingness to attack Shadow. Finally, she landed a hard hit to Shadow's face. That's enough Shadow. You know as well as I do this is stupid. Shadow responded by charging again. Tiffany's eyes turned red and she swept him away. You're making a huge mistake. She said calmly. Says you. I say all humans and those who sympathize with them are scum. Chaos spear! Chaos Storm! Tiffany countered. The attacks canceled each other out. The two had similar powers, so it was a stalemate for a while. Tiffany, however, had common sense, which Shadow lacked. Shadow attacked blindly, while Tiffany picked her spots. Little by little, she wore Shadow down.

You survived? Silver asked, letting a little surprise leak into his voice. Ask around. I don't die so easy. Now, if you'll tell me why you decided to be genocidal, maybe we can make some sense of this situation. I'll tell you nothing. Silver said, scratching at his ear, which seemed to be bothering him.

Check your ear. Forget it, you're just trying to divert my attention. Silver lunged suddenly for the emerald. Ekyt sideswiped him and managed to attack. Silver rebounded and charged. Why are you full of energy? What I did should have killed you! Ekyt ducked again. You killed the echidna version of me. The human me has been cooped up and is bursting to get out. OOF! Silver threw him backward. Outside, Tails and Amy looked on, wincing. We've got to do something! exclaimed Amy. Yeah. Wait, those are the chaos emeralds! Tails explained. If we had fifty rings, they could all hit their ultimate forms. But where do we get fifty rings? Amy asked. The pond only gives two a day. Tails thought.

Sonic's Billionth Ring! It has special powers! It's the only chance! Ekyt hit the wall. You and your friends are the scourge of the future. I can't let you live. Silver punched the wall, as Ekyt was a touch quicker. The others, except Linda, were still unconscious. She was trying to get them awake. Silver blasted Ekyt into a concrete beam. Let's look at the odds. I'm from the future.

I'm more than an ultimate life form. I have six emeralds. *You're* human. *You* have one emerald. Bad odds for you. Ekyt spat out blood, then answered I've had worse odds. And, in case you aren't as bright as you think, I'm still alive. And while I'm alive, you won't touch them. Sonic and Knuckles were finally awake, but they couldn't move. Linda-Su could, and she formed a desperate plan. Wait, Silver, we give up. Please, let me say goodbye to him. Ekyt understood she had something in mind, and smiled when she said what. I'll do it. Ekyt shrugged off his coat. Linda, since he's going to kill me, I've got to admit it: You're the only girl for me. That's sweet of you. And you're the one for me. One kiss later, they put their plan into action. Ekyt threw his coat at Silver and dove at his leg. Linda-Su grabbed the chaos emeralds floating around his head. At that moment, Tails shouted Catch! Sonic's billionth ring came rolling toward Ekyt. He handed it to Sonic. Mix seven chaos emeralds, fifty power rings (Or a special ring) and one hopping mad hedgehog, and you've got Super Sonic.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE: NO ESCAPE

127 - Silver's Mistake

Silver threw Super Sonic aside and rubbed his temples. Ekyt suddenly fell to his knees. Images running through his head. Almost unbearable. He saw Linda-Su dead. He saw himself in exile; all his friends killed, their heads on stakes, arranged like some sick collage. He relived the pain and anxiety of every death, everything he had ever experienced. Silver used his telekinetic powers to throw Ekyt into a concrete beam. Super Sonic had seen enough and, grabbing Silver, he flew through the concrete beams and walls.

Heya! Stand still! Shadow yelled, frustrated. Chaos Storm! Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog responded), hitting Shadow square. How can you do that? You don't have an emerald! Shadow yelled angrily. Tiffany smirked. No, not technically, but my boyfriend is a living chaos emerald. *You* do the math. Kurt was wide-eyed. Had he heard her right? Suddenly his life seemed less tragic. Super Sonic's attack broke Silver's telekinetic bind on Ekyt. Ekyt attacked, furious at the low blow. Silver retaliated by attacking Linda-Su. She dropped, injured badly. No one noticed; Ekyt thought Super Sonic had blocked the attack. Ekyt punched wildly and tagged the ear that Silver had scratched at (See last ish. NG-); the attack revealed a device that had Robotnik written all over it. Super Sonic stopped attacking. So did Ekyt. Ekyt picked up the device. With a flick of his wrist, he smashed it into powder. Silver struggled to one knee. W-What happened? Robotnik was controlling you. Said Sonic. He powered down and handed the chaos emerald to Ekyt. Do you know what happened? I came from the future, and when I arrived, someone hit me and put that on me. That's all I remember. This was when Ekyt chose to look over at Linda-Su. He froze. He shook his head and rubbed his temples. No. No, this isn't happening. Ekyt muttered, racing over to her. I did that? Silver asked, shocked. Y-yeah. Sonic stammered. He looked over at Ekyt. You aren't gonna- no, hey! Ekyt bent down to her body, tears flowing freely. E-Ekyt. Cheer up, bud. You know we'll get through this. With what must have been the last of her strength, she brought his head down for a kiss. Ekyt shrugged off his coat and laid it over her, covering her face. I'm sorry. I-I can't help her. It'll take time and medical expertise. Ekyt knelt by her, then looked up. The look he gave scarred Sonic and Silver.

Chaos Blast! Chaos Control! Chaos Blast! Shadow yelled in rapid-fire succession. Chaos Spear! Chaos Spear! Chaos Shield! Tiffany countered. Chaos firestorm! Tiffany barked. (Hope this is okay Shadowthe_Hedgehog) Fireballs rained from nowhere, knocking Shadow down. He lay there, unable to get up for the first time. Finish it sister. He said, looking her in the eyes. Tiffany was ready to attack, but something held her back. *His past is as tragic as mine. To forgive is divine.* She held her hand out and helped her brother up.

I'll kill you. Ekyt spat. Silver backed up. You know it wasn't supposed to-; Shut up! I swear, you'll pay for this! Ekyt grabbed Silver by his quills and threw him into a beam and attacked for all he was worth. He broke his hand on Silver's jaw. Undisturbed, he attacked with his other hand. Sonic grabbed him. Ekyt pushed Sonic away, but Sonic went super again, and, with help from Tails and Amy, restrained him. I'm sorry. Silver said quietly. He disappeared.

TO BE CONTINUED&

128 - Possesion

Sonic, Tails, and Amy finally let go of a fired up Ekyt. He finally ran a hand through his hair. Sorry Sonic. Do you think you can get her to the Albion General Hospital? Yeah Pal, no problem. He zipped off. Tails and Amy were both trying to keep Ekyt calm. Finally, he turned to Tails. Protect her with your life, because you never know what might happen.

King Acorn sat in his throne, waiting for the young echidna. Colin marched through the doors and knelt down. Colin, I've been informed of your progress. Colin had no idea what that meant, but kept listening. Before the attack, Ekyt and Linda-Su informed me that *you* should take over the reigns of the OSS (Ekyt's group of Freedom Fighters NG-). I voiced my concerns about your age, but I'm convinced. If you'll remain kneeling.. King Acorn held the Sword of Acorns. He tapped Colin on the shoulders and on the head. I officially declare you the leader of our Office of Strategic Services. And, the former leader asked me to pass this on to you. King acorn handed Colin a package. Colin bowed and left.

When he was alone, Colin tore open the package, revealing a leather jacket, a set of brass knuckles, and a note. Ekyt had written:

Well Colin, you proved me right. You were an underdog, and I know you'll still have your trouble, but it's nothing you can't handle. Once you joined the group, immediately I knew you were going to be the one in charge someday. That day came sooner than I thought, but I have no regrets. Linda-Su sends her best wishes. The knuckles were actually Knuckles' idea. No offense, but you're built like me (Scrawny and small), and these will give you a little more power, especially since they were made from power rings. And as for the jacket, a leader's gotta look his best. I know I ticked off your parents, and I hope I didn't cause you too much trouble. But you've reaffirmed my belief that you are the best man for the job. Keep your head up, and if you need me, I'll be there. Linda too. Take care of yourself, and don't do anything I wouldn't do.

Ekyt.

Knuckles took a walk along a familiar path. Something suddenly struck him in the ear. He scratched at it, then stopped. Something told him to get back to the Chaos Chamber.

Tiffany helped Shadow up. You should have finished me off. He said. Shadow, you're my brother. I'm not going to kill you; not unless I have to. Now, look, get your head straight. I miss Maria too, but we've got to move on! I've got a boyfriend (Kurt blushes and kicks at some stones) and a life. You could have a life too. Shadow stopped. He hugged her. Thank you. Then he turned mean. But no thanks! Chaos Control! Kurt swiped at Shadow's disappearing form but missed. Let him go Kurt. He's still struggling. He'll figure it out eventually. C'mon, let's go rest somewhere. Chaosing the crap outta him tired me out.

Ekyt could tell something was wrong with Knuckles. Maybe it was the vacant stare; or it could have been the fact that Knuckles punched him on sight. He headed for the emerald. Oh no you don't! Ekyt charged into him and caught him around the waist. Knuckles punched downward, forcing Ekyt to roll out of the way. Then he continued his march toward the emerald. Ekyt recovered and scrambled in front of the

emerald. Get out of my way! You'll die! Knuckles shouted. Ekyt ducked at the shot, then jumped over the leg sweep. The same bug that got Silver..- That's it! C'mon Knux, shake it off! Ekyt turned to Tails and Amy. You two, get out of here, Tails, you summon Locke and Athair! (In case you don't know, Tails is the Chosen one by the ancient walkers in the original comic, and Locke died. NG-) Knuckles glided, hitting Ekyt with a bone-crunching uppercut. Ekyt swung his leg out and connected solidly. You're not getting the emerald. Knuckles scratched his ear. So that's where it is! Hold still! Knuckles punched Ekyt in the stomach, his sharp knuckles drawing blood. I taught you everything you know Ekyt. But I didn't teach you everything I know! Knuckles' hands were glowing green, and Ekyt was at his mercy. But he remained defiant, struggling to stand up in front of the emeralds. Forget about it. I'll die before you'll get to those emeralds. Knuckles smiled unpleasantly. So be it. *Guardian*.

Linda-Su moaned and sat up. Doctor Quack was checking her blood pressure. Man alive! What hit me? she slurred. Telekinetic attack. You'll be fine in a couple of- hey! Linda-Su pushed him out and threw on her clothes. I'm fine now! It's Ekyt that needs the help. Doctor Quack pushed her down gently. He can wait. Not with that psychotic hedgehog he can't! Sonic, c'mon! He looked at Doctor Quack. Girls gotta point Doc. later! He scooped up Linda-Su and bolted back toward the chaos chamber.

BUT CAN THEY MAKE IT IN TIME? FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE! NG DOES WHAT OTHERS WON'T!

129 - Oh, You Didn't Know?

Linda-Su charged into Knuckles and threw all she had. He threw her off and she jumped back on and bit down on his arm. Anything to do damage. Knuckles threw her toward the emerald. Ekyt dove in the way. His arm was hurt, he couldn't catch her, but he could at least soften the landing. But something went wrong. She wasn't moving. He swore. There wasn't a mark on her.. Silver's attack. Too Bad. But you'll join her soon. Knuckles taunted, scratching his ear where the bug was.

Geez, that'll leave a mark. Kurt commented on Tiffany's (Shadowthe_Hedgehog's) burn. I've had worse. I'll live. Kurt cocked his head toward a tree suddenly and darted toward it, scampering up it. A split second later, he came crashing to the ground. Oof! Don't go up there! There's a panther up there! Tiffany gave him a what? look. Not too many panthers around normally, she thought. But this one was definitely real. Hey, is he okay. The (Female) panther asked. I think so. He's a tough kid. Who are you? Tiffany asked. My name's Emmy. (Emmy is Fuzzball96, temporarily licensed to NextGuardian for exclusive use in original Next Guardian fanfic- Um, yeah, lol). Kurt sat up, then dove in front of Tiffany. She pulled a claw on you! he exclaimed, pointing. Emmy rolled her eyes. Sorry about that, this one won't go back in like the others. Kurt still looked wary. Tiffany strode forward. Well, it's nice to meet you. Tell us a little about yourself.

Ekyt picked up Linda and put her behind the emerald. He vaulted back over just in time to kick Knuckles. I know the real you is still in there Knux. Ekyt said solemnly. That Knuckles is dead! Now give me the emerald! Knuckles demanded. Forget it. *I've got to end this quick, or Linda won't make it. I can keep fighting him, which is stupid, or I can try to use the emerald against him. But that'll probably cost me my job.. Oh well.* Ekyt concentrated on breaking through to Knuckles' mind. He could sense a breakthrough, but suddenly Knuckles rushed forward, hitting Ekyt into the wall. Ekyt blindly swung and caught Knuckles on the ear. The thing that had been controlling Knuckles hit the wall and exploded. Knuckles collapsed in front of him.

Colin knew it would be too much trouble to go back to Robotropolis and try to salvage anything. Swatbots would be patrolling everywhere. Better to work from scratch. Tails, can you fly that wood up to the loft? No problem Colin. The OSS was getting used to their new building. It was a former barn, renovated to be a home for Colin and Mitch as well as the base of operations for the others. Colin sat down at the desk in his room. Eden (Violet_Rose) had left the group for personal reasons. Tiffany and Kurt were missing, as were Ekyt and Linda. Tails, Amy, and Mitch were with him. And those maps. He was frustrated as all get out. How did Ekyt do this? he said to himself. He looked at the maps on the desk. Their next target was going to be a project Robotnik guarded jealously. No details on it. Their mission was to get details and, if possible destroy it.

The black panther across from them moved her eyes across them to a tree. Get out of there Espio. Espio popped out. Okay, geez. Can't you behave? She made a move to pounce. Espio disappeared again. That's my boyfriend. She said, exasperated. She had explained her past (See Fuzzball96's profile for details- NG) to them and they didn't seem overly shocked. It was similar to their own. Tiffany had an idea. There's someone you have to meet. They headed to the chaos chamber.

130 - On the Horizon

Knuckles woke up groggy. He was alone, but he could remember what happened. I've got to help them! He glided over to Albion General Hospital, where Ekyt was having some words with the doctor in charge of Linda-Su. I'm afraid there's nothing I can do. The doctor told Ekyt. She'll either live through it in a few days, or she'll.. his voice trailed off. Die? Knuckles said, not believing it. Ekyt made no mention of Knuckles. He looked away and took a deep breath. Thank you. The doctor nodded and left. Ekyt looked toward Linda's door. I can't visit her, apparently it's caught. Ekyt said somberly. Knuckles put his hand on his shoulder. I'm sorry. Ekyt nodded. Silver will pay.

A nurse came by to Ekyt, and fainted at the combination of his broken hand and blood loss. Undisturbed, Ekyt put her on the front desk and sat back down. He put his hand against the wall and smashed it with his other hand, popping everything back in place. He took some medical tape of a nearby gurney and tied up his hand.

Colin studied the maps again. Mitch! Can you identify this? Colin called out. Mitch, the technical whiz of the group took a look. Large Machine.. internal power source.. artificial intelligence.. Probably a robot. So what? That's Robotnik's specialty. Look a little closer, and you'll see that it's powered by chaos emeralds. So, using that information, his next stop will be at the old emerald mines, near the crater the floating island left. Unfortunately, only a guardian can get in, and we'll need more than one with Robotnik involved.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) and Kurt returned. They had already agreed to not say anything about what had happened (See last couple issues- NG). Colin was still huddled over the map, tracing something. Tails and Amy Rose were working in the loft. Mitch was at a computer console, creating a 3D version of the map. When they walked in everyone greeted them and Colin explained the situation. I don't mind getting them. Tiffany said. Thanks. I'll have this map done by tonight. Colin answered.

The familiar sight of chaos control lit up the hospital hallway. Ekyt didn't even flinch. You guys, the OSS group needs you. Robotnik's planning something at the chaos emerald mines and.. Wait, what happened? Tiffany asked as she realized they were at a hospital. Linda. Was all Ekyt could say. He glanced toward the door, then looked at the floor. Knuckles quietly explained what was going on. Tiffany grimaced and told Knuckles about the mines. Ekyt. Come on man. Tiffany's gonna talk to Linda. You're needed. Robotnik? Good, I foresee some revenge on the horizon.

131 - Never Ending...

Ekyt shook hand with Colin. So, Tiffany told you the problem? he asked Ekyt. Yup. I m good to go. What we ll need from you guys is to stall Robotnik s reinforcements. Because they *are* coming. And, I did a little research into the mines- only guardians can enter the way we re going in. I don t know how Robotnik got it, but you guys will have to protect the back. Colin nodded.

They made their way to the mines. Ekyt and Knuckles stepped up front. They ran their hands down the walls, which glowed green along with the bands on their chests. A stone door slid open and then closed immediately. Millions upon Millions of shimmering chaos emerald shards lit the way. At the end of the tunnel they saw what they feared most- The Death Egg. (As seen in Sonic 3 for the Genesis/Megadrive, as well as the Death Saga series by Archie Comics- NG) Ekyt and Knuckles exchanged glances. Without talking, they agreed to make sure the Death Egg stayed dead.

Linda-Su woke up with a start and punched the first thing she saw. Easy Linda. Just me and Kurt here. Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) said. Oh, good. Where am I? Albion General Hospital. Tiffany answered. You just.. collapsed, Ekyt said, and-.. Ekyt! Oh my God, is he okay? Where is he now? she said, sitting up. It s okay. He and Knuckles were called away. He didn t want to leave, but it was a matter of life or death.

Back at Knothole village, Sonic zipped from house to house, checking around to make sure no one got hurt. Now it was time to meet with the freedom fighters. He opened the top of a stump and slid down into their base. Howdy Sugah hog! Bunnie greeted him. Hey Bunnie. Hey Twan. Sonic smirked. Zut Alors! Eet is Antonie, hedgehog, Antoine! Chill out Ant. Anyone seen Rotor and Sal? Well, ah do declare, last time ah saw them, they were over in Rotor s lab. Thanks Bunnie. Gotta Juice n cut it loose! Sonic zipped over and stopped short of the door. He knocked. Come in. Came Rotor s voice. Hey Rotor, Sal, what s cooking? Oh, hi Sonic. We were just working on a power ring storage system. Way Past Cool! This thingamajig will give me more power to whip Robuttnik s fat can! He zipped off to collect some rings to fill it.

Ekyt scooped some emeralds into his pocket. Think this ll do it? he asked Knuckles. Yeah, that s good. It ll give us enough power to hit our Hyper and Mega forms, and blow the Death Egg away! I think we d better.. Uh oh! Company! Ekyt said pointing. Swatbots. Only a few though. The rest must be after the OSS! Ekyt said. They ll be fine. They have guns. I wouldn t leave those kids hanging. Now let s trash these losers and get the big prize. Ekyt pulled out the shards and the two glowed. Knuckles turned magenta and was instantly Hyper Knuckles. Ekyt turned a pale green and was Mega Ekyt. (Lame-NG)

Back at the hospital, Linda-Su was feeling better. It seemed that whatever Silver had done to her would go away on it s own. Suddenly, she had a relapse. Speaking to Tiffany, she told her how she wanted her will to go. Hang on Linda. Just hang in there. Linda was dying. There was only one hope for her. And the one who could do it was fighting for his own life.

Ekyt s band lit up. Linda s in trouble! he said. The band was changing from green to red. My God! This

is serious! Let s plan the charges from the OSS and-.. Not so fast. Robotnik was hovering above them. Ekyt finished off the SWATbots and said You d better leave Robotnik! You re getting a reprieve from me tearing you into bite-sized pieces for what you did to Linda! If she didn t need me, I d rip your cold, black heart out and feed it to Snively! Knuckles turned to Ekyt. Go to Linda. Take some emeralds, and come back if you can. I ll deal with this big, dumb tub of duck fat. Ekyt nodded and raced out, practically flying.

MORE TO COME!

132 - It's Now or Never

Ekyt tore through the mines at a speed he didn't think he could reach. Of course, the chaos emeralds were helping him. The walls shimmered with energy from the millions of emeralds. Ekyt's band was still pulsing red. He reached the end of the mines to find himself being attacked by SWATbots. In two minutes, he had destroyed them. One of them had a vehicle. Ekyt decided that, if that SWATbot was still alive, then he was on foot. He remembered the radio frequency the OSS was on and shouted to them to guard the caverns.

Knuckles jumped to the left of the blast. You miserable rodent! You'll make a fine trophy! Robotnik taunted. Snively! Release the AlphaDog-bot! A huge metallic dog pounced at Knuckles who glided upward and clung to the ceiling. He had an idea of what to do.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) was near panic. Linda-su was fading fast. She wiped off her forehead with a cold cloth, and turned to Kurt. Kurt was pacing, looking furious. What kind of a son am I? I couldn't protect my own mother! he snarled to himself. Tiffany strode over to him. C'mon, you're doing your best. My best isn't good enough! It never was! Why did he have to save me! I should have died! Kurt exclaimed. Tiffany tried to calm him down. C'mon, you're good enough for me. One kiss on the cheek later, and things didn't seem so bad for Kurt.

Ekyt blazed through the forest. He saw a troop of SWATbots up ahead, and decided to play a favorite childhood game of his: Traffic Jam! He floored the piece of machinery and aimed right for the SWATbots. He jumped out and hit the ground running without checking to see what damage he had done. The hospital was in sight. The band on his chest beat furiously, reminding him that Linda was near death. He couldn't let that happen. He opened the doors to the hospital and had one leg in when the other suddenly erupted with pain. Ekyt hit the floor. He had been shot in the leg. The doors closed behind him. Ekyt dragged himself to a nurse, just before losing consciousness, handed her the emeralds and said Use it on Linda-Su. Tiffany can help... His voice trailed off. But had he made it in time to save her?

Knuckles dug into the ceiling in a circle. Robotnik knew what he was up to, but could do nothing to stop him. He ran away with his tail between his legs, leaving his giant dog creation behind. The ceiling caved seconds later as Knuckles glided away from the wreckage back toward the floating island.

NEXT ISSUE: IS LINDA-SU SAFE? WHAT ABOUT EKYT? OR SONIC? AND IS KURT GONNA COME AROUND? FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE, CAUSE THE ONLY TIME YOU GET THIS MUCH CHAOS IS WHEN NG DOES WHAT OTHERS WON'T!

133 - Who Dun It?

Ekyt woke up with a start, cursing silently as the pain hit his leg. A nurse was just about stick a needle into him. Ekyt gently grabbed her arm and shook his head. "This will numb the pain." Again, Ekyt shook his head. "I don't like drugs. The pain's fine." She smiled at him, if somewhat warily, and walked away. Ekyt got up immediately and walked to Linda's bedside. Kurt had fallen asleep, worried about his "mother." Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) looked up at him and silently gave a thumbs up. Silently, he motioned to her to follow him.

"She's okay?" he asked anxiously. "Yep. Just sleeping it off." She said with a grin. Ekyt breathed a sigh of relief. "Good to know. And Knuckles? The OSS?" "They're all fine. The Chaotix met with the OSS and took the team to the floating island. Colin took a shot in the shoulder, but he's the only one. He says not to worry." Ekyt looked down at his leg. "And me? What happened?" Tiffany sucked her breath in. "Wellllll.. it was kind of.. um.. hey look! There's Sonic!"

Sonic screeched to a stop. "Hey pal, I heard you took a shot. How ya feeling?" "I'm alright. Thanks. Is everything cool on Mobius?" Ekyt asked. "Yeah, no problem. Ol' 'Butnik had to run for it, and you and Knux pretty much wrecked him." Sonic said, also grinning. "So, what happened with my leg?" Sonic looked at Tiffany. "What are you hiding?" Ekyt asked, suspicious. "Hiding? Us? Don't be silly!" Tiffany said. Ekyt wasn't buying it. "Uh huh. C'mon, tell me what's up." They exchanged glances again. "Well, okay. See, you had the emeralds, and you were just about in the hospital. Someone with a laser shot you in the leg. And the only one who has that type of laser is.." Sonic hesitated. Ekyt made a "come-on" gesture. Tiffany winced and said "Okay, it was Julie-Su." Silence. Ekyt's breath caught in his chest. "I can't believe it. Where is she?" he asked. "No one's seen her since." Tiffany said.

Ekyt thought something was up. He looked over at Linda-Su. She seemed to be okay. He turned back toward the two hedgehogs. "Hmm. You know, if what you're saying is true, then I would believe anything." Ekyt's foot flashed out and caught Sonic in the stomach. With a clang. Tiffany was shocked. What the heck? "Sonic" got up. "Good look kid. Only you would have figured that out. Too bad it won't last." "Sonic" raced toward Linda-Su, jumping into the air, impossibly high, and coming down with a spindash. Ekyt dove forward and kicked again, knocking Sonic aside. This time, Sonic's eyes were red. Without warning, he spun into Ekyt and put his foot across Ekyt's neck. "Good riddance." Ekyt struggled for a moment, but whatever painkiller they had put into him while he was out cold was still in effect. "Tiffany, find Julie-Su! She's probably in trouble!" he coughed out. He was fading fast. He reached up and felt a flimsy plastic chair that was for visitors. He swung it as hard as he could. It cracked "Sonic" once. Twice. Again. Finally, the blows forced the imposter to relinquish the grip he had. Ekyt got to his feet. "No way am I gonna let some 'bot get past me." Ekyt gulped internally. You know, I think that's just what he's going to do. But why?

The real Sonic raced along the green fields on his way back to the Great Forest. "Hey Rotor, I've got enough rings here to.. Yipe!" Sonic jumped back as Rotor and Sally's eyes glowed red. "Get him!" A group of Freedom Fighters, all with matching eyes, started toward him. Sonic decided to run for it. Even he couldn't defeat all of the freedom fighters himself.

TO BE CONTINUED!

134 - Robot Rampage

Sally, Tails, Rotor, Julie-Su, Bunnie... all replaced by robots. Sonic raced away, trying to decide what to do next. "I've gotta hook up with the others...if there is anyone." He said to himself. "Yo, heavy metal-heads! Gotta Juice!" He sped up, leaving the robotic Freedom Fighters in the dust.

"Sonic" Charged at Ekyt, who leapt aside, grabbing a beam on the ceiling. Not a good place for a kid who could never do pull-ups. He scrambled up onto it, trying to get his breath. "Sonic" cut through the beam, forcing Ekyt to jump down, where Sonic was waiting. Without thinking, Ekyt swung the back of his foot around into "Sonic's" face. Linda-Su would be safe with Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog), so he could concentrate on his own battle. As his foot connected, "Sonic" swung out his fist, catching Ekyt in his other leg. His bad leg. Ekyt hit the ground with a curse and rolled under the bed, upending it into the robot. He searched frantically for a weapon. Anything.

Sonic raced to the Chaos Chamber. Knuckles was sitting eerily still. With red eyes. "Oh man!" Sonic groaned, burning rubber to get away as Knuckles glided into the wall where Sonic had been. Sonic beat feet to the hospital, hoping to find everyone in one piece.

Ekyt swung the tray of food. It made a smart crack on "Sonic's" head, but didn't faze him. Sonic's hand flashed out and hooked Ekyt's ankle. He gave it a torque. "Shame I can't break it, Master Robotnik needs you." Ekyt kicked with his free foot, trying to get away. In a haze, he saw the fire box. If it was cracked, water would rain down. Maybe it would rust this imitation... Ekyt reached for the hammer to break the glass. He grabbed it just as Sonic gave a particularly nasty twist on his hurt ankle. Ekyt's hand flashed out and cracked the glass. Using the tiny hammer, he beat on "Sonic's" knuckles, forcing the metallic hedgehog to let go.

Sonic ran into the room and saw... himself. Fighting Ekyt, who was obviously in pain. Sonic jumped up and spun into the robot, which broke in two under the powerful spindash. Sonic helped Ekyt up. "No red eyes." They said at the same time. "Tiffany and Linda-Su are okay, they're going to look for Julie-Su." Ekyt explained. "The freedom fighters too." Sonic said. "Robotnik?" Ekyt asked, gingerly putting weight on his leg. It hurt, but held up. "Must be." Sonic answered. "He's gotten to all of them. We've got to rescue them before they get roboticized." Ekyt nodded, but his face held a trace of doubt. "I'll help Sonic. But they'll make me regret it." Ekyt said sadly. "Whadda ya mean? Oh, wait..." Sonic remembered how King Acorn treated Ekyt. "Don't worry bud, we'll rescue them, that'll convince the King."

Tiffany and Linda-Su ran full speed across the lush jungles. "We've got to get to Robotropolis." Tiffany said suddenly. Linda-Su shot her a glance. "Tif, that's suicide!" "No. If I know Sonic and your crazy boyfriend..." "Then they're on the way." Linda-Su finished. She smiled ruefully. "I should've thought of that." "You've got a lot on your mind." Tiffany told her. "And don't worry, we'll save your sister and everyone else." Linda-Su nodded her agreement. "But, let's go armed. You can do those chaos tricks, but I can't. Not yet anyway." Linda-Su added. "Lead the way. Using Chaos Control would probably bring every robot to us."

135 - The Race is On!

Sonic and Ekyt backed through the woods. In a scene from a cheesy comedy, Linda and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) were coming from the other direction. They bumped into each other. All four jumped. Linda and Tiffany had weapons, and were aiming them at the two shocked guys. "You've got ten seconds to prove that you're not robots before we shoot." Linda-Su warned. Ekyt laughed. "Okay. I'll roll up my pant leg. Slowly, with two fingers." He displayed a cut he had gotten. Blood dripped out. Linda-Su gave him a small grin. "Okay, you're clear, since robots can't bleed. Now you Sonic." Sonic didn't have any proof. "Tell them something only you would know." Ekyt advised. Sonic nodded. "Okay. Here's my proof: There's only one Sonic, and you're looking at him! Faster than sound, cooler than the other side of your pillow! I'm there and back before you even know I'm gone!" Sonic exclaimed. Tiffany nodded. "That's classic Sonic. They're real."

Linda lowered her gun. "Thank God you're okay." She hugged Ekyt, who returned it. Sonic and Tiffany both rolled their eyes. "Hey, lovebirds?" Sonic said, tapping his foot. "You know, that whole "stop the imposter thing" ain't gonna wait while you two make out!" Linda shot Sonic a false, exasperated look. "A "hug" isn't making out!" Sonic backed up, hands up in mock-surrender. "Sorry, you and Ekyt will have to explain the difference to me someday." "I don't think he knows." Linda pointed out. Tiffany had to stifle her laughter at the look on Ekyt's face, which was a mix of confusion, understanding, and comedy. "Let's get back to the mission, shall we?" she said, thankfully sparing him from answering.

They hid behind the stone wall at Robotropolis. It was supposed to protect Robotnik from outside forces. "Okay, I lived in Robotropolis for a while, so I know where we'll be safe. I'll bet anything that Robotnik is controlling those metal duplicates, and that he's got the real one's locked up. We need to get to the old OSS hideout, and wait for daybreak. During the night we can cause a distraction. Anyone have anything to add?" Sonic asked. Ekyt spoke up quietly. "Distraction- I think Tiffany and Linda can force some of their ammunition to "cook off." In other words, blow something up that's not near us. Robotnik scrambles the troops, but not near us." The whole group agreed that would be a good course of action.

Robotnik pounded his fists on his computer console. "HOW DID THEY GET THIS FAR!!! SNIVELY!!!" "Yes master?" Snively said meekly. "DISPATCH MY MINIONS TO THE MUNITIONS FACTORY!!! NOW!!!!!" Robotnik destroyed the monitor. "I'll have your heads for this!" He turned to his captives. "And I'll have yours too..."

136 - Infiltrating Robotropolis

Robotnik decided to start with Sally. "In you go, your majesty!" he said with a vile smile. "You're a monster! And you won't get away with it!" Sally yelled as she squirmed. A blue streak sped in, destroying Swatbots and grabbing Sally. "That's no way to treat a lady! Didn't your motherboard teach you better?" Sonic stared, smirking, that little half-smile on his face. Robotnik turned to run. Ekyt was standing there. "Sorry Charlie. Or rather, Tubby." Robotnik turned. Tiffany's (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) grinning face met him. The last direction was covered by Linda-Su. "Going somewhere?" Robotnik laughed again. "Don't let him-!" Robotnik managed to reach his computer console and initiate a self destruct. "You've won the battle, but not the war, you pathetic creatures!" Robotnik's voice boomed out as he rose in his hovercraft. "You'll get yours!" Sonic shouted back, too angry to zing Robotnik. The Freedom Fighters all crowded around. "We need to get out of here, fast!" Rotor exclaimed. "'Ow? Zee 'egehog is zee only one who can run fast enough! And zee girl...chaos control couldn't possibly 'andle zis much weight!" That was a point. "You blokes seem like you're in a stick wicket!" "Flash?!?!" Sally exclaimed in disbelief. Flash was serious now. "There's a couple vehicles over this way. It's not the best chance, but it's all you've got." He said, leading the way.

(NOTE: Flash, if this isn't okay for me to add, please let me know, and I'll remove it immediately –NG)

(NOTE #2: Check out Flashthehedgehog's awesome fic, starring her OC.)

(NOTE #3: Check out my profile for other great fics by my amigos on FAC –NG)

(NOTE #4: (Last one. Promise!) As the next paragraph will attest to, I just played MOH: RS. If anyone out there is offended by the dialogue, please let me know, and I'll remove it. It's not meant to be offensive. That line is my favorite part of the game! ^^ –NG)

Didn't it figure the vehicles were dead? "Lemme see if I can't just juice these crates up!" Flash somehow created a burst of Static electricity, powerful enough to jump start the two strange vehicles. "You just played Medal of Honor: Rising Sun, didn't you?" Linda pointed out. "Yeah, how'd you know?" "C'mon, Major Bromley, the "stick wicket" line?" Linda said. "Okay, okay, guilty as charged. Now, let's go!" Ekyt took one vehicle's wheel with Rotor, Antoine, Linda-Su, Julie-Su, and a freedom fighter he didn't know. Sonic took the other one, with Tiffany, Uncle Chuck, Muttskie, Bunnie, Sally, and Tails.

The vehicles flashed out of Robotropolis. The explosion was strange, in the way that it seemed peaceful. Like something had been accomplished. "That's a good day's work." Julie-Su muttered. "Yah, I'm beat." Sonic agreed. "Let's get some shut-eye and head back to Knothole tomorrow." "We're totally out in the open here." Tiffany pointed out. Ekyt was kicking at some rocks. Linda took it for granted he had something up his sleeve. "What've you got?" she asked him, a smile in her voice. "The old OSS shelter. It's not Knothole, but we should be safe, if somewhat crowded." Everyone seemed to like the idea, so they all piled in, looking forward to some rest.

137 - The Reverse Universe...

The next day they made their way back to Knothole. Immediately, two things happened. Tails ran up to Ekyt, while Amy ran up to Sonic.

Tails: She slapped me!

Amy: He's a whiner!

Tails: ME?! How about you?

Amy: Humph!

Tails: Rotten fangirl!

Amy: WHAT?!

"Hey, break it up! C'mon break it up!" Sonic had Amy around the waist as she was swinging her hammer. Ekyt was holding Tails back. "You take her to the Ring Pond, I'll take Tails over here!" Ekyt called out.

Tails sat down across from Ekyt. "What happened?" Ekyt asked carefully. "Well, she was telling me for the millionth time how great Sonic is. Then I remembered how he and Sally treated me, and I told her "I'm as much of a hero as Sonic." Then she laughed and said I'd never be half the hero Sonic is! Then I called her a stupid fangirl, and she slapped me! It's Fiona all over again!" Tails said, finally letting a few tears trickle out. (See Archie Comics Sonic the Hedgehog #172 -NG (you won't be sorry for checking it out) Ekyt sat down. "You know, I know it's hard to believe, but the world won't end just because you and Amy aren't a couple anymore. It happened with me and Linda-Su. It could happen to you too. It'll work out. Trust me."

Sonic asked Amy "What happened?" Her story was identical to Tails. Except at the end, she hugged Sonic and wouldn't let go. Sally already knew about Amy's obsession, and she laughed at Sonic's disgust.

Tails walked along, his head down. Fiona had slapped him and told him he couldn't trust anyone. And now Amy had done the same thing. When he saw Amy coming, Tails started to fly. He had enough pain for one day. He couldn't talk to Sonic or Sally anymore, and he wasn't comfortable talking to Antoine or Bunnie, or Rotor. He needed advice, maybe even from a girl.

Amy walked along and saw Tails fly away. "I've got my Sonic!" she said. Sonic pushed her off his leg. "Amy, you've got to understand, you're a great kid, but we're too different." Amy let go and cried. "I understand Sonic." Sonic rolled his eyes. "Oh man! You've just got to meet the right guy Amy. You're a cute girl, you'll meet someone and things'll work out. Trust me, I've been there."

Tails flight took him to the cosmic interstate. Through here, you could access every dimension in the world. Tails headed into the "Reverse Universe," a world where Freedom Fighters were evil and Robotnik was good. The reverse Tails saw him coming. "Hey, you're looking down pal." Tails looked up and started to back away. "Hey, relax, I'm not gonna hurt ya. After all, I'm you. Why don't you talk to me and friends." The reverse Tails put a comforting hand on Tails shoulder and steered him toward a

cluster of buildings.

Amy's walk took her right to the Royal Palace. "Amy, are you okay?" Sally asked, concerned. Amy gritted her teeth. "I HATE YOU!" she yelled. Sally didn't know quite how to respond. Amy stormed off...

Tails explained to his new friends what happened. "They did that? You're a tough kid." Anti-Sally said. "Really?" Tails asked. "Sure. Why don't you hang with us. You're cute anyway, better than the scum I've been hangin' with." They tossed Tails a pair of sunglasses and black boots. "You're one of us kid. You just steer us to them and we'll take care of this for ya." Tails felt accepted, and he loved it. He couldn't wait to tell Ekyt and Linda...

138 - Tails' Turn

Ekyt was talking with Linda when she suddenly showed her teeth in a snarl. Ekyt spun around to face Tails. "Hi!" he said brightly. The black boots, bandana, and sunglasses had done their job: They gave him a new look. "Tails? Nice clothes man! Where'd you get that look?" Ekyt asked, thinking he already new. "My friends form the cosmic interstate. And, I'd like you to meet my new girlfriend!" Anti-Sally stepped out. Linda made a move, but Ekyt put a hand on his shoulder. "Any other friends Tails?" "You bet!" Anti-Antoine, Anti-Rotor, and Anti-Knuckles stepped out from the bushes. Ekyt made no move to attack. "Hmm. Well, to each his own." Ekyt said calmly. The anti-Knuckles suddenly leapt at Ekyt, tacking him. The two rolled on the ground exchanging punches. Linda fought with the Anti-Antoine, until Anti-Rotor shot her with some magnetic beam, pinning her to a rock. (Yes, some rocks have metal in them –NG)

Sonic and Sally were having a talk about Tails and Amy. "Maybe Ekyt's right." Sonic suggested. Sally sighed. "I'm just looking out for him. But I guess he DOES have as much experience as we..." Sonic could tell she didn't like this at all. "Well, something has to be done about Amy. But, well, being a guy, I have no clue what." Sally giggled at that. "Boys!" Sonic tapped his foot impatiently. "Whatever it is, it needs to be done quick. I can't fight Robotnik with a girl strapped to my leg!" "Well, let's get Tails sorted out first." Sally said. "Yeah, good idea. He's probably gone to see Ekyt."

Ekyt punched again, twisting out from under the semi-conscious anti-Knuckles. Tails was in a state of shock. Anti-Sally made no move, though. She had some strange thoughts running through her head. Did she actually like him? It seemed that way. But she needed to know where his loyalty lied.

Anti-Rotor charged Ekyt, hitting him with his full mass of blubber. Ekyt dodged him; that was easy enough; then he shot the magnetic ray again, binding Ekyt to the rock. Anti-Antoine slapped Linda-Su. Ekyt tried to bite, or kick, or anything after that. Anti-Antoine punched him, as did Anti-Knuckles. Anti-Sally looked on with concern. "Tails...they're your friends aren't they?" Tails nodded. "I know, I've gotta choose." "No, let me choose for you. GUYS! Knock it off!" They all stopped at their leaders request. She walked up to Ekyt and Linda. "You guys are taking care of him. Thank you." Ekyt stared at her, not believing it. He did when she slapped him across the face. "Yeah! Go get 'im Sally!" That came from Tails. Ekyt shook his head. Tails had gone to the dark side, and there was nothing they could do to bring him back.

Sonic raced up, holding Sally, and saw what happened. He sped past Tails, let Sally off, and attacked the nearest enemy. Anti-Rotor's machine broke, and Linda and Ekyt came flying out. Linda-Su picked Anti-Sally, while Ekyt attacked Anti-Knuckles and Anti-Antoine. Sally fought Anti-Sally. Tails hit Sally. "Back off sister! That's my girl!" Tails snarled. He then kicked Ekyt in the shin, hard enough to create a small "crack!" Linda grabbed his Tails and tied them in a knot. "What's gotten into you Tails?!" Sonic yelled out. "All of you treated me like a kid! Except you and Linda, Ekyt, so I hope no hard feelings. But I've gotta protect my girl. Right babe?" he asked the Anti-Sally. "You bet." She said, ticking him under the chin. Ekyt felt...betrayed. He burst forward, spearing tails with his shoulder. "You get your little orange butt of my island! Now I see where your loyalties lie!" Sonic shook his head sadly. "I'm sorry bud, but he's right."

TO BE CONTINUED...

AND: TIFFANY, KURT, and the OSS JOIN UP WITH THE CHAOTIX TO STOP CRIME ON ANGEL ISLAND!

139 - A Cry for Help

Tails looked up, stunned, at Ekyt. "Why'd you do that? I was only following your advice!" Ekyt stared down harshly. "My advice was to meet the right girl. If she's the right one, you won't hear a thing from me. But if you come here and start attacking people, I'll put your Tails in a sling." Tails looked genuinely hurt. Then he tugged his shades back on and straightened his coat. "C'mon babe, let's skedaddle. This chump isn't worth our time." He threw his arm around the anti-Sally and they flew off the island.

"We've got to bring him back!" Sally said immediately. Ekyt shook his head. "No, that's the reason he left. Being babied. Sonic, you know these jokers better than anyone. What are they gonna do?" "They'll drop him like a bad habit. That kid doesn't have a bad bone in his body. He'll snap out of it." Linda agreed, and brought up their next topic. "Robotnik's been active lately. And I think we'll need more than the regulars to stop this. Let's head to Knothole and discuss this with the others." Ekyt held back. "Let me just get someone over here to keep an eye on the place..."

Colin looked at the screen. Ekyt wasn't a father to him, though his Colin's parents were both dead. Ekyt was more the cool cousin who let's you have fun. Today he was all business, seeing if Colin and his group, the OSS, could come to the island. That meant Colin, Mitch, Kurt, Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog), and Amy. Amy wasn't in any shape to go. She was desperate for a new boyfriend. She lost out on Tails AND Sonic. Tiffany convinced her to go. Of course, it didn't take much convincing when she learned the Chaotix were going to be there. A group of boys (Minus Julie-Su) could only be good for her. She kind of liked Espio. The mysterious nature and all... (Blegh! I can't believe I wrote that!!! *shot!* -NG)

"Well, Sugah, ah do deklah! Ah haven't seen hide nor hair 'o ya'll since the last time we put the boots to Robotnik!" Bunnie hugged Ekyt. "Ello." Antoine held out his hand, all stiff and formal. Ekyt shook it. "Hey, would you try out some new stuff for me on this mission?" Rotor asked. Ekyt thought to himself: These are real heroes. "Sure Rotor. I'll try 'em out." "It's been a while, hasn't it guardian?" Ekyt threw himself backward, in front of the group, staring at the echidnas in front of him.

(Commercial Break- LOL)

Ekyt pointed at them. "No way. We can't trust them." Wynmacher and Lara-Le, Knuckles mother and step-father (who have tried to kill Ekyt in the past, because Lara-Le doesn't like seeing humans and echidna's as couples -NG) Wynmacher stepped forward. "You have every reason not to trust us. I can't blame you. But, well, we all worked together in this." "What's that?" Ekyt asked, slowly realizing there was a circle around him. "You see, we couldn't tell you because you would never have agreed." Linda-Su began. "I'm afraid we need a liaison to the afterlife. Someone who the deceased members of the brotherhood trust. And that's you." "And just why do they need me?" Ekyt asked sternly. "Why not ask Knuckles?" "Because Knuckles can't know this. He's too emotionally involved." With a sigh, Wynmacher continued his story. "The brotherhood is about to fall. If Haven is lost, then all hope is lost. We all thought Kragok was dead, but now he's got an orbital satellite aimed at Haven. If the ray from that thing is fired, we're doomed." Ekyt stared at Wynmacher and Lara-Le. "I don't trust you..."

“You need further proof? Meet Janell-eli, Athair’s mother.” Ekyt stared wide-eyed at this thousand year old woman, who looked as if she was in her early thirties. “My son needs you, as do his ancestors. You’re the last guardian left to trust. Please.” Ekyt bowed, indicating he would. Linda followed him out.

“Linda, will you work with the Chaotix? I know you can take care of yourself, but” “Say no more. I get your point.” She said with a mock pout. “I’ll just see how my sister is doing. Besides, it’s a short trip.” She said, falsely chipper. Why did he have to go? This was dangerous, not that it was anything new. But she was just starting to really feel comfortable with him. She suspected he felt something similar.

Ekyt geared up, taking his staff, his mask, and a backpack with a couple of power rings. In his coat pocket, he kept a shard of chaos emerald. Time to go meet with the Brotherhood and stop this maniac.

MORE TO COME

140 - Haven's Hope

Tails flew around, back toward the reverse universe, trying to ignore just how much Ekyt's words had stung. "Somethin' wrong there Tails?" Anti-Sally asked. She seemed genuinely interested in him. "Not a thing. I'm looking forward to kickin' some Robotnik butt when we get back. That goody-goody has it coming!" (Remember, in the reverse universe, Robotnik is good, and the Freedom Fighters are bad.) Anti-Sally laughed cruelly. She too was looking forward to that.

The Forbidden zone. "They sure named it right." Ekyt muttered. He walked in, but immediately dove for cover. The Dark Legion was attacking Haven, and they seemed to be in check, for now. But there was strength in numbers. The remaining members of the Brotherhood were powerful, but older, and would get worn down. And Ekyt knew enough about Kragok to know that he wasn't going to give in just because a few of his soldiers got hurt. That in his mind, Ekyt combat-crawled to the meeting place. "Archimedes!" BAMF! "Glad you made it kid. Hold still, and I'll transport you."

"So you guys are the Chaotix?" Amy said in wonder. "Uh, yeah, that's us." Vector said, exchanged glances with Mighty and Espio. "Not you! You, the purple guy! You're Espio, right?" Espio nodded, but definitely didn't like the tone of her voice. Mighty laughed good-naturedly. "It seems she has something of a crush on you Esp." "Be quiet Mighty." Espio shot back. Julie-Su stifled a laugh, while Vector looked annoyed at being brushed aside.

(for Reference, here's a list of guardians and their traits)

Hawking- Dead

Locke- Alive

Sabre- Alive

Sojourner- Alive (Thinks guardians are hypocritical at times)

Spectre- Alive (Brash, arrogant)

Steppenwolf- Dead

Edmund- Dead

Thunderhawk- Alive (Loud, outspoken)

Tobor- Dead (Killed Kragok at the time)

Athair- Dead

Ekyt didn't land in the familiar red area. He skipped that part and landed in a white area. Hawking, Steppenwolf, Edmund, Athair, and Tobor were sitting, discussing quietly. Hawking stopped them and turned toward Ekyt. "You are the liaison?" "Yes Sir." Ekyt responded. "Good. Guardian...It seems strange to say that to a human. Never mind, right now, we need your mind more than your body. Haven must not fall." Tobor, a great hero to the guardians, walked over and looked Ekyt over. "Human...hmmm, interesting choice Athair. Perhaps he can help us..."

After some discussion, Ekyt said what was on his mind. "Isn't there any way for you to come back temporarily. I mean, I've been killed, and I keep coming back, being told that I've earned another life. Considering all of you are heroes, couldn't you do the same?" Steppenwolf, the most approachable of

the bunch, stroked his chin. "Perhaps he has a point. But you see (He's speaking to Ekyt now), our flesh forms are long...gone, for want of a better word. You could always come back because of your immediate appeals. We would need a host. And they would need to be echidnas." Ekyt cocked his head. "I can get you that. I'll do whatever you need me to do." Edmund, the only one of the group who was a scientist by trade, muttered "Dark Legion bodies...We need them unconscious..." Tobor shook his head. "Two things are wrong here. How do we know we can trust this kid, and you all know we would be tempted to stay in our flesh forms." Ekyt stepped in front of Tobor. "I respect all of you. I would fight to the last in Haven, if that's what you need me to do." The group of echidnas exchanged glances. "That is what we need. Haven cannot fall." Hawking said. Athair moved Ekyt away from the group.

"Tell me, how is Knuckles taking this? Why didn't he come?" Athair asked. Ekyt knew something was up since Athair never talked this much, or showed any emotional attachment. "He doesn't know Athair. The others thought he would be involved too emotionally." Athair nodded slowly. "I see. And answer me this: Why did you want to be a guardian?" Ekyt smiled at the thought. "There's so much wrong Athair...And if there's one more person to help correct it, all the better." "There's lots of good in the world too." Thinking of the Knothole group, and Linda-Su, Ekyt agreed. "There is. But you have to look hard enough to find it." Athair looked worried. "Haven will still stand Athair. I give you my word."

NEXT ISSUE: THE LIVING MEMBERS OF THE BROTHERHOOD SOUND OFF! THE OSS AND CHAOTIX MEET THEIR FIRST NEMESIS! AND SONIC HAS TO TALK TAILS DOWN!

141 - Give It Your All

(for Reference, here's a list of guardians and their traits)

Hawking- Dead

Locke- Alive

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Sojourner- Alive (Thinks guardians are hypocritical at times)

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Thunderhawk- Alive (Loud, outspoken)

Tobor- Dead (Killed Kragok at the time)

Athair- Dead

The Dark Legion battled into Haven. Locke, Sabre, Sojourner, Thunderhawk, and Spectre were fighting, trying to force the enemy back, all the while knowing that if they didn't get help, it was futile. Help could only come in two forms, and who knew if it was quick enough.

It was decided that Tobor and Steppenwolf would be the two to fight. Ekyt was back on the floating island. He saw two soldiers lagging behind. Quietly, He grabbed one and pulled him into the bushes. Using a carotid artery hold, the echidna went unconscious quietly. Ekyt repeated the move with the other one. Before his eyes, the two former Dark Legionnaires took on the forms of Tobor and Steppenwolf. "Let me get their attention." Ekyt whispered.

Tobor and Steppenwolf watched him crawl away. "I don't like it." Tobor spat. Steppenwolf looked over at him. "What don't you like?" "A human in our ranks." "He's an ally, be grateful." "I'm grateful that he's an ally, I'm displeased that he bears the guardian's stripe." "Tobor, we all do what we can. If this is his calling, so be it."

Kragok looked across at his troops. "Haven will fall within the hour! Guns or not (Haven automatically blocks outside weaponry), we have the advantage! We have the power! We..." "Have a big mouth." Ekyt said dryly. "You again? You are like those miserable fireants, returning from the dead to foil me." Kragok attacked. He and Ekyt wrestled, as the Dark Legion soldiers watched. This allowed Steppenwolf and Tobor to get inside. "It was a success Locke." Tobor said tersely. "He's outside, fighting Kragok as a distraction. Now, how can we help?" Locke nodded. "We need to protect Haven. I propose we take Hawking's path and move it to a separate zone." "Agreed. The seven of us should have enough power."

Ekyt and Kragok were at a stalemate. "You can't honestly believe that you can beat me!" Kragok exclaimed, laughing. Ekyt thought to himself : I don't need to, I just need to hold out long enough... Kragok drew his hand back as it glowed red with energy, hitting a solid shot to Ekyt's forehead. Ekyt flew back, hitting Mount Fate. He slid down the side until he was lying at the bottom, his head propped up. Kragok smiled down at him. Out of instinct, Ekyt grabbed Kragok's leg and rolled forward, between his legs, forcing Kragok to fall. The Dark Legion members switched their focus from Haven to him. Ekyt

began to brawl with anyone in range. Suddenly the Dark Legion panicked. Eight guardians were pushing them back, two of which who were supposed to be dead. Steppenwolf and Tobor reached Ekyt. "Good work. Now, get out of here." Tobor told him. Ekyt ignored him. "Did you hear me? I said go!" Ekyt turned to him. "No. You've already made your sacrifice." Steppenwolf could admire him for that. "I think we've gravely misjudged you." Ekyt started to respond, then yelled "Duck!" and dove over Steppenwolf, onto Kragok. He tore open a portal to his home dimension. Ekyt almost grabbed his robe, but missed. The Dark Legion was thrown into disarray, and they ran from it. The guardians didn't give chase.

After, Ekyt was angry and it showed. "Tobor and I must leave. Ekyt, before I go, I want to wish you the best of luck. You've earned my respect." Steppenwolf extended his hand. Ekyt didn't take it right away. "What respect have I earned? I couldn't stop Kragok! He'll be back! I should have had him!" Tobor put a hand on his shoulder. "You did well. You wished to sacrifice yourself like I did to stop him? It's not worth it." Ekyt shook hands with both of them. "Thank you. For everything. It was an honor to fight along side you." Ekyt said, truthfully. They disappeared. Ekyt was about to talk to Locke and the others, when Spectre aimed a finger at him. "You! Boy! Go to your girl quickly! The Chaotix need you! And we need Knuckles... Go!" "Where are they?" Ekyt asked urgently. "The Zoot Chute entrance. Go, quickly!"

142 - Good Friends...Better Enemies

Ekyt ran down through the emerald chamber and climbed up the Zoot Chute. Heard voices on the other side. "We've got the "Chaotix," and the girl. Apparently that's her sister...Oh well, either way, lord Enerjak will be pleased..." Ekyt peered over the tip of the chute. He could see the captors had their back to him. Perfect...

Ekyt flung the cover of the hidden chute (It's covered with grass to mimick the natural habitat.) at the back of the right one's head. It connected with a dull "thunk." Before the other one could even scream, Ekyt had the echidna around the neck, a hand over his mouth. "Shut up! One sound and you don't eat solid food again! Drop the knife and taser! Don't screw with me, DROP IT!" Ekyt hissed. The legionnaire complied. "Good." Ekyt picked up the taser and zapped him. Unconscious.

Taking the knife, Ekyt took the knife and cut the gags and ropes of the Chaotix. "Everyone okay?" Ekyt asked. "Yeah. But you've got to be careful. There were more earlier. They could be back any time." Espio said, camouflaging himself. Might climbed up a tree while Vector scampered into the bushes. Julie-Su climbed down into the hole Ekyt had just occupied. Linda-Su looked at him uncertainly. "You should hide." Ekyt said quietly. "And you are gonna do what?" "Stay here. I want them to see me...element of surprise." "That's crazy!" she hissed. "You should expect nothing less." He said with a small smile. "I suppose not. But I'm staying here." Ekyt knew better than to argue.

Sonic raced after Tails. "Listen pal, just hear me out, okay?" Tails stopped. He had been chomping on a toothpick, which he flicked at Sonic. "Hurry it up meatball, me and hotstuff here ain't got all day." "You're making a mistake! They tried to kill us! Listen to reason! If you come back, no more baby talk! You're an adult...and my oldest friend..." "I was, you pile of Robotnik dung." Tails slapped Sonic. "C'mon, hit me back! If I'm such an adult, I can take it! Hit me! Hit me!" Sonic rubbed his cheek, seeing red. He had enough. He flew at Tails.

"And then, lord Enerjak, we had caught..." The soldier's voice trailed off at the sight of Ekyt and Linda standing there. "You! How did you free them?!" "Tricks of the trade." Ekyt said casually. "It's been a while...you're a full guardian now...and you have not yet discovered your powers...good...I will have you killed before you do, rest assured." Ekyt was shocked to see Enerjak. "I don't know how you're still alive, or why you're worried about my powers...but the way I see it... THIS IS A SCRAM ORDER! EVERYONE OUT OF HERE!" The Chaotix reluctantly ran for it. "So this was to be a setup. A move you will live to regret...or perhaps, die to regret."

Before he could move, Enerjak had Ekyt's arms bound to his sides by some invisible force. Ekyt kicked Enerjak's assistant, knocking the hood off. It was Lien-Da. The sight of her, who he thought was dead, shocked him. But not so much as her whip did. The electronic stinging went through his trapped body and knocked him off his feet. He couldn't get up... "It is over human. Surrender yourself, and the girl may live. Don't, and you both die." Linda-Su was being held by her half-sister. Ekyt's ring glowed. "No! Stop him!" Too late. Ekyt used his own version of chaos control to send Linda to a safe place: Haven. "You will pay. Bring him along! And destroy the ring..."

Sonic hit Tails hard, knocking him down. They grappled. Sonic was easily the better fighter, but he held back in spite of himself. Anti-Sally jumped in. The Real Sally saw all of it and jumped in the mix too, creating a nasty brawl...

143 - The Rescue

“So, have you decided to talk with us?” Lien-Da’s voice greeted Ekyt. He looked ruefully at the chains that bound him to the wall. “Let’s make him more comfortable. Have him kneel, on one knee.” Lien-Da ordered the guards. She knelt down to Ekyt’s level. “If it’s an echidna you want, as you can see, I can offer you more than that second-rate deserter can. And my group is dedicated to protection, just as you are. We have a lot to offer each other.” Her hand tickled Ekyt’s chin. He jerked his head away. “I have no interest in dealing with the devil... My loyalty lies with the guardians, and with Linda-Su. They accepted me when no one else would.” Lien-Da sat back. “Hmm, that’s not entirely true, is it?” Seeing the look on Ekyt’s face, she smiled. “I think you’ve said enough about that. You are aware, that if you are not with us, you are against us?” “Yes.” “And you’re willing to risk alienating yourself from the clearly superior race?” Ekyt looked her in the eye, making no mistake about his crisp tone: “You aren’t superior. So, yes, I’ll risk it.” Lien-Da snapped away. “You’ll regret that, you human scum! I personally vow it.” “Yeah, you do that.” Lien-Da thought to herself: It’s time to bring out my secret weapon...

“Stop! Stop!” Rotor, Antoine, and Bunnie forced the brawling four apart. “This is insane! Tails, that girl is EVIL! Sonic, you just attacked your best bud! Sally... actually, yeah, you should be here.” Rotor stated. Sonic and Tails looked at each other. “I want to be an adult! I’m tired of being treated like a child!” Tails yelled. “You know you can trust me Tails! Honest!” Anti-Sally crowed soothingly. “You can’t trust her man! She’s no good!” Sonic exclaimed. “Tails, I’m sorry. You left because of my babying. If you come back, it won’t happen again... I promise.” Sally said, bowing her head. Tails smiled weakly. “Friends?” “Friends big bro.” Sonic said. Anti-Sally had a tear in her eye. “I really liked him... You’ll pay!” She dashed through the Cosmic Interstate to her home world.

The Brotherhood was immediately on guard. Linda landed with a “pop!” “He continues to defy us!” Yelled Thunderhawk. He was an outspoken member, who always had a vendetta against Ekyt. Spectre spoke next. “While he is a rebel, he’s done nothing wrong. Personal feelings aside.” “Chaos control is forbidden to all but Knuckles!” “To all but **guardians**. He’s done nothing that we can persecute him for.” Locke corrected him. Turning to Linda, he said “The most important thing now is to find him, and make sure he is out of harm.” “He’s been captured by the Dark Legion.” Linda stated grimly. “We can do no more than monitor his progress... Linda, you are free to go.” Linda bowed slightly. “Locke, she could have been useful!” Thunderhawk said in a voice that demanded an explanation. “She will go to him.” Locke said confidently. “How can you be sure.” Spectre asked. “I knew love briefly...” Locke said, smiling ruefully.

Ekyt didn’t bother tugging at the chains. He stayed kneeling, in a meditation-like state. The cell door opened. “So THIS is what they meant. You poor thing.” He looked up to stare at Rouge the bat. He didn’t say anything. “You know, I’ve always found authority figures to be irresistible.” Ekyt laughed, coughing afterwards. “You used the same line on Locke she-devil.” Rouge’s hand hit his face with a stinging SMACK! “You little monster! I hope Lien-Da tears you in half!” “No, that would be too kind of her. She’d rather see me suffer. And- have you gained weight?” Ekyt said inquisitively. Rouge jumped on him, hitting him. Ekyt couldn’t do anything to stop it. When the guards wrestled her off, Ekyt’s forehead was cut, his lip was bleeding, and his eye would be black soon. “How dare you?!” Ekyt was silent again, his face cast in shadows of anger and doubt.

Linda crept up behind the guard. She put a hand over his mouth and dragged him into the bushes, knocking him unconscious. She slipped into his long, hooded robe and marched toward the prison.

"Knux, what are you up to?" "I told you Julie. It's a trip to Haven. We have to renew your citizenship." "What for?" "The Dark Legion." "Okay, okay, don't remind me. I was young and stupid. So sue me." She said. "WAS?" Knuckles asked, his eyebrows raised. "What was that?!" "Oh, Nothing."

"The human prisoner is to be released to lord Kragok." Linda-Su said in a deep voice. "I have heard no orders..." "Then take it up with Master Kragok! Now give me those keys! I will have you committed!" "Yes sir!" The young guard gave Linda the keys. She strode over to Ekyt's cell. "If it isn't the guardian..." she began. Ekyt didn't make any indication that he had heard her. She got in close as she unlocked his chains. "We're outta here." Ekyt closed one eye in a wink. "Hit me." He muttered. "What. Hit me. Make it look good. Then drag me out of here." She swung hard; too hard, in retrospect, as she knocked him for a loop. "Let's go scumbag!" she dragged him toward the edge of the Dark Legion camp. "And where are you going?" The soldier that had confiscated Ekyt's ring blocked their path. Coming to "life," Ekyt's foot lashed out, catching the soldier in the jaw. He dove on him and covered his mouth. "Be quiet! I'll make things worse! Now shut up!" Ekyt hissed. The guard responded. "Put the ring on the ground...good. Drop your weapon...Very good." Ekyt kept his hand over his mouth. He snapped the taser that he had taken and zapped the soldier unconscious. "Let's go!" "GET HIM!" Kragok's voice rang out. "Are you alright?" Linda asked. "Yeah. I'm gonna use the ring. I'd better do it now, they haven't fed me in a full day. Hang on!" Ekyt concentrated on the ring as Linda climbed into his arms. Ekyt used some age-old guardian power to create a chasm between the Dark Legion and them. Then he ran ten times his normal speed.

"Thanks for getting me out." He murmured shyly. "No problem." Linda said, also blushing. He kept running. "I think we're safe." The familiar paradise of Angel Island was in view. Gently, Ekyt put Linda down. He stumbled. She caught him under the arm. "Sorry. They starved me." "And you didn't talk?" "No. I couldn't. Lien-Da and Rouge both hit on me and I swore loyalty to..." Ekyt's voice trailed off. "That's really sweet of you. Any girl would be lucky to have such a loyal boyfriend." "The fact is, you're not just any girl. You proved that when you accepted me. That's something that I'll never forget."

144 - Loyal if Nothing Else

Linda dragged Ekyt somewhat. He was weak from hunger, and the landscape was kind of blurry to him. "Hold on." He said weakly. He tossed off his coat and shirt and ducked his head and body into some water in a pond nearby. "Sorry. That helped though...I'd better get some food in me, especially with Kragok on the loose..." "Yeah. Lemme see...the nearest place is...your place." "I'd better get there then." Linda propped him up again, noticing the slash marks on his back, and the cuts on his face. "They did a number on you...I wish I had gotten their sooner." "Not your fault. I'd be dead if you hadn't showed up. Like I said, you're a special girl to put up with me."

"Julie-Su, Dad. She wants to get her citizenship renewed." Knuckles told his father. "I see. Of course, Julie, you're app" "Locke, a word?" Spectre beckoned to Locke. "That girl has the mark of the Dark Legion." "That is in the past Spectre." Locke reasoned. "Well, she forbidden to have citizenship." Locke looked furious, in a rare display of emotion. "Spectre, I will see the council's decision on this is just. Why you have to try this again and again is beyond me, but I am not going to let you harm an innocent life." Locke turned away from him. "Julie-Su...I'm sorry. I wish I had some say in the matter. Your citizenship is not renewed." "What? Why! Dad, c'mon!" Knuckles sputtered. "I'm looking into it. It's not my idea, I assure you." Julie whispered to Knuckles "C'mon, let's just go. Let's talk to Ekyt, he's been banished a ton of times, and he's still here." Knuckles nodded. "We'd better hurry...."

"Did you get the data Kragok?" Robotnik's face appeared to the leader of the Dark Legion. "Of course I did." Kragok told him stiffly. He passed a vial of blood into a small transfer pod. With a whirr and a click, it arrived to Robotnik seconds later. "Excellent! This will fix him...Robotnik out."

Ekyt offered a seat to Linda once he got home. She shook her head. "No, you need rest and food. I'll handle the food. You get some rest." Ekyt plopped down, too weak to argue. Linda made some food. Ekyt ate it without even looking at it. He felt a little stronger after that. He started to get up, but Linda pushed him gently back. "I'm staying here to keep an eye on you." Linda told him, leaving no room for argument. "Do you have extra blankets and a pillow?" Ekyt nodded, pointing. "Good." Ekyt yanked his blanket and pillows off the bed and laid down on the floor. Linda, who had been down the hall, smiled at this. **Half-dead, and my comfort is still more important...He's a rare one.** She climbed up on his bed, curling up and falling asleep quickly, while Ekyt snoozed on the floor.

Robotnik chortled with delight. "My new robot is ready for testing! Attention, metal human!" A Ekyt-like robot's eyes flashed. "Yes master?" it answered in a hollow, mechanical voice. "Do you understand your orders?" "Yes master. I am to pursue and kill the human, Ekyt. The device you've installed in me will prevent anyone from helping him." "Very good. Go on, then. Attack!"

Ekyt woke up on the floor and took a moment to remember what happened. He heard a crash. "What the???" Linda-Su heard it too, and they both went outside.

A metal Ekyt was staring at them. Without warning, it fired a beam, which made a dome, encircling the two. "You are slated for robotication or death." Ekyt wasn't 100% yet, but he had to fight. "You're a cheap imitation of me, scrap-metal. Time to back to the junkyard you came from." The two clashed,

bouncing all over the dome.

“It’s good to have you back Tails.” Sally told the young fox. “Yeah, it’s good to be back. I missed you guys...” Sonic ruffled his fur. “I hear ya bud. How about a race to Knothole?” “Nah, let’s race to the Floating Island. I’ve got to apologize to Ekyt.” “Sounds good, lit- I mean, big bro.”

“I am ingrained with even your personality. You have no hope of beating me!” the robot announced. Ekyt hit the side of the dome, bouncing off, his foot extending in a kick. The robot caught his foot and shoved him- hard! Ekyt hit the dirt on his side. He rolled away as a hand slashed into the grass where his head had been. He rolled over onto his back and kicked with both legs, landing them on the sternum of the robotic him. It fell backward, cracking it’s head on a rock. Seeing a hope of winning, Ekyt jumped up and brought his foot down across it’s head. It bent, but it didn’t break.” The robot seized his leg the second time he tried it, fling him high into the air. It jumped up and rode Ekyt’s body into the ground. Ekyt saw what that thing had planned for him. He punched futile, before getting an idea. He grabbed the robot’s coat (Remember, it’s just like Ekyt except for red eyes and a mechanical voice) and swung himself upward. He wind up on top of the robot, riding it into the ground.

The dome around them exploded in a shower of sparks. It looked like the miserable robot had lost. Ekyt, for once, had come out largely unscathed. Linda jogged over to him. “Light workout?” she asked him with a smirk. “’bout the size of it.” Ekyt said. He heard a whirr behind him. CLANG! Ekyt got hit from behind, metal hitting him in the head. He had tried to duck, softening the blow a little, so he had his wits about him to hit the ground and roll. **Concussion for sure...This monstrosity has Robotnik written all over it...I hope they didn’t make it faster than me...** “Come and get me!” Ekyt turned and ran. The robot was up along side him. Ekyt saw what he was looking for. He reached up and snagged a tree branch. He swung around it. One foot hit the robot. The metal monstrosity’s leg flashed upward, hitting Ekyt in the chest, knocking him backward.

Linda saw this from a distance. “Oh man...not good...he doesn’t have his full strength back yet...” She watched him wobble on his feet, having a hard time standing up after those shots, let alone fighting.

145 - The Right Thing

“Where is this thing’s power source?” Ekyt thought of one last hope of beating this monster. He saw his staff lying on the ground. “Linda!” he called, “Throw me the staff!” Linda threw it to him. He caught it deftly, swinging around and hitting the metal version of himself in the side, He turned the staff around to the pointed side and drove it home. The robot crackled and fizzed. “YES!” Linda cheered. Ekyt relaxed for a moment. The robot reached into it’s stomach and pulled out the staff, snapping it. “You’re not going to win this. Your flesh cannot stand much more.” Ekyt privately agreed with that statement.

Knuckles, Julie-Su, Sonic, and Tails all arrived at the same time. They gaped with horror as their human buddy got thrown by...himself??? They watched him get up, and wobble. “Concussion, at least.” Knuckles said to the group. Ekyt managed to run, hitting a flying front kick, landing, and spinning around to strike with his heel. He ducked and kicked low, spinning one more time, with a roundhouse kick. It had taken a lot of his energy, that much they could tell. What they couldn’t tell was how much damage it had done to both of them...

The dome was gone, and Ekyt was on his last legs. The concussion was taking it’s toll on him, as his punches and kicks didn’t have the usual power behind them. The metal version of Ekyt kicked backward, landing both feet to Ekyt’s stomach. It used it’s built-in rocket boosters to strike incredibly hard with it’s shoulder, ramming Ekyt backward. It raised it’s own staff, sharpened at the end, to end the fight. Ekyt was so out of it between the concussion and the pain there was nothing he could do.

“That’s it! Stand back!” Sonic and Knuckles spun and glided (respectively) into the mechanical (attempter) murderer. It broke in half. Linda hauled Ekyt to his feet (Good thing he’s so light). “C’mon, we’re going to get you looked at by a doctor.” The robot moved. In pure anger, Linda emptied the clip of her pistol into it.

They all went along to the doctor. “He’ll be fine, I’ve given him a special shot, the concussion will be gone within minutes (Gotta love technology!).” Ekyt emerged, sporting a pitifully fake grin. “Thanks for the save guys. I saw my life flash before my eyes...I need more memories, it didn’t take long enough.” They watched him walk down the hallway, knowing he was hiding something.

“What’s his deal?” Sonic asked. “He’s alive, ain’t he?” Knuckles nodded his agreement. Tails and Linda, who had spent the most time with him, thought they knew what was troubling him. “If I know him, he’s down about losing the fight.” Linda started. “Yeah. He’s got that “If I don’t have my pride, I’ve got nothing” attitude.” Linda turned to Sonic and Knuckles. “Thanks for saving him. And I know he means as much.”

As soon as he was out of site, Ekyt let his shoulders drop. He lifted up his mask, wiping a bead of sweat away. **Now I can’t even fight my own battles...Maybe it’s time to give it up...That’s not in my nature, I know that...I’ve got to do things my way...And I’m going to start by tackling Robotnik...**

All of them caught up with Ekyt as he was about to use a vine to swing down to Mobius. “Hey, wait, I’ve got a problem!” Julie-Su called out. Ekyt let go of the vine. “They won’t renew my citizenship!” Ekyt

squeezed his eyes shut. He thought for a moment. "Well...what I would do is walk up to them and tell them why I should be back. And then Linda would come in and say something, then Knuckles. Strength in numbers." Julie-Su shrugged. "Tried it." "Not with me. Let's give this a shot..."

"Excuse me, Locke?" Ekyt asked. "Hm? I've been waiting for you to come in and defend her Ekyt." Locke said offhandedly, stroking his beard. "She deserves it Locke, you know it. Between you, me, Knuckles, and Linda..." "I know. Spectre is set against her affiliation with you." Locke stroked his beard as he watched the young man think. **Take the bait lad! You know what to do...** Ekyt nodded suddenly. "Julie, you're going to have to learn to hate me, quick!" Julie's face was screwed up in confusion. "Say WHAT?" "Trust me. Fake it. Say whatever you want." Julie hesitated, then swung her fist at him. "You little worm! How dare you soil the good name of the guardians?! You don't deserve the charity that the Brotherhood gives you! You couldn't protect yourself against a mosquito! I hope you rot in Devil's Gulag!" Ekyt acted mad. "You know, what you're not worth it Julie!" he "stormed" out. Locke stroked his beard again. **Right on the money lad. And whatever it is that's troubling you, may Steppenwolf guide you...**

146 - A Chaos Heart

"I know of your disobedience." Spectre, an elder member of the brotherhood, hissed at Ekyt. He and Ekyt disliked each other, and this little incident didn't help. "Disobedience? Pray tell, what?" Ekyt asked back, looking mockingly surprised. "You lied for that little witch, didn't you? Well, she's back. Congratulations. But, your treachery won't go unpunished." "Surprise, surprise." Ekyt crowed. "You are to work in the chaos mines for the remainder of today. If you refuse... Little Julie and Linda will have to find a new home... I assume we understand each other..." Spectre hissed. "I get you." Ekyt said back flatly.

"This is the place Sal mentioned... time to set these charges and motor, Rotor!" Rotor, the walrus and one of the resident handy-men of Knothole, nodded stiffly. "I can't wait to turn that Robotnik into a can-opener!" Sonic placed a cluster of black spheres around what looked like a telephone pole. It was actually a thick cluster of cables, running to various workshops and factories and, according to Sally's computer, Nicole, Robotnik's mainframe computers. "Ten seconds! Hang on, we're juicin'!"

"Man, that's horrible! You didn't argue that one?" Knuckles questioned Ekyt, while Julie-Su and Linda-Su flanked them. "Anything short of banishment or demotion I'm going to take in stride. I don't have much choice. You know he wants me gone." Julie tapped him on the shoulder. "Thanks again. That was some quick thinking." "No problem Julie. Glad to help." Knuckles stopped. "They blackmailed you, didn't they?" Everyone stopped. "Blackmailed?" "They did something. You're not the type to just... go with the flow." Ekyt laughed at that. "No, I'm not. And, yeah, they did." Ekyt admitted. "And how, exactly, did they threaten you?" "A day in the mines, or Julie and Linda are out a home. It's worth my time, trust me." Ekyt grimaced, folding his coat up and placing it behind a bush. "I'd better get at it..."

"Great job Sonic!" Sally exclaimed, giving him a peck on the cheek. "Hey, thank you, thank you. But, Rotor did a great job too. Right Rote? Rote?" "Sonic, come quick!" Rotor was pointing at the sky.

A huge hovercraft, decorated with Robotnik's seal, was hovering over the clearing they were in. "Looks like we ticked off 'Buttnik off this time! I'll just send him packing!" Sonic motored to Robotnik's vehicle. "I know you're in there, blubberbuns!" Thirty swatbots answered from around him. "Here I am, rodent! And here are my friends!" "Freedom Fighters charge!" Sally ordered. It was so uncharacteristic that everyone hesitated, but ran over to the swatbots. "Get me Haven, Nicole!" Sally called into her computer. "Connecting Sally..."

"Locke." The older echidna answered tersely. Princess Sally's concerned face appeared on his monitor. "Princess." "There's not much time Locke! This is an S.O.S.! We need Knuckles and Ekyt! We've just been ambushed! Sonic and Bunnie can't hold out much longer, and Tails and Rotor are down!" "Understood Princess. I'll send them. Haven out."

"Knuckles!" Archimedes, Locke's friend and messenger, a fireant, appeared at Knuckles side. "Huh? Arch? (Pronounced "ark") What's up?" "Trouble's up, m' boy! You and Ekyt have to get over to the Great Forest! The Freedom Fighters aren't going to hold out long!" "Oh man! I'm on my way. Ekyt's in

the mines, Spectre” “I heard. We had words. I’ll fetch him. If you see Linda and Julie on the way, take them too.”

Ekyt pried another emerald loose, getting progressively more angry at the situation. BAMPF! Ekyt dropped the emerald, but didn’t see where it went. “Archimedes? Something wrong?” he asked, concerned. “Afraid so. You’re needed at the Great Forest. Take the Cosmic Interstate; Linda’s going with you, she’s got your weapons!” Ekyt stood up quickly and scrambled outside, tossing his coat on as he ran. “Best of luck kid!” “Thanks Arch!”

“You ready kid?” Linda called mockingly. She tossed him a black helmet with a tinted visor. “Hang on!” she called back. Her motorcycle kicked forward, aiming at portal to the Cosmic Interstate. She raced along the checkerboard-style highway. She navigated expertly, hitting the Knothole exit perfectly.

Sonic and Bunnie were down, hit from behind. Sally was shrinking back, with a defiant look on her face. “You’ll never win Robotnik!” Robotnik smiled evilly. “Once I have you, I’ve already won!” He reached a fat arm out to grab her.

“Forget that Chubsy-ubsy!” Knuckles sharp fist knocked Robotnik’s arm away. Julie-Su sailed into him, bouncing off his cone-shaped head. “OOH! I hate hedgehogs! I hate chipmunks! I hate squirrels. Now I hate echidnas!” “Well, we hate humans!” Knuckles called back. Linda-Su’s motorcycled roared through. “Present company an exception!” Julie called. Ekyt threw his helmet, hitting a SWATbot, getting it’s attention. “I’m going to get Sally!” Linda called to him. “Right-o! Tin-grin is all mine!” The robot.

A SWATbot, an older model, took aim with it’s crossbow. He watched as the human destroyed it’s comrad, A780945231655, with two sharpened weapons he identified as swords, Kris blades, Phillipino in origin. He took his shot.

“What the” Ekyt had time to get out before the arrow pierced him in the heart. He fell to the ground, the arrow sticking menacingly out of him. Robotnik laughed hysterically. “One guardian down! One to go!”

He stopped laughing when Ekyt sat up and pulled the arrow out of him...

147 - The Break

“You’re not dead?” “He’s not dead?” “I’m not dead?” Ekyt said the last one. Then he fell back over onto his face. Linda-Su was overcome with rage. She blazed through the SWATbots to get to Robotnik. Sonic had recovered, and Knuckles was still fighting strong. Robotnik ordered more SWATbots to attack, simply hoping to swamp all of them.

Ekyt’s hand twitched. He felt into his pocket. The emerald from the mine... “That’s why I’m not dead...Thanks for something Spectre.” He murmured, getting to his feet. Linda tackled him suddenly, as three arrows flew by, sticking into the ground where his chest would have been seconds earlier.

He had managed to absorb most of the blow, by holding onto her while she was on top of him after the tackle. “You okay?” he said, suddenly blushing. “Just fine. I’m glad you’re alright.” She said, smiling. “Back into the fray. I’ve got a little surprise of my own...”

The SWATbots kept coming. Sonic, Knuckles, Julie, Linda, Ekyt, Sally, Rotor, Bunnie, and Tails. Against a hundred SWATbots. They each took out their fair share, destroying in their own signature way. But they all sagged, exhausted. “Give up, rodents! Victory is mine!” Sally put her head down. “He’s right.” “No he’s not Princess.” Ekyt was holding up the emerald. “When I give the word, run, take cover anywhere you can. Because this is going to cause some HEAVY damage.” Ekyt told her. “And you?” “A risk I’m willing to take, since if this works, Robotnik will be gone too.”

Ekyt ran up a tree, using the arrow he had pulled out of himself to puncture the emerald. “NOW!” He yelled, flinging the emerald into the center of the robots.

The explosion was movie-violent. A hole in the air materialized, sucking all the robots in. Ekyt was going to be next. Without thinking, without knowing what to do, he said to himself “Chaos shield.” “Enjoy “The Zone of Silence” Robotnik.” Ekyt called. Sonic, on cue, spun into Robotnik, loosening his grip on the rock he had been hanging on to. “You’ll pay! I’ll get all of you! WAHHH!” He was sucked in. The hole vanished, the fierce wind that had whipped through stopped.

They all cheered, but sagged, exhausted from the Herculean effort it had taken to fight off Robotnik. “Great job Sonic.” Ekyt said, holding a hand over his bleeding chest. “You too, pal, that was a neat trick!” Ekyt smiled vaguely.

He was in pain, but satisfied. They had held their ground. Ekyt was ready to move to the fight in a separate clearing, where Flash (Flashthehedgehog), Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog), Amy, and Antoine were holding their own. Without Robotnik, the robots would only obey existing orders, unable to improvise.

Linda was sitting down, tired, with a troubled expression on her face. Ekyt made his way over to her, to see if she was hurt. “No, nothing like that...thank you though...I just...” Ekyt didn’t like where this was going. “You can tell me. No matter what it is, you can tell me.” Ekyt said comfortingly. “I-I need to...to...” Ekyt finished for her. “Break up with me.” He said, revealing nothing with his tone of voice or face.

“Yes. I’m really sorry. I was just thinking I want to have children someday. I don’t want them to lead a guardian’s life, and I want them to have a father that can always be there for them, instead of almost dying, or always working.” She tried to gauge Ekyt’s reaction, but there was none. “Do-do you see where I’m coming from?” she asked.

“I do.” Ekyt told her. “I’m surprised you’ve put up with me as long as you have. I appreciate that, and I’m glad you told me the truth. There’s no hard feelings. Just...take care of yourself.” Ekyt said, meeting her eyes.

Out of habit, she moved to kiss him, but he was already on his way to the next battle. Linda nodded firmly, and then followed. It was a long, rough road, and this wasn’t the ending either of them had foreseen. Funny how dreams come true, but so do nightmares...

148 - Judge, Jury, Executioner

Ekyt was the first to the next battle. There was no pressure, just a routine battle that was quickly won. But not before a problem hit...

Ekyt had just dodged a SWATbot's punch. The secret was to either get in really close, or stay away entirely. Ekyt was in close, rendering their laser weapons useless. Ekyt was taking on four SWATbots, everyone had four or more. But it was easy, they had no orders other than "attack." But one landed a critical right hand to Ekyt's face on the right side. His flesh tore away, leaving the right side of his face a bloody mess.

The battle had been won. Ekyt was almost at his lowest point. He had always had Linda's support, and for her to just not be there anymore. Suppressing a sigh, he slipped his mask over his face for the first time in a long time.

Linda didn't see his injury, and couldn't bring herself to talk to him right away. When she did, he had his face covered with his mask. "Just because we're not...you know...doesn't mean we're not friends." Ekyt's vicious streak suddenly came forward. "Says you. Enjoy your life."

Linda couldn't believe that. But, she couldn't blame him either.

Ekyt was making some decisions about his life. Maybe he hadn't lived right? Was this all his fault? As he walked by, an old enemy was walking in the opposite direction. It was a narrow path, and Ekyt didn't really notice him until he heard a laugh. A cocky life that made his blood boil.

"HEY!" Ekyt stuck an arm out. "What do you want?" the echidna Ekyt remembered as "Staph," Linda's ex-boyfriend, sneered. "Take a shot at me. Go ahead." Ekyt taunted. As Staph attacked, Ekyt's fist hit him squarely in the jaw. Staph's fist stopped just an inch from Ekyt's unflinching head. "I should have done that a long time ago." Ekyt said, a smile crossing his face. "They think I'm a monster now? Wait until they see what I've become..."

It was a week before Ekyt was seen again. His coat was closed, his mask firmly in place, covering his face, save for his mouth. His hair was shorter, and he looked...taller.

When he was seen, Ekyt had caught a member of the Dark Legion escaping from jail. With one hand, he grabbed the echidna and threw him into a tree. When a second escapee tried to attack, he was thrown THROUGH the tree. With one in each hand, Ekyt threw them back into their cells. "Dirtbags...you're safer in here than out there...with me." Ekyt rasped, a gloved hand pointing at them, a scary smile crossing his face.

He became untouchable, no one could find him. Knuckles saw him only once, when he thwarted an attempt to steal the island's chaos emerald. Knuckles described it as "Sheer brutality." Ekyt had caught the intruder with one arm, slamming him to the ground and holding him there, choking him, letting go just before it was too late.

“My God...I’ve unleashed a monster...” Linda muttered upon hearing the news. Julie was with her at the time. “No. Something else is going on in his head...it wasn’t you, or not just you...” “I shouldn’t have broken up with him.” She said quietly. “If you didn’t love him, then it was for the best.” “I DID love him. I STILL do. But I don’t want my children to live the kind of life he does!” Julie scratched her head. “Well...you know...if you were to go into the future, you would see what it would be like. Maybe he’s settled down in the future...” “Sonic can get me there, right?” Linda asked. “Yeah. Then you can see what Ekyt’ll be like in the future.”

Ekyt sat up in his bed, which was his coat, as he curled up under a tree. He heard footsteps; that was what had gotten his attention. A group of echidna thugs were standing over him, brandishing clubs. “Time to take your medicine for hurting out friend freak!” the head goon declared. “If I had any clue what you were talking about, I might deny the claim. But since you’re here...” Ekyt kicked the goon in front, smashing his nose. “...I’m assuming you want my attention. You’ve got it.” Ekyt’s arms flashed out, grabbing two stunned crooks. He banged their heads together, then tossed them aside. Two more goons left. One swung his club across Ekyt’s face. His mask cracked slightly. Ekyt laughed. “Good try. I’ll give you that.” He said, lifting up the offending echidna and throwing him into his friend. Grabbing the last conscious gang member (the leader), Ekyt pushed him into the tree, pulling back his right fist and striking, for once, without hesitation...

149 - How it All Began...

“Next stop: Ten years in the future! Hold on tight!” Sonic ran, reaching a speed unattainable to anyone but him.

The future wasn't a ruin yet, as Linda had seen it once before. This future had a minor fight going, but no major war. She and Sonic watched as an egg cracked open, revealing a baby echidna girl...

(Conversation between future people)

Ekyt: You followed our wishes?

Doctor Quack: I did guardian.

Ekyt: Good...I don't want her to suffer the same fate I did...

Doctor: She has your hair, but other than that, she's 100% echidna.

Ekyt: Excellent, thank you Dr. Quack.

Doctor: My pleasure. I can't believe I've finally gotten to deliver a guardian's child.

Ekyt: Believe it. You've delivered Princes, Princess, Queens, Kings, and guardians.

Doctor: Well, I'll leave you with your wife and daughter guardian.

Ekyt: She has your tail Linda.

Linda: She's got your eyes...and that tuft of hair on top! Daddy for sure!

Ekyt: (Smiles) But she's beautiful...like her mother. Thank God.

Linda: Well, you had a hand in it too (blushes)

Ekyt: S'pose so (blushes too)

(End Conversation)

Linda and Sonic exchanged glances. “But where's the war?” Linda asked. “He still had his guardian band and coat, and a limp! He hasn't settled down at all!” She exclaimed. “You don't know that yet! Besides, look at the two of you and Paula!”

(Conversation)

Linda: What do we name her?

Ekyt: Oh geez, I don't know...Nancy?

Linda: No, she doesn't look like a Nancy.

Ekyt: Stella, Amy

Linda: Those sound like stripper names! (A comment one of my teachers made in high school! I don't actually mean it, it just sounded funny to me!)

Ekyt: Paula?

Linda: That works...not my first choice though...

Ekyt: What was your choice? I was just trying to pick a girl's name...

Linda: I don't know, actually, Paula just wasn't the first to come to mind...

Ekyt: I've got all the time off I need.

Linda: Good. I was always worried you'd drag out daughter into training from day 1

Ekyt: No, that's something we'll ALL have to decide...when she's old enough to choose for herself, I won't stop her.

Linda: I hoped you would say that. I just don't want her to wind up hurt all the time...

Ekyt: It's a tough line of work. If she decides to be a guardian, I'll make sure she knows what she's risking...

Linda: I know you'll be good with her Ekyt...I'm glad we made the right decision...Our break-up was nasty...

Ekyt: Which one?

Linda: Wise-acre. You know the one. I'm glad I talked you down finally...

Ekyt: Yeah...If I ever become that monster again, I'll have good reason. The good reason being you and Paula...Wait, what was that?

Ekyt: (Runs over to a radio setup) Knothole, that was your end, what happened?

Sally: (Over Radio) We've been attacked! Shadow (Radio fades in and out) robots...Sonic and I...banished

Ekyt: I'll be right there! We're going to have to evac you and Sonic, and any surviving Freedom Fighters. I'll contact Knuckles.

Linda: What's going on?

Ekyt: The Kingdom of Acorn has fallen...

Linda: Robotnik?

Ekyt: No...Shadow...You know what I've got to do...

Linda: Just come back safe for your daughter...and your wife...

Ekyt: (Smiles) I promise you I'll be back in one piece.

The two kissed, as their daughter stared in wide-eyed wonder, not yet knowing just how dangerous a world she was going to be living in.

(End Conversation)

"Sonic...I'm ready to go home." Linda said hollowly.

Ekyt looked at Mount Fate. "Maybe I should go home..." He turned to do just that as Sonic and Linda came blasting out of nowhere.

“My God...this is what’s happened to you?” Linda said in wonder. “What of it?” Ekyt answered, not taking his eyes off either of them. “Ekyt...we need to talk...if you don’t like what you here, then you can leave...I don’t blame you for hating me.” Ekyt looked up. “You better have a good reason...because I’ve had my share of pain and suffering here...I’m heading home...”

150 - Issue 150 Special!!!

“Home? You live here!” Linda sputtered. “Then I’m homeless. I’m sure not welcome here, unless the multiple stab wounds mean something else...” Only his eyes and mouth were visible, but they both showed an intensity that the young man had never displayed, let alone felt, before. Linda looked near tears, but stiffened her face, grabbing his coat’s collar.

“You listen to me! You have braved everything else here without destroying yourself. There’s something going on in your head, and I want to know what.” “And what gives you that authority?” Ekyt shot back. “I’ve always had your support, and then it just wasn’t there. In a way, I should be thanking you. It was time for my baptism by fire anyway. I made promises I haven’t kept. Some people say that promises to yourself don’t count; but think about that...Shouldn’t those promises matter most? If you can’t trust yourself...who CAN you trust?”

Linda let go of his collar, shocked by his words. “What happened to you? You used to be...” Linda’s voice trailed off. “You don’t like what I’ve become? I can’t say I blame you...I never said I LIKED myself this way...” Sonic and Linda exchanged glances. “He’s too far gone Linda...” Sonic shook his head. Linda nodded, a single tear trickling down her cheek. She reached up and kissed him on the cheek. “Don’t let us change your decision. I’d rather have you happy away than miserable here...” she gave him a sad smile as she turned his collar up against the cold one last time.

Ekyt had his stuff gathered, and was in the chaos chamber, waiting for Knuckles. “This is it. Thank you for everything Knux.” Knuckles shook his hand. “You’re sure about this?” “I have to be. It’s the only way to...what was that?” They both ran over to the other end of the Chaos Chamber. They stopped, exchanging silent glances. Sonic and Linda were laying at their feet. Seconds later, Julie-Su joined the heap. “They’re alive.” Knuckles said. “Knux...I know this out of character...but stay here and watch them...you’ll get your chance at whoever did this...Because I will throw them down here...” Ekyt pulled off his mask. Knuckles smiled. “Good to have you back buddy.” Knux told him. “Good to Be back...for now. The mask will be back on me as soon as I find who did this...”

Ekyt didn’t have to search long to find his answer. Four echidnas in long, red robes, with hoods, blocked his path. “You did this, didn’t you?” Ekyt asked. No answer. “I asked you a question, freaks in red! How about answering a simpler one: Who are you?”

What seemed to be the leader of the group stepped forward. “We are the Elite Legion. Unlike our “Dark” brethren, we do not have use for technology. We have no need. We are the prime fighters, the best of the best. You’d be wise to join us, for we have a lot in common...”

Ekyt contemplated the four echidnas. “No we don’t. I don’t attack the innocent...leave them lying...I don’t want to seem hostile, but you did that, didn’t you? Attacked my friends and left them lying?” The leader nodded. “We did. But are they REALLY your friends? We have observed you guardian. You have a powerful side you do not unleash...either because you don’t know of it, or you don’t choose too...or haven’t, until recently.” The echidna sneered, remaining gentlemanly. Ekyt took in their words. “Your trip if you run on your way to power...not something I intend to do.”

"No one has ever refused us!" "Then I'm honored to be the first. Listen, and listen good: I will NEVER be like you. I don't like to admit it, but I'm human. I'm mortal. I'm a lot of things. I'm anti-social. I'm habitually mysterious. I'm loyal. In short, I am The Next Guardian. However lame that sounds, I guard the emerald, I guard lives." "You have no one to guard!" One echidna laughed. "Then I'll guard myself." Ekyt's eyes darted around as the four surrounded him... With an enraged yell, the one behind him attacked. Ekyt spun, his foot slashing out, but he only hit the air as the echidna dodged him deftly. His right hand managed a hit, but he was thrown. He hit the grass on his back and rolled quickly as a foot buried itself in the ground where his chest had been. He swung his other leg low, connected with the echidna's rising leg. He continued the forward motion and spun to his feet. He let the echidna remove his foot from the dirt. "You have integrity guardian...that is your biggest obstacle...is it one you can overcome? If not, you have no chance against us." "Do you clowns have names? I'd like to know who's butt it is that my foot is going to occupy."

"I'm Shi'arr." (Pronounced She-Arr) The one behind him said. "I'm Ada'man." (Pronounced Ah-Da-Mahn) The one to his right stated, somewhat cockily. "You may all me Kee'lar." (Pronounced Kay-le-arr) The one to his left said condescendingly. "And I am Gala'nata." (Pronounced Gow-lah-na-tah) The leader said, not breaking eye contact. Ekyt gulped inwardly. These guys were going to be tough...

Linda stirred first. "Oh thank God." Knuckles breathed a sigh of relief. "Knux? What's going on?" "You talked Ekyt down, that's what! He's back, but he's off fighting whoever it is that attacked you." Linda's eyes widened. "Oh, that's bad! There's four of them, and they're going to kill him if he doesn't join them! We've got to help him!" Knuckles agreed. "When the others wake up, we'll go. And don't worry about Ekyt, he dies hard."

Ekyt had fought Shi'arr, who was now circling with him menacingly. "Your mistake was letting me remove my foot. It's a lesson you must learn." With a shrill "Kee-ya!" of effort, Shi'arr kicked forward; his leg was thwarted by Ekyt's forearm. Undeterred, his other foot came up, twisting it's owner gracefully through the air. The foot met it's mark on the back of Ekyt's head. The impact forced Ekyt to bend forward. A rising knee brought Ekyt back to his senses. He leaned back quickly, throwing his left fist out, aiming for the knee of Shi'arr. It connected, sending the echidna down temporarily.

Shi'arr's foot was turned the wrong way. Despite that, he continued to smile. Ekyt punched again, knocking the echidna back further. "Don't you see? Pain won't bother me!" "Too much of anything isn't good, you'll crack!" Ekyt called back, amazed that Shi'arr's three companions didn't attack. That thought distracted him as Shi'arr's forearm hit the side of his head. Ekyt's elbow swung down onto the retracting forearm, breaking it. His knee met the echidna's midsection. His surprise finally showed as his eyes narrowed when there wasn't even a flinch on Shi'arr's part.

"I warned you..." Shi'arr took advantage off Ekyt's temporary distraction to land an uppercut to Ekyt's jaw, which knocked him backward. The kick that the echidna threw knocked Ekyt down; that gave Shi'arr time to jump on top and grapple with Ekyt. Ekyt, who saw this coming, put his foot up while pulling down on his neck, flipping Shi'arr over and bending him backward in a way that made even him howl in pain.

Ekyt moved away and let Shi'arr's friends tend to him, hoping that the show of respect would end the

fight. Ada'man smiled at Ekyt (It amazed Ekyt that a friendly gesture could be done with so much intimidating force behind it) and told him that "That was an excellent move. But you won't have such an easy time with me. I'm the one who hit your girlfriend across the head and dumped her down into the chamber below." Ekyt all but turned red as he pushed Ada'man away and attacked with high, low, and middle kicks in rapid fire succession, displaying a sense of balance that he wasn't sure he could pull off again. Each kick was blocked. Ada'man's palm came flying toward Ekyt's nose. Ekyt dodged the black-gloved hand and stepped on the echidna's foot, pushing hard, tipping the echidna over. With a grunt of effort, Ada'man flung his leg up, hitting Ekyt in the side of the face, just above his eye. A narrow cut opened, not the worst Ekyt had ever received, but the blood running down his face was reason enough for Ekyt to try to bring his foot down onto Ada'man. He did so successfully, using the echidna's chest as a springboard to a diving thrust kick, which earned him a right cross the jaw.

Linda had never been so angry. She now thought of the young man as more than a friend, perhaps more than a boyfriend. A Soulmate. "Soul Touch never lies Linda." Knuckles said, as though he could guess her thoughts. "No. I hope he's alright." The others stirred. "Excellent. Now I'm going to rip their heads off! If Ekyt's hurt..." "He's fine Linda. Trust me. If anyone could hold off four punks, it's Ekyt..."

Ada'man landed three hard kicks to Ekyt's midsection. Ekyt blocked a fourth kick with his shin, raising it up, then kicking from that position. His kick hit home on Ada'man, his foot landing in the center of his chest. It knocked the echidna down. "We can stop this senseless fight right now." Ekyt offered his hand to Ada'man. "I would have killed her if Gala'nata had let me..." Ekyt was enraged by the echidna's words. He yanked the echidna up, punching three times with his left hand, once with his right, and then pulled the stunned echidna forward while kicking his legs backward. CRACK! Ekyt had thrown out the echidna's back. Ekyt stomped on his ribs, aiming to do damage. Kee'lar stepped in. "That will do guardian. I believe you've made your point that Ada'man went too far. However, orders are orders, and ours are to have you join us, or die." "I'd rather die. But your mistake is giving me options and leaving one out. My third option is to beat all of you back to where you came from." Ekyt growled. Kee'lar smiled. Ekyt suddenly stopped. "I can't fight you...This is senseless...and..." Ekyt's hand grabbed the hood. "You're a girl!" Ekyt exclaimed, seeing long, golden dreadlocks.

"Astute, guardian. Very astute to notice my gender before I intended you to. Narrow-minded, however, to think yourself different than me. Men and women alike have fallen at my feet, gender never being a consideration." "I've never hit a woman, and I won't start now." Ekyt replied stubbornly. "Not even if I give you a good reason?" Kee'lar said teasingly. She suddenly kicked at Ekyt's groin. Ekyt blocked her foot and stepped back. "No." Ekyt answered, making eye contact with her. "You should be used to deadly women!" Kee'lar called as she attacked again. Ekyt blocked and dodged. "Why is that?" He managed just before a boot caught him in the stomach. "Your girlfriend put up a good fight. She gave me the scar under my bangs." The girl pushed her hair back, showing a small scar. "That's my Linda!" Ekyt grinned. Then stopped. "My...Linda..." His eyes took on a faraway look.

Linda and company arrived just in time to see Kee'lar rear back with her leg and kick Ekyt hard in the jaw. The blood from his lip fell in a descending arc as he hit the ground. He struggled to get up. "Kee'lar!" Linda yelled, rushing to Ekyt's side. "Linda? Well, you picked me out, did you girl?" she said. "Yes! I haven't seen you in so long!" Ekyt couldn't believe it. "You two know each other?" He said in exasperation at being deprived of such knowledge. "Well, we were in school together!" Linda said, shrugging. "Yeah. We had a school-girl feud." She looked over at Linda. "One I'm anxious to continue." Linda smiled, baring her teeth. "Of course. Let's get a definitive end...Katie." Kee'lar smiled

broader. "One of the few who would know my childhood name. And you landed a guardian...lil' Linda's growing up." "Oh, get bent!" The two girls started to punch and kick.

Linda's fist met Kee'lar's jaw, causing an "umph!" sound to resound from her mouth. Kee'lar's left foot kicked at Linda's right shin. Linda pulled her leg out of reach and deftly back-flipped away, her right elbow coming down for a strike that was blocked and turned into an arm bar that Linda squirmed out of. "You've gotten better sweetie!" Kee'lar taunted.

"Man, two chicks fighting..." Ada'man commented, a stupid smile on his face. "If you're staring at my girlfriend..." "Yeah, I am. What of it?!" WHAM! Ekyt's knee hit Ada'man's ribs again, breaking two more of them.

The two girls' continued their fight, all the while talking like they were best friends. Ekyt had to be restrained to stop from hitting Ada'man again. "Let it go man! Besides...aren't you over her?" Sonic asked with a chuckle. "Of course not! Even if she doesn't want me, I love that girl!" Ekyt yelled, his struggle stopping. "I-love her? I love her." Ekyt said to himself, as if only realizing it himself.

Linda dove on Kee'lar, landing a series of punches. Kee'lar didn't get up. "You win Linda." Linda smiled and helped the echidna up. "Now we're even." She said. The two hugged. Ekyt squinted, something had directed the sun into his eyes. He saw it. A knife.

"Linda! Watch out!" he yelled, running over there himself.

Too late. Linda was stabbed. She moved aside, the cold steel hitting her shoulder instead of her chest. Kee'lar raised the knife again, only to find Ekyt in the way. "You'll find I have no trouble dealing with a member of the opposite sex!" she taunted, before stabbing. Ekyt didn't move. He stared Kee'lar in the eyes, his hand in his trench coat pocket. At the last second, he thrust something upward, something hard enough to knock the knife away.

His mask had returned.

No one moved. "I can't let you hurt her." Ekyt said, shaking his head. "This girl...she means a lot to me...and letting you kill her...is not something...I'm prepared to do." Ada'man, Kee'lar, Shi'arr, and Gala'nata all attacked. Ekyt's hand found Linda's. "No matter what..." he said to her as they got closer, "...stay behind me...No matter what." He emphasized. She gave his hand a squeeze.

Ekyt pulled Linda up into a fireman's carry, jumping to a tree. He put her behind it, and yanked off a limb. "Three on one...I've had worse odds, and without a weapon!" He pointed the staff menacingly. He wasn't alone. Linda, holding her wound closed, was standing next to. Sonic joined him, then Knuckles. Ekyt pushed them all slightly behind him. He had never really tried to do what he was about to attempt, it had just happened.

"Valiant to the end...and the end is now!" yelled Shi'arr. Ekyt waited, the others behind him, understanding his plan, but ready to attack if something went wrong. "CHAOS VORTEX!" he yelled. For a moment, he glowed green, red, blue, white, gray, purple, and yellow. The seven chaos emeralds, all lending him their power. Then the colors left him, except for a green glow.

The Chaos Vortex was a unique ability. Instead of a “super” form, Ekyt had this. A 30-second range where he could attack or defend, impervious to pain, and feel no repercussions, except for exhaustion, afterward.

He did so now as punches, kicks, knives, and even a hammer hit him. Sacrificing a little bit of his power, he gave enough to Sonic to race around them while Ekyt repeated the trick he had used with Robotnik. He stuffed them all into the zone of silence.

Then it was over.

Ekyt sagged to his knees, exhausted. Sonic slowed down. Knuckles and Julie-Su looked on in amazement. “I thought it was a legend...” Julie whispered. “It was...but there was only one crazy enough to defy the legend...” They fell silent again.

Ekyt looked over at Linda. “Are you alright?” they asked in unison. “Forget me! I’ve got a little pinprick. I don’t know what you just did, but...wow...” her voice trailed off. “Your arm should be fine, if I did that right.” Ekyt told her, trying to get his breath back. “It is! Oops! C’mon, up we get tiger!” she helped the human to his feet. “Thanks...all of you...” he said.

“So, are you still going to go home?” Linda asked Ekyt, as they sat on Mt. Fate. “No. I never wanted to leave. You called my bluff. How did you know?” Ekyt asked. “The future you was some help.” Linda said mysteriously. “So...I...” Linda stopped him. “You know, I was upset the other day...now I realize how petty that was...I think I’ve been...in love with you all along...” she said, embracing him. He returned it, despite his bloody forearms. “I love you too.” He managed. Her emerald-green eyes met his, their eyes and mouths both smiling as their lips met for a kiss that neither would forget.

Despite all the blood shed, it was one of the happiest nights in Knothole and the Floating Island.

Too bad it wasn’t to last...Not if the returning Dr. Robotnik had anything to say about it...

NOTE: THIS IS **NOT** THE END OF THE SERIES! THERE’S MORE TO COME! THANKS FOR 150 GREAT ISSUES FAC!

-NG