

Sonic X: Next Guardian Style!

By nextguardian

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A Sonic X fanfic. Features fan chars at times, and is my second-longest running series!

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1 - Meet the players

Sonic and friends sat at Chris Throndyke's mansion. The news was on, but no one was really watching. They were watching Mr. Tanaka demonstrate some weird martial arts move. Then an interesting story came on.

And in local news, Station Square's criminals have been plagued by a mysterious vigilante. He had been described as pale, with dark hair, a white shirt, and long black coat. The police are baffled by this human's actions. More on this as it comes.

Amy hugged Sonic tight, much to his dismay. Sonic, you don't think he'll come after us, do you? she asked. Relax, Ames, he's like us, a good guy. He's going after criminals. Tails had pulled up a search page on his laptop. Hey guys, look at this! The photo showed Rouge and Shadow, but the background was what caused everyone to stare. That's gotta be him! said Chris. The pictures showed a blurred him, jumping behind a building. The group was unaware they were under surveillance.

He let his coat blow behind him. Chao? asked the little creature at his side. He petted it absently, as it rubbed against his leg. Relax, Blush. We'll get you back to her soon. The blue hedgehog particularly interested him. But there would be time for that later. He left, leaving the strange domestic scene.

Here you are Ma'am. He handed the chao to its owner. Thanks kid. What do I owe ya? Rouge the Bat, formerly a government spy, asked. The human shook his head. Nothing. Well, come in and dry off, at least. He stepped in the door, and immediately took in his surroundings, looking around warily,

some kind of martial arts instincts kicking in. Well, thanks kid. You sure I can't pay you? *As if I would.* He shook his head again. He decided to talk in a fake voice, just in case.

It was my pleasure. He said, or, rasped. He nodded at her, then rose from the couch and left. Rouge stared at him as he left. Hmm. I'll have to keep my eye on him&

Sonic raced around town, saying hi to the people he knew. Quiet day. He commented to Amy, who had been hanging on his leg for the last mile. Too quiet Sonic. She said. He rolled his eyes. C'mon, let's hold it! He dashed up a building, next to the human up there before he could react. You're that vigilante! Why are you doing this? The human, taken by surprise, answered. I do what's right. Same as you. *Aw snap, I talked in my real voice. Too late* Why, are you going to turn me in? Sonic smiled. Wouldn't think of it. Thanks for the help. Would you like to join us? He actually nodded.

Back at the Thorndyke mansion, he was tightlipped. They asked him questions, and he responded politely. But quick. His dark eyes darted around, searching for a threat. Then he was asked his name. Rather accusingly, actually, by Tails. He shook his head. Amy pushed Tails out of the way.

We really can't thank you properly, until we know your name. Amy said. The human sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. No one has asked me that in a long time. My name is Ekyt. Sweet! That's an awesome name! How come nobody's asked you? she said. Because I'm alone. Have been for a year. Amy felt her heart soften. Cream, bring Cheese here. Chao are a good judge of character. Cream brought Cheese over, and the human bent down to let him smell his hand.

Cheese did, looking at the human's fingerless gloves, before a heart popped over his head. Well, if Cheese thinks you're cool, so do we. Sonic welcomed him. Now we just gotta introduce you to Knuckles& Shadow.

2 - The Wrong Stuff

Ekyt walked alone. Nothing new. He wasn't lonely. Just devoid of feeling. Some punk tried to mug him. He didn't answer. A simple whack from his staff took care of the problem. The police could take it from there.

He went back home. Home. That was a weird word to him. He had loving parents, and they supported him. But he couldn't endanger them. That was why he lived alone. A life. That was foreign. He didn't have friends. He had plenty of enemies, but they were all in jail. As for a girlfriend. He was partial to echidnas (Check out my other fanfic, the original Next Guardian! You'll see what I mean!) but they were practically extinct. Rouge? Business. Only business. He didn't know what to think of her. Strictly speaking, she was bad. But somehow, she seemed to like him. Hmmm. She was attractive, no doubt. But he had been alone for the better part of a year. At least that was how it seemed.

No time for feelings. No time for emotions. He left, thinking all the way. His mind never stopped. No. Romance was out of the question. At least for now. He needed to think & Not that he had anything else to do, aside from busting the occasional criminal.

He went to the casino, his regular place. What'll it be? asked the bartender. Coke. They should know by now. He noticed a purplish hedgehog at the end of the bar. She was staring down into her drink. Dead to the world. He decided to help.

Hey. He said. Hey. She said back. You okay? he asked, trying his best to be comforting. Yeah, I'm

okay. She looked down again. Is there anything I can do? *Duh, stupid, introduce yourself.* I'm Ekyt. Violet Rose. (Violet_Rose) Nice to meet you. Now, c'mon, I know something's wrong. Nah, I can handle it. Violet suddenly remembered she was dealing with a human. Just stay out of it. I don't trust humans. Least of all one who shows up out of nowhere. He stared at her eyes for a moment, then nodded. Something about your past? That's okay. I have plenty of enemies, you're not the first. But still, let me know if you decide I'm okay. He left. Violet stirred her drink, then downed the Coke. That human was weird. Sincere enough, but weird.

Ekyt was walking alone again, Good. Rouge turned to her chao. Okay Blush, you're up. Get him over to me. She smiled. *Find an easy target, and milk 'em. Hah, easy.*

Chao? Ekyt heard the timid sound, and saw the chao crying. He walked over and comforted it, then scooped it up. Rouge, on cue, came running around the corner. Oh thank God, I was so worried. Blush, don't you ever run away from me again! She batted her eyes at the human, watching the slightest bit of color rise in his cheeks. Thanks kid. I owe ya? He started to say no, but she insisted. Sonic saw the whole thing. Something was wrong here&

3 - Hook, Line, and Sucker

Violet- Violet_Rose

Ekyt went with Rouge. He couldn't honestly say why. She led him to the chao garden. Three of them actually. He looked at her, hoping for an answer. She leaned against a wall, eyes half-lidded, filing her nails, then polishing them. Go ahead, pick a chao of your own. Are you serious? he asked. Duh, of course I am. Just go into the school to the black market. Tell them Rouge sent you, and they'll break out the good stuff.

Ekyt did, and emerged a short while later with a white Chao egg. Thank you Rouge. Let me know how I can repay you. Well, how about you and I head down to that casino. You can buy me a drink. They did.

Sonic and Knuckles watched the whole thing. I don't know Sonic, he's not stealing anything, so what harm can it do? Knuckles, you know how Rouge is. She's usually got her sights on you, for starters. Secondly, a human? That is out of character for her. I say we keep an eye on them. But for now no action. Sonic agreed.

Rouge ambled into the casino followed by her strange escort. A few guys dropped their coins because they were concentrating on her. Ekyt spotted the same purplish hedgehog as before. Violet. That was her name. Give her whatever she wants and put it on my tab. He called to the bartender, who nodded. Rouge sat on a stool, legs crossed, leaning back as she sipped some drink that was a deep red color.

Ekyt walked over to the hedgehog. How are you Violet? he asked her. She looked up, hair falling over one eye. Kid, what is it you want? What, I can't just be friendly? he asked her. You humans are always up to something. Now you're hanging around with Rouge. I just don't get you. Seen Shadow around? he asked, already knowing the answer. No. Not any business of yours anyway. Well, um, nice talking to you. He walked back over to Rouge, who motioned for him to sit down.

Well, kid, aren't we just making friends. She said. Maybe you are. He said with a snort. She shrugged. It helps to keep an air of mystery. I'd imagine the girls fawn all over you. Ekyt let one, sarcastic laugh out. Nope. Not one. And you don't exactly fawn. In fact, you're one of only two females that don't treat me like I have the plague. Rouge shifted positions, meaning to attract the kid's attention. His face remained stony. *Geez, what's with this guy? I'm giving him all the signs, and he's not responding.* You scratch my back& she paused and batted her eyes seductively & I scratch yours. She ran her pink nails down his back. She laughed inwardly as he blushed. She then ran her hand down his cheek. So what is it you need me to do? he asked. She smiled her most charming smile. *Better start simple. This kid has a nose for trouble.* Do you think you could do me a favor and. Help! the cry came from outside.

The purple hedgehog was surrounded by ten assailants, one trying to get her money. Ekyt strode out into the brisk night air, unfolding his telescoping staff. How about you leave that girl alone? he said. One of the robbers gave him a shove. So you're the tough guys who's been putting down my buds. We don't take too kindly to that, do we? Tell ya what, step into my office and we'll talk business. He pointed to an alleyway. Ekyt went in first. The thug followed, holding a club. There was a sound like thunder, and the thug came rolling out of the alleyway in a garbage can. Out cold.

Four others rushed Ekyt. The other four turned back to Violet, who by now had out her hammer and had K.O.ed three of them, and then dispatched the other one.

The police sirens scared the criminals. Three of the conscious ones ran for it, but Ekyt grabbed another by the shirt. No you don't scuzzbucket. He punched the guy, who flew on top of a cop car, cracking the windshield. Get outta here, I'll handle the cops. He whispered to the purple hedgehog. She nodded and went back inside.

Okay, kid, you did your job. Now get out of here before we have to arrest you. Ekyt gave him a look. You're welcome, officer. Have another donut. He turned and left, the officer cursing at him. He joined up with Rouge inside.

Well, not an ideal first date. She said. Huh? This was a date? he asked. Let's see, boy meets girl, girl meets boy, boy buys girl a drink&you know the rest. But you did what you had to do. She gave him a bump with her hip. I like that. I'd better go for the night, kiddo. Take care of that egg.

4 - More than Meets the Eye

Ekyt wandered the streets, holding the egg (See last ish.) Rouge had given him. Station Square could be a fun place, if you knew where to look. Ekyt didn't. Fun was his past. He was all business now. He heard a whoosh, and turned to meet Sonic face to face. Sonic gave him one of his classic grins.

Little late night prowling, kid? Sonic said jokingly. Yeah. Ekyt answered, putting the egg in his pocket. Sonic's grin disappeared. You know Rouge is bad, right? No. Well, she is, and you oughta be careful. I've taken care of myself for a year now. I hardly think a bat could get the drop on me. Besides, she hasn't done anything. Sonic just shook his head. She's using you. I don't know, maybe she really is interested in you, but her track record says different. I'm just saying watch your back. Ekyt nodded.

Rouge and I are headed to the beach tomorrow. You and the others wanna come? To be honest, I'm not a big fan of water. Sure, I hate water too. Yeah, I'll see if the others wanna come. Later kid. Sonic juiced off, leaving Ekyt alone. The night was getting darker. He decided to head toward the hotel he was staying at. (The one from Sonic Adventure ;)

He checked in. The clerk knew him. Hey Ekyt, how're things? he asked amiably. Good, Paul. Listen, can you open up the chao garden for me? You have chao? Didn't figure you for the type. Sure, sure, no trouble. He hit a button on his computer and a key popped out of a hole on the desk. Thanks. Have a nice one Paul. Take care, kid.

The chao garden at the hotel was amazing. There were three sections to it. The first section had a pool, deep for a chao anyway. There were some trees around, occasionally leaving orange coconuts for the chao to feast on. It was always pleasant here, no rain or anything. Just a place for chao to grow. There was a school for chao, too. It was kind of like paradise.

Ekyt sat with the egg throughout the night. He nodded off for a couple hours. He woke just in time to see the egg hatch. He checked his watch. It read five a.m. He stretched and leaned over to watch the egg hatch.

It cracked open, and a white chao with a blue dot above its head popped out. The dot twisted itself into a question mark, then an exclamation point as the chao realized it wasn't alone. It crawled over to Ekyt, who held out his hand. The chao climbed up it onto his shoulder. He scratched it gently on the head. Its dot twisted into a heart. Ekyt cracked a rare smile at that. He reached down and grabbed a coconut. He put the chao next to it, then handed it to the chao. The chao looked up with its eyes wide, head cocked, then began to devour the fruit. It made a satisfied sound.

Ekyt read a notice on the wall and decided to name his chao Tyke. It was his name backwards, and he thought it suited the little guy. Tyke jumped up onto his coat and crawled up him, into a pocket where it went to sleep. Ekyt checked his watch again. He had to meet the gang at the beach at 9:00. His watch told him it was 8:30. He decided to head there.

When he arrived, Rouge was there. She was sitting on a blanket, reading a book. On jewels. It figured. Good morning Rouge. Good morning yourself kid. The chao popped its head out of his pocket. So the little guy hatched. Can I see him? Ekyt handed him over. Rouge petted Tyke, whose dot turned into a heart. Then he leapt back into Ekyt's pocket. Hmmm. Shy. Just like his owner? Rouge said, or asked, rather. I see you didn't bother to wear a swimsuit. I don't like water. The beach ain't all about water, kid. It's about scenery. What do you think of mine? She stood up, shedding her robe. Ekyt had to try real hard not to drool.

She had on a bikini, tied in the back. It was red with black ties on the top and bottom. It looked to be too small for her. Um, nice. He said. *Well, this is new. Never had a girl do that for me before.* Rouge tossed him a package. Go try that on. Changing room's over there. She lowered her sunglasses at him. I'd lose the coat, too.

Ekyt went into the changing room against his better judgment. He came out in a swimsuit that was black and red in color, and sunglasses that were blue tinted. Rouge was waiting for him. My, don't we look cute. How's about coming and sitting next to me for a while? Ekyt did as he was told. *Hmmm. For all the things everyone says about her, she's really nice. But someone once told me if more than one person says something, you should consider it. Maybe there's more to her than meets the eye&*

NEXT ISSUE: EKYT IN TROUBLE? PLUS- THE RETURN OF VIOLET!

STAY TUNED!

5 - Down and Out

Co-Author credit to Violet_Rose

Chars:

Violet- Violet_Rose

The others arrived pretty soon. They sat near Ekyt and Rouge. Behind Ekyt's back, Rouge and Knuckles made eye contact. Rouge narrowed her eyes and snuggled up to Ekyt. Knuckles laughed and tapped Sonic on the shoulder. Sonic looked and snickered. She's really putting the moves on him? Man, she's lost it! Knuckles had to agree.

Ekyt, slightly uncomfortable, petted his chao, who was newly alert and digging in the sand. He popped back up, holding a shell and looking really proud of himself. Ekyt took the shell and patted him on the head. He handed it to Rouge silently. Rouge made a huge production.

Ekyt spotted Violet. He waved to her. She ignored him. He backed off.

Then a huge object eclipsed the sun.

Sonic, Ekyt, and Knuckles got up. It was Eggman. Oh man. You again? How many times do we have to beat your fat butt before you give? Sonic started to run, but got hit with sand in the eyes, blinding him. Ekyt jumped with a kick, but got thrown into a sand dune. Violet chuckled. Then she saw Shadow behind Eggman.

Shadow!!! She shouted. The whole beach, which had been in an uproar, stopped. Shadow, tied up behind Eggman, looked at her. Violet? Knuckles and Sonic, along with Tails above them, were distracting Eggman. Ekyt, using a sharp stone that had cut open his forehead, freed Shadow, who totally ignored him, and went to Violet.

Ekyt started to vault with his staff, but a pair of hands grabbed him. Wha? Rouge had a hold of him. He s with me, kiddo. Come with us. It ll be fun. Rouge wanted him to go with Eggman? I can t do that Rouge. I m not into fun. Not like that. She sighed. Too bad. Guess this is goodbye, kid. She kissed him and then threw him. He spun and landed on his feet. His chao jumped in the hole he had made in the sand. Ekyt saw a question mark, then an exclamation point. The chao tossed out a chaos emerald. Ekyt caught it.

He then passed it to Sonic, who hit his super form. Between Sonic, Shadow, Tails, and Ekyt, Eggman knew it was over. He flew off in his hovercraft, with Rouge in tow, who gave Ekyt a last look. She blew

him a kiss, smiling mischievously. Then she smiled and threw the shell at him. It stuck in the sand at his feet.

Ekyt looked down, then immediately changed back into his old clothes. He scooped up his chao and started to leave, only to be stopped by the good guys. You're definitely one of us kid. Sonic said. Yeah, that saucy bat's a tough customer. Knuckles said. Tails just nodded, and Amy hugged him. They noticed him looking downcast. What's wrong, mister? asked Cream, as Cheese and Tyke played together. First love. Gone. He shook his head and then whistled. His chao climbed into his pocket as he turned to leave Emerald Coast.

But he was stopped once more. Violet and Shadow were in the way. Thanks. For saving Shadow. Doesn't mean I trust you. Violet couldn't help but feel sorry for the kid. To a point. Shadow just grunted. I didn't need your help. Whatever. Ekyt left, still down. The whole group of them watched him leave. That poor guy& Amy said, crying just a little. Cream patted her shoulder as Cheese flew around the two of them. Sonic turned to Knuckles. Knuckles, he was pretty good with that emerald. Do you know anyone who needs a kid like him around, to help? Knuckles thought for a moment. Tikal might have an idea. Knuckles left to check with her.

Violet and Shadow stayed on the beach a little longer. Nice to have you back Shads. You too. Let's go home. Violet playfully punched him. What, is the big, bad ultimate life form tired? *C'mon, take the bait* Fine, we'll stay longer. Violet silently congratulated herself.

Ekyt walked down the alleyway, his chao noticing his problem. He crawled up and sat on his shoulder. The alleyway suited his mood. The dark corners, fire escapes, and garbage cans just seemed right. He knew that Rouge cared for him to some extent. It just wasn't enough. He went back to the hotel, into the chao garden, and laid down with his new chao friend. Tyke, his chao, was the last remaining shard of his love life.

6 - Down for the Count

Down and Out. Rock Bottom. Those were the words that came to Ekyl's mind. He should have known Rouge was playing him. He was depressed, but he held onto the anger instead. He busted a record number of thieves. But he took no satisfaction in it. He wasn't vicious. Unless provoked.

He walked around, leaving his chao in the garden to play with the other chao.

His aimless walk ended when he hit the corner of Otis and Rockview. He had heard that there was a gang around here.

He entered their turf. What he didn't realize was that he had already tangled with them before. That time outside the casino with Violet. What did that hedgehog have against him? He didn't have long to figure that out.

The ten thugs from before, plus countless others, surrounded him. He stood his ground, straight up, staring straight ahead. Slowly, he put his hands into fists. The gang charged. Ekyl fought back, handling the gang as best he could. Then the unexpected happened.

Shadow fought beside him. What do you want? Ekyt asked him. I'm evening the odds. They jumped my girlfriend. That hedgehog is yours? What exactly does she have against me? You're human. That distracted Ekyt enough to where a wave of goons piled on.

Think of Rouge. She betrayed you. Left you in the dust. You're alone. With a yell prompted by rage, the goons went flying in all directions. He fought back with a viciousness that surprised even Shadow. The gang ran for it, leaving a piece of paper in their wake. Ekyt picked it up. The Hornets? What kind of name is that? He gave the paper to Shadow. Thanks for the help. He said to Shadow. He extended his hand.

Shadow shook. We have a lot in common Shadow. Both our pasts haunt us. Ekyt shook his head. Well, say hi to Violet for me. He climbed up a fire escape and disappeared into the night.

Shadow nodded, then skated away. *What did he mean, both our pasts haunt us? What happened to him? It has to be more than Rouge.*

Shadow told Violet (Violet_Rose) what happened. Humans. Who needs them? was her response. She hadn't forgiven the entire race for her parents being killed. (Check out her fan fic and Bios) Shadow raised an eyebrow. This one is different He said something about his past being like mine. I don't think he likes humans either. Violet almost had sympathy for him, but she remembered her past again and said He's human. I don't trust him. It's gonna take a lot more than him helping me out once to get me to trust him. Shadow shrugged, then sat down, weary from fighting off hundreds of goons. The guys that attacked you call themselves the Hornets. They're easy pickings. But watch yourself Violet. I can handle those idiots Shadow. She smashed a bottle with her hammer. When there are more than a hundred of them, it gets a little tricky. Hmm. Good point.

Ekyt stood up on the roof across from the Thorndyke mansion. He thought back past Rouge, to being

bullied. His head hitting lockers, gym floors. He closed his eyes. Sonic chose that instant to appear. What's up? Sonic asked. Just thinking. About my past. A tear actually trickled down his eye. About Rouge. Sonic put a hand on his shoulder. You should come inside. It's cold out here. Tell us a little about yourself. There's nothing to tell. Everyone has a story. I bet you do too. So they did go inside. Ekyt stood by the window. Amy and Cream decided to make him feel more welcome. Mister, would you like something to drink? Cream asked. Chao! Cheese said. Ekyt petted the little chao, but shook his head. Thanks for the offer, but I'm okay. Amy broke in. No you're not. You're standing by a window, looking lost. You've got something going through your head. It's more than just that stupid bat. Spill it! Amy suddenly realized how ferocious she sounded. Sorry about that. She sat down like nothing happened.

Ekyt turned. You want to know my story? Okay. He said, his voice seemingly deeper than usual. I was bullied my whole life. Not just by people though. By something else. For years, everyone around me thought I was just being a bad kid. They never stopped to think that something else might be wrong. I was polite. But things started to change. I became tired easily, whereas before I had led a life full of activity. My grades in school dropped off, though my I.Q. told everyone I was wasting my potential. At this point he stopped and put a hand to his head, then shook it firmly as if answering himself.

Somewhere along the line I had lost my confidence. I became chronically anxious. Then, with the stress mounting, I became violent. A loose cannon. Even those who had bullied me were afraid. I didn't want it, I didn't ask for it. It chose me. The anxiety ate me up. It left no room for other emotions. Only slight feelings of love from my parents. But I was empty. A shell. And the hits kept coming. Three grandparents died. Death in school. I couldn't escape. At some point, I even gave up. I'm still trying to climb out of the pit I was in. He stopped to catch his breath, then continued.

Then it happened. I was walking out of the bathroom when I got attacked by one of my worst bullies. He went to punch me, but I ducked and kicked him. I left him lying. He would be okay. He taunted me some more, until I finally attacked. I charged across the hall and slammed into him, holding him there. Calling him the names he called me. I thought it was over. But I was wrong. The bullying continued. Eventually, my mind gave in to the stress and the anxiety worsened.

And if you think that was it&Sorry, wrong. It's been ten years now. Ten years of pain. Ten years of suffering, of not fitting in& Ten years of being alone, a slave to myself.

The group sat in stunned silence. But things began to look up. I came here. I found myself as a vigilante, had a girlfriend& his voice trailed off. Had a girlfriend. He shook his head. No I didn't. I had a slave master. She wanted me to do her bidding. She didn't care for me. I learned my lesson. I'm through with trust.

Now hold on! That's waaayyy past uncool! Sonic said. I just can't trust anyone. Throughout this whole thing, Amy had been watching. She had an idea how to snag Sonic. She just needed this guy's help&

7 - Amy's Idea

Amy listened to his whole story. It was sad, somewhat. But she had an idea on how to snag Sonic. She walked over to the human and laid on the floor, staring up at him, widening her eyes. He tried to ignore it, but Sonic couldn't.

I can't believe it! Amy's after this kid now? I thought she had her cap set for me! Well, she's off my back. But he didn't like it. This Ekylt guy didn't look like he wanted any part of it, but Amy was&Amy.

Amy went to Cream's room. Cream, can you keep a secret? she asked excitedly. Sure Amy. Well, you know this new kid, Ekylt? Yes, he was very polite to me. Well, things are about to get even more polite. I'm gonna use him to lure Sonic. Don't tell him. Or Sonic. Don't say it out loud. Cream's eyes widened. But Amy, that's wrong. It's mean. I know, but you promised to keep it a secret. Cream nodded her head, knowing she did. She had to think of a way to tell Ekylt, before he got hurt worse.

Ekylt sat by the fire, listening to Tails and Chris. Tails had apologized for his suspicion. Ekylt thanked him. The two were discussing the Blue Typhoon, how to soup it up. Ekylt leaned back, eyes closed. You need more speed. Try adding 360o thrusters, so you get the speed at all sides. Chris typed something on his computer. You're right! How did you know? I didn't. I just thought about it. He shrugged.

Amy, who was behind the chair, jumped over it and onto his lap, cuddling him around the neck. Isn't he brilliant? she said to Tails and Chris, who just stared. Ekylt looked down at the pink hedgehog that was in his lap. He took it in stride. Pardon me Amy, but I have to go to the bathroom. He got up, and she

gave him one of her famous flying hugs. You re not getting away that easy! she said mischievously.

This is weird. She likes Sonic, I know it. Why s she going after me? If I was her, who would I tell? It would have to be Cream.

He shook Amy and found Cream. Cream looked at him, her eyes wide. She scribbled something down on a piece of paper, gave it to Cheese, and handed Cheese to Ekyt. Ekyt took the note and petted the little chao. It read:

Mister,

Amy is using you as bait.

I promised not to say it

Out loud.

Cream

That explains it. Now, how do I go about fixing this? Mister Ekyt? I have a friend who could help. Her name is Crystal, and she likes Sonic. (lilsoniclover) Good idea. Where do we find her. Mister, I think I should ask her. Cream, I owe you. Tell her to meet me at Emerald Coast. I'll get Sonic. Thanks!

After he explained it to Sonic, they went to Emerald Coast to meet Crystal. She had agreed to help. It was time to teach Amy a lesson.

Elsewhere, a familiar hedgehog was having problems of her own. Violet (Violet_Rose) was thinking of her past again. That human had made it worse than ever. She kept seeing her parents being killed. She kept seeing those awful soldiers, shooting the guns that killed them. That left her alone to fend for herself. Then she had met Shadow. Still, she was depressed. And seeing Ekyt just reminded her of the race she hated. She couldn't forgive humans for their crimes.

Shadow, who, by now, could tell when something was bothering her, took her by the hand. Where are we going? To cheer you up. Violet shrugged. Shadow was an ultimate life form, so he had to know something.

He did everything right. The two ate at a nice little place Shadow knew of. Still, Violet seemed kind of down. He knew just what to do. But that human was going to have to play along.

8 - Strike 2

Ekyt, who was walking with, or more accurately, dragging Amy Rose, ran into Shadow. Shadow asked to talk to him alone. Amy blew Ekyt a kiss and skipped off. See you soon, Hot stuff! Shadow looked at her leave.

What was that about? Never mind. What's up Shadow. Well, Violet's depressed, and you can help me cheer her up. Okay, what do you need me to do. Shadow sighed. Normally I wouldn't need help, but this is hard to pull off. I need you to insult me, therefore ticking off Violet. Then, I need you to let her bash you with her hammer, and then let me pound you into oblivion. Ekyt laughed. Yeah, okay. But you'll have to get on me quick. I don't know who makes those hammers, but they hurt! I can use the chaos emerald to cushion the blows. Okay.

Ekyt went with Shadow. Yeah, Shadow, for being an ultimate life form, you sure are weak! Just like they planned, Violet nailed him with the hammer. I'll get him! Shadow dove on and pounded Ekyt. He finished by throwing him through the plate glass window in front of the cafe they were at.

Violet went to Shadow's side. That rotten kid! It served him right! She looked at his unconscious form. She found it cheered her up. She and Shadow walked off hand in hand. Ekyt got up and shook out the cobwebs. But he couldn't sit long, he had to get back to his plan.

As soon as he left, Amy tackled him again. Hi Amy. She was hanging around his neck. I have an idea, Amy. What say you and I go Emerald Coast, a little moon gazing. I bet Sonic'll be there. Amy sighed.

Whatever you say. *Boy, this is weird. I feel kind of guilty, but if it gets me Sonic&*

Sonic was there. They planned it that way of course. But still, it was a sight, him and Crystal (lilsoniclover) cuddling under the stars. Ekyt sighed. *Boy, I need a true love. I miss Rouge&No, don t think about her! The task at hand, think of that. Just like you have the past five lonely years&*

Amy spotted the two. SONIC THE HEDGEHOG!!! she shouted. Sonic turned around, a kiss mark on his cheek. Oh, hi Ames. How s things? Do you know Crystal? he asked, gesturing toward the light blue hedgehog. I FIND YOU WITH ANOTHER GIRL AND YOU ASK ME HOW S THINGS? she roared. Chill, you and Ekyt are Forget him! I was trying to get your attention!

Ekyt winced. *Boy, that hurts the old ego.* Thanks Crystal. Anytime Sonic. She kissed him on the cheek and ran off, while Sonic got a full-blast talking to from Amy.

Ekyt walked off. By himself again. He decided to hit the casino. It was a place for happy people. Which he wasn t. He felt alone. He even got ditched by Amy. Even though it was part of the plan, it still kind of hurt.

At the other end of the bar, a bat, brown in color, wearing a torn black shirt, with black boots and skulls on the end. She was digging in her purse for something. Ekyt sat down at his usual spot and order a coke.

Roxy (Violet_Rose) had seen the guy enter the bar. She knew a guy who just got dumped. Cute too. Hmm. She decided to get his attention. Oh shoot! I can't believe I forgot my money. Ekyt, hearing this, called the bar tender over. Whatever she ordered, it's on me Rob. Rob the bartender, an older human, maybe 60, stopped cleaning the glass he had been holding. Geez, isn't the same chick you were with last time? No Rob, she's gone& Aw geez. Tough break kid. Yeah.

Rob, a kindhearted old fellow, hated to see the seventeen year old like that. So he walked to the end of the bar and told Roxy That guy took care of it.

Roxy smiled. She walked over to Ekyt. Thanks for buying, kid. I'm Roxy. And you are& Ekyt. Nice to meet you. Roxy studied him up and down before sitting next to him. You look lost, kiddo. Not quite. You just remind me of my first girlfriend. Her name Rouge? asked Roxy, filing her nails. Yeah, that's her. He looked down into his drink. Cheer up. She's pretty cruel sometimes. She's the black sheep of our family. Ekyt nodded absently. Roxy put her hand under his chin and lifted his head. She looked him in the eyes. *Yup, this guy'll be easy picking to get some good jewels.* She wrote down a number and left it on the bar. That's my address. Why don't you come see me sometime? Ekyt pocketed the number. Thanks. When's good for you.

Roxy leaned back against a table and pretended to think. Anytime. See ya around. Ekyt looked on. *She's cute. But something's up. Girls like that don't fall into your lap. Unless they're fan girls like Amy, anyway. She's no groupie&*

9 - Hittin' the Town

It turned out that Ekyt and Roxy (Violet_Rose) would meet by chance. He had been out, scouting a new place to live. A more permanent residence. The hotel was good and all, but it looked like he would be on his own for a while. He picked out an old warehouse, abandoned. It was perched up on a hill, and was high enough to where he could see for miles. He kicked open the long-nailed shut door. He swept a cobweb out of the way and was greeted by a nearly empty room.

There was, however, a vehicle in the corner of the room, covered with a tarp. He yanked off the tarp and it revealed a open-topped Jeep thing. It looked like heck, but it ran.

He explored the rest of the room, finding nothing of interest. He climbed out onto the fire escape and sat up on the roof. Collecting his thoughts.

First Rouge. Then Amy uses me. What about Roxy? I just don't know. He put his hands to his head. He saw himself again, then saw Rouge flying away, and Amy skipping of, hand in hand with Sonic. Rouge with Eggman. Shadow had Violet (Violet_Rose). He shook his head. His gloved hand made a fist, like it had a mind of its own. *Focus. Anger. Harness the anger. Sadness&useless emotion. Despair&no, don't go there. Anger. Anger&* He sighed. He was so far into his own thoughts he hadn't even heard the tell-tale flutter of Roxy's wings. Only when she put her hand on his shoulder did he look up.

Something on your mind, kid? Nothing important. He said, tactfully avoiding the subject. Roxy, kindly, almost condescendingly, said No, you're thinking about Rouge again, aren't you? I can make you forget

all about my lowlife cousin. You just come with little ol' Roxy. Ekyt looked out, over the city, then saw police cars. Um, gotta take a rain check. Duty calls, unless you wanna come along for the ride. Roxy, surprised he had a ride. It wasn't what she expected. He floored it toward the city.

He looked over at her, and she made sure to let her fur flow in the wind. Guys seemed to eat that sort of thing up. *Anything to crack this guy open. He's not gonna be the easiest patsy in the world, but he'll work. Kinda cute, anyway.*

The police cars had Shadow and Violet cornered. Ekyt stopped the car short and jumped out, and ran to Shadow's defense. Out of the way, punk! He's a criminal. A police officer yelled to Ekyt. Ekyt called back. What exactly has he done? None of your business. Ekyt shot back. I'm making it my business.

Shadow and Violet looked at him darkly. We don't need your help. Shadow snarled. Ekyt snarled back. I didn't say you did. Like it or not, I'm here to help. You two split. Let's go Shadow. This kid bugs me. Violet said. Fine. You handle the cops. Shadow chaos controlled himself and Violet away.

The policemen looked at Ekyt, then filed out. Great job kid. One cop said. Ekyt stopped him from leaving. What exactly did he do? He stole a bunch of jewels. Chaos emeralds? No, just regular jewels. The officer left.

Roxy had split. Ekyt, somewhat confused, drove over to the Thorndyke mansion. Amy answered the door, took a look at him, then scurried away. Chris came next. Good to see you Ekyt. What's up? I'm looking for you and Tails actually. Do you think you guys could help me out. Sure! What do you need? You know that warehouse on the outskirts of town? The grey one? Yeah, my dad used to own that! You and Tails come down in the X-Tornado, and we'll talk business. What'll I owe you?

Chris shook his head. You don't owe me anything. Friends do this sort of thing. Ekyl lowered his head. Friends? Never had one of those before. Chris looked down too. Yeah, I know the feeling. Before Sonic and the others came I was lonely too. Chris, would you mind telling Amy not to worry, I understand. Oh yeah, invite the others too.

Ekyl walked back outside to find Roxy sitting in his car. Where we headed kiddo? Gonna go have some fun? Huh? Where'd you go? I had to go to the bathroom. Take it easy, if you're thinking I stole those jewels, think again. Rouge is probably behind it. I'm not like her. She took him by the arm. C'mon champ, let's hit the town.

TO BE CONTINUED:

NEXT TIME: THE THIEF REVEALED IN: A SHOULDER TO CRY ON

10 - Cursed

Ekyt collapsed into bed at three a.m. He was too tired to even wipe the lipstick Roxy had left on his cheek. And ear. And nose. And eventually lips. Something bothered Ekyt though.

The night had been fun, more than he had in a while. They played some slots at the casino, watched the sunset (he never understood the allure until Roxy sat on his lap and cuddled his neck) She had kissed him a lot, too. Especially by the bank& It wasn't like he was loaded, but what money he had went to good use. They had walked by the jewelry store, and Roxy had darn near squeezed his guts out. But something was weird. She ran hot and cold. Affectionate, to flirty, back to affectionate, then both. Ekyt shrugged. Whatever. It had been good, clean, fun.

Roxy washed up. Usually she despised kissing, especially humans. But this kid was fun. He was so shy, he turned redder with each kiss. Roxy always got a kick out of that. All part of the plan, though. She'd play the kid to get the emerald. Then&he was on his own. Unless she decided she liked him. As if. She could live with guilt. It was emeralds she couldn't live without.

The next day, Chris and Tails had fixed up his truck. Weapons, turbo, the whole deal. Good thing too, he would be needing it sooner than expected.

Angel Island:

Knuckles watched the emerald. Jewel thieves were around, he had to be vigilant. Then he heard the rush of wings. What? Roxy and Rouge were flying overhead. Hey! Get away from the emerald! He shouted to them.

Ekyt, who had been watching from the roof, distinctly felt his heart break in two. But now the time for action. He got jumped down onto the fire escape and rebounded onto the top of his truck.

Knuckles stood, fists clenched, as the two circled. The emerald s mine Rouge! Not a chance Roxy. It s mine. Knuckles finally shouted to them both It s *my* emerald. They both looked at him and started arguing again. Ekyt showed up. Not another one! Relax Knuckles. I m here to solve this.

Ekyt! Thank God! Tell this hussy that the emerald is mine! Roxy said as she swatted him on the butt.

Ekyt, how s my boyfriend? Rouge asked. Miss me? Tell you what. I ll leave Eggman if you give me that emerald.

Ekyl jumped up on the alter. You both used me. If you think I'll let either of you near this emerald, think again! Rouge and Roxy both looked stunned. You two may be beautiful, but I'm nobody's fool! Now get out of here before I forget I'm a good guy! Ekyl snarled. Knuckles stood next to him. Roxy and Rouge retreated.

Thanks kid. Why'd you help? Ekyl, trying to keep himself together, just muttered Doing my job. I help people. Then he turned and left. Knuckles could tell what was going on. Tikal knew something. But what?

Ekyl walked through town. He did that when he was depressed. He swore that would never happen again. But he couldn't get angry this time. He broke up a bank robbery, but he didn't really care. Three girls had used him.

He walked toward the bar part of the casino, where Rob gave him the usual. Hey, where's that bat chick? Another one gone Rob. That's three. Three? Who's the other? Amy Rose? Hmm. Well, I think I can help you out. You're my buddy, best tipper for sure. How about I take you to meet Sasha? (Sasha belongs to Texas_Luver- thanks again for letting me use her again!) Who's Sasha? She's kind of a waitress. Well, kind of.

Sasha turned out to be a performer too. She could sing, and that sparkly red dress that outlined her body was hard to forget. She was a beautiful hedgehog, yellow in color. But the thing about Sasha was, well, she was kind of flirtatious. In fact, Sonic had once dated her. (See Texas_Luver's awesome fan fic. Also, check out Violet_Rose's too. She gets co-author credit. Thanks to you both!)

So Rob introduced them. Sasha liked to have fun. They hit the casino, and wandered around Station Square. She stuck really close to him. She could tell he was totally down and out. Below rock bottom. That was when she did her best work&

TO BE CONTINUED:

THEY COME AND GO&

PLUS- VIOLET?

11 - World Weary and Jaded

Ekyt had lost of late nights. Sasha and him seemed so right&Until fate struck again, in the form of a certain blue hedgehog.

Ekyt knew from the start Sasha had been with other guys. But her and Sonic&He guessed it made sense.

How it happened&

Ekyt and Sasha were definitely and item. For a week, he pretty much defended her. He didn t know they were all hired thugs, Sasha s Angels, as she called them. But that was for the best. A good test of loyalty. Which he certainly was. This way he wouldn t suspect anything. He was pretty battered, but it helped her to make sure her latest heartthrob was hers, and hers only.

Sasha knew the ins and outs of city living. She knew which guys would react which way. But she didn t count on the two knowing each other.

At this point, while reliving it, Ekyt leaned back, his head against the wall. *Another one&*

Sonic had dropped by for a look around Ekyt's new place. Sasha was over, and looked shocked to see him. Sonic, for his part, looked furious. Sasha? Not you again! What do you want with him, you vicious man eater? Sasha walked over to him, just like a little minx. Me? I don't need him blue boy, not with you around. Ekyt stood there, letting his head fall. *This can't be happening again&What do these girls have against me?* Sasha remembered he was in the room. Uh, I didn't mean that the way it sounded. Scram. What? Nobody, but nobody, tells Sasha the hedgehog to scram. You change your tune or else. Ekyt laughed, more cruel than he meant to. Or what? You'll break my heart? Been there, done that, read the book, bought the t-shirt, and hold stock. You don't like it, then scram. Then beat it. Leave. Out.

Sasha turned with a huff back to Sonic. Ready to go, blue? She said, batting her eyes for good measure. Not with you. Sasha couldn't believe this. *Two* guys were turning her down? Not possible. She didn't need them. She left with a huff.

Thanks Sonic. I didn't know she was double crossing me. Sonic shook his head. Well, they say ignorance is bliss. But I don't agree. Yeah. Pardon me. I've gotta go do&something. Sonic left, understanding.

Ekyt walked out of town this time. Station Square had been pretty hard on him. All the work he had done. It was all for nothing. He wasn't an ultimate life form. He couldn't run at the speed of sound. He couldn't fly.

Chao? his little chao, Tyke, poked his head out of Ekyt's coat pocket. He picked it up and managed a smile as the little creature formed a heart above its head. He patted its head. It yawned. He had a long day too. Cream had let Cheese play with him.

A flash of brilliant light blinded the stunned human for a moment. Tikal stepped out of the light, surrounded by chaos. Ekyt, don't be saddened. Your destiny will soon be fulfilled. Ekyt, not even bothered, just let the questions wash over him. How Tikal? It's obvious I'm not wanted here. Even my friends have used me. Okay, only Amy did that. But all this chaos. What does it all mean? Why am I suffering? Tikal looked down at him. Come with me. She said. Wha-what? Come with me. You have not suffered. I'll show you your destiny. But I cannot give you answers. Those you must discover for yourself. A brilliant light washed over him.

He and Tikal landed at the base of the altar of the master emerald. It glowed as chaos played around it. One by one, they turned into grey cocoons and disappeared. Then the emerald shattered. Time moved fast. Knuckles was now there. The shattered remains of the emerald were behind him. He looked panicked. Ekyt realized his island was falling.

Time went back again.

This time, there were lots of echidnas, all warlike. Then he was back in his own time.

Tikal looked down at the human again. She could tell his time in Station Square had made him world weary and jaded. She could not make him care. Not again. She could tell a broken heart. She had never loved either.

She kissed him on the head and disappeared.

Ekyt knelt on the ground, his head swimming with questions. But he didn't bother answering them. He just walked back toward Station Square.

What is my purpose? What's the point? Chaos emeralds&Chao? It's confusing. He stopped as his head throbbed. He shook it off. He heard shouting. The voices were familiar. He ran toward the commotion.

What do you mean? How could you say that? Say what? I just told it like it is! Is *that* what you were doing? And here I thought you cared about me?! Don't put words in my mouth. How about I put my fist in your mouth? Don't threaten me! Ekyt stopped. Shadow and Violet (Violet_Rose)- arguing. Ekyt, spotting a garbage can lid, took his staff and banged it. Violet pulled out her hammer and Shadow pulled out a gun.

Easy Shadow. Care to tell me what's going on? he asked casually. No. Shadow snapped at him. Violet pushed him and walked toward Ekyt. This stupid hedgehog is insulting me! Shadow&you're insulting someone other than me? Ekyt snickered. That's a first. Violet was kind of shook up. Shadow cocked the gun. Keep talking. Violet knocked the gun away from him. Shadow, he's trying to help! Be reasonable! Fine. I told her that sometimes it bites being an ultimate life form. Then she told me it was no picnic being her. So I said Poor you, you lost someone close to you. You heard the rest. Ekyt closed his eyes. *Boy, how do I handle this one?*

Ekyt, can I walk with you for a while? Violet asked. I don't want to be here when he's this angry. Is this okay with you, Shadow? he asked. Hmph. You suit yourself Violet. He skated off.

To Be Continued&

Next Issue: Violet tells her Story

And

Ekyt- Another Blow

12 - Truth...and Consequences

&So my parents got killed when I was young. I had to fend for myself. I never forgave humans for that. Ekyt and Violet (Violet_Rose) We're not all bad Violet. He considered his words, remembering his own past. But some are. I've made it my business to get rid of the bad ones. That's why Station Square's jail is so full. But one thing puzzles me&If GUN did it, why do you hate all humans? She stopped, and he put his hands up in a take-it-easy gesture. I'm not defending them. I'm just asking. Violet had to consider that for a moment. Because GUN is a human installation. They're all linked. She thought for another moment. I don't hate all humans. I guess you're not so bad. Thanks. I think. She laughed. You know what I mean.

Yeah, I do. He found himself telling her his past. The bullying. The pain. She could relate. Then he stopped and said what he'd been hesitating to say. Shadow was wrong to downplay your situation. But I think you should forgive him. He's having a hard time too. You don't want to be mad at him anymore than he wants to be mad at you. You care for him, and that's all the more reason not to let go. If you let go, you wind up like&like me. Both of you are going through a hard time. You need each other. She nodded. I'm going to apologize to him. Violet, one more thing. Yeah? If you or Shadow need me, I'm more than happy to help. Thanks.

He was alone again. He was happy to have had the company. And helping people felt good, it always did. But in this case, he was kind of sad. It meant he was alone. That meant time to think.

He stood up on the outskirts of town, on top of a hill. He watched the people move back and forth. Living their lives. Not looking back. Carefree. He guessed that some people had to be the worriers while the others had fun. He was one of the worriers. If only he could accept it.

But that was more mature than he could be. In two weeks, he had been through four girlfriends. Amy, Sasha (Texas_Luver), Rouge, and Roxy (Violet_Rose). All of them had used him. But he had bigger problems.

Just what had Tikal meant about his destiny. The more he sorted things out, the more questions there were.

He got back to his house shortly before midnight. He climbed up to the roof, where he liked to sit. He used to be one of those people that thrived on action. Lived for the moment. *Look at me now. Sitting on a roof, feeling sorry for myself. What a life.* He closed his eyes and tried to block out Station Square and its noise. Then he heard a noise that just didn't fit. He opened his eyes to see a huge ship flying overhead. It wasn't one of Eggman's. It had to be the Metarex.

He rushed down to the garage part of his house and floored his car. He had a sneaking suspicion that Knuckles was about to need help.

13 - True Colors

Ekyt got there just in time. Sonic, Shadow, and Knuckles were already fighting off the Metarex. Amy was bashing at one Robot's leg when it tried to stomp her. Ekyt floored his car over and jumped out as the car hit the robot's leg, toppling it. "You okay Amy?" Ekyt asked her. The pink hedgehog gulped and nodded. "Good. Huh? Amy wasn't sure she heard him right. *I was sure he was gonna yell at me for using him&*

Ekyt focused on the Robot, which was after the master emerald. "Watch your back Knux! He called to the red echidna whose attention was diverted. "Huh? Ekyt charged the robot's leg, causing it to lose its balance. Amy took a swing, knocking the robot over. "Nice one! Tails in his spaceship (What's the name again, someone remind me!) appeared over the horizon. Sonic and Shadow were busy, and Tails and Chris were piloting the ship. Ekyt got an idea. But it was risky.

"Tails, fire the Sonic power cannon! With what? Sonic and Shadow are out there! With me in it. Are you crazy?" Chris shouted at him. "Yes, trust me, give me five minutes to get there. Chris followed him as he ran down the hallway. "This could kill you! So could the Metarex. Ekyt said quietly. "Trust me. Chris stopped. "Good luck. He ran back to the bridge.

Shadow and Sonic were finally being overrun. So they hit their super forms and battled back. But that big Metarex Robot kept knocking them away. Then they saw the cannon come out. "What's Tails going to fire?" Sonic asked. "That human. Good riddance. What?! We gotta stop them! Too late.

Ekyt, inside the cannon, heard Tails' voice. "Okay, take the position you want to be fired in. Are you sure

you want to do this? Yes. Fire the cannon. Tails hand flipped open the switch that would fire the cannon. He hit the red button.

The power hummed all around Ekyt. He held his staff out to his side, like a spear. *Here s hoping this works.* The cannon fired. Ekyt sailed through the air, his coat acting as a parachute as he hit the robot with his shoulder. It started to go over. Ekyt took his staff and put it right in the Metarex s eyes. Then he jumped. *Oops. I can t fly or glide&And there s nothing to grab!* Shadow saw this, and made a difficult decision. *I hate humans&But this one helped Violet&Ahhhh!* CHAOS CONTROL! He warped time and set the kid down gently. I owe you Shadow. Rain check, kid. For now we better run for it! The robot started to explode. Shadow grabbed Violet (Violet_Rose). Sonic was unconscious, but out of Danger. Knuckled had taken cover. That left Amy Rose. Ekyt sighed. *Man, she dumps me, and now I m saving her. Sometimes being a good guy sucks.* He ran towards her, and grabbed her. Close your eyes and cover your ears! he told her. She did. He ran full speed as the others watched. No way he could make it in time. He put Amy behind a sturdy rock and kept running. The rock could only hold one. He needed cover. Too late.

The robot blew apart. Tikal, seeing that the kid was to be crushed, grabbed him into her mysterious light. He disappeared.

Nobody else saw this. Oh My God! I killed him! Amy started to sob. Sonic, just waking up tried to comfort her. NO! IT S MY FAULT! I PLAYED WITH HIS HEART, AND NOW HE S DEAD! Sonic didn t know what to say.

Violet (Violet_Rose) was in shock too. *One good human and he dies! Everything gets destroyed, everyone gets killed.* She and Shadow left the scene quietly. Knuckled was furious and started bashing the ground where the robot had been. His fist hit something hard and he dug it out. Ekyt s staff. It had snapped in half when the robot had landed. He gave the broken half to Amy. Amy stared at it. Quietly she took out her hammer and took it apart. She put his staff in the handle as a memorial.

Ekyt shook his head, trying to clear the cobwebs. He stood up, in front of ancient Angel Island. How did I get here? he said to no one in particular. He was shocked to get an answer. I m responsible for that Ekyt. Tikal stood before him. Tikal? Why d you help me? I ve done nothing to deserve it. Haven t you? You ve helped people Ekyt. The same as I tried to do. But you had some success. She stared into his eyes. But you don t think so, do you. No, you think it was all in vain. And your past& She looked into his eyes again, and saw a solitary tear. It haunts you doesn t it? Understand, you are not the only one with a hard past. I have showed you mine. I wish I could do more. Wait, Tikal! I know you can t tell me what my destiny is, but please, show me another clue. Tikal stopped. That is foremost on your mind. You have nearly died, and it doesn t faze you? Ekyt suddenly felt very bitter.

Why should it? I haven t exactly made friends. Maybe my attempts to help people is a cry for attention. Aside from my parents, and maybe a couple others, I have no one. You think no one cares for you?

Tikal bowed her head. Look into my headband. You will see the truth. Ekyt did. He saw Shadow slowing his descent. He saw Tikal rescuing him. He saw Amy crying&Amy? Ekyt watched silently as she put his staff inside her hammer s handle, then continued to sob. He couldn t watch anymore.

Thank you Tikal. He said, suddenly all business. *How do you thank someone for saving your life?* He hugged her. It was awkward. How do I get back? he asked after the weird embrace. Before I send you back, you wanted another clue. Look in your pocket. His chao, Tyke, was shaking. He scooped him up and tried to comfort the creature. It has something to do with chao. Thank you. Go to the master emerald and think of your own time. Thank you again. If you ever need me Tikal, let me know. She smiled. I will. You be careful. No more than usual. He said with a grin.

He got to the emerald and thought of his own time.

He landed hard on the master emerald s altar. He saw Knuckles staring. Sorry. Wrong address. It can t be. We watched you get killed! I don t die easy Knuckles. I ve gotta go tell the others. Wait, what happened. Tikal saved me. Tikal? But she only helps guardians! She was telling me about my destiny and that it had something to do with chao&Wait, are you telling me that& I guess so. Congratulations. I guess you and I guard the emerald now. Yeah. Thank you. Count this as my first coffee break. He ran off to Chris Thorndyke s house, only to be informed by a teary Ella (the maid) that someone had died. She directed him to the cemetery.

The whole group stood silent. Amy held the handle of her hammer. *It was my fault.* They didn t even see him come up. He had a sledgehammer. They noticed when his gravestone exploded. The whole group gasped as a grim-looking Ekyt stood there. A ghost! Tails shouted. Not quite. I m very much alive. Amy ran back to Chris house. Ekyt explained the story to them. Then he had to find Amy.

He found her in her room. Cream was trying to figure out what was wrong because all the sounds Amy made were incoherent. She saw Ekyt and fell off the bed. Cheese got a little spiral above his head. Ekyt helped Cream up. I m alive Cream. It s okay. Here, hold Tyke. Ekyt handed his white baby chao to Cream, who stroked him and Cheese absently.

Amy, it s okay. I m alive. Wha-what? I watched you die. It was all my fault. If I hadn t broken your heart. Amy, really, I m fine. No, it s my fault. You re dead. I m dreaming. I m alive. No you re not! I watched you die. They buried you in the cemetery. You re dead! Dead! DEAD! Ekyt kissed her, then hugged her. He looked into her tear-filled green eyes. I m okay. He said firmly. She buried her head in his chest and cried. He stroked her gently. Then he got up to leave.

Mr. Ekyt? Cream asked timidly. Yes Cream? Amy asked me to give this to you. She was going to bury it. Thanks Cream. Would you mind watching Tyke for me? I ve got to sort out my life. Not at all.

Ekyt read the note. He was shocked. It was an apology, but more than that.

Apparently, Amy had a new crush.

Next Issue:

Sorry, SonAmy fans, Make way for EkytXAmy!

But who s with Sonic?

14 - You AGAIN!? (Beware SonAmy fans!)

Co-Author Credit to Violet_Rose

This was&akward. Ekyt usually patrolled at night. He couldn't sleep anyway. He had been walking around, like normal. Some thug jumped him. He was surprised, and turned to go after the guy. He suddenly came flying back. Nose broken for sure.

Ekyt looked to the source of the guy's pain, to find Amy Rose twirling her hammer. Ekyt sputtered, and Amy shrugged. Just thought I'd help you out sweetie. *Uh oh. Don't tell me she's after me now. How do I handle this?* It wasn't that Ekyt didn't like Amy. She was cute and nice. But she always was after Sonic. He had to be dreaming. Yeah, that was logical. Amy chose that moment to hit him with one of her famous Flying hugs. He managed to catch her as she made herself at home, arms around his neck. He talked to her as he half-carried her.

So, how's Sonic? he asked casually. Sonic's fine. But he doesn't appreciate me. Her eyes sparkled. Not like *you* do. I should've been with you this whole time instead of trying to bait Sonic. What made you change your mind Amy? She pressed a finger to his lips to silence him, then pointed behind him. She took a defensive stance with her hammer in front of her. He stepped in front of her. They were in the hornets turf. Go tell the others. I'll handle these guys. She nodded and ran full speed away.

One of the hornets tried to get to her and Ekyl flattened the guy into a brick wall. The others all tried to pile on. That didn't work. Ekyl introduced one to a garbage can., while fending the others off with kicks. Sheer numbers started to wear him down though.

Sonic blasted into the guys full speed. Between Ekyl and Sonic, the thugs decided to retreat. Ekyl and Sonic stood panting, but satisfied. Then Sonic raised the inevitable question. So, how's things with Amy?

Ekyl gulped. You're not mad? No Way! You got that groupie off my back! I really care for someone else. Okay, I'll bite, who's that. Violet. Ekyl's eyes widened. *Violet (Violet_Rose)? Oh boy. If that wasn't a breeding ground for trouble.* When did this happen? Oh, it's been that way for a while. I like Amy, but not the way she likes me. Okay then. Um, she's a little excitable. How do I handle her? Sonic shrugged with a comical grin. If I knew, would I have run away from her every time I saw her? Good point. She's a sweetheart though. Yeah. Well, take it easy, and get some ice or something on that leg. Ekyl noticed he was bleeding. Yeah. See ya.

Amy popped out from around the corner. Heading home Ekyl? She asked, just a tad flirtatiously. Um, yeah. Is there something you wanted to do? She smiled. Sonic *never* asked me that. How about hitting the park? Sure. She jumped on his back. Piggyback ride! she shouted. *What the heck? I didn't know she actually like me. This is weird&Nice in a way. Even though she is a little young for me&Phhh! It's the twenty-first century. Four years means nothing.*

Amy got real cozy at the park. She curled up in his lap. Cold? he asked her. A little. He shrugged off his coat and tossed it over her. She snuggled up and looked at the stars. At one point, Ekyl could have sworn she felt his stomach. He heard her make a little coo sound. He tried to roll with the punches.

Ekyt noticed Violet, Sonic, and Shadow staring at the stars. Well, Violet was. Shadow and Sonic were focused on each other. Ekyt decided to let them handle it. Partly because it was none of his business until it got violent. Part because he had a cute little hedgehog curled up on his lap, asleep.

Psst! Hey, faker, why don't you go kiss an alien or something? Sonic said to Shadow as he moved closer to Violet. Shadow moved closer and whispered back. Hmph. There's a crowd, you blue pest. Yeah, you're right, why don't you go do whatever it is ultimate life forms do? They both stood up.

Violet stood up too. Cut it out both of you! This is *not* the way to win me over. Shadow apologized. Yeah, you're right. He punched Sonic, causing Sonic to retaliate.

Ekyt sighed and moved the little bundle off his lap and ran over to the fighting hedgehogs. He reached into the fray and plucked Shadow off of Sonic. Sonic was bleeding from the mouth, and Shadow's eye was swollen. Violet got behind Ekyt. There was no talking to Shadow when he was angry. Okay, I don't care who started what. This is Violet's decision. She's not a piece of property. Neither of you own her. Amy came over at this point, glaring at her sister. Violet glared back. Ekyt saw this. Don't you two start! Shadow dove on Ekyt, landing a few punches. Ekyt slipped him off with martial arts precision as both got to their feet. Sonic, Shadow, and Ekyt all charged at the same time. Amy and Violet looked at each other, nodded, and took out their hammers.

WHACK!!! CRACK!!!

The three boys went flying in different directions. Now you guys cut it out! Who do you think you're impressing? Ekyt got up and shook himself off. He had landed in a fountain. Shadow was up already, a

small cut on his head. Sonic was on one knee, the wind knocked out of him. Amy helped Ekyt up. Violet didn't know what to do.

Violet, you've got to pick one of them. Ekyt told her as he dragged Amy along. *Man, she's the clingy type! It could be worse. She could be nuts or something.* His thoughts drifted back to Rouge. He still liked her, he guessed. But his main concern was Amy. In terms of love anyway. His *biggest* concern was that the group was breaking apart. Sonic vs. Shadow, Amy vs. Violet.

Violet looked at the two. The decision was easy for her. Telling the one she liked less was the hard part. She took a deep breath and said. I'm sorry Sonic. It's Shadow. Sonic let his head drop. Ekyt stepped between him and Shadow just in case. Sonic tried to smile, but he was too depressed. Ekyt whispered to Amy. We've got to keep an eye on him. He might do something dangerous. To Sonic, he said. Here, let's go to my place. Why don't you two head there? I'll be right there. They left. Ekyt turned to Violet and Shadow. Good luck. He turned to leave. Hold it. Shadow stopped him. Thanks for the help. Then he punched him. That's for getting in my business. Shadow jumped on him and punched or all he was worth. Ekyt refused to hit back. Violet put an end to it by wrestling Shadow off him. Shadow, we already discussed this! We both hate humans, but this one we leave alone. Understand? Fine.

Ekyt wanted to tackle him really badly. But he had two hedgehogs to deal with.

Of course, by the time he got back, things were messed up again.

15 - Matchmaker, Matchmaker

It was clear to Ekyt from the start that he had to get Sonic and Amy back together. He liked Amy, maybe even loved her. But Sonic was a hero, and if he was down on himself, the whole city would be down. It was a hard choice for Ekyt. It was gonna tear his heart out. But he was used to it.

Fortunately, he was spared the agony of explaining it. Things were back to normal, with Sonic kind of liking Amy, and Amy being her naturally clingy self. Ekyt watched the two leave. His heart wasn't broken this time. But that stung. Dumped twice by the same girl. *Oh well.*

He heard the flutter of wings behind him. His chao, Tyke, poked his head out of his pocket and made a heart. Rouge stood behind him on the roof. He got up, but she sat him back down as she sat next to him. Miss me? She asked. Ekyt started to lie, but Rouge saw right through it. Yeah, you did. I broke your heart, huh? Poor guy& She kissed him. He blushed, partly with pleasure, partly with embarrassment. Mostly with shame, though. Why'd you come back? I know how you work. Shouldn't you find another host? I'm not going to join Eggman. Rouge looked mildly surprised. Hmmm. That's a shame. You and I are so right. You like how I look, I know you do. It's practically a digital mantra running across your forehead. You liked that kiss. You want more of those, don't you? You want me. She paused dramatically, letting the kid fill his head up with notions. Join us, me and Eggman. You can neutralize Shadow, and that's not something everyone can do. She pushed her shoulders back, then leaned closer to him, breathing in his ear. Come with me. You know you want it. You don't want to make me sad, do you?

I like her. Love her? I don't know. Do I love her enough to join my sworn enemy? It seems wrong, but we seem so right. Rouge, why don't you join me? Rouge looked up, stunned. He wasn't supposed to say that! Maybe I do really like him&But all those jewels&hmmm. Tough choice& What could you offer me, kid? No, never mind. She got up and extended a gloved hand to him. Come with me. Forget Eggman.

You and I can handle this stuff without him. You've got good friends, and I don't. I know you won't turn on me. Ekyt nodded. Works for me. I did miss you. Wait, you didn't take that seriously did you? Ekyt swallowed hard. *Not again. Two girls in one day! That's a real hit to the old ego.* Yeah, I did. Why don't you just go. I'm not joining you and your evil cohorts. Rouge slapped him across the face. Hit me. Go ahead. I'm a big girl. I can take it. Stop! the voice belonged to Tikal.

Ekyt, your destiny lies with the chaos emeralds. If she can't handle that, she's not your soulmate. Ekyt was stunned. Rouge tried to jump Tikal, but Ekyt tackled her. She flew off cursing.

I will need your services soon. Take care. Do not despair. You will find love someday. She disappeared. The breeze left his trench coat flapping in the wind.

He sat down on the roof. Broken. Lost. Alone. *Alone. That's a scary word. Sonic and Amy, Tails and Cream, Shadow and Violet(Violet_Rose)&Then there's me. Well, I've learned my lesson. Trust no one. As Sonic says, trust your feelings, live and learn. Well, I've learned not to let my feelings control me. I'm done with the dating game.*

Ekyt could feel himself darken, but it didn't matter. Not anymore. He had only himself to please. He would continue to fight crime. But alone.

16 - Innocence of Old

Ekyt's new attitude was different. He had set out to help people, to do good. That hadn't changed. But he had.

Gone was the red shirt, replaced with a white shirt that reminded him of his failures. He exchanged his white and red shoes for plain black shoes. New gloves, black, fingerless gloves, covered his hands. A chain decorated the waist of his trenchcoat. Finally, he held the mask in his hands. *Am I really going to do this?* He thought to himself. Of course he was. Who was going to justify his actions but him? The mask itself was black in color. But there were violent, deep red slashes around the eyes. The mask had no real significance. But he was hiding from himself. His past. The past was over. The future was now. He put the mask on his head. It was a good fit. Now to get to work & He walked through town, ignoring the looks he got from the other people. It didn't matter to him. Not anymore. He walked by Amy and totally ignored her. She dropped the bag she was carrying and watched him walk away. *What got into him? I'd better tell the others.* She ran off to the Thorndyke mansion.

Okay, calm down Amy. Tell us again. What happened? She was practically hyperventilating. H-he must have gotten hurt. He had on a mask, different shirt, and he totally ignored me! Imagine that! said Sonic sarcastically. For once, Amy ignored him. Chris offered his opinion. Maybe Shadow broke his jaw in that fight. No, I was with him. He was fine. Amy said, shaking her head. Tails was dead-on. From what I know about psychology, I'd say he's failed to come to terms with his failures. With women, against Shadow. All his efforts have been for nothing. He doesn't think he's made a difference!

But why the mask? asked Cream. Chao Chao! agreed Cheese. Then Cream remembered she had his chao. Sonic said he'd take him back. He raced to the warehouse. Ekyt stood in a dimly lit corner of a big empty room on the fifth floor. He stared out the window. He sensed someone in the room.

He turned, head inclined slightly. Yes? he rasped. His normal voice was gone too. His gloved hands were dripping with blood. The blood came from a gash across his chest. Uh, kid, you okay? No. What can I do for you? Sonic was a little wary of him, but handed him the little white chao. Just bringing this back buddy. See ya later, okay? Whatever. You can come and go as you please. Ekyt held the chao, stroking it gently.

This little chao is like me. Alone&He can t be with his family. I d be putting mine in danger, and he doesn t know who his parents are. I guess I d better make him feel at home. Ekyt took of the mask briefly, shaking his hair back into position. He brought the little chao to the fourth floor, where there was a makeshift garden. Tails, Chris, and Knuckles had made it for him. Back when he made the mistake of trusting someone.

The little chao decided to swim. Once he was done, Ekyt handed him a fruit from one of the trees. The little chao ate it greedily, bring a small grin to Ekyt s face. Then a crash came outside. Stay here. Ekyt told the little chao. He slipped the mask back on and went outside.

He found Shadow outside, with Violet (Violet_Rose). What s with you? Shadow asked, snickering. You okay? Violet asked, less coldly than before. Dandy. He rasped. Can I help you? Shadow and Violet both looked on, surprised. Um, can we come in? If you like. He stepped aside to let them pass.

He lived on the fifth floor and roof of the large building. The first floor served as a garage and workshop of sorts. The second floor contained an office, along with a library of sorts. Books on World War II, video games, a Bible, and some other assorted material were in the makeshift shelves. The third floor was a gym, littered with equipment.

The fourth floor was the chao garden. Violet was amazed that Ekyt could maintain this place. Finally they reached the fifth floor.

This was the weirdest of all. The walls were white, and somewhat cluttered on one side of the room, where there was a target, a collection of knives, swords, staffs, and other weapons. Another side of the room contained a bed. One wall was empty, and the other one held some pictures. Pictures of some people that Shadow knew, others he didn't. There were four stools that stood in front of the bar near the window. Ekyt gestured silently to them. He himself stood by the window.

What happened to you? asked Violet, concerned. The creepy mask of his&it was eerie. Ekyt, who had his head down, raised it. What happened? Ask Rouge, Roxy (Violet_Rose), Amy, Sasha (Texas_Luver), ask yourself Violet. Years of feeling alone unhinge a man. I've thrown away my past. Very few strands hold it in place. The most vital ties. However, most have been severed. Loneliness is a powerful conductor for change. He stopped. Isn't that right, Shadow? It's amazing what stress can do to a person, isn't it? I've just decided to give up trust. Trusting is a dangerous precedent. I'm not saying that it's wrong for you, but it doesn't make sense to me. Not much does. I don't need it too.

Violet could sense that he was unhappy with himself. That he felt boxed in. She knew that feeling as well as anyone. She and Shadow left. Left him alone with his thoughts and his new attitude. His heart was gone, so it couldn't be broken again.

Then another crash outside forced Ekyt out of his thoughts. He saw Rouge the bat falling from above, with Eggman laughing maniacally. He dove to catch her.

WILL HE CATCH HER? AND WHAT'S WITH THIS GUY? FIND OUT NEXT TIME!

17 - I was the Victim!

Rouge opened her eyes. A moan escaped her throat. Wh-where I am? She tried to get up out of the bed she was on, only to be eased back by a hand. She looked up and screamed. Rouge, relax! the mask said. Rouge had grabbed a brick and was swinging wildly. Keep away from me! Rouge, relax! It's me! Ekyt! Rouge stopped. Ekyt lifted his mask up for the first time in two days. He eased Rouge back into her bed. You're okay. You had a nasty fall. I caught you before you hit the ground. You sprained your wing and hurt your leg, by the look of it. I checked your eyes, you have a small concussion. Where am I? She asked again. She was genuinely moved that her ex-boyfriend would do this. But that mask. You're at my place. You live in the old warehouse. Yeah. Oh yeah, Blush (Her chao, I made it up) came looking for you. She's on the fourth floor with my chao.

What's with the mask. He looked away, the mask sitting awkwardly on top of his head. Scars. Rouge looked shocked. What scars. Not the kind you can see. The kind caused by stress. Pain. Rejection. He spat the last word. Rouge decided to stop this part of the questioning.

How long have I been out of it? Two days. You woke up once before, muttered Eggman, then conked out again. Rouge had one question burning in her mind.

Why did you help me? After what I did? she asked him, looking into his eyes. His deep hazel eyes met her eyes. It was the right thing to do. I couldn't risk bringing you to a hospital. Now with gangs, the Metarex, and Eggman around. So I kept an eye on you. Rouge was amazed. I was rotten to you. No. I was rotten to myself. He moved to the window again, slowly running a gloved hand down it. Only then did she notice the gash in his leg.

I gave up trust, Rouge. I'm done. I help people, not interact with them. They can see me for what I am, or they can see me for what I appear to be. What's that? she asked, eyes wide. To them, I'm a freak. No. Yup. So here I am. Now, do you want to tell me what happened? he asked calmly. Rouge noticed his voice was raspier. He must not talk much anymore.

Only if you answer my question: What happened to your leg. He walked with a cane. Against the Metarex, my leg got torn open pretty bad by one of their robots. Then I got shot out of the Sonic power cannon, and, I didn't know it at the time, but I had hurt my leg. So now I use this& he held up a cane. At least until my leg heals. When will that be? she asked. I don't know. It doesn't matter. Rouge got up out of the bed, limping slightly. What do you mean, it doesn't matter! Of course it matters. You're living, breathing, you're only seventeen. You don't care if your leg heals?! No. he said, coldly. And why is that? Who's going to care? Let's face it. Sonic has Amy. Shadow has Violet (Violet_Rose). Sasha (Texas_Luver) has& anyone she wants, but Sonic. Tails has Cream. I'm alone. You don't have to be. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be. I've given up. Relationships, friendship, contact of any kind. It doesn't mean anything to me. Not anymore. His fist met the wall, cutting his exposed knuckles. He watched the blood with disdain. Rouge actually felt bad for him. But she had her sights on someone else. Will you take me to Knuckles? she asked him, batting her eyes for good measure. If that's what you want. You don't mind? I help people. I do what I can for them. So let's go. He whistled, and Blush and Tyke came running. He scooped them both up and put one in each of the big pockets of his coat.

He dropped her off to Knuckles. She kissed him. Ekyt turned and walked away. Angry, defeated. He cared for her. No, he *had* cared for her. Caring, at least for romance, was gone.

On the way back, one of Eggman's robots got in his face, asking about Rouge. He destroyed the piece of scrap metal easy. But a piece of metal hurt his leg. He plucked it out and walked back home. If you could call it that. Only then did he realize his chao had been hurt. He ignored his leg and rushed to the Master Emerald, ignoring the lip prints on Knuckles' face.

Tikal! he said urgently. She came, worried. What is it? she asked. It's my chao. Can you help him?

The little chao was curled up into a ball, a pained expression on his face, tears running down his cheeks. Ekyt handed him over. Tikal immediately looked worried and placed him on the Emerald. She concentrated. Some blue and yellow chao appeared, then disappeared. Ekyt, his only chance is to come back with me. Ekyt turned to his last friend. Take care, Tyke. He hugged the little guy carefully. Then he handed the chao to Tikal, with Rouge and Knuckles looking on. Tikal disappeared again.

Ekyt, his eyes lit with fury, pushed past Rouge and Knuckles, who were questioning him. He charged across the bridge, down the mountain to Station Square. He pushed his through the crowd. He spotted an Eggman ship. The only way to reach it was the highest building in the city.

It was owned by a real jerk, who gave him trouble immediately. Ekyt punched him out, then demolished the security guards that tried to grab him. He fought his way to the roof and jumped, just grabbing the ship. He pulled himself up. It was time to hunt down a certain fat creep.

18 - A Historic Meeting

The mask covered his face, except his mouth. That was what the criminal saw. Before he saw black. Ekyt cold-cocked him in the face. The police could finish up. Then the guy got up and cracked Ekyt over the head with a garbage can lid. It drew blood, but didn't faze Ekyt. The gut practically ate the lid.

Ekyt felt his head and immediately got enraged when he felt the blood. He left it alone. Open wounds weren't something to play with. He just jogged back home.

Rouge lay awake. She couldn't help but think about how the kid had cared for her. She had dumped him. Twice. But he came trotting back like a loyal dog. They were so much alike. But her heart belonged to Knuckles. The kid knew it, and accepted it. She decided to leave.

Ekyt watched her fly away. He wasn't even sad. He just opened the door and walked in. Dried blood decorated his head and gloves. His shirt too. His coat was untouched somehow. Oh well. No big deal. Not anymore.

He didn't care anymore.

Sonic saw Rouge fly away and knew that he had been right. She had done it again. Hopefully Ekyt had heard him.

He found Ekyt training. That was what he did. Sonic felt bad for him. Ekyt felt bad for himself, but was determined not to show it. He responded with sarcasm. It wasn't that he wasn't desirable, he had plenty of girlfriends. None human. But he liked it that way, he guessed. But his girlfriends all played him. Angry, he slammed his fist into the wall.

This was the scene Sonic walked in to. He saw the blood on his shirt and his hand. Ekyt balled his hand into a fist again. His chao, who had been training with him, got a little exclamation point over its head. Ekyt turned to Sonic. Take him with you. Ask Cream if she'll watch him. He shouldn't be around me. I'm a danger to everyone. Sonic walked a little closer. No way! You done nothing but good! I don't care. I'm not in it for credit Sonic. It's just the right thing to do. But it's cost me a lot. My health. Any relationships. Maybe even my sanity. Oh, c'mon, you're not insane, and you've haven't met the right girl yet. I don't think there is one, Sonic. I mean, I've tried, but they all just use me. Not all girls are like that. Sonic said. Ekyt cracked a small smile. Amy? No, she's just nuts. Loyal, but clingy. And nuts. Well, whatever. It's not my problem anymore. I'm not going to be tempted by the outside world. Not anymore. Anyway, I've gotta go. Ekyt left, with Sonic shaking his head.

Oh his way to the casino Ekyt thought about what he had said. *Did I really mean that? I mean, I know there's probably a girl for me out there, but how much can I take? You can only have your heart broken so many times&I'll ask Ray.*

Ray was the bartender that night. It was either him or that new guy Harry. What a jerk. That guy was a piece of work. You couldn't tip him enough. Ray, however, had taken a liking to the disturbed seventeen year old and helped him when he could.

Kid, ya gotta pull yourself back up. You ll meet the right chick. You re a good kid. I hate to see ya like this. He said in his thick Brooklyn accent. Ya gotta get back in the ring. Ya gotta&Huh? He heard a radio bulletin.

The announcer said In a bizarre situation, two hedgehogs have freed an echidna from jail. The girl, known as Linda-Su, was part of what was supposed to be a near-extinct race of animal. More details to follow. Ekyt s eyes widened. A girl echidna? Ray smiled at the kid. I told ya, kid. You like your echidnas, right? Why don t ya go meet this chick? Ekyt handed him some bills and downed his coke. I might just do that, Ray. I have a feeling I know who busted her out&

Shadow and Violet (Violet_Rose) hid the echidna girl. Ekyt dropped behind them. Everyone okay? he asked. His eyes nearly popped out of his mask when he saw the echidna.

She was a deep pink color, with black tips on bangs and dreadlocks. He wore a black vest and jeans. She looked like she could hold her own. Violet smiled. Exactly the reaction she was counting on.

Earlier:

I know Shadow, I know. He did help us. I don't like humans any more than you, but we've gotta help him out. I don't care. Let him rot. He's gonna snap. You've been there Shadow. Let him snap, then. Violet threw her hands up, frustrated. She was willing to overlook the fact that the guy was human. For now. He had helped her get Shadow back, so this would make things even. Fine Shadow. I'll get her myself.

Back to the present:

Violet laughed silently at Ekyt's reaction. The girl stood up and looked him over. For her part, Linda-Su didn't know what to think. She had no beef with humans. But that mask&weird.

Ekyt had offered his hand to her, but she declined the help. Shadow and Violet had split, leaving the two alone. I'm Ekyt. He managed to stutter. Linda-Su. Nice to meet you. You too. A cop car whizzed by. Let's get to my place for now. He said. She agreed. They ran side by side through the brisk night air.

19 - The Exchange

Co-Author credit to Violet Rose, with a special thanks to Mr Gimp for letting me use Blain

Linda and Ekyt crept along the building, into his warehouse. He shut the door and locked. Make yourself at home. He said to her. She nodded, then stared at him. He ran his hand over his face. Oops, I m sorry. He took off the mask. Sorry, I forgot I had the thing on. Can I get you something? he said pleasantly.

Linda looked at him skeptically before saying Just water. He got her a glass of water, then sat down. She had questions for him. But he blurted his out first. If you don t mind my asking, what were you in jail for? Then he shook his head. Oh boy. Bad question. No, it s okay, really. Linda was eager to share her story with someone. She put down the glass. Before she started, she looked him in the eyes. My story is&weird. He gave her a half-smirk, saying So s mine. Shoot.

She sighed heavily and began, eyes closed.

Flashback:

Linda remembered herself, strapped to the table. Monitors, needles, poking her, drawing blood, taking her blood pressure. The government decided to reverse-engineer one of these animals. Linda was the lucky one.

Linda remembered cringing with pain as they stuck a long needle into her stomach. They basically tortured her. They poked her all over, testing her. Finally, she slapped one doctor and fought off a whole entourage of nurses.

She ran for it, but someone wearing a torn leather jacket stopped her. She didn't hesitate to punch him, and keep running. Her foot got caught on his jacket though. It tore out a large gang insignia. It was a Hornet.

End Flashback

She expected Ekylt to recoil in horror, at the very least. He didn't. He stood up and walked to the window. I've had anxiety for ten years. I couldn't go to school. I couldn't travel. I was shunned. He turned. But now I'm here. And I& He found himself telling her everything. Her eyes widened. *My God. I can't believe this.* Her thoughts raced as he told his story. He stopped and perked up. Linda heard it too.

Shadow and Violet (Violet_Rose) were arguing. I told you this was a bad idea! he shouted at Violet. Save it! For an Ultimate Life Form you sure can be a wuss! Ekylt pulled on his mask and dove out the window onto the fire escape. A group of Hornets (A gang in Station Square- N.G.) had the two cornered. And they were arguing. Ekylt thought to himself *I really should start charging a fee for this.* He dove down, in front.

Pack it in chumps. He snarled at them. He clenched his fist in front of him. The Hornets started to whisper to each other. You know who I am, you morons! Ekylt said, lifting the mask. They rushed. Ekylt, getting to relieve some stress at last, floored one after another. He turned to Shadow and Violet. Get outta here! Shadow skated off, leaving Violet.

But two hedgehogs put an end to that problem. Sonic raced up, scooped Violet up, and ran up the building. Not that she couldn't handle herself, but Sonic wanted to make sure she was alright.

The other hedgehog was Shadow's son. Blain (Mr_Gimp) was an ultimate life form, like his father (See Mr_Gimp's stuff for history on this, read it anyway, hilarious!- N.G.). But unlike his father, Blain took a liking to Ekylt. Ekylt was older per say. Blain had the appearance of about 12 years old (Check Mr_Gimp's pics to see Blain) even though he was older. He ran off the last of the hornets. Good to see you again Blain. Ekylt said. Yeah, see ya! Whoa! Who's the chick? Blain asked. Ekylt shook his head,

laughing. Blain, this is Linda. Linda, this is Blain. Shadow's son sort of. Blain looked her up and down before whispering to his buddy I give her an eight! Then he zoomed off, laughing. Ekyt walked Linda back to his place.

Meanwhile, Violet and Sonic were talking. Violet usually couldn't stand Sonic, but he seemed charming & yeah, that was it. Charming today. Maybe because he gave her respect that she didn't always get from Shadow. Well, something was different. They talked for quite some time.

Thanks for the help, Sonic. She said. Anytime Violet. He checked his watch. Well, I gotta juice. Good night. Good night Sonic. Violet thought about Sonic for a while before she decided to head home. Wait, she couldn't go there. Shadow was there. She went to the hotel in Station Square. She met Linda and Ekyt as they were walking in. Real good place, Paul will take care of you & Oh, hi Violet. Ekyt walked up to the counter. Paul, these two girls need your two best rooms. It's on me, don't let them pay. Paul winked at him.

Paul was like a younger, more conservative Ray (the bartender). Instead of wearing Ray's T-shirt, he wore suits. Ekyt had lived in the hotel for a while, before he decided to go to the warehouse. Paul didn't know what it was like to fail with women. So he advised Ekyt. Ekyt decided not to listen, though. He couldn't honestly say why.

Two of the phillies now kid? Paul taunted with a chuckle. Yeah right. Just friends. How'd things go with that bat? Don't ask. Another classic Ekyt foul-up? he laughed. Call it what you like, wiseguy. You'll be pretty uncomfortable with that stupid bell on the desk up your nose. Comprehend? Yeah, I hear ya kid. Two rooms. Violet and Linda each grabbed an arm and pulled him back. What are you doing? they scolded in unison. Relax, I'm just paying for the hotel rooms. I've caused you both some trouble. I may be different. But sometimes that's a good thing. Anyone need anything. Linda was game to hit the casino. Violet decided to call it a night. Maybe she'd give Sonic a call &

Ray watched the kid walk in. He dropped the glass he had been cleaning. Where d he get an echidna? he wondered out loud. He stopped wondering, though. That kid was like a miraculous country store, anything you couldn t find he could somehow get. Ekyt got up to the counter, the mask in his pocket. Ray, this is Linda. Linda, this is Ray. Nice to meet you. Linda said. Same here. What ll it be? he asked. *The guy s first date with a girl who isn t a criminal&Go figure. Attaboy!*

Linda looked at Ekyt. Ekyt said Coke and Linda said she d have one too. Ekyt had his head turned away. But when he turned back toward her, she noticed the gash just below his eye. And how could she have missed the limp? What the heck? Ekyt, you ve gotta get that thing on your leg closed up! Ekyt looked at his leg and shrugged. I didn t notice. To be honest, this happens a lot. She dragged him toward the men s bathroom. There was also a shower in there (From Sonic Adventure DX- N.G.) Get yourself cleaned up! Ekyt did as he was told, though he couldn t honestly say why.

Linda went back to Ray. You got the kid trained good. Ray said with a smile. She smiled back, tired. Yeah. Listen, you re not gonna play him, are you? She sat up. What? No, I m not insulting you. It s just&Wait, he didn t tell you? No, what? Ray sighed and ran a hand through his graying hair. Okay, I probably shouldn t be the one to tell you this, but all his girlfriends before have used him. Rouge and Roxy (Violet_Rose) to get emeralds. Amy Rose to get Sonic. And even Sasha, my star singer, to get to Sonic. I m just worried about his mental health. Linda nodded. I understand. No, I m not going to play. But I m not his girlfriend either. I just met the guy. Ray looked at her seriously. The last time that guy did what he was told, he had a gun to his back. You just told him nicely to go get cleaned up and that s what he did. Think about that. Linda did.

Ekyt let the water run over him. It stung when it hit his cuts at first, but it went away. He got to thinking about the incredible echidna he had just met. *She s beautiful. And she doesn t think I m nuts! Awesome. But I ll screw it up, I always do&* He dried himself off and threw his clothes back on, his shirt tied around his leg. He closed his coat up and walked back to the bar.

Hi, Sonic? Violet said into the phone. Violet, hi! Sonic s voice answered. You have a minute? Violet asked. For you? Sure! They started to talk at midnight. At three A.M. they still weren t done.

At three A.M. Linda was finally tired. Ekyt was too, so he walked her back to the hotel. You gonna be all right? he asked her. Yeah. Will I see you again? she asked, already knowing. Yeah. I ll drop by whenever you want. How bout tomorrow? Sure.

20 - Not Alone

What are you waiting for, doctor? Ekyt asked calmly. Eggman stroked his beard. This was part of Ekyt's desperate plan to outwit Eggman. If it didn't work & well, he was dead. Let me get this straight & Eggman began, pointing at Ekyt. You *want* to die? That's not what I said. Besides, you don't seem to have given me much choice in the matter. Besides, who'll miss me? Ekyt let his hands drop. He didn't want to die, but he didn't want to go back to Station Square either. There was nothing there for him.

No. I'm not going to kill you. I'm going to make you suffer. Eggman laughed. Ekyt shut him up by saying, Oh, you'll send me back? Eggman growled and had his guards grab Ekyt. Ekyt didn't struggle, figuring he needed the energy. But all at once, it left him. *Does it matter what I think? I can't go back to my family, not with so many criminals wanting to kill me. But Station Square isn't all that great either. I'm tired of the animosity. Tired of the fighting. Tired of being alone. Tired of playing the unsung hero.* It took a hit from Eggman to snap him out of it. Ekyt pushed the guards roughly away.

That's it, whopper! You're going down! Ekyt smashed Eggman's hovercraft's windshield. Glass cut Eggman as he yelled for help. Ekyt turned to the guards and mangled them. His mind was racing, but his body was in the lead. He told himself to get off the ship, but he was bent on doing as much damage as possible. Finally he was cornered as a tired smile reached his face. So you think you've won, fat boy? Your ship is in ruins, and the only thing you have to show for it is me. Must make you feel big, knowing it took a fleet of your robots to take me down. The others would have mangled you.

Eggman cackled again, saying We're very much alike, kid. Both outcasts. No family. And I can see you're intelligent, and even in prime physical condition. Why not join me? I'll make it worth your while. Ekyt responded by smashing a window nearby. That's going to be you if you don't back off! Ekyt looked out the window. He saw a high building coming up. He guessed they would reach it in thirty seconds. Ekyt made his move.

He dashed forward (30)& Smashed a robot (15)&Ran for the deck of the Egg Carrier (5) and leapt (0). Eggman was cursing as Ekyt fell toward the building's top. He landed and waved, just to rub it in. Then he sagged, all energy gone. He realized he was on the Thorndyke roof and soon others were crowded around him. You okay boss? asked Sonic. Mister, that was a nasty fall! exclaimed Cream. Man, that's rough. Said Chris. Tails called out Are you okay? There's no way you should have survived that. Shadow ignored him. Violet (Violet_Rose) asked if he was hurt. But where was Linda? When he asked this, everyone looked away. Finally, Cream spoke up. Um, Mister Ekyt? She got hurt really bad. She fell on her leg awkwardly during the chaos control. Ekyt sat upright. Where is she? he asked. You're not going anywhere! Amy exclaimed. You just fell off that flying ship! I don't care! Where is she? He got to his feet, but was grabbed by Rouge, Amy, Violet, and Shadow all at once. He was too tired to fight. Take me to her, and I'll rest. I promise. They showed him her room. Sonic pulled him aside and said You've got it bad for her, don't you. Ekyt nodded, then got the big problem off his chest. Sonic, I want to apologize to you. I've been a total jerk to you, and you've done nothing to deserve it. I'm going to reserve my anger for those who *do* deserve it. Sonic patted him on the shoulder. Hey, no problem. You just get that whole love thing straightened out.

Ekyt walked into Linda's room. She had her leg bandaged and propped up. Hey. He said softly. She smiled. Hey, come on in! she noticed he was battered and bruised. And bleeding. Shadow do that? she asked. No. I took out half of Eggman's ship before I jumped off. But I think I broke my hand. No big deal. Are you okay? getting better. Sit here for a minute. She patted the bed. He sat down gingerly, flinching as she wrapped her arm around his waist. That was really brave of you. Not really. It was the only option. Bravery comes from within. You could have gone with us. But you chose to make sure all of us got away safe. Yeah, and I did a heck of a job. He said, pointing at her leg. That was a freak accident. No matter. She motioned for him to move closer. She lifted his mask up and kissed him on the lips.

His first kiss that felt right. It ended too soon, of course, he guessed all good kisses did. Linda spoke up softly while tickling his chin. You know, I think you should stay here. I need someone to protect me. She said jokingly. If that's what you want. He said. She stopped. You know, you've really gotta stick up for yourself. Don't let those stupid girls who messed with you ruin your life. I don't really need a slave. I can handle myself. Ekyt ran his hand through his hair, before finally saying: It's not just them. I've always been shy like this. And I really think you should know something. I'm like the kiss of death. Everyone I fall in love with gets hurt, or I get hurt. Lots of people hate me out there Linda. I've put lots of criminals in jail, and once they get out, they're gonna gun for me. My question is this: Are you sure you

want to put yourself at risk by being with me? If I were you, I d tell me to go away. I d understand. She got up, leaning on his walking stick.

Do you know what you just said? You admitted you re human. I thought I was dating a robot. Besides... she said, turning around to grab him by the collar for a quick kiss& There s no turning back now. I think I ll take my chances with the kiss of death , provided he ll stay with me, at least until I recover. She gave him a sideways look, laughing silently as his head and neck turned red. I can take care of myself, but it would help me a lot if I had someone like you around. He smiled at her, another rare gesture for him. It that s what you want, I ll talk to Chris about staying until you heal. He left, not believing that this beautiful girl was in love with him. He found Tails waiting for him.

Ekyt could tell the kid fox was troubled. What s the matter Tails? he asked. Ekyt, I need your advice. He said. Ekyt s eyes widened. About what? he asked, seriously. Girls.

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT GUARDIAN: SONIC X STYLE S FIRST EVER SPECIAL;

TAILS LOVE TROUBLE

AND

VIOLET AND SONIC? NO WAY!

21 - Of Hedgehogs and humans

With Linda's leg healed, she set out to find her place in Station Square. She had already decided to stay near Ekyt. She saw the goofy son of a gun as her own project. But not selfishly like Rouge. She really liked the guy. He was shy, but it was kind of cute. Linda thought to herself about what she could do. She hardly knew anything about her newly installed boyfriend. But he hated crime and bullies. That was enough to direct her to the police department. It was a step below GUN (Which both her and Ekyt hated), and she could do what she enjoyed.

Violet (Violet_Rose) and Sonic were still close. Shadow had apparently disappeared. Sonic felt guilty about that, but Violet put his mind at ease. Relax, it's not like you told him to disappear. He pulls this all the time. She said with a wave of her hand. She had to admit to herself that she did kind of miss the mysterious black hedgehog. But the blue blur was more warm and friendly. Maybe that's what she needed, to get away from her past, look to the future. It looked promising. Sonic wasn't the type to settle with a job, so they could walk along Emerald Coast, or do any other number of things that they wanted. It was paradise.

Ekyt was having problems of his own. His chao, Tyke, seemed to hate him. Ekyt would hold him, and the white chao would push away. He would pet the chao, and he would get a pained look on his face. At one point, the chao ran away from him. Linda came home, her new badge on her leather jacket. She didn't say anything but whistled to the chao, who came running. How did you do that? Ekyt said in astonishment. Well, see, your chao is a girl, number one. How the heck can you tell that? She came to me. Well, *that's* fair! he said sarcastically. Number two, have you checked the chao's head? No, he&it&she&whatever won't let me get close! Well, there's a bump here. Linda pointed. So what do I do? My chao hates me, I can't take it to a doctor without it running off! Linda petted the chao gently, as it rocked, its eyes closed, mouth showing elation. I'll take it. You sure? I mean, it's my responsibility and, it's not that I don't think you can&Boy, I'm doing that rambling thing again, aren't I? he said, shaking his head. Why don't you keep the chao? I'll get another one. Hey, that's really sweet of you! she said. Both of them turned progressively redder. Um, yeah, I've gotta get this chao to the doctor. Ekyt shook himself out of his haze. Right, I've got to go see some friends about a part-time job.

Ekyt's friends turned out to be the Chaotix. He was no detective, but he had a feeling they could use the help. Dawg, what makes you think you kin hang wit us, yo! Vector said behind the desk. Charmy was buzzing around. Let him in, let him in, let him in, let him in, let him-mmph! Charmy had been yelling but Espio grabbed him. He could be helpful Vector. He can get places we can't. Are you trippin Esp? He's a human! At this point Ekyt had Vector by one of his chains. What was that about me being human? Cause I can be a monster, if that's what you want. He looked him in the eye. But I don't think that's what you want. If I don't have the job, fine. But I would appreciate some respect. He let Vector go hard, much to Espio's and Charmy's delight. Espio shook his hand. You're hired.

Well, Linda, your chao seems fine. That bump must have been a fall. Your chao must have been learning to walk. The doctor said, handing the chao some kind of treat. Just keep an eye on her, and let me know if something goes wrong. I will doctor, thank you. The chao wouldn't go to my boyfriend. The doctor stroked his beard. That's strange. Normal chao aren't discriminating. This chao has been treated fine. Hmm. Try being with the chao when your boyfriend is with her in the garden, try to wean her back to being nice to him. Linda nodded and carried the chao out. I need to name you, don't I. Tyke's more of a boy's name. How about Blush? The chao made a heart. Okay, Blush it is.

Sonic and Violet had a great day. I had a great time Sonic. Violet said, more shyly than was usual for her. Me too Violet. Sonic scratched his head. Um, can I kiss you good night? he asked shyly. Sure! she said. They were about to do that when Amy Rose and Shadow jumped them. What the matter with you! all four shouted at each other.

Get lost Faker! Sonic yelled to Shadow. The only fake thing here is Violet pretending to like you! Shadow snapped back. What's your problem Amy? Violet shot at Amy. MY problem is you're with my Sonic! she shot back. *Your* Sonic? He runs away from you and runs to me. I see you still have a twisted perspective. The four all began to exchange punches.

TO BE CONTINUED!

22 - Brawl For All

While that fight was going on, Linda was telling Ekyt the good news about the chaos. Well, it was good to her. Even behind the mask, she could tell he blamed himself. She was about to tell him to take it easy, but a flash swallowed them both.

Tails and Chris heard the fight. Heck, even Rouge and Knuckles, who were fighting to begin with, heard the fight. Four hedgehogs were brawling on the Emerald Coast. At one point, Amy's hammer nailed Rouge in the face while Chris got a taste of Violet's (Violet_Rose). Knuckles and Tails dragged the fighting hedgehogs apart. What the heck happened? asked Tails. That fake hedgehog started to steal my girl! Sonic snarled, pointing accusingly at Shadow. Yeah Right! She was mine before she was yours! Violet, who was flattered by the attention, was still pretty angry. Rouge was now being restrained by Knuckles, while Amy taunted Rouge. Come on, man eater! She yelled to Rouge. You bet I will! Rouge yelled. Let go! Take it easy! Hey! she threw an elbow at Knuckles, then charged. This is hopeless! Chris shouted over the sounds of the angry animals. Where's that Ekyt kid?

That was what Ekyt was wondering. He and Linda landed in a lush green paradise, with tall Aztec-looking buildings. Linda seemed almost in a trance, like she knew something he didn't. They had landed in a heap, Ekyt catching the worst of the fall. But she had gotten up, and was talking to- another echidna? As he struggled to his feet, Ekyt knew what was going on. Only Tikal could be responsible for this. Linda, we've gotta find Tikal. He said. Who? Wait, that sounds familiar&But why? Probably because you're related, but separated by a span of a few generations. Ekyt said, running his hand over some carvings. This is ancient Angel Island (My personal name for the floating island, it's got to many names!) Ekyt and Linda! Tikal had found them.

Chris, Tails, and Knuckles stood between the fighting friends. Now break it up! Tails shouted. Not until we settle this! Shadow shot back. Fine by me. The group all agreed. Now, we get who thinks is with&!

Gah this is confusing! Amy and Violet continued their silent battle, while Sonic and Shadow continued trading insults. Okay, everyone go their separate ways! At least until we can find someone to sort this out!

&So you see, the chao are without a guardian in your time, and I have sensed one of you has the calling. Tikal explained. So now we must perform a test to see who is the one who will guard the chao. Tikal held a small, timid chao in the palm of her hand. She set it down between the three of them. A question mark appeared above its tiny head. It crawled toward Linda! Ekyt kind of thought it would have been him, but then remembered how his chao had been acting toward him. Linda scooped the chao up. Ekyt hugged her and congratulated her. Then he suddenly thought of something.

Tikal, why did my chao dislike me all of a sudden? he asked, suddenly wanting an answer. Do you have the chao? she asked. Linda handed the chao over to her. Hmm, I see. She said after holding the chao. It appears this chao was bred for evil. Ekyt looked shocked. He was shocked. I never&I mean& You know I wouldn't! he sputtered. Tikal smiled. No, not you. Someone who held the chao put this& she held up what looked like a microscopic radio &on her. Someone evil. It is not either of you. Tikal started to continue when Ekyt did something totally unexpected.

Ekyt knelt before Tikal. Take heart human, you will find your place. Ekyt didn't nod, or even respond. It took him a few seconds. Thank you for your kindness Tikal. I'll never forget it. Ekyt said. Why do you sound&final? Sad, perhaps? Tikal asked him. Ekyt took a deep breath, looking at the two stunned echidnas. It's like I told Linda. I am the kiss of death. I am going to find a way to not hurt people. Not anymore. It's just not in my nature. He ran a hand through his hair. Tikal, what do you know about humans? he asked. My information is limited, Tikal admitted. He nodded. I am seventeen years old. Humans, as they age, change. My hair is gray. To humans, this doesn't typically happen until middle life, or about 50 years of age. He let his head drop, the sun showing some stubble on his normally clean-shaven face. I set out to do good. But I can't. People shun me. Even chao shun me. Only certain animals seem to accept me. But they wind up hurt& He risked a look at Linda, who still had a stunned expression on her fifteen year old face. So, whatever life has in store for me, it can be done alone, right? I know it's not like you to lie Tikal, so tell me the truth. Am I meant to be alone. No. she said simply. No? Who would risk death for me? A human, of all things? Tikal smiled, eyes closed. You need not look far. I told you your soulmate would arrive soon. And she has. My great-great-great (Add about thirty more greats - N.G.) granddaughter. Linda.

23 - A Hedgehog in Every Corner

Silence fell on the small group. That was&wow&um& Ekyt couldn't even talk. That was awkward. muttered Linda. Ekyt nodded in agreement. That's the word I was looking for. Um, congratulations. Thanks. They both let their heads drop. Tikal just stood there, kind of confused. Don't you two like each other? she asked, curious. Oh, it's not that, it's just real sudden. Ekyt said. Tikal cocked her head, still confused. She handed Ekyt a chao. This one was black, with red and blue wings and a white ball above its head. Ekyt took it, unsure. It made a heart, then bit him.

Ekyt calmly put the chao down, where it attempted to gnaw on his ankle. Why is this thing attacking me? Ekyt asked. Tikal grabbed his coat. You were with someone evil. She said. Well, yeah, Rouge tricked me into coming over to her place&ls that it. What, you were with Rouge?! Linda said, shocked. Not like that! She told me that she was in danger, and she needed help. Then she started to kiss me, and I pushed her away and left. She was trying to show Tails how to tell someone he likes them. I swear! Linda was disgusted, but not angry. You are so gullible! You know that man-eater is nothing but trouble! Well, there's a lot of trouble around here, and I don't discriminate. If someone needs my help, I'm there, whether they would knife me in the back or shake my hand. I don't turn my back on anyone who needs my help! *I can't believe we're having a discussion like this! She thinks I cheated on her or something! That's not possible! I don't like Rouge! Boy, I can't win!* Out loud, he said Send me back. Tikal sent them both back.

Amy vs. Rouge vs. Violet. Sonic vs. Shadow vs. Knuckles. It was a mess. Tails and Chris tried in vain to keep order. A yellow blur rushed in between them and sent everyone skidding except Shadow. Amy Rose felt herself grabbed around the waist, with a hand over her mouth. Hi Bro. Star (Violet_Rose) said, beaming at Shadow. What do you want? Can't you see I'm in the middle of something! he tried to get at Sonic, but Star had him pinned. Sonic looked on, amazed. *I never knew Shadow had a sister&She's cute!* He thought.

Amy turned around to find a deep, green emerald-colored hedgehog. I'm sorry about that, but Rouge was going to attack you from behind. Immediately Amy felt her anger disappear. Oh thank you! What's your name? she said politely. I'm Kurt. I think you know my, um, well, closest thing I have to a father, Ekyt. Oh, I know him! It's not safe here. Kurt said, eyes shifting. Here, come with me, I know a safe place- duck! Amy did as Rouge crashed and burned into a rock. Let's go! Kurt said urgently, still looking around warily. Amy wasn't sure, but went with him. Something made her trust him&

Knuckles helped Rouge up. But the big surprise was Violet rushing to Shadow's side after the takedown. She was going to bash Star, but Sonic zoomed in the way. I know you've made your choice Violet. I just hope we can still be friends. C'mon, you'd better juice, cause you're dealing with one hoppin' mad hedgehog! Star nodded silently. *Meeting Sonic is a dream come true. Perhaps this sordid story will have a story book ending.*

Maybe for her, but Ekyt was having problems of his own. I thought you broke it off with Rouge! Linda said vehemently. I did! I thought she needed my help! You know you're the only girl I'm interested in! *Oh Crap! Talk about putting your foot in your mouth!* Linda's reaction, however, was surprising. I'm sorry. It's not that. It's just I have all this responsibility now. And I'm worried. Really worried. I thought for sure the guardian would be you! (Sound familiar?- N.G.) I know you can handle it, and you can always call me if you need my help. Linda turned painfully red, not knowing how to ask this without it being&racy. C-can I stay with you tonight? she stammered, hoping he wouldn't take it in a sexual way. He smiled understandingly. Sure, if that's what you want. Unfortunately, it would be a short night for everyone.

24 - Man of his word

Ekyt told Linda she could pick any floor she wanted. She chose the chao garden floor, to protect the ones that were with her. After making up a bed for her, he went to his own room, mildly happy. *I didn't think she trusted me. Well, I hope she can sleep. If she's guarding the chao, she's gotta be well rested. I'd better hit the hay too. Someone's gotta guard the guardian, not to mention all the others around here*& Ekyt drifted off to sleep with that thought in mind.

Sonic and Star (Violet_Rose) finally kissed each other goodnight. It was around three in the morning, and they were both tired. Tired, but happier than they'd been in a while. For Star, it was a dream come true. For Sonic, it was hope that he'd finally found the right one to be with.

Tails was with Cream. They had been together constantly since their first, turbulent date (See Tails Love Trouble Special- N.G.) It was way past their bedtime. Cream's mother would have a fit. So, in traditional sneaky kid fashion, he helped her in through her window so her mother wouldn't suspect.

With Shadow and Violet (Violet_Rose) things were still turbulent. But they agreed to disagree. Shadow had, in fact, joined up with Eggman, as had Rouge. Violet went along with it. She didn't have much use for the overweight human, but he seemed to have it in for other humans. Why not go for it?

Eggman looked at his re-united crew. Then looked at their hostage. How does it feel, genius boy, to know that you are completely at my mercy? Eggman sneered at Chris. Rouge had gotten the drop on Chris and brought him to Eggman in the middle of the night. Chris clammed up, refusing to say a word.

He was worried about his friends. Dr Eggman Dr Eggman! Bokkun (sp?) ran into the room. We're about to hit! The whole Egg Carrier rocked as they hit a tall building. Unfortunately, this building was inhabited.

Holy crap! What was that?! Linda exclaimed. Ekyt was already on the roof. Stay down. He whispered to her. Hey lardbutt! Get down here! You're gonna pay for this! Ekyt called to the ship. He whispered to Linda again. When he comes, run for it. Don't argue! Just go! Get the chaos out of here, find Sonic and the others. She nodded silently. When she saw Eggman's fat figure, she raced down the stairs, scooping up the alarmed chaos. *I hope Ekyt's okay.*

Ekyt had already spied Chris. His first order of business would be to get Chris out of there. He tossed a knife, which went skidding across the floor toward Chris. But it was stepped on by a white boot.

R-Rouge? Ekyt looked up, hoping against hope his ex-girlfriend wouldn't be there. It wasn't his night.

That's me. And what have we here? A rescue? Can't have that, now can we? She grabbed the knife and leaned toward Ekyt, cutting his shirt. Good effort though, I'll give you that. Now you just sit down on the floor next to the genius there and— What'll it take to let him go? Ekyt asked. Rouge smiled, just a tad mischievously, knowing she had the upper hand. Valiant move! Why, it's simple, and painless—for Chris. Get to the point. Ekyt snapped. Fine. You trade places with him. *And you have to join us.* Ekyt started to protest, but he knew he was defeated. Okay, you win Rouge. I'll join. Ekyt looked sadly at Chris. But I want no tricks. I want to see him get a head start, and leave him alone for a full day. In return, I'll surrender my weapons peacefully. Rouge nodded slightly. Shadow! Take his weapons and let the other punk go. She smiled at him as she felt his torn shirt. This one'll be more fun. Easier too. He has no friends here, except for some old bartender. Shadow nodded. Violet, get some rope for our friend here. He said. Violet tossed Shadow rope. Ekyt thought to himself: *This is it. I'm a man of my word.*

Has Ekyt lost it?

25 - A Shaky Alliance

From now on, certain issues will get theme songs. Something I listened to while writing. Feel free to listen along if you know the song. This time it's Step Up by Drowning Pool- N.G.

With his hands securely behind him, Ekyt had time to think. Shadow and Violet (Violet_Rose) ignored him for the most part. They had mixed feelings, he could tell. Well, Violet did. Shadow wanted to kill him. And that whole I hate humans thing with Violet made him worry. If he had a power ring& But he didn't. That meant, as Sonic would say (The old cartoon- the good old days!- N.G.) Super Sonic intelligence is gonna have to get me outta this one. His idea came in the form of Rouge. But, boy, he would hate himself in the morning.

Linda kicked open the doors of the Thorndyke mansion, worried and furious. She got a hold of the group, when Chris stumbled in. They-h-have him& Chris passed out from exhaustion. Sonic had to go this one solo. Or so he thought. Linda stayed with him. You'll need the help. Trust me.

Kurt (My new char- so N.G. 2006, all rights reserved, etc.) and Amy wound up at his place. It was a cave of sorts. Amy looked around wide-eyed. Why'd we come here? she asked. Kurt handed her a drink. It's a precaution. Ekyt doesn't know I'm his son, well, sort of. But the important thing is I know Rouge and Shadow are back with Eggman. I won't leave anyone exposed to that sort of danger. He paused for a moment, gauging her reaction. Tell me your story. Amy said. Kurt sighed. Well, get comfortable. It's

a long and confusing ordeal&

On the Egg Carrier, Ekyt found himself face to face with Rouge again. He had a plan, and he knew the repercussions of this. Not to mention the fact it made him feel like a complete jerk. But dying was worse. Hey sexy. He motioned for Rouge to come closer. *I hate myself* he thought. Rouge strutted over. A little lonely? she said mischievously. He nodded in a mock-shy manner. He shook his head, then looked at her. Did you get more beautiful? he asked. You mustve. Man! Have I been missing out! How about you come here beautiful and I& He moved his head closer to her and kissed her. *This isn't right* was his next thought. She dropped back stunned. She untied the rope. I never noticed it before Rouge&but you re really beautiful. And something else too& He smiled at her. She moved toward him, but he side-stepped her and hog-tied her. Gullible. *That s the word.* You re gullible. He turned to leave, but Shadow was blocking his path. *Aw snap.*

Sonic raced to the top of Ekyt s warehouse. The Egg Carrier was out of reach from here. Unless& Linda, can you pick off that engine? he asked. Yeah, but not with my boyfriend on that ship! But if I know him, he ll get the ship down. It s just a matter of following it. C mon!

Flashback:

Kurt, Honey, you be good. Ok Mom, bye. The year was 2008. Then a blast violently shook the earth. Kurt s mother and father were dead, but he had a chance of survival. Ekyt saw this. Without a second thought, he picked up the unconscious 10 year old red hedgehog and brought him to Knuckles. Ready Knux? Ekyt asked. Let s do it.

End Flashback

The next thing I knew I was green and was with Ekyt. He was torn up pretty bad. But I didn't have a scratch on me. I remembered him helping me, and my anger&Well, I blasted the guys beating on him. He adopted me, sort of, and the rest is history. He had let his head drop, looking older than ten. Amy immediately felt for him. I understand. You should meet the rest of the gang! C mon!

Shadow stared at Ekyt, who, in turn, stared back. Going somewhere? Shadow asked sarcastically. Ekyt only said Are you going to get in my way? He looked Shadow in the eye. That I am. I'm going to make you pay for taking Violet away from me. Shadow charged, and Ekyt flew back. He got up slowly, rubbing his head. I didn't do that, but you're gonna believe whatever you want. Ekyt felt the rage building. Step up, Shadow. You're gonna get knocked down! Shadow charged again, but Ekyt booted him in the stomach, grabbed his head, put it on his shoulder, jumped up and landed hard, jarring the older hedgehog's neck. Ekyt was on him, punching ferociously. Violet yanked him off. She didn't threaten him. Just go, and if you tell anyone I helped you, I'll kill you. Ekyt nodded, then headed for the control room.

26 - Cunning

End of the line. A grim looking Ekyt, torn to shreds by robots, limped up the stairs to Eggman. Egad! How did you get here! Eggman saw a Shadow move above them. He smiled menacingly. Sorry your trip has to end here. Rouge flew down from the ceiling, trapping the human against the wall. Play with my emotions will you!? She had him by the shirt collar. If that s how you play the game, honey, so can I! She tied him up. Wait, where are you going? Eggman called out. Rouge yelled over her shoulder. To ruin his life. Now back off!

Rouge dropped him in the woods. Now what are you going to do? Leave me to rot? Murder me. I m on a tight schedule, I need to know how to thwart you. She smiled as she pulled out a tube of lipstick. No. I m going to ruin your life, not end it. And how, pray tell, are you going to do that with lips-tick. Oh crap! Rouge, like an artist, kissed him all over the face and neck, and tore his shirt just a little. Good! Now I m going let you go. No, that won t work. I m going to deliver you to Linda. She gagged him with a torn piece of his own shirt.

Here you go, girlie. Rouge dropped Ekyt at Linda s feet. Mr. Wandering eye here insisted I kiss him like that. He s your problem now! Rouge flew away chuckling. Linda looked furious as she untied her boyfriend. I don t want to hear any explanations. I just want you away from me. She said. I trusted you. Ekyt didn t speak up in his defense. He only said You meant the world to me. And to think you don t trust me&No matter what I say you won t believe me. He limped away. Linda watched him go.

Amy introduced Kurt around to Sonic, Tails, Chris, Cream, Cheese, Mr. Tanaka, Ella, and the rest. Kurt was painfully shy. He politely shook hands or nodded. Amy clung to his arm the whole time, and, whether she knew it or not, that didn t help his embarrassment. He liked her, but this wasn t the way he wanted to meet the legends. But it was an honor. Until he had to tell his story to them.

Linda didn't cry. But she was still lost. She realized that she had just sent her only friend packing.

Ekyt too was lost. He kicked aimlessly at a rock, then heard a cry for help and sprang into action. The Hornets (Gang from previous issues- N.G.) had cornered some little human girl. Ekyt, not feeling merciful, jumped in front of her and decked the nearest one. Go call the cops! I'll teach these J.V. lowlives a lesson! (Taken from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles first live-action movie, from Casey Jones-classic bit on cinema!- N.G.) The little girl ran past the fallen guy as Ekyt grabbed two and smashed their heads together. One last guy punched, but he hit the trashcan lid Ekyt put in front of himself. Shame! BAM! The guy went skidding across the pavement. The cops came. Who are you! they asked. Just your friendly, neighborhood crime fighter. Then he climbed up a fire escape and out of sight.

He tossed the mask aside before going to bed that night. He picked up another, all black. He pulled on a pair of black gloves. Black shoes, socks, coat, shirt, pants. The black was a reflection of how he felt. He clenched his fist tight, the leather glove making a vicious sound. That was the other half of how he felt: merciless.

27 - Turn It All Around

Feeling depressed and merciless at the same time is never a good thing. But that's exactly what Ekylt felt. He heard a cry for help. A little girl, maybe eight, he guessed, was being mugged by the troublesome Hornets (Gang from previous issues-N.G)

Ekylt leapt in front of the girl, cracking the nearest gang member in the face. The two others rushed. Ekylt sidestepped one, and rode him into a dumpster, slamming the lid. Ekylt grabbed the other one around the neck. You think it's fun, huh, you JV lowlife? You like robbing people? Do ya? Well, maybe it's time someone robbed you of your pride! Ekylt tossed him across the alley. He turned to the little girl. Are you okay? he asked gently. She nodded. uh huh, thanks mister! Ekylt nodded. Will you go across the street and call the police for me? Tell them to look in the dumpster. I have to go. He strode to the casino.

Usual Ray. He said glumly. Ray knew something was troubling his young friend, and he didn't need many guesses as to what it was. Love trouble kid? Ray asked, already knowing the answer. What happened? he asked immediately. Ekylt told him. &And then she dropped me like a bad habit. No way she's gonna believe me. Then Ekylt's head popped back up. I know what I'll do! I'll do what everyone else does&I'll get revenge. That blasted bat needs to be taught a lesson. Easy kid! What are you gonna do? Ray demanded. His eyes widened as Ekylt explained. You've got guts, my friend. Ekylt grinned at him. How else would I survive around here?

Linda stared vaguely. Unbeknownst to her, Ekylt was going out the back door as she was coming in the front. Ray smiled. It's on me. He said when she tried to pay for her food. Thanks. She said, with zero emotion in her voice. Ray didn't like seeing her like that, so he told her what happened. It's true. The guy came in here, pouring his heart out. He's trying to make things right.

28 - Little Help From my Friends

Ekyt should have seen this coming. He had been one of the few to deny Rouge the bat anything. To dare to resist her charm. So he became a casualty of her other best asset: cunning. That wasn't the first thing you noticed about Rouge, but her prowess for the unexpected had taken yet another promising life. While Ekyt continued to breathe, his mind tore him apart. All the acts of violence against him, bullying, his inability to defend those he cared for. It ripped his heart out of place.

Violet (Violet_Rose) and Shadow were an item again. Then police sirens filled the air. Shadow the hedgehog, come out with your hands up! a policeman with a megaphone yelled. Shadow grinned at him and proceeded to bash the megaphone over his head. You expect this to stop the ultimate life form? Hah! he said scornfully. We will open fire! Shad, let's just get out of here! If I get shot, I'm done for! Violet said urgently.

Ekyt heard the sirens. Curious, he got up from under the tree he was sitting under. He muttered to himself. Shadow, again? Now what did you do. He got up and jogged over to the policemen.

(Blue is the policeman, red is Ekyt)

Pardon me, but what s the ruckus about?

He stole some jewels.

How do you know it was him?

What s it to you?

They re friends.

Because a note was left saying it was him. Yeah, okay, nobody could ve *faked* a note. (Roll eyes)

Cut the sarcasm punk, or I ll run you in.

Sure officer. (Under his breath: Bribe takin , donut-suckin trigger-happy, obstinate jerk!)- Taken from Married&With Children

Ekyt walked over to the man who seemed to be in charge. I ve got it on good confidence that Shadow is innocent. Do you have proof son? the officer asked. Give me one day. I can t do that. So take him into custody. Me and his girlfriend will get your evidence. Fine, but if you can t prove it& the officer said menacingly. Then you can lock me up too. Ekyt said. Under what charges? said the officer, eyes narrowed. You ll think of something. Ekyt said. The officer thought for a moment, then said Fine, talk your friend down, and let him come into custody, and we ll give you your twenty-four hours. Deal. Thanks.

Shadow. Shadow looked disdainfully at the human wanting his attention. Get lost. Look, I can get you out of here. I don t think you did it. But you have to trust me. Go with the cops, and violet and I can prove your innocence. I know who did it. Why should I trust you? Shadow shot at Ekyt. Because if you don t, the boys in blue are gonna gun down you *and* Violet. Do it for Violet. Shadow, by way of response, put his hands up. You better be right.

Linda was still struggling with her own feelings. She had thought she could trust him&wait, maybe she

still could. It was all so confusing. She decided to head down to the Casino. Just for something to do, to escape something she couldn't.

29 - Her Way

Cream had seen Linda disturbed and, since seeing Linda as a big sister, tried to coax out of her what was wrong. Linda just said boyfriend problems. Cream seemed genuinely shocked. But you and Mister Ekyt helped me and Tails! What happened? Linda told the story to Cream. I don't believe Mr. Ekyt would do that! I think you two belong together. Linda cocked her head, asking Cream what she meant. He does care for you. Remember when Eggman tried to escape, and Ekyt jumped on the his machine and stopped him? Linda had to think about that. Why don't you put him to the test? she said. How? Linda asked. I'll ask Amy to try to get his attention again, and we'll see if he's loyal! Linda let her eyes widen. You're growing up quick, aren't you?

Why'd you do it? Violet (Violet_Rose) asked Ekyt. Do what? Help us out back there? He stopped. You helped me. I know you don't trust me, and I don't blame you. Besides, the hero in me says I can't let him take the fall for what Rouge did. How do you know Rouge did it? When she kidnapped me and, ah, well, left her mark, I saw that she had jewels stashed in her pocket. Then you didn't betray Linda? Violet said, believing him somehow. No, I didn't. I couldn't. But that's the past now. He looked forward. We've got a rotten bat to catch.

Amy dragged Kurt to Twinkle Park. He was in awe. In his time (He's from the future), there were no such games or rides. Or such frivolous food that had no nutritional value that he could see. He was starry-eyed as Amy dragged him from ride to ride. Then a little rabbit- Cream, that was her name- came urgently to Amy. Amy nodded, and gave Kurt a quick hug and kiss on the cheek. I've gotta go.

Rouge was greedily trying to push her jewels, practically drooling at the money she would make. She was talking to a shady looking man, in his mid twenties. C'mon, they're a real slick buy. I dunno&l- HEY! He got pulled back into the alley as Ekyt stepped forward. Hi Rouge. Miss me? he said flatly. Rouge turned to run for it, but Violet was standing right there. WHAM! Rouge got knocked out by a

vicious shot from the hammer. Ekyt smiled. Revenge is a dish best served cold. He slung Rouge over his shoulder and headed for the police station.

He dumped Rouge on the counter, watching as the jewels fell out of her pocket. The officer let Shadow out and tossed Rouge in the cell. You miserable little creature! I left you pouring your heart out into the gutter! Rouge shouted at him. When he just laughed, she said Sorry babe, I m an ambitious girl and you- she kicked the door open and charged him, pinning him, her pick-like nails at his neck. You-re just a small-time hero! She scratched his chest and leg, causing the wounds to bleed. (Sorry, had to throw in some GTA III dialogue) before the police could restrain her. Violet, much to her surprise as well as Ekyt s, helped him up. You okay? he asked her. Yeah. Ekyt limped out onto the street as Linda and Amy ran up to him simultaneously. Oh My God! You re so adorable! Amy screeched, hugging him.

Linda stood in the background. Ekyt made eye contact with her and gently pushed Amy off him. He made his way over to her. You know I didn t do it. Was all he said. With a cane he bought from a store, he started to limp away, but stopped. Love isn t something you can turn off like a faucet. I still love you. Whether you accept that love or not is up to you. He said calmly. But inside, he was burning. He wanted nothing more than to throw himself at her. But he restrained himself. *No, she has to make the choice.*

30 - Betrayl in it's purest form

Ekyt walked away from Linda. Sonic joined up with him. Nice work back there! Sonic exclaimed.

Thanks. HEY! Chris Thorndyke jogged up to them. What s up guys? he said cheerfully. Then he pulled out a police knightstick. He cracked Ekyt in the head and then beat on him before Sonic stopped him. Chris, what are you doing!? I had to Sonic. He was ruining our friendship. You and the others&All trying to help him. I m alone too! Ekyt stirred and Chris booted him in the stomach. Sonic tried to calm him. Chris, take it easy! He doesn t even want out attention! We re just trying to make him feel welcome! Ekyt, suddenly, inexplicably, grabbed Chris legs and yanked him down, grapevineing his stomach with his legs and pulling head into his chest. (This is called a Guillotine , a legitimately painful move that ends most fights, or so I ve heard- N.G.) Chris passed out and Ekyt rolled him off him. Then he dove on his leg, seemingly trying to snap his ankle. It took Sonic, Amy, Knuckles, Tails, and Linda to pull Ekyt off. If you re gonna use me as a stepping stone, step HARD! Ekyt yelled out. He pulled away from the group. Go ahead. Do whatever it is you were gonna do to me. I deserve it. They all shook their heads. No, you were totally justified. Sonic said, and the others nodded.

Eggman laughed from his hovercraft. Well done! I was hoping you two little pests would kill each other, but then I wouldn t have the fun. Ekyt knelt down and grabbed Sonic s leg, boosting him up, and tossing him. A Sonic Spin dealt with Eggman. Ekyt, after looking around, pulled off his cracked mask. Blood gushed out after he did. His collarbone stuck out oddly too. I was right. Ekyt said to no one in particular. I never should have trusted another human.

Shadow and Violet (Violet_Rose) sat with an old friend, Mariic (SegatheHedgehog). That really happened? Man it s weird here! Mariic commented. Where do you come from? Violet asked. Zoness. It s kind of like where Sonic comes from. Shadow got up. Violet, can I talk to you for a minute? Alone? He gestured over to a bush. This is for you. He mumbled, before racing off into the night. Violet opened the box to find a diamond ring and an apology.

Ekyt said goodnight to Ray the bartender and left. Going my way? Linda asked him? I don't know where I'm going. Yup, we're going in the same direction. Linda answered. Sorry about that attack. Not your fault. It's just like in the movies. Humans are meant to destroy themselves, it's in their nature. Linda rolled her eyes. *Time to get his attention again&I trust him.*

She faked a shiver. Cold? he asked. A little. He shrugged off his coat and put it on her. Better? My lips are cold. She said, closing her eyes and grinning. What? he said. *No way! I'm reading the wrong signs here!* Apparently not, because after a sound of exasperation, she kissed him full on the lips. Is it hot out here? he said, tugging at his collar. No. Now how 'bout walking me home tiger? Sure thing.

31 - Chris Loses it!

As they were walking away, a gunshot rang out, striking Linda in the back. Ekyt ducked down and checked on her. Rouge flew into the scene, holding a smoking gun. Back away if you know what's good for her&and for you. Hands up! Ekyt backed away. Rouge smiled unpleasantly. Well, what have we here? It seems I just killed your girlfriend. She's not dead, you bat bimbo! Rouge cocked the pistol at him. She'll live- if you do whatever I say. Ekyt thought that he could dodge the bullet and reach Rouge, but she could pull the trigger on Linda. Ekyt got down on his knees, hands up. Fine. I surrender. Take her to the hospital. Rouge shook her head. My employer wouldn't like that. Chris Thorndyke stepped out of the shadows. To make sure you cooperate, we'll just hang on to Linda here. If you do what you're told, then we'll let her go. If not, we kill her. At Ekyt's glare, Chris turned to him. We'll kill you too. Now let's go. I'll carry her Rouge, you keep an eye on our friend here. Chris slung Linda over his shoulder in such a violent way that Ekyt wanted to rip him apart. But he walked along like he was told.

Sonic was with Crystal (lilsoniclover). Crystal was a new friend of his. She was a light blue hedgehog, wearing a deep blue dress that was decorated with some light-purple diamonds. She had saved Sonic's life (Check out lilsoniclover's incredible story!- N.G.) a while back, and had a crush on him. He had a crush on her. He could actually sympathize with her, because people usually bothered her for being able to shoot ice. His speed gave him more media attention than he wanted. They heard the gunshot and took cover and watched as Ekyt was marched away, with Linda over Chris' shoulder. Best get the others for this one. Crystal said. Sonic agreed, then dashed off with her silently.

Amy, Kurt, Cream, Cheese, and Knuckles were sitting around the Thorndyke house, unaware that Chris Thorndyke had lost all touch with reality and attacked Ekyt. Sonic let them know, and they were furious. Knuckles wanted to kill Chris and Rouge, but Sonic asked him to find Shadow and Violet (Violet_Rose) instead.

Ekyt marched along, angry and helpless. Rouge kicked open a door. Welcome home. She said. Rouge, is that you? Finally! A voice said. Ekyt slapped his forehead. Yeah, it's us Roxy. Got them both! Roxy sauntered over. Ekyt stared at her. She stared back. Shame how things work out, huh kid? She kicked at Linda, whom Chris had dropped on the floor. Well, let's get out demands straight, then, shall we? Ekyt didn't say anything. For starters, we want&

Shadow and Violet were relaxing, hanging around Station Square. When Knuckles showed up, Shadow figured out that something was wrong. Knuckles explained, but Shadow was skeptical. Why should I help you. He's your problem. Violet spoke up, Oh, come on Shadow, let's just get the kid and his girl so we can go back to living in peace. Violet got up and smoothed her black dress just as her sister Amy came by. The two glared at each other. There's no time for a fight now! No one's safe with those lunatics out there!

Ekyt looked around the room. Linda's wound had stopped bleeding, and he had found a chair in the room. He broke it and hid one of the legs in the coat pocket. Every time he was alone, he worked on the leg until he had a weapon. Something blunt, so it would stun rather than kill. He was embarrassed by their stupid demands, like cleaning the floor with a toothbrush and kissing Rouge's boots, but he put up with it for Linda's sake. But something had to give&

32 - Warriors Code

You want me to do what? Ekyl shouted. You heard me! Either you do it or I pull the trigger on Linda! What'll it be sport? Rouge answered. Ekyl clenched his fists, then let them drop. He got down on his knees, bowed, and said Yes, I admire you. You are beautiful, talented, and I should never have thrown my life away. Rouge patted him on the head like a faithful dog. Good boy! She cracked a whip at him. Go back to your cell. Ekyl did. With them following him in. They chained him up and tore off his shirt. One sound, and we kill her. Rouge took Ekyl's belt and whipped him. He didn't utter a sound. Rouge was impressed, especially since Ekyl's belt was all chain. Shame you won't help us, you're a tough kid. Ekyl didn't say anything. A punch from Chris cut his lip. Blood streaming down his face, Ekyl looked over at Linda. She was still fazing in and out, but at least she was alive. Ekyl had to buy her more time&

Crystal (lilsoniclover) and Violet (Violet Rose) were on the roof of the fourteen-story apartment building where Linda and Ekyl were being detained. Behind them were Sonic and Shadow. Tails was hovering near Ekyl's window, keeping an eye on Linda. Amy and Knuckles were at the bottom of the building, Cream and Cheese in the lobby talking to the owner, a surly-looking man with greasy black hair and a potbelly. Dressed in a sweat-stained shirt and torn pants, he hardly looked in the mood to deal with Cream. Mister, how much for a room? Cream asked sweetly. Chao Chao! Cheese added enthusiastically to the unimpressed owner. He began to go over rates as Kurt snuck up the stairs and opened the locked door, letting in Sonic, Crystal, Shadow, and Violet. Amy and the others were meant to watch the door. What they had planned was pretty violent, so they had ushered the other tenants out of the building with their valuables.

So far, Ekyl had been forced to kiss Rouge's boots, clean the apartment with a toothbrush, taking brutal beatings, pretend to admit feeling for Rouge, and had even been forced to kiss Roxy. He was ashamed and angered at the same time. But there was nothing else he could do. Linda's life was in the process. He had plenty of time to think, and he decided his job was, aside from being a vigilante, to guard the guardian, so to speak. Linda was to guard Chao, and he was going to guard her. The embarrassment had to end. He was humiliated, but he could live with that. What he couldn't live without was guilt. If Linda died because of his actions, he might as well have pulled the trigger.

Linda watched her- she couldn't deny it anymore- her boyfriend take all this abuse. For her. She was foolish to think he had anyone else in his life. When he was whipped with that chain, she couldn't do anything, but it killed her. He was only seventeen years old, but he took it like a man.

At that moment, Crystal walked briskly through the doors, heading for the stairs. Hey lady, you can't do that! The owner said. Crystal froze him (She can shoot ice). She didn't normally broadcast her powers, but this was a special occasion. With the owner detained, Sonic, Violet, and Shadow raced through the hallways, trying to find the room. It wasn't hard, especially when a gunshot rang out.

The round caught Linda in the leg. Ekyt turned to them slowly, menacingly. Why did you do it? he asked quietly. Because I want to see you suffer. Killing *you* would be too quick. Watching your girlfriend die, however, that's perfect. Ekyt lowered his head. He crouched, reaching for the chair leg he had in his pocket. You have pushed me too far. I did what you wanted, and you broke your promise. He paused. I have asked myself this many times: Why do I do it? Why do I risk myself for those who shun me? The answer came to me: It's the only job I'm qualified for, and that's the warrior's code. He sprang forward, knocking the guns away. Ekyt threw Chris Throndyke through the window, and tackled Rouge and Roxy (Violet_Rose), tying them up. You will regret this. If she dies, I have nothing to live for. There's nothing you could do to me anymore Rouge. And that means I wouldn't care what I did. Think about that. Because if I lose it, I'm coming after you first. He snarled, then tossed the two aside. But he had a new problem: How was he going to get Linda out of here without hurting her more?

33 - Ekyt Hangs it Up!!!

I'm not cut out for this hero stuff, I guess. Ekyt murmured to Linda. They had escaped, but he hadn't done such a great job of keeping her out of pain. Of course, the flying jump wasn't his idea, but still. Linda shook her head, wincing through the gesture. Nah, you're fine. That crap wasn't your fault. By the way, she had to pause, to group her words together, Why did you do all that stuff? You could've just— Ekyt looked away, the side of his mask scratched. I didn't want them to hurt you anymore. Of course, being evil, they did anyway, then I did. But to answer your question, I couldn't stand watching that. I had to do something. I mean— Linda held his arm, then softly said I know. I love you too.

Sonic and the others now had a new problem: They were without a home. Ekyt walked up. His mask had been repaired, with black wire-mesh in front of the eyes so he could see, but they couldn't see his expression. You're more than welcome to stay at my place. It's big enough, and I have to do something— They all exchanged glances before Cream walked up and tugged on his pant leg. That's nice of you mister. But what did you mean— Ekyt gave her a rare smile, albeit a hollow one. I'm not cut out for this hero stuff. When they all protested, Ekyt talked over them. You all come out of combat, unscathed. Sonic has speed, Tails can fly, not to mention is a complete genius, all of you can do something—I'm human, and I guess it's time I accepted it. After a moment of silence, Sonic spoke up. What do you mean bud? You've saved our bacon lots of times. Ekyt shook his head. Thank Sonic, but I've been at this for over a year now, and—I'm just not any good at playing the hero. It's time I—&to hang up the mask. When he heard police sirens, he motioned for them to follow him. All of them, including Violet (Violet_Rose) and Shadow.

Ekyt opened the door to the warehouse. Five floors, including the basement. You can all choose your own spots. Anywhere you want. Ohh, except the fourth floor. That's Linda's because it's the chao garden. They had all heard about her being the chao guardian, and wondered if Ekyt not getting the job was his hangup. Once they were all settled, they had a discussion. We've gotta get the hero back out in him. Sonic said. Hmph. Best this way. Shadow laughed. Watch this. He said to the group. He went over to Ekyt.

Wussing out? Just like a human. Shadow taunted. Ekyt put his mask on a shelf, revealing his pail face and dark brown hair to the others for the first time. Waste of time. Shadow kept going. Ekyt shrugged off his trench coat. You couldn't even defend your own girl. How sad are you. Ekyt snapped. Without thinking, he tackled Shadow, firing punches until he was restrained. Just because I don't want to be in the hero biz, Ekyt started, Doesn't mean I won't kick the crap out of you. You know darn well what happened. Ultimate Lifeform or not, I'll rip you to shreds. Linda put her arm around his neck. Easy, easy, let him talk. He's full of crap. He's not worth it. She let go. Ekyt nodded to the group, then headed to the basement, his new sanctuary. He changed out of his vigilante clothes and into his civilian clothes quickly. White and red shoes, black and silver shorts, a white T-shirt.

Guys&We've gotta do something. Sonic said. Human or not, he's been a lot of help. Linda spoke up. It's my fault. He thinks it's his fault I got hurt. It's not, that stupid jump he had to pull as the fire escape came apart. Not his fault at all. That miserable pair of bats and that stupid little punk are at fault. She went on to tell them everything he had done, the embarrassment he had suffered to keep her safe. They knew he was a rare breed of cat, and that he needed to be back on the good side, not flying solo in the middle.

Ray recognized Ekyt and motioned him to one end of the bar. What happened to you? he said in his Brooklyn accent. Kid, you look like you just lost. Ray, I'm out of the hero business. He told the bartender the whole deal. I don't blame ya, kid. But if you care for dat girl, you better get right back in. Ekyt started to shake his head. Then a shotgun blast hit the glasses above Ray's head. He and Ekyt dove down behind the bar. Not good.

34 - New Beginings

Chris Thorndyke entered the bar, while Rouge flew above him, two pistols aimed at the sides. Chris held a shotgun, straight forward. Ray got up. Kid, are you - BLAM! Ray hit the floor as customers screamed and raced for the door. I know you re here Ekyt! He shouted. Rouge flew off to look in the casino part.

Ekyt s heart thudded behind the bar as he vainly searched for something to defend himself with. His hand flashed out and grabbed a tap with a hose. Ekyt sprang up. Have a drink Chris! he shouted as he doused Chris with the drink. Chris let his guard down long enough for Ekyt to kick the shotgun away from him. Chris, inexperienced, charged Ekyt, who side-stepped him and threw him into the wine bottles behind the bar. As Chris lay behind the bar, Linda ran in, her pistol drawn. Ekyt reached down to grab Chris, only to hear a CLICK. Don t move hot stuff. Rouge breathed in his ear. Slowly, Ekyt turned around. Linda had a gun to her back. It was held by Roxy (Violet_Rose).

Why are you tormenting me! Ekyt demanded. Rouge smiled, then pouted. You didn t want my attention. That s a lie! You dumped me! Twice, I might add, for Knuckles! I was happy for him, but I hope he knows what he s gotten himself into with you. Ekyt snarled. Always the hero, aren t we? Rouge answered. Ekyt dropped his eyes. No¬ anymore. Rouge was momentarily shocked. Why is that? Ekyt looked her in the eye. I wasn t cut out for it. Now let s make a deal&

Sonic picked the top floor of the warehouse. He liked it up here, he could change the locks daily to keep Amy out, and he could have Crystal over anytime he wanted. She was looking out the window, deep in thought about something. Anything you need to tell me? Sonic asked. Crystal blushed. She hadn t realized he had been watching. *I can t tell him I was thinking about him&* I was just wondering where Ekyt and Linda are? Sonic shrugged his shoulders. Couldn t tell ya.

Amy and Cream had the third floor. The two had grown close, like sisters. & then Tails said good night Cream. And then he kissed me! she said. Oh, I m so happy for you Cream! I wish I could get Kurt to do that&

Kurt and Paula had the second floor. Being brother and sister, they split the room. The two didn t plan on staying for long, they needed to get back to their own time. Kurt, age ten, was fascinated by Amy. He didn t really know her age, though it hardly mattered. He was more like Linda, he guessed. She wasn t his biological mother, but she had helped raise him. He glanced over at Paula.

Paula was restless, and didn t seem to fit, much like her father, Ekyt. She spent her time training with weights and in martial arts, so her contact with others was limited, but she had a natural beauty that somehow set her apart. Her dark brown hair on her head had come from her father, but she looked mostly like her mother. She also had her mother s ability to come forward and claim what was hers. But she had a shy side like her dad. She rarely smiled anymore, and as for a relationship- well&she hadn t had much luck. Except with a half-bat named Kruise (Next Guardian). He never mentioned his parents, but he was half bat, half something else. Hard to tell&

The first floor was inhabited by the Chaotix. It was sectioned off into four pieces: Vector s room, Charmy s room, Espio s room, and a room for business. The warehouse seemed perfect for the detective business. Espio could train alone, Charmy could fly around without being too much of a pest, and Vector could blast his music. Good deal, they all thought.

The basement belong to Shadow and Violet (Violet_Rose). The setting suited them, for sure, but it wasn t what they needed. The darkness only gave them time to think about their awful pasts. That is, until a knock came on the door&

So you're telling me that if I let you call an ambulance for your friend, I get you, no questions asked? Rouge said, gun still trained on Ekyt. He nodded. And what about her? Rouge asked, motioning at Linda. You can let her- Ekyt started, but was interrupted. I'm part of the package. I stay with him. Ekyt looked over at her. No, here's your chance to-! She had him around the neck, kissing him. Their foreheads met as she said softly No. I may guard the chaos, but you guard me. But that's more than your job, that's your duty as my boyfriend. Ekyt blinked for a second. Except for the guns trained on them, that would have been perfect. Rouge took Linda's handcuffs and some rope she had with her. You two want to see each other suffer? Fine. After securing the doors, Rouge and Roxy started to beat up Linda. Ekyt tried to get to her, but he was helpless. He wouldn't have to wait long, he was next.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) looked at the paper the officer had given her. She looked up at the address. This is the place. She knocked on the door, meeting a green hedgehog. Oh, hi Tiffany! he said brightly. She took a step back. Um, pardon me, but who are you? Kurt remembered he was in the past. Oh, sorry, I'm Kurt. You're looking for Shadow, right? Uh yeah, how did you know? Never mind, this place is kinda weird. Is he around? Yeah, sure, follow me. He rapped on the basement door.

To Be Continued!!!

35 - Blood Lust

Linda had a black eye, cut lip, and a broken nose. Ekylt furiously tugged at his restraints, forgetting that he was retired from the hero business. Chris punched him in the face, but Ekylt's adrenaline was going, so he barely felt it. Several hits later, Ekylt was cut down the chest, his shirt torn off, and handcuffed to the footrest at the bottom of the bar, held by Roxy and Chris. Rouge strode over, Ekylt's belt in her hand. She slapped Linda and said "Make sure you watch this sweetie." She proceeded to whip Ekylt. His back was red and bleeding before she was done. Then Rouge took her nails (pick nails from SA2B) and scratched them violently down Ekylt's face. Linda was helpless as her boyfriend was decimated.

Kurt rapped on the door. "What the heck do you want?" Shadow snarled at Kurt. "Hey Mr. Sunshine, got someone for you to meet." Kurt shot back. Tiffany and Shadow locked eyes. "Wha-you're me!" Shadow exclaimed. "No, I'm a girl stupid!" Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) called back. Violet (Violet_Rose) spoke up: "You two look alike. Either you're twins or you've been unfaithful Shadow." Tiffany stood face to face with him. "We met on the ARK briefly. Prof. Gerald kept us separate. I've come back Shadow. But how? Those soldiers killed everyone! I escaped, but landed on a weird planet (Mobius to us Sonic fanatics- read Shadowthe_hedgehog's awesome fanfic for more info!- N.G.)."

Sonic and Crystal, Tails and Cream, Kurt and Amy. It was always the same. Paula thought. She missed her boyfriend.

Fast-forward to the future:

A bat, red in color, with a thick crop of black hair falling over his eyes, red bangs blocking his vision, walked over to Ekylt. Hey. The young bat said quietly. Ekylt was surprised to see the young creature, as he was Rouge's son. Then again, half of him was Knuckles as well. It's Kruise right? Ekylt asked. Yeah. Listen, I came to ask your permission to date your daughter. Ekylt didn't respond right away. He looked the creature up and down. He had Knuckles' knuckles, and Rouge's wings, Knuckles' dreadlocks and red body. A tattered black vest and pants with a chain for a belt were on him. Normally, that would have sent up flags in Ekylt's parental dept. But times were tough. He turned back to the bat, nearly shuddering at his unblinking yellow eyes. Paula, could I see you for a minute? Bring your mother! Paula and Linda came over. Paula, this is Kruise. Kruise, I think you know Paula. Why don't you two get acquainted for a minute. The two left to go to the next room in the bunker complex. Kruise held the door for Paula. Ekylt was mildly impressed.

What do you think? Ekylt asked Linda. Linda smiled and raised her eyebrows. You never fit in either. Let them date. She's twelve! Linda smiled again. You were seventeen at your first date. Don't you want your daughter to have a better chance? Yeah. I admit, the look of the guy & You're wearing a mask and a trench coat with fingerless gloves. Yeah, you should complain. Let them date. He did.

Back to the Present

You okay? Linda asked Ekyt. Yeah. I'll be fine. You okay? Yeah. Just worried about yo- about us. She said quickly.

Sonic and Crystal (lilsoniclover) were at the store when a black and red bird zipped in. Hey Twen. Sonic called to him. Twen ignored him. Amy! was all he said. The store's clerk had the radio on. &And in other news, former government agent Rouge the bat, son of Station Square's wealthiest Chris Thorndyke, and another unknown person have taken the casino hostage. Two patrons, an echidna and an human, both unidentifiable, are believed to be& Oh God, that's Ekyt and Linda! Crystal exclaimed. Yeah. We gotta juice!

Shadow, Violet, and Tiffany were still catching up when they heard the same radio announcement. Tiffany jumped up to help, but to her surprise, Shadow remained sitting. Why should I help them? Shadow said carelessly. Tiffany shook her head. I thought the doctor would have given you some common sense Shadow. Guess it's up to Violet and me. They rushed off.

Where are your chao? Rouge asked Linda. Linda stayed silent. Answer me! They're the key to the master emerald! I need to know. Linda said nothing. Rouge cocked the pistol. If you shoot her again, I swear& Ekyt started. Chris punched him. Ekyt bit Chris, causing everyone to come running to him. He ignored the pain, thinking *if she isn't getting hurt, I'm doing my job.*

To Be Continued&

36 - Call of Duty

Ekyt, still restrained, tried to bite, headbutt, anything. His job was, as far as he concerned, the guardian of the chao guardian. He bit Rouge's hand, then head butted Chris. Through the pain, he watched Ray stir. Hey, you got us! Call the ambulance! Ekyt shouted. Forget it honey! Rouge shouted back. At least let me check on him. Ekyt pleaded. Why should I do that? Rouge asked. Because holding hostages carries a light sentence compared with murder. Ekyt said with a shrug. Fine. But nothing funny. It's not laughing matter. Ekyt knelt down beside his friend. Easy Ray, it's Ekyt. How ya doin kid? Ray asked with a pained smile. Not great. That bullet hit you in the ribs? Yeah. Missed the meat though. Ekyt nodded. I'm gonna get you outta here, you'll be fine. Ray grabbed his sleeve. Wait, take this with you in case I d-d-&kick the bucket. He handed Ekyt a small knife. That thing saved my life once. He said, a twinkle in his eye. Maybe it'll save yours. Ekyt gave the man a drink of water from the tap. Rouge pressed the gun to his back. Playtimes over hotshot, let's go.

Ekyt obeyed, but when he passed Linda, he dropped the knife in her hand. Wait, Rouge. Kill me if you need to, but let me say goodbye to Linda. Rouge smiled nastily. Who am I to stand in the way of love. Go ahead. Ekyt hugged her, and, holding her close, whispered. Cut yourself free and run for it, I'm going to cause a distraction. No. I'll cut myself free, then we'll *both* get out of here. They talked more loudly now. If you die, I want to go with you. You've done everything to protect me, but you respected that I could take care of myself. No one, especially no boy, has ever done that for me. Her emerald eyes looked beautiful in the light from the slot machines, Ekyt noticed. He knew he was blushing. He was easily embarrassed, but this was unexpected. But nice. yeah, well, you know, you guard the chao, and I guess it's my job to guard you. Not just my job title, but my job as your boyfriend. Rouge slapped him on the head.

You never said that stuff to me! she said, genuinely miffed. You found me beautiful once. Ekyt saw that Linda was free. Honey, you got real ugly! (Dialogue taken from Evil Dead: Army of Darkness.) Ekyt said as he tossed her into the bar, then moved to tackle Chris. Linda and Rouge fought, Rouge's pistol falling toward Ray.

At that moment, Sonic and Crystal (lilsoniclover) got to Ekyt's level of the warehouse. I just gotta grab something& Sonic's rooting around through Ekyt's stuff, then says. aha! Found them! Let's go Crystal, we've gotta get to them. Twen (skylord) is still zipping around them. Look, what do you want? Sonic asked. Twen, talking really fast and barely coherent, says gonna go help them! Ekyt's good to Amy, Linda's good to Amy, good guys need rescuing! Sonic started to say something, then stopped. Crystal answered instead. Alright. Here's what we'll do&

Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) and Violet (Violet_Rose) were sprinting over, when they both suddenly stopped. Violet, are you gonna be okay if I chaos control us into the building? Violet laughed. Sure, Shadow does it all the time! Whenever you're ready.

Chris yelled something incoherent, then charged Ekyt, who broke his chair over Chris' head. It didn't even faze him. He threw Ekyt over the bar. Ekyt returned fire by throwing wine bottles, then smashing one over Chris' head. Linda and Rouge were still going at it. Then he saw it. Rouge reaching for her knife as she held Linda by the hair. Chris grabbed him as he was distracted. Linda, head's up! She's- Chris clamped his hand over Ekyt's mouth, not even budging when he bit down as hard as he could. Ekyt threw him off and ran forward to get the knife, but Chris tripped him and smashed a bottle over his head. Linda saw the knife and ducked the first strike. But she was backed into a corner. When you play with knives, you get cut. Fortunately, at that moment, help arrived from both sides. Violet and Tiffany appeared, and Tiffany went for Rouge immediately. Violet saw a gleam of metal. Eggman's robots! she shouted, before sending the first wave flying. Sonic and Crystal blasted through the door. What the-whoa! Sonic ducked as Crystal froze the `bots. Sonic tossed Ekyt something, yelling You've gotta get back in the business pal! Ekyt opened the package. His coat and mask were on his lap. He elbowed Chris, then tossed him through the drywall. He quickly pulled on the coat and mask. He turned to the robots. The man is back, and better than ever! he growled. You picked the wrong day to tick off this human!

Ray woke up, seeing the gun within arm's reach. He hated to kill, but if it came down to it, he would pull the trigger. He propped himself up against the bar, then fired repeatedly into the squad of robots. When the ammo was gone, he tossed the gun at Rouge, bouncing it off her head. More robots came in, starting overrun the small group.

Ekyt grabbed onto the rafters as the robots moved in on his&friends. It seemed foreign to him that he had such loyalty working for him. It was time to pay back that loyalty. He let go of the rafters, falling down toward the robots&

37 - Death's Door

He took out five robots, nearly gutting himself in the process. Rouge was unconscious, and Ray was still bleeding. Linda stopped for a minute to close a wound in her head. Violet and Tiffany were holding their own, but starting to tire. Ekyl had five robots to deal with himself. Linda saw him starting to lose it, and took a chance. Hey Ekyl! Ten years ago! She shouted, hoping that it would motivate him, something he had told her. A ring fell from Rouge's pocket at that point. It rolled across the floor. Sonic and Crystal were battling, but then everyone went silent. It hit Ekyl's shoe. Not knowing what would happen, he picked it up.

He felt himself glow. He felt lighter, faster, but at the same time ten times stronger. This distraction enabled Sonic and Crystal to go to one side, while Tiffany, Violet, and Linda went to the other. They took cover behind the bar next to Ray, not knowing what would happen. Ekyl charged, cutting through the robots. He flew- yes, flew- ten of them through the wall.

Chris Thorndyke stepped out of the drywall, his skin rotting away, his hair falling off, metal shining through. Metal? Tiffany and Violet noticed it first. Oh man! This isn't good! Violet exclaimed. Chris charge forward, but a Sonic Spin took him off course. Sonic, you handle the Egg-bots! I'll take on Chris. We have a score to settle! Ekyl called to him. Sonic did.

You and me, bot! Chris began to glow. It started with his eyes, turning red. (30 seconds until detonation) Ekyl, eyes widened, shouts for everyone to run for it. (20 seconds) he hoists the unconscious Ray on his shoulders, and runs with the rest of the group. (15 seconds) The ring's power leaves him. (10 seconds) the door is in sight, but Ekyl is tired & (Five seconds) Linda and the others watch for the two left in the building. (0 seconds) Ekyl dives out, Rouge in one hand and Ray in the other. The building explodes.

Shards of glass, coins, bottles, and wood go flying. In seconds it is over. Ekyt looks down at Ray and Rouge. Rouge aims a gun at him. But Ekyt is worried about Ray. Ray stirs, and Ekyt breathes a sigh of relief. Rouge, tired, lets the gun drop. What happened? she asked. Linda plucked something off her wing. You were being controlled Rouge. Eggman. Rouge flies away, looking to kill Eggman.

Ekyt Come on, you've got to go to a doctor. Linda and the others try to persuade him. No. Get Ray help. Ekyt says. Sonic and the others dash off to do that. Linda sits down next to Ekyt. Hey, this wasn't your fault. She says. I shouldn't have let this happen. It's my job to protect you and Station Square. And now look what I've done. Linda didn't know what to say. Come on, this isn't your fault. Ekyt looks down at the dying bartender. Thank Ray. For everything. You saved us. Ray smiled. Kid, you take care of that girl. Just in case I'm not around to set you up again. Ekyt shook his head, smiling sadly.

You'll be fine Ray. But I plan on taking care of her. It's my job as a vigilante, and my job as a boyfriend. He smiled at her, blushing. She pulled him close, pulling off his mask. She winced as dried blood from the brutal beatings he had taken held the mask in place. She got it off, looking at his battered face. It's okay, Ekyt said quickly, I know I'm not in the best of shape, and I understand if- Linda kissed him, swift and hard. When it ended, she laid her head on his chest. Just relax. She said to him. She listened to his rhythmic breathing. Then he tensed up. Oh God he said. What? she said, alarmed.

Where's the real Chris? he said. She couldn't answer. But they forgot for a moment as an ambulance came and put Ray in. But the search would continue. On the roof across the street, watching the blaze, the battered crew that had just saved Station Square looked at the fire. Ekyt turned to them. Thank you for the rescue. He turned away and swore to the stars. But this isn't over! I'm going to hunt down Eggman and put an end to this!

38 - Knuckles X- Linda?! 0_o

Being the chao guardian meant Linda had to move near the master emerald. That was cool with Ekyt. She had a purpose, she was happy. His job was half done. The other half&well, that was harder. One night Knuckles came back as Linda was talking to Tikal. Linda turned around and gasped. Geez, Knux, give a girl a heart attack? Always. He responded with a smile. Then their eyes met. One word could sum it up. Love. *But what about Ekyt?* Linda thought, knowing the answer already. Let him down gently. And pray he's not upset.

Ekyt himself was by himself, staring. He had discarded his mask, it was kind of uncomfortable. If he needed it, he could always go back. He sat outside a store that sold comic books. He sat still, wondering, thinking, hoping. Something felt off to him. He was good at reading looks and personalities, but he let his personal feelings get in the way. His goal was to take away weakness he had. Oh, here came Linda. Uh oh. That look wasn't good. She sat down across from him. Hi. She said quietly. oh, Hi. Ekyt answered. He could only sit in stunned silence after that as he listened to what she had to say. &so you understand? she asked hopefully. He nodded, silently, his face giving away nothing. Say hi to Knuckles for me. Was all he said. She got up and walked away.

Ekyt couldn't kid himself, someone like her could do better than him, he was small, skinny, no matter what he did to put on muscle. *So do what you always do, move on.* It would be harder this time. A voice from a man, maybe 20 years old, probably was in college. Hey, freak. He said, for no apparent reason. Today, Ekyt snapped. He grabbed the guy by the shirt and threw him into the grass. Freak, huh? Is that what I am? Or did you mean something else? Ekyt asked, or snarled rather. Yeah, yeah, not you, I was talking to, um, my invisible friend. The guy sputtered pathetically. That's what I thought scuzzbucket. Ekyt let him go, watching him run. He felt a hand grab his collar. Huh? What do you want? he shot at the grabber. Rouge looked back at him. Take it easy tiger. I just wanted to say I feel sorry for you. Ekyt stopped to contemplate that. Well, yeah, a lonely life where no one understands you. Right, kiddo? She actually seemed genuine. Pretty close. Tell ya what, I'm gonna keep an eye on you. Sorry, but I can't trust you. Rouge didn't answer. Then she slapped him and flew off. That settled it. Ekyt needed a vacation.

He went to the master emerald and knelt before it. Uh, what are you doing? Linda asked. Get away from the master emerald! Knuckles yelled. I'm not gonna touch it Knux. In fact, I'm out of here, and don't follow me. Either of you. He turned back to the emerald. Tikal! he called. She appeared, pleased to see him. What can I do for you? she asked. Ekyt shook his head. It's what I can do for you, Tikal. But I can't talk here. Could we& he gestured vaguely. Sure& she answered, curious. They disappeared with a flash. Linda and Knuckles were left standing side by side, wondering what just happened.

Ekyt landed, crouched, in the lush green paradise. Tikal, I want to offer my services to you. Ekyt got right to the point. To do what. To stop that war from ever happening. Imagine if your tribe never went to war and all the echidnas didn't get destroyed! She thought. That would change history& *I'm tempted&But is it right? I&I&* I can't. I want to. I really do, but the suffering is necessary. She answered. Ekyt tossed off his trench coat. At least let me stay here. I can't go back Tikal. What do you mean. Ekyt explained what happened. Tikal could tell his heart was ripped to shreds, but he was trying to keep himself together. You know I can't do that& she answered sadly. He shook his head, hard. I understand. Send me back. But could you send me to the far end of the city? I can't deal with anyone right now. Look at me. Human. Nothing else. I can't do anything special. That's not true! Ekyt nodded.

It is Tikal. But please, be careful. You're the last one I can trust. She sent him back, regretting it before the flash disappeared. She went before the master emerald. Could I have been wrong? What purpose will he really serve? Will he be alone forever? Some drops in the water around the emerald answered. She lowered her head, letting the tears fall freely. Please, reconsider! she sobbed. You can't ask that of him! More drops answered. I refuse to let his future fall into the hands of evil! Tikal didn't even notice her father behind her. You will do as you are told Tikal. He said firmly. Y-yes father. Ekyt landed again. He closed his eyes. Several policemen approached him. Are you the vigilante who's been terrorizing Station Square? Ekyt, still angry, answered curtly. What do you mean by terrorizing? I haven't terrorized anyone. The lead officer opened his book, writing a ticket. This is for mouthing off punk. Now go back to where ever it is you live. Ekyt held his temper in check, before realizing he had no home. The others were in the warehouse, and he wasn't going back there&

39 - Ekyt X...Tikal?! (Well, read it!)

In Tikal's Time&

(Note: The Master Emerald is going to answer, just so you know what it's saying)

I beg you! Spare him that fate! What wrong has he done? Tikal pleaded with the Master Emerald. Wrong, Tikal? You assume this is a punishment? How else should it be considered? He loses his love, and his humanity? Perhaps that may be best Tikal. If he can't feel the pain& He's noble! He'd rather live fully than live without being& Tikal, it is out of your jurisdiction. He must be given the choice. How could he choose? Save the love of his life, or fulfill his promise? Maybe lose his own life in the process? It is an impossible decision! Be that as it may, he must choose Tikal. Tikal stood up. Fine. But he'll make the right choice! He will rectify himself! He will see the potential he has! If you have such faith, Tikal, you should not worry. The emerald answered.

Ekyt stood by himself on the rooftop. Where he met Rouge earlier...

(Flashback)

Fine. I'll do it Rouge. Just let her be. Ekyt pleaded. Rouge, knowing she had the upper hand, smiled nastily at him. Kiss my boots and say I'm beautiful, and I'll leave her alone. Why you care I don't know. She dumped you for that brain-dead red head. And don't even consider commenting! Ekyt did as he was told, glad no one else was around to see him being humiliated by her again. He could have hit her, ended this whole thing, but he was old-fashioned. He wouldn't hit a woman, not even jokingly. He got down on his knees and kissed her boots. You're beautiful. He muttered sullenly. Good boy. So you bring that money to the building on time. That's 12:00 midnight. Promise? I promise. You know what will happen if you break that promise? No, what sick idea have you fathomed? Ekyt shot back. Rouge giggled. Why, you're my servant if you don't. Deal.

End Flashback

Those wounds still hadn't healed. Not that he ever expected them too. The police cars went zipping by him, their lights barely visible in the dark city. Against his better judgment, he followed them. Ekyt ran after the cars. Sonic and the others had the day off, so this was all him. Maybe it would get his mind off Linda. The scene was taped off, police everywhere. Ekyt saw just the answer to his problem. Violet, Shadow! The two turned. Oh, great, what could you possibly want? Shadow asked viciously. Keep the cops busy, I'm doing a little detective work. What's in it for me? Shadow asked. Name your price, but later. I've gotta get in there. He turned to talk with Violet. Should I do it Violet? Shadow asked. Go for it. Just get something good out of the deal.

Fine kid. Hey, you bribe takin', donut suckin' trigger happy, P.I.G.! Shadow yelled, then skated off. Violet nearly broke a rib trying not to laugh. Ekyt snuck into the building, shocked at what he saw. Linda was trapped under some concrete blocks. Ekyt, seeing the clock on the wall, knew he didn't have time to save her and keep his promise to Rouge. But he knew the right choice. Using his staff for leverage, he pried the blocks up. Hurry! Crawl out, and get out of here before this place collapses! Ekyt said, grunting with the effort. Linda bolted, feeling awful about putting him in danger.

Ekyt showed up with the money at 12:15. He tossed it to Rouge, who gave him a look. A little late? she said sweetly. Yeah, I know. I stopped to save someone's life. Oh well, a great last act of freedom. She handcuffed him. Come on, you've got work to do. Ekyt went with her, resigned. He had lost.

Tikal sighed heavily at the sight. I told you he was trustworthy! she told the Master Emerald. Then why do the chao dislike him? it answered. Chao don t like everyone! He s done nothing to deserve you taking away his freedom; his humanity! Why throw away an innocent life? What does this prove? Tikal shouted. He failed to make the delivery on time Tikal. He is not trustworthy. The emerald declared. He saved that girl s life after she dumped him! And his thanks? He is now a slave to the woman who broke his heart to begin with! All because you hold a grudge because of chao! Enough Tikal! Master Emerald, I&I protest! I wish to stand by the human and prove his innocence of whatever crime he will commit! This is unheard off&But granted Tikal. If he fails, you know the consequences, do you not. Yes, his execution, then mine. I accept it. She vanished, going to a time period where she did not know what to expect.

Ekyt had already been forced to do her laundry, wash windows, vacuum, sweep, dust. All the things he hated. He did it all without a word of complaint. Rouge, for her part, laughed. See what happens when you decide I m not good enough? You pay, don t you? Ekyt stopped washing the floor and looked at her. Did you ever really have feelings for me? OR was I just in the wrong place at the wrong time. She leaned back. Hey, don t get me wrong, you re cute, I ve just got my sights elsewhere. If you weren t such a goody-two-shoes, maybe you could ve had me. Ekyt thought for a moment. Thank God I m such a good guy. If this is what it s like living with you& Rouge used her pick nails to tear the back of his shirt, leaving four long slash marks down his back. You could ve been mine. But you chose that echidna instead. And what happens? She dumps you. Lesson learned, I hope. Ekyt just went back to work. Tikal observed this, shaking her head. Perhaps fate was wrong&The way he looked at me earlier&Like an equal&His daughter is an echidna&and my blood runs through her veins&as does his&but what if it wasn t Linda that was their mother? I m an ancestor of hers... Her eyes widened. Him&and&Me?

40 - The Past Becons

That's it, under the couch. Rouge commanded. I know how to clean Rouge. Ekyt answered dryly. How long do I have to do this crap for? Fifteen days. One for each minute you were late. A knock came on the door. I'll get it. Ekyt answered. Good for you.

Tikal was at the door and pulled him out quickly. I know this is abrupt, but I think I may have made a mistake. Tikal told Ekyt. What do you mean? About you and Linda. It's her blood that runs through your children's veins, but it might have been an ancestor of her instead& her voice trailed off as she blushed. Oh. Wow. Um- boy! Ekyt murmured. Well, I guess it's no secret how I feel about you then. Ekyt answered shyly. I did guess. Tikal answered. Well, you're beautiful, and I can relate to you. I mean, about the whole love thing, and the helping people& Tikal couldn't help herself, she was too curious. What about Linda? Ekyt looked away slowly, his hand making a fist near his side. I couldn't prevent her from real love. I loved her, still do, to be honest. I could never hurt her. Tikal nodded and took him gently by the arm. I say you have served your debt here. I-I do want you to come back to my time. We can do so much good. She said, excited. What about what the Master Emerald said- I protested the emerald. It was it's will that forced you to sacrifice all you held dear and serve Rouge. It's my duty now to guide you to rectify whatever the emerald believes you have done wrong. Ekyt gave her a grave smile. Whatever you need done. But first I've got to say something to a couple of friends. Shadow and Violet hid in the warehouse, tired from the chase. He owes us. Shadow mentioned. Violet was too tired to answer. Ekyt came in. Thank you Shadow. And you too Violet. You helped me save a life. I'll never forget it. As for what I owe you&The warehouse is yours Shadow. You and Violet. Under the condition that the others who live here *stay* living here. Say goodbye to Sonic for me. I'm going with Tikal. To the past. What are you going to there? Violet asked. Whatever it takes to clear my name. Ekyt explained quickly. Say goodbye to the others for me. Oh, and tell Tiffany and Blain they can move in, if they want. I don't know when&if I'll be back. He turned to Tikal and knelt, ready for the trip to the past.

41 - Getting (un)Settled

The past. It was beautiful to Tikal. Ekyt didn't consider that so much. He couldn't get over Linda. But that was his past. He wasn't a vigilante anymore. His job now was to protect Tikal, and do whatever he could to clear his name. Tikal seemed glad to have him around. She led him to the master emerald. He knelt before it while she stood back, petting the chao.

What wrong have I done? Ekyt asked. You are human. You are born into evil. My life is not predetermined. My fate is my own. What crime am I supposed to have perpetrated? Ekyt countered.

It's what you did not do. Behold. Ekyt saw a vision. Linda and Knuckles trapped, fire around them.

What does this have to do with me? Ekyt answered, shaken by the vision. A human can't be trusted.

That's your problem? So make me an echidna. The emerald paused. You would forsake your birthright to do good? If that's what it takes. Go to Tikal. I need to seek advisement.

Ekyt walked back to Tikal. You are angry. Tikal observed. Everywhere I turn, my humanity is against me. I'm glad you don't hold it against me. I'd rather be an echidna some days. Tikal understood totally.

Well, for now, let's get you a place of your own. But be careful. The men are gearing up for war. If my father meets you, he may expect you to join. I'm here to prevent the wars, right? Right. But even though I know you can, it's best that you keep low until we can make you comfortable. Tikal looked at Ekyt, who had a strange look.

Is something bothering you? Tikal asked. Well, it's just-I-man, this is weird-! he sputtered. Tikal smiled soothingly. I think I understand. It's not customary, but& The two kissed for the first time. That's what I meant! Ekyt exclaimed. Tikal smiled back. That's my first kiss. I never dreamed that the boy I'd be kissing would be human&or from a few generations in the future.

Ekyt rolled his eyes. Well, considered everything else that's happened around here, I'd say this is the norm. But, um, yeah, let's find me a place to live. Blushing, the new couple went off hand in hand.

Knuckles and Linda were enjoying their new life too. I never thought I'd meet another echidna. They both said. Well, it is rare. Knuckles mentioned. Yeah. Knuckles looked at Linda. I hope Ekyt understands& He's okay with it. He just wants us to be happy. I'm glad he can take it easy like that. If it were me, I would've killed the other guy.

TO BE CONTINUED&

HEY WAIT!!! WHAT ABOUT CHRIS THORNDYKE? WILL SONIC AND THE OTHERS FIND HIM?
TUNE IN NEXT TIME TO FIND OUT!

42 - Chaos (un)Control

Eggman laughed at the unconscious form of Chris Thorndyke. Well, that's one genius out of the way! Now, how to get rid of Tails- Hmm? E-199 clanked into the room. Report? Eggman barked. Subject: Ekyt, Human, age 18, Caucasian, unaccounted for. It responded in a mechanical tone. Elaborate. Eggman ordered. Last seen at the Master Emerald. Since no trace left. Subject Linda, Echidna, remains at the emerald, with subject Knuckles, echidna. All available data:

Video Clips:

00:01 Ekyt and Linda arrive at the emerald

00:10 Linda hugs Knuckles

30:00 Mysterious Echidna, orange in color, leaves with Ekyt.

Ekyt performing servant work for subject: Rouge the Bat, dual agent

Ekyt leaves with Tikal

Eggman looked closely at the clips. These are outdated! When were you going to inform me of this? Before the robot could respond, it was destroyed. Quite a find E199, too bad it was too late. But, if the video feed doesn't lie, Ekyt has been destroyed! Eggman laughed manically. He's gone! Hahahahahaha!

Behind him, Chris Thorndyke stirred. He had heard everything. He needed to contact Sonic. But where was he? Eggman, seeing him awake, answered his question. Well, look who's awake? Chris, I was worried you'd never wake up! We're already to the Master Emerald! You won't get away with it Eggman! Sonic will stop you! Bah! You don't know, do you Chris? I have you, half of the brain trust, and Ekyt is gone! Sonic is practically alone! Do you really think he's enough to stop me? Chris laughed. Yeah, he had every time before this. Wise little punk! Eggman snarled.

Ekyt and Tikal were walking to her hut when her father ran into them. Good Morning Father, Tikal said brightly. Tikal, who is this, and what is it? the chief asked, gesturing at Ekyt. He's- he's a human father. His name is Ekyt. He has come for the good of the tribe. Tikal said to cover him. The chief looked at him. What can you do boy? I can fight, Ekyt said, raised his eyebrows, then said, Or, I can help you become more profitable without fighting. The chief grunted. You are different&perhaps a test&Bring Me Chaos!!! He yelled, as the other echidnas rushed to comply. Should you lose, you will be banished. If you win, I will grant you three requests. For now, you should be ready to fight. Tikal looked worried. Ekyt cocked his head at her, questioningly. Chaos is a vicious beast! You are formidable, but I fear the worst. Tikal told him. Ekyt nodded gravely. Hold these. I'm sure I've fought worse. He said, handing his trench coat and mask over to her. He had seen pictures of chaos, so he thought he knew what he was in for. But that was Chaos 0 and Chaos 1. The monstrosity before him, three stories tall, was Chaos 7, it's ultimate form. Tikal winced. Ekyt, trying to keep her positive, yelled, it ain't the size that counts, it's what you do with it! He rushed at chaos.

Sonic and Tiffany were searching for Chris. She was the only one who could keep up, and the only one willing to go along. You're pretty fast! Sonic called to her. She was matching him almost stride for stride. Thanks! Uh oh! Better watch out! They were getting close to Eggman's base near the Mystic Ruins. He's probably got some traps set up. He loves his useless mechanics. Sonic called over to her. Yeah, he- OW! Sonic stopped. Tiffany?

WHAT HAPPENED TO TIFFANY? HOW'S EKYT GOING TO BEAT CHAOS 7?

43 - Ultimate Chaos and Sacrifice

Chaos seven was a monster. Literally and figuratively. But that wasn't it. The giant monster absorbed the master emerald as well. Chaos Unlimited was born. I am in trouble. Ekyt whispered. He jumped back as the creature transformed. Five stories tall. Two eyes, piercing red, a mouth that stretched from eyes to stomach. A tail 50 feet long. The eight emeralds inside it glowed. Ekyt turned to Tikal, figured, what the heck, and kissed her. He jumped on some rocks, and dove forward, stopping just short of the monster, and whacking it with his staff. The staff snapped. Aw crap! he groaned. Chaos bit down, Ekyt moving sideways at the last second as the monster ate the rock he had been on seconds ago. It swallowed the rock.

Tikal pleaded with her father. Why ostracize him father? What has he done? Tikal begged. Tikal, you know all our tribesmen have been to war before. And they are all one of us. This one you bring, he has to pass a test. You know that it is almost impossible to beat Chaos Unlimited! Tikal squealed. I know Tikal, but this is the way our tribe has always operated. No! Grandmother was a better leader! Tikal stormed off, surprised at herself for losing her temper.

Tiffany was an ultimate life form, so something extremely damaging for some else would be a paper cut for her. In this case, a spike had popped up and caught her in the leg. She grimaced and yanked her leg off the spike. Tiff, you okay? Sonic asked. Peachy. She said back. You chill here, I'll find Chris, and we'll get out of here lickety-split. Sonic, just be careful, don't juice into a hole or something. I'm going to contact Shadow just in case.

(A # at the begging and end of a sentence is Shadow and Tiffany communicating telepathically.)

#Shadow!#

Shadow, who had been tossing an emerald in the air aimlessly, answered, bored.

#What's up Tiff?#

#Sonic's alone, A spike diced my leg, can you help out?#

#No#

#Don't give me that crap Shadow! You owe me! Get over here! Bring someone with some medical knowledge!#

#Fine. But after this we're even!#

Ekyt dodged again, this time rolling and throwing a kick. But he was absorbed by the monster. Good. That was his plan. He leapt up on the rock chaos had eaten earlier, and snatched two chaos emeralds. Grabbing one more, he kicked his way out of the monster's mouth, holding three of the eight emeralds. Chaos Ultimate was now Chaos 5. And Ekyt well, he was now beyond super or hyper. Meet Mega Ekyt. His hair was still brown, but longer and flew at weird angles. His red shirt glowed green with the power of the emeralds, same with his black pants and shoes. His gloves turned a deeper shade of red. He was faster, stronger, and definitely more lethal. Father, I've never seen this! Tikal exclaimed. The scrolls&They are coming true! The tribe's savior. Tikal, perplexed, voiced her concern. The ancient scrolls, passed down from leader to leader, they say a human will save the tribe from a great evil. Tikal, excited that her new boyfriend was finally getting a break, asked how it happens. Her enthusiasm wavered quickly.

Ekyt backed up, charged, at the speed of light, rolled into a ball, and flew into Chaos, knocking it over.

He grabbed the emeralds and Chaos melted. Ekyt had won. Or so he thought. Tikal came over. How d I do? Tikal was crying, he noticed it just then. She handed him the scroll her father had just showed her. It showed a human chained up, and a monster about to eat him. Ekyt s eyes widened. That would be me, wouldn t it? he already knew the answer. He wished he knew how to get out of it. Shadow grabbed the first person he knew who could help. Eden had some medical knowledge (Hope this is okay Violet- N.G.) Shadow, not thinking, just picked her up and ran. *I hope Tiffany is alright&*

44 - Emerald's Go Bad?

Chaos rose up behind Ekyt and struck, mistakenly hitting Tikal. Ekyt, now furious, had an idea. If I did a spindash before&that means my mega form can copy other s attacks& Ekyt thought **SONIC!** And he was running faster and faster around Chaos, picking up Tikal, zipping up one of the ancient structures, jumping off and curling into a ball. He didn't have spines, but this was still gonna do damage. Ekyt hit Chaos just as it put up a shield. The two super-powers colliding, sending the whole tribe scurrying for cover. The electricity from the friction they were creating was frightening. They were face to face, Ekyt slowly gaining the advantage. He managed to reach in and grab another emerald. Four chaos emeralds (Ekyt) vs. Three emeralds and the Master Emerald. Ekyt ran in place, creating more electricity, before jumping up, his legs going in a figure-eight pattern, which caused the electricity he had built up to hit Chaos. Tikal, waking up, saw this, was happy he was winning, but upset that he was still going to lose (his life, see last issue), unless she did something quick.

Tiffany had caught a spike through the leg. Being an ultimate life form, it only meant that she would be out of commission for a couple of days. But it still hurt. Shadow arrived with Eden. Eden told Shadow to go on ahead, that she would help Tiffany. I think we should get you out of here first, that way we can fix this in a less rushed place. Tiffany agreed. Hang on. I can't believe I didn't think of this before- Chaos Control! In a brilliant flash, the two were bound for what had been Ekyt's warehouse. Now it was everyone's *but* his. Where had he gone anyway? They all wondered.

Sonic got into Eggman's base at the Mystic Ruins. The Egg Carrier was about to land as well. Sonic took cover for the time being, waiting for the right moment to zip aboard and get Chris out of there.

Kurt was still trying to get used to this time period. Where he came from, everyone was in the military. Men, women, children. Anyone alive amongst the grim backdrop he called home. He heard people complain about this time period, and he wanted to shake them and yell 'You're lucky!' But he couldn't. It was great here, and Amy went out of her way to make him feel comfortable. Did she like him? He couldn't say. He was good at reading every *other* emotion. Just not love. He couldn't be sure. He could tell Tails was with Cream, that Rouge had a crush on Knuckles, that Sonic&well, he was a mystery. He knew he *liked* Amy, but did he love her? And where had his Dad gone?

Ekyt and Chaos were across from each other, staring each other down. Ekyt rushed, still keeping Sonic's speed. He jumped and rolled into a ball again, and hit Chaos square in the face. It fell to the ground, and melted away into the pond surrounding the Master Emerald's altar. Ekyt won the fight. He handed the emeralds to one of the chief's servants, who flinched at the look. Now, you made a promise Chief. In case you've forgotten, I get three requests. First, I want you to listen to your daughter. Second, I want to be pardoned for all crimes I supposedly committed. And third, I want a chaos emerald that is *mine*. A promise is a promise. Tikal, I will stop the troops immediately- Tikal? Tikal had turned a green color, and spoke in an evil tone. Fools! Do you know how long I've been waiting for that miserable beast to be destroyed? Tikal, take it easy- Wait. I know what happened! Ekyt pointed at the now-green Tikal. The Master Emerald has possessed her!

45 - Confusion on all Sides

The Egg Carrier landed, its crew of advanced robots disembarking. Eggman followed, an upset Chris marching at gunpoint. Sonic smiled to himself. Oh yeah! he yelled as he burst from his hiding spot, destroying the robots around Chris before their mechanical minds could register what happened. Come on Chris, time to juice! Hold on! Sonic blasted away, Eggman cursing as no lasers struck Sonic or Chris.

There will be another round, you little blue pest. Eggman yelled. But Sonic was out of earshot with Chris. Sonic! Stop for a second! Chris yelled. They skidded to a stop. Listen, Ekyt- Ekyt- He's dead! Chris sputtered. Sonic's eyes widened. What? Eggman? No. Near the master emerald. Light just struck him down, without a trace. Eggman showed me. It's real, I can tell. Chris said, nodding. Sonic looked disturbed, but spoke up. We're going to see Knuckles. Maybe he can explain what happened. I think Linda has something to do with it. Chris said sheepishly. How's that? Sonic asked, stunned.

Didn't you know? She broke up with him. Aw man! That's the fifth time that's happened! We've gotta jam! Sonic sped up toward the master emerald. Shadow, keeping pace, couldn't help but chuckle. Good riddance. That's one less human.

Linda and Knuckles were more than a little upset by their friend's sudden departure. It's my fault, I pushed him over the edge. Linda told Knuckles. That's not true. He's never been comfortable here, Knuckles said soothingly. I still don't believe that he did that. It's not like him. Linda said, shaking her head disbelievingly. Sonic galloped up, almost dropping Chris. Just heard about Ekyt. No trace? Sonic asked. Trace of what? Knuckles asked, confused. What killed him! Sonic exclaimed. He's not dead! Linda answered as the others waited for an explanation. Shadow looked disappointed.

I'm dead. Ekyt was staring at the possessed Tikal. This is your doing human! the chief barked at him. You know that's not true. Let me talk to her-it-whatever. Back away, all of you! If you kill her, I kill you, you primitive suckheads! Ekyt walked forward slowly, Tikal staring menacingly, teeth bared. What exactly is it that you want? Ekyt asked. The smile that greeted him was not a kind one.

Tiffany and Eden materialized at the warehouse, where Amy and Kurt were waiting. That looks bad. Kurt commented. Amy looked sick to her stomach. Kurt took a closer look. Eden, could I borrow some long bandage? Kurt looked to reassure Tiffany. Where I'm from, I learned field dressings pretty good. Hold on, this is gonna hurt a little at first. He tightened the bandage as Eden looked on nervously. There! Okay, just take it easy for a couple days here, it's not too bad. Well, I mean, in the worst case-. I know what you mean, Tiffany reassured him with a smile. You are good at this stuff. Kurt looked away, slightly embarrassed by the praise. I'd better check on Amy. *What a nice girl.* Kurt thought to himself. Tiffany sat back, impressed. He's good. I can't believe what a crappy life he's had. I can relate. Poor kid.

I want you gone. Was the terse reply from the master emerald/ Tikal. I'm gone. Let Tikal go! She hasn't done anything but protect you! Ekyt was trying to talk down the possessed Tikal. She flew high, then the color left her, and she began to fall, unconscious. Ekyt made a diving catch, saving her, but she was green again. A slap to the face and kick to the stomach later, Ekyt was trying to decipher the problem. Seems you have a predicament, don't you? Attack me and you'll win, but you lose your girlfriend, since she *is* me. Don't attack, and I'll punish you for the crimes you committed against my followers. What are you talking about, you whack bag?! Ekyt exclaimed/asked. I've done nothing to the chaos, and I'll prove it!

46 - The 6-time Loser

Kurt checked on Tiffany's leg and told her one more day and you're good to go. Amy got over her bout of sickness pretty quick. It was easy to forget she was more than a pretty face, she was a pretty tough girl. Tiffany was ticked that she got hurt. She wanted to get back in action. #Hey, Tiff! I've got some good news and some bad news!# Shadow contacted her through telepathy. #What's that bro. Well, the good news is Ekyl almost died, the bad news is that he's just in the past helping Tikal.# #Shadow, you can be a real jerk sometimes! That kid's done nothing to you! If you don't lose this I hate you because you're human attitude, I'll beat it out of you!# Tiffany would be lying if part of that wasn't her injury talking. Still, Shadow saying that was just evil.

And there's no holding me back, I'm not driven by fear, I'm just driven by anger, and you're under attack& The words Ekyl lived by (And the one's that Our Lady Mercy sings in *The Rabid Wolverine*). If you think I'm going to allow myself to be killed, you're wrong. Very wrong. Ekyl, with the four emeralds, took on his mega form again. Tikal/the master emerald laughed. You dare to try to use my own powers against me? So be it, but it will be you and Tikal who suffers! We'll see. Because, if these are your powers, you know what they'll do for me, don't you? So you can be faster, it means nothing. Oh? Maybe you don't know your own powers enough. Because that's not all I can do. I can absorb the powers of any being I have been in contact with. Something you can't do. So now, I call upon CHAOS! Ekyl's slight teenage form took on liquid properties. He reached into Tikal and pulled out the master Emerald. Tikal fainted, and was grabbed by warriors from her tribe. **Knuckles!** Ekyl thought, and shattered the emerald with a single punch. He fell down, panting from the effort. Game over. He said. A group of five chao, the favorites of Tikal, flew, crawled, or ran over to him. Instead of biting him, they were crying and trying to help him.

Tikal woke up and saw her boyfriend about to be killed by a spear from a tribesman. Ekyl, get down! the spear sailed over his head. In their haste to get to Ekyl, one of the tribe got too close to Tikal. Ekyl clocked him, causing the tribe to pile on, Ekyl fighting before finally being restrained. Leave him be! Tikal shouted. Kill him! her father shouted. Father, if you kill him, I will die with him. Tikal said solemnly. W-what? My own daughter, fighting for a worthy cause, just as you did. Or thought you did. I believe what I am doing is right. You are no daughter of mine! Ekyl heard this and lost it. If you don't want her, let her go. Ekyl said coolly. She is of no use to anyone. At this point, Tikal burst into tears. Ekyl looked at the chief. I will take care of her. But be warned, if you hurt her, you will pay. She had your best interests at heart. Take her and go!

Ekyl started to do just that, but Tikal shook her head. If I leave, the chao are unprotected. *Not again. I struck out again! I'm not cut out for love, I guess.* I understand. Just, please, send me back, there's nothing here for me. He said, trying to hide his sadness. I-I'm sorry. Tikal said, eyes down. Not your fault. She kissed him goodbye and sent him back.

47 - Genesis

Ekyt landed in reality. The words from that song rattling around in his head. Another loss. He laid on the grass for a while, well aware of the fact that he was back in his own time. He sat up, seeing Linda and Knuckles kiss in the distance. He shook his head. Boy, fate is sure kicking me in the butt. He thought he heard someone call his name, but he ignored it. Someone else who wants me dead probably. He was past the point of caring. He just walked up to the hotel, and asked for a room. No way kid. This response came from Paul, Ekyt friend. What? Never mind. Forget it. And you. Hey, man, I m just doin what I m told, alright. Thanks for the loyalty amigo. Ekyt walked out the door, deciding it was time to leave Station Square.

Knuckles and Linda, Chris, Sonic, and Shadow were all around the master emerald. Looks like he had a rough trip. Knuckles commented. Something went wrong, he never ignores someone calling his name. Linda pointed out. Was past uncool. But he needs his space. I ll catch up to him later. You don t suppose something happened with Tikal, do you? Chris asked, already knowing the answer. Tikal appeared beside them, head bowed. Yes, something did happen. She explained and the group collectively winced. Except for Shadow, who burst out laughing. That s great! Stupid kid can t get a date with a women more than 10 centuries older than him! Linda punched him in the face. Shut up or I ll rip your throat out. She snarled. Maybe he s not my boyfriend, but he is my friend, and if you keep saying that, I will kill you. You get me? Sonic and Knuckles sat her down. Linda looked at them. I should talk to him, I caused this whole thing. She went off to look for him.

Kurt checked Tiffany s knee. You re good as new Tiff. He told her. Thanks Kurt. I ve got a score to settle with Eggman! Can I come? Kurt asked. I just thought about it. If I stop him now, then the future will be different. My parents will still be alive, and so many others. Tiffany stopped him. If you do that, you and Paula won t exist. And I know you re parents wouldn t want that. Besides, what I have in mind for Eggman isn t death. He didn t kill me. An eye for an eye, Kurt.

Ekyt ran into Eden near Emerald Coast. Ekyt, how are you? she asked amiably. Huh? Oh, I m great Eden, thanks. Um, do me favor, okay? You didn t see me. Ekyt walked more, not waiting for an answer. I wonder what happened? Eden thought to herself. Ekyt was gone for ten minutes when Linda showed up. Have you seen Ekyt Eden? she asked. Eden, telling a half-truth, said I can t say I have Linda. Linda ran toward the emerald coast, finding Ekyt sitting up against a rock, eyes closed. hey. She said quietly. He opened his eyes and titled his head in response. I m sorry. She said. She felt that she had been saying that a lot lately. To quote a song, Linda, I ll never long for what might have been, regret won t waste my life again. The time has come to change my ways. He got up and walked on. Linda caught up. You re not mad? No. Just tired. Ekyt lied. *Tired of being jerked around.* I ve gotta go. Ekyt said. But you live that way Linda said, pointing, thinking that in his haze he was distracted. I know. Came Ekyt s reply. I m headed in the right direction. He said.

TO BE CONTINUED

48 - Eye of the Emeralds

You're seriously leaving? Linda asked Ekyt. Yup. Yesterday's news. When will you be back? I don't know. I can't say. He ran a hand through his hair. Just take care of yourself, okay? He continued his walk.

Two weeks later

Ekyt faded into obscurity. His friends remembered him. But he went out of his way to be forgotten. He was pale from lack of sun. He didn't live anywhere. He was off the grid. Just what he wanted. It always looked so cool in the movies, but in real life it felt rotten. But he had no choice. He was done with Station Square. He knew he would go back eventually. He still had the chaos emeralds, so he was safe. So he thought. That was before he ran into a biker gang with bad intentions.

Tiffany was just about to leave when Kurt showed up again. Good luck. He said. Tiffany thought the young hedgehog was always so somber. Hey, c'mon buddy, smile, what's the problem? she asked, not really knowing if there was something wrong. There was. Amy went back to Sonic. Kurt said quietly. Everyone knew Kurt and Amy were together. Amy just had her heart set on Sonic. Hey, cheer up, you can come with me to wreak some havoc on Eggman. Maybe you're like my brother. Shadow always needs to get revenge on someone before he's happy. Kurt was hesitant. *She sure is pretty&Aw, c'mon Kurt! She older than you! Just help her out. Strictly business, just like Dad says.* Sure, I'd love to, maybe that'll help. Whenever you're ready to go!

Sonic, Shadow, and Chris headed back toward the warehouse. It's been weird around here with Ekyt gone. Sonic commented. Yeah, no offense Sonic, but it's not as safe around here. Chris commented. You're right on pal. Shadow stopped. Don't tell me you guys actually thought he was useful! Sonic snickered. He beat you on at least two occasions Shadow, that's not useless. Even Shadow couldn't argue that point.

Tails and Cream too felt the sting of Ekyt's departure and Linda's new love. Remember how they got us to date? Cream asked, giggling at the memory. Yeah, Good thing I listened to Ekyt and not Rouge&

(For the sake of understanding, here's the story, well parts of it.)

(At least Ekyt has had a girlfriend before. I've never had the time. Cream is really cute, though. Tails thought to himself as he was put another screw in place. What girl wants to be with a geek like me? I need some advice. That was one step, Tails thought, but who to get advice from was another problem. His options were pretty limited. Sonic? No, he's got plenty of problems. At this point Sonic ran in and dove into the X-Tornado. Amy Rose barreled in after him. Sooooo-nnnnniiiiiiiccccc! Oh! Where is he?! Tails, have you seen Sonic? Sonic was still hiding, so Tails said Sorry Amy, haven't seen him. Did you check at the hotel? No. Thanks Tails! She ran off. Thanks bud. Sonic whispered to him. He walked out the door when Amy tackled him. Not Again! he yelled. They started the chase all over again.)

(Rouge was fixing her eyes. The eye shadow wore off fast in her line of work. Her lipstick too. She heard

the doorbell ring. She tossed down the cosmetics and answered it. She was shocked to see Tails there. Um, Rouge, can I ask you for some advice? he said shyly, blushing. Even though he was ten, he knew beautiful when he saw it. Sure, kid. Rouge said with a laugh. What's the problem. Tails sat down on a kitchen chair. It's Cream. I can't get my mind off her. What should I do? He asked, blushing. Rouge knelt down next to him. Here, I'll show you. She called someone and asked them to come over. A few minutes later, Ekyt walked in. Rouge grabbed him and kissed him vigorously. Tails eyes widened. A-are you sure that's how you let someone know you like them. Imagine Ekyt in the background with his eyes closed, looking like he's gonna faint. That's what ya gotta do kid. Rouge answered, pleased with herself. *Nothing like corrupting a young mind.* Well, I'd better go Rouge. Thanks! Tails called. Ekyt followed him. Tails still wasn't sure what to think of Rouge's advice. Hey Tails, do you know what that was about? Ekyt asked. Huh? Oh, Rouge was just telling me how to show Cream I like her. Ekyt shook his head. No, no, no, no, no, no, that's the *worst* thing you can do! Tails turned around. Huh? Really? he said, shocked. Yeah, that's not love, that's *lust*. There's a difference, believe me. I can tell what to do, or, better yet, I'll show you. I've got a date with Linda tonight. Follow me.)

(Um, Linda? Cream said timidly. Linda turned around with a smile. Oh, hi Cream. What can I do for you. Cream looked down blushing. It's Tails. I think I have a crush on him. Linda nodded. You want to know what to do, don't you? Cream nodded, while Cheese winked at a girl chao (Sorry, this part made me laugh so I thought I'd include it!- N.G.). Follow me. Linda, whose leg had healed, found an apartment near Ekyt's place. It was decorated modestly, and was clean. See, Cream, all guys are different. Take Ekyt for example. He's smart and he's in good shape, but he's always down on himself because he's different. What he doesn't know is that's one thing I like about him. I don't understand. Cream said, confused. I like him *because* he's different. He's always polite, and he stands up for himself and everyone else. He took Rouge in after she dumped him (See previous issues- N.G.), something most people wouldn't do. He doesn't conform, he doesn't criticize or show off. Linda had on a two piece black skirt and blouse with matching shoes. What you've gotta do is what you think is right, never mind what others think. In this case, only two peoples opinions matter. Yours and Tails. Cream thought for a minute. Can you make me beautiful like you? I really want to& &impress Cream. Tails said. Sure. In fact, Why don't we go over to the casino. That's where Linda is going to meet me. You set? Tails was yanking at his bow tie. Ekyt laughed, nodding Yeah, that's what I think too. But that's the price you gotta pay. I know Cream's worth it to you, just like Linda is worth it to me. Now, let's go wow `em! Ekyt wished he could give himself that kind of a pep talk.)

(Linda smiled at Cream. Linda had blue eye shadow while cream wore red. Linda whispered to Cream watch this Linda leaned across the table and tickled Ekyt under the chin, watching him blush before kissing him. Cream got the idea and kissed Tails on the cheek. Tails and Ekyt both turned red. Linda sighed. Waiter! Could I have some ice water please? Ekyt and Tails were both out of it when the water came as Cream giggled. Linda told her This is how you snap them out of it after you kiss them. I guess our guys are both similar. She took a pitcher of water and handed one to Cream. They dumped it on the two guys)

(That s how it happened, readers!)

Back to the story

Knuckles stood up as Linda got back. He s leaving. She said in disbelief. Knuckles too, was shocked. It s not like him. Maybe there were some other problems too, that thing with Tikal. Yeah, still though, it s going to be less safe around here. Linda commented. He ll come back Linda. He s just gotta clear

his head.

So you want the job kid? the cigar-chomping guy behind the counter asked. Yeah. Ekyt's voice was deep and raspy from not talking for two weeks. The gym he was a dump. Cracked concrete floor, weights chipped, paint peeling. No women, or real women, the women here all smoked and drank. You don't have to pay me, just let me work out. Ekyt told him. No money? I'm pretty sure that's illegal kid.

What do you care, I'm not telling. Do you want me here or not? Ekyt said to his new boss. Whatever kid. When can you start? When can you leave? Ekyt said. Now. Good, I'll handle it.

In ten minutes a blonde woman, probably early twenties, and muscular, walked up to Ekyt behind the desk. Hey hottie. What can I do for you? Ekyt answered mildly. Well, it's not so much what you can do for me, it's what we can do for each other. She smiled, revealing her lack of teeth. Uh huh. Sorry lady, you're really not my type. If you're looking for some guy to seduce, try the small guy flexing in the corner. He's not my type kiddo. Sorry, this is a gym, not a dating service. The lady walked away, angry, and began pumping two 90-pound dumbbells like they were nothing.

The gym closed 5 hours later. Ekyt kicked everyone out and locked up. Then he trained himself. He trained for an hour, then decided to go get some food.

He had a motorcycle, so started to drive. Before long, a gang of bikers got in his way. Toll bridge, toothpick. The lead biker snarled. The tires were sagging under his weight. Yeah? Well, forget it whopper. Getting money out of me is like getting blood out of a stone. I don't think you understand. We're not asking. We're demanding. Too bad, go earn the dough grease ball. To say the bikers too exception to that would be putting it mildly.

49 - Ekyt's Revelation (and Tiffany's Quest)

Kurt and Tiffany spotted the Egg Carrier. Hang on Kurt, I'm going to Chaos Control us up! Kurt held on, secretly enjoying it. Well, somewhat secretly, Tiffany had a sneaking suspicion that Kurt liked her. Oh well, time to rock. She could think about *that* later. They hit the deck of the Egg Carrier. Kurt was up almost as quick as she was. Old habits die hard. He said, unsmilingly. Heads up! Tiffany chaos blasted a robot to shreds, while Kurt pulled off a sweep kick, leaving it prone for her. Good teamwork. He commented. We can celebrate later though, we've got to get to the obese owner of this flying scrap heap.

Knuckles and Linda were exchanging knowledge of martial arts. That's when Espio chose to appear.

Anyone seen Ekyt? he asked solemnly, looking around. Yeah, he left two weeks ago Esp. Knuckles told him. Linda excused herself at this point, the tears finally setting in. When will he be back? Vector wants his help with a mission. Espio asked. Esp, I don't think he's coming back. After Linda and Tikal broke up with him each in a matter of days, he just kind of left. Espio couldn't hide the fact he was stunned. I thought those two were No, it's me and Linda now. Knuckles said quickly. I see. Thanks Knux.

The three bikers all dismounted and formed a circle around Ekyt. One last chance shrimp. Hand over the goods or you eat asphalt. Ekyt smirked. He didn't care anymore. I was wondering where my next meal was coming from. He kicked him in the face before getting off the bike, blocking one punch while delivering another. Ekyt fought, and had two down in front of him. The third produced a pair of brass knuckles and proceeded to leave Ekyt lying from behind. No money boss. Oh well, that wise guy had it coming. Leave him here. We'll find someone else. Eden decided to take a little rest too. During her walk, she found Ekyt just getting to his feet. To say he was a mess would be an understatement. She ran over to him. He almost hit her by mistake, but stopped himself. Sorry bout that. He slurred. What on earth happened to you!? Eden exclaimed while helping him up. Some bikers took exception to the fact I wouldn't pay them. Geez. What are you up to now? she asked. I'm working at a gym. Free workouts. Gotta keep in shape. For what I- I don't really know. He confessed. When are you coming back? Eden asked, though she could guess his answer. I'm not coming back. It's pretty obvious I'm not much help in Station Square. You know that's not true. Well, either way, it's just too awkward. Hold on a sec. Using one of the four emeralds he kept from the past, Ekyt healed himself. That's better. Anyway, I've gotta go. Take care of yourself. Ekyt got back on his bike and rode off, leaving Eden to question his sanity.

Kurt and Tiffany were having some problems. Tiffany's emerald had gotten away from her. No problem. But five robots turned to fifty. A blue blur spun up and knocked over ten of the robots. Need some help? Sonic was grinning at them while running circles around the dazed robots. Be my guest. We've got to get to Eggman. Tiffany answered. All right, go for it, I'll mop up these losers! He bounced off the heads of the robots, taunting them so they shot each other. Boy, you guys are good! You musta drank your milk! Suckers! Catch me if you can!

Ekyt thought about it. Was Eden right? What had he always said to himself. No holding me back? What the heck was wrong with him. Girlfriend or not, Station Square was a city that needed help. Whether they wanted it or not, they were gonna get it in the form of the eighteen year old. But first he had to take care of something in the past&

50 - ISSUE 50- Attitude Adjustment

Ekyt got back to the past, confronting the tribe, who turned spears on him. Go for it. I'm here for one reason, and if you try to stop me, your ancestors will never be born. Ekyt was in a hurry and had no time for small talk. He pushed past the angry but stunned tribe to Tikal. Tikal saw him coming, and for a moment feared his anger. He gave her a smile, which soothed her instantly. Here. I've had these for a month now, and it's time they returned to this time period. Ekyt handed her the chaos emeralds. She handed him the purple one back. You keep it. You need it more than I do, you saved my life. Ekyt bowed his head. Thank you. But now I've got to go. Station Square needs me. They need me as a town. He turned to leave, but she grabbed him in a tight hug, apologizing for breaking his heart. His next words alarmed her. I have no heart anymore. It was gone before you came Tikal. It's beyond repair. But you know, maybe it's better that I've lost my humanity. It makes things easier. As he looked at her, he knew it made the wrong things easier.

Tiffany and Kurt found the bloated genius surrounded by Metal Sonic's. It's your doomsday. If I'm going down, you're coming with me. Eggman laughed, then unleashed the metal Sonics. Tiffany thought this was great, a chance to release all that pent-up anger. Kurt, distracted by Tiffany's beauty, almost got his head taken off. *Maybe I am more like my father&just like they say in the future. They're right.* Kurt now understood what that meant.

Sonic finished off the robots, but was confronted by- a metal Shadow? Even Sonic was sure this would be hard. C'mon rust bucket, let's race! Sonic jumped off the ship into a spindash, with the metal Shadow keeping pace.

Eden was the one around when Ekyt returned. He landed hard on a table. The angry couple threw him through an unlucky caf owner's window. That's gonna leave a mark. Ekyt said. Eden stopped, totally shocked. Ekyt saw her, grinned, and said Hey, what can I say? You were right Eden. I never should've left. Ekyt had to admit it felt great to be back. At this point, Sonic and metal Shadow came flying by. Ekyt, motivated by his new attitude, threw a chair at the black blur as it went by, earning metal Shadow's attention. Eden, I think you'd better take cover. Cause this is gonna get *ugly*. Ekyt and Metal Shadow jumped, Ekyt scoring a punch, then being punted back into the furious caf owner's display case, cracking it. This gave Sonic time for a quick spin dash. Welcome back pal! Thanks. Hey, where is everyone? Well, Tiffany and Kurt are on the Egg Carrier. What? Oh man! I've gotta go! Ekyt grabbed his emerald and used it to speed up, propelling himself up a building and onto the Egg Carrier's deck. Linda and Knuckles were just sitting around, Rouge wasn't around to steal the Master Emerald, no one harassed the chao. A frantic Eden came sprinting up the steps, screeching to a stop before panting something. He's (puff-puff) back! Huh? Ekyt? Knuckles asked. Eden nodded. Where is he now?! Linda demanded. No idea, he disappeared somewhere. And I can't put my claw on it, but he's changed somehow&

Ekyt heard the sounds of battle ahead of him. Grabbing a fire extinguisher, he ran into the room and nailed the first thing that moved toward him. A CLANG!, a sound of metal meeting metal greeted his ears. Robots? Works for me! He smiled sarcastically and decided that he'd skip the robots and wreck the source. He kicked Eggman full in the face, but his foot went through him. A hologram. Uh, who's controlling the ship? He asked Kurt and Tiffany. He got his answer as the ship bucked and dropped. You two chaos control out of here! I'm gonna have a little fun! Ekyt bashed everything he could with the fire extinguisher, somehow causing flames to raise up from one of the things he destroyed. Oops, party's over. Chao for now, bots! Ekyt thumbed his nose at them and with the help of a chaos emerald

ran down a building, landing at the bottom. Now to find Sonic, I doubt he needs the help, but he's gonna get it anyway. Sonic came to him, Metal Shadow not far behind. It's nice to be needed. Ekyt muttered. Kurt and Tiffany both collapsed, worn out from the fight. Kurt looked over at Tiffany. Being an ultimate life form and all, I guess you probably figured out how I feel about you. He said it as if he was commenting on the weather. I had a hint, Tiffany said with a smile. I already figured out that it wouldn't work, so I'll save you the trouble. Kurt said, eyes straight ahead and back military straight. Yeah, but hey, you'll meet someone! Tiffany said. Kurt turned away, eyes closed. I doubt it. See, I'm not gonna exist Tiffany. Tiffany was shocked to hear that. Why? You didn't know? Ekyt and Linda aren't together, and the only other hope of me being born, Ekyt and Tikal, that fell apart. Oh. Gee. Tiffany didn't know what to say. What do you say to someone who won't exist anymore? So what *will* happen? To you, I mean. Tiffany asked. I'll just disappear. That's how it happened with Kruse. Kruse? Knuckles and Rouge had a son, a little older than me, who dated my sister. But he just was gone one day. Kurt took a deep breath. Thanks for being so kind to me Tiffany. I'll miss you. Tiffany considered giving him a kiss, but Kurt was gone. She stood there, speechless, before she felt a hand on her shoulder.

Metal Shadow had Sonic cornered. It had thrown Sonic off a building, and now the battered hedgehog was his. Ekyt grabbed its head and twisted, popping it off, and stepping on it. You okay Sonic? Ekyt asked. Then Ekyt's back was slashed. Robots don't need a head to function. Sonic had recovered somewhat, and told Ekyt to get out of here, that he's got other problems. Ekyt kicked Metal Shadow for good measure before running off.

Knuckles and Linda were being harassed by the Hornets. Knuckles and Linda each took care of one, but the third had a pipe. Ekyt ran up behind him, hook a leg, lifted him up, and fell back, dropping them both on the sidewalk. Ekyt grabbed onto a leg and put on a submission hold that left the huge man crying for mercy. Knuckles pulled Ekyt off. For the first time in a month, Ekyt and Linda were face to face& Tiffany turned to find Paula, Ekyt's daughter. Except, instead of a brown patch of hair, she had a red patch of hair. Thank God I still exist! Paula exclaimed. Yeah. I just watched Kurt disappear. And I'm sorry about Kruse. It's okay, Dad didn't t& Paula choked back tears. Tell my Dad I love him. she choked out. I have to go. Tiffany had just seen Ekyt's future fall apart. She felt bad for him, but there was nothing she could do.

Metal Shadow had lost its head and a leg, and Sonic finally put an end to the fight. He was exhausted. Eden was nearby, and though she disagreed with how Sonic lived (Did I get that right Violet?), she helped him up. Thanks. He said, not sure what to make of the situation. Eden had heard what happened to Tiffany, and took the lesson to heart: Petty grudges should be forgiven before they have serious repercussions.

Linda blushed. Hi. She said quietly. Ekyt, sporting a half smile, responded, Hey, how are ya? Haven't see you in a while. And Knuckles, how are ya red? Linda grabbed him by the arm. I need to talk to you privately. Hey, sure. He responded brightly. Once they were alone, she asked him the question foremost on her mind. About&you know&me and you. It's up to you. You know I care for you. I care enough to make sure you're happy. When you are, it's good enough for me. He said. I think I am& she said. Then that's enough for me. Just take care of yourself&wait, one more thing. I don't know if I'll date again, but if I do, will it bother you? Oh, no! she said, not really meaning it. Alright. Best of luck then. Ekyt answered with a smile.

51 - Field Day for the Press

Tiffany sat Ekyt down to tell him the news. She could see in his face that he was expecting the worst. He Got it.

He disappeared? Ekyt said, dumbfounded. It s my fault! He put a hand through his hair. He could feel himself aging. It is *not* your fault! Tiffany exclaimed. *You* didn t break up with Linda, *she* broke up with you! Ekyt was zoning by now. I-I just can t believe it. My own kids; gone before their birth. It just doesn t seem possible. Ekyt got up to leave. In your condition, you d better not walk home alone. Tiffany piped up. Before he could answer, a microphone was thrust in his face. A news crew was standing in front of Ekyt. Are you the vigilante who s been terrorizing Station Square? the Stossel-like reporter asked. Ekyt, still wearing his mask, was through with the cloak and dagger stuff. He could always change the mask, or lose it all together.

What do you mean by terrorizing? Like what your doing to me right now? Or did you mean invading people s privacy? I could have sworn I was having a *private* conversation. Ekyt snarled. Tiffany put a hand on his shoulder warningly. Take it easy& No. You listen to me, all of you. You think you can tell me what to do? I don t fit in here, I know it! I don t need you- Ekyt pointed at the reporter, Telling me how to do my job! And for the record, your microphone needs to be fixed. The perplexed reporter asked What s wrong with my microphone? Ekyt grabbed it and smashed it against a building, hand what was left of it back to the hotshot reporter. Oh, and no further comments! Get that camera out of my face! I ll break it! Tiffany, an ultimate life form, was struggling to hold him back. Eden, little help here! Tiffany called, spotting Eden. The two of them managed to get Ekyt away from the reporters. One of them threw a series of rocks, hitting all of them. Normally, I d say to let this go, Eden began. But we re gonna let go aren t we? Tiffany asked. Yup. They let go, and Ekyt tore after the news crew, catching the guy who threw the rock and throwing him into the reporter. He held the two up by their ties, before tossing them down, disgusted. You aren t worth my time. You jerks ever hit anyone, especially any innocent bystanders, with a rock, I will personally make you eat every rock in this city. Now Scram!

Tiffany and Eden forced Ekyt to walk back toward the warehouse. They could tell he was a wreck. At one point, someone told him he should ve died, and they had to force him to the ground to keep him from ripping the guy to shreds. His life had shattered again. Eventually they were joined by Shadow. He gave Ekyt crap. To his surprise, Ekyt didn t fight. Instead, he let Shadow talk. It s better this way, your kids would ve been crap anyway! Shadow laughed. Tiffany slapped him. If you don t shut up, I swear! Tiffany started, but Ekyt stopped her. It s okay. You see, it takes a lot to make me crack. But you, Shadow, you crap after one word. What s that? Maria. Shadow tried not to show that the comment rocked him, but it failed. Yeah, that s what I thought. You keep your comments about my kids, living or dead, to yourself, or I will kill you. And if you think I ll stop there, you re wrong. DEAD WRONG. Shadow took a swipe at Ekyt. Ekyt tackled him, but Shadow chaos-controlled and started to beat up Ekyt. Say it again! Say it again! Shadow was crazed. Sonic came speeding up, followed by Knuckles, Tails, and Chris. It took all six of them to restrain the two. Ekyt was bleeding, and Shadow was sporting a black eye, cut lip, and busted jaw. Ekyt was just a mess of blood. Linda followed Knuckles in. Get the emerald away from Shadow! Tie them up! people were shouting over Ekyt and Shadow. Rouge heard the commotion and came down from her room. She picked Shadow s pocket, getting the emerald away from him. Shadow was escorted away by everyone but Linda.

What happened? Linda asked. Reporters first. They threw rocks and me and Tiffany, and Eden. Some guy made a comment, and then Shadow started going off on me. What was the comment? Linda

asked. Ekyl, looking banged up, arms tied behind him on a chair, legs secured, looked up at her. You'd better sit down. I can take it. Seriously. Really, I'm a big girl, I can handle it if it's about me. It's not. It's about the future. Well, tell me! It's obviously important! Ekyl sighed. Linda&Kurt and Paula are-are- gone. What? What killed them? Not dead. Never existed. Because you and I aren't together, it changed the future. Paula is Knuckles daughter, you're still her mother. But Kurt is gone entirely. Rouge's son is gone. Silence. You're not kidding, are you? she asked quietly. He shook his head. She hugged him, crying on his shoulder. I've got to tell Knuckles. She said, leaving. After that, Ekyl thought he might cry too.

Linda ran into Blain on the way back to island. She explained to him what happened. Whoa, that's awful! I'm sorry! Yeah. Shadow and Ekyl even got in a fight over it. Ekyl's pretty banged up. Blain normally would have seen Shadow's side of the story, but this was awful. I know! Blain (MrGimp) hurried over to Flash (Flashthehedgehog), who was bugging a store clerk about a new shipment of Doritos. Flash, you hear about Ekyl? Nah, I've been here all day. This clown won't order the new spicy Doritos! You believe that? Yeah, you! Flash shouted over the counter at the middle-aged bald guy reading the paper. C'mon Flash, this is serious. We've gotta do something. I don't know what we could do Blain, if Linda isn't interested in him anymore& She is, she just doesn't know it. But for now, let's at least get Ekyl outta here. I know this bar and grill outside of town. Just one question Blain. What's that? You're twelve, and you can name every bar in town. And out of it, apparently. Flash said, eyebrows up. Welllll, biologically I'm old enough to drink&Ahh, forget it, let's just get Ekyl outta the warehouse for a while.

52 - Say What?

Shadow looked at Ekyt. Ekyt looked at Shadow. Ekyt, tired of playing the good guy, snarled. Anything to say? Yeah. Thank God you didn't reproduce. Shadow laughed. Ekyt, smiling evilly, said one word: Maria. I will kill you if you say her name again. Shadow and Ekyt were through exchanging pleasantries. You're a piece of work Shadow. You *want* to bother me. Look, I know I've lost my kids and multiple girlfriends. If anything, I figured you and I would have been best friends. But if you want to make an enemy of me, so be it! You've given me as good a reason as any for a fight Shadow. Shadow snickered. You don't fight, you take a beating, get saved by one of your friends, and then get patched up by some dumb girl. Now *that's* a way to get attention. At least I don't repeat my legacy Shadow. For the record, we all *know* you're an ultimate lifeform. And, newsflash, nobody's impressed.

Tiffany, walking in to say good morning, immediately called for the others. Sonic, Knuckles, Rouge, Linda, Tails, Cream, Chris, Klein, Blain, Flash, and Amy all got between the two. Don't start you two! Blain warned. Come on guys, can't you talk this out? Klein asked. The time for talking is over. That insult-happy hedgehog pushed me over the edge! Ekyt snarled. Come on, come on, Rouge, Amy, Blain, you guys get Ekyt out of here. Take him to Chris' place. Me and the rest will restrain Shadow. Sonic told him. Klein powered up, ready to stop the two of them. Ekyt left peacefully. There go the day's plans. Blain said to Flash. Could be worse. Yeah? We didn't disappear. Good point.

Ekyt was escorted away to Chris' house. They all took turns trying to calm him down. Well, Blain kinda wanted to a fight, but Amy tried. Rouge was, well, Rouge. She kept flirting with Ekyt, despite the fact that she tried to kill him numerous times. Amy, one of the youngest of their group, was the most understanding. I'd be upset too. She told him. Yeah. It doesn't look like it'll change anytime soon. Linda just isn't interested in me anymore. I don't blame her, she's got the chance to be with an echidna. I mean, take a look at me. I've seen better days. It just makes me so mad&that stupid hedgehog! Ekyt tossed a knife at a picture of Shadow. Right between the eyes. *Uh oh. Not again. Don't say it Amy! Don't say it!* You're cute when you're angry. Amy clasped her hands to her mouth. She had said it. Ekyt understood. Thanks. He said with a sad smile. You'll find the right person some day. You've got a good heart, you're friendly, you're Cute? Ekyt said with a grin. Amy blushed. It's okay. I think you're cute too, if it's any consolation. But what about the way I treated you? Amy asked. Live and learn, forgive and forget. It's no big deal. The two had been sitting on the bed that was Ekyt's tonight. He got up and looked out the window at the storm. I've got to get a hold of my life.

Rouge took this opportunity to step in. I couldn't help overhearing. Ekyt smirked. I bet. Wise guy. You know, being evil gets lonely& She said a tad seductively. So don't be evil. Ekyt said coolly. Then he shook his head. I'm sorry, I don't know why I said that. It's not really your fault. He looked back out the window. Rouge and Amy exchanged glances, then noticed a slash mark on Ekyt's side. Rouge shook her head at Amy, and went over to Ekyt. What happened there? she asked, pointing at the slash.

Knife. He opened the window. Not knowing what state of mind he was in, the two girls grabbed him. I'm not going to jump! he protested. They dragged him over to the bed and forced him to lie down, actually wrapping the cord from the telephone around his hands. Eden walked in, followed by Flash and Blain. Uh, are we interrupting something? Blain asked. Rouge realized how stupid the scene must have looked. No. We're just making sure he doesn't jump out the window. Eden looked at Ekyt. Ekyt looked *through* her, like she wasn't there. I'll get more rope! Flash said brightly.

Sonic, Tiffany, Tails, and Chris forced Shadow to sit down. Now, what's the problem? Tiffany asked Shadow. He's human, and he's scum. You know that's not true Shadow. Chris answered. You're

scum too. Shadow answered. That's enough! Sonic shouted. Look, the guy just lost his kids and two girlfriends. You can give him a break. And by that I mean leave him alone, not break his arm. Tiffany nodded in assent. I don't know why the doctor didn't give you common sense, but since I have some, I'll share this little fact with you: You're ticked off at the wrong person. I hate GUN as much as you do, but Ekyt's not involved. So lay off! Shadow gave Tiffany a sideways glance. You seem to be taking this rather well, considering, well, you know& And what's that? That you were in love with his son. Shadow said, sneering. I know he loved me. I just- you know what, shut up. Tiffany really hadn't sorted out her feelings for Kurt.

Sonic walked into the room, but immediately ran back out because Amy was chasing him. Blain and Flash wanted to see this, and Eden was downstairs getting something. That left Ekyt and Rouge alone. Neither one was comfortable. Rouge was trying to be good, and Ekyt was worried that she might kill him, finish what she started, now that she had the chance. As if she could tell, Rouge piped up. You know, I don't hate you. Huh? Was all Ekyt could manage. Yeah. I set out to ruin your life. And, well, I guess it worked. I've got no reason to hate you. She looked away, but not before Ekyt saw a little red on her cheeks. Well, I never go to thank you for being the first to make me feel welcome in Station Square. It was Ekyt's turn to blush. Really? Rouge asked him. Yeah. Rouge looked away. Well, I gotta go. Thanks for the memories. Anytime Rouge. Now, if you'll just untie me, I can go too. I've got a lot to do. The next day saw Ekyt. A new him. On the street people gave him looks, but he looked forward. He was on a mission. As he was passing the bank, a robber ran out. Without losing a step, Ekyt caught him, flipped him, and threw him into the marble steps leading up to the bank. He tossed the money up to the stunned guards, and kept walking. Sonic spotted him and ran to catch up. Hey, you alright man?

Never better Sonic. I'm just about to put my past to rest. Hold it pal! What do you mean by that? Sonic said, eyeing Ekyt's knife and the fact he was headed toward the floating island. I'm not going to hurt anyone Sonic. I'm going to talk to Linda. This has to stop. And then what? You're not gonna do something nuts, are you? Depends on what you consider nuts. I'm going to talk to Linda, and if we don't have a future, well, I'll take it from there.

53 - THAT'S a relief

I said no, Shadow. Don't be that way. I'm telling it like it is! Violet (Violet_Rose) and Shadow were arguing. So you're gonna hang out with someone else? He has a name, and he's not into genocide! Violet snarled. Shadow grabbed her wrist, but a piece of wood bashed his wrist down. Uh uh uh! Ekyl wagged his finger at Shadow. Still being angry, he took a swipe at Ekyl, missing by inches. Pointing at Violet, Ekyl said That's no way to treat a lady. That's low, even by your standards. Shadow's next punch connected. Ekyl flew back. That's enough. Stay out of this Klein! (ShyWanderer43) Shadow shot at him. I'm making it my business Shadow. I would suggest you leave her alone. Klein was staying calm, but he was reaching his boiling point fast. No need for another demo Klein, we know what you can do. Ekyl told him, chuckling while booting Shadow in the stomach. This isn't a tag team match! Shadow complained. You're an ultimate life form and you're complaining. Alright, have it your way. Klein, you want this one while I get Violet out of here? My pleasure Ekyl. Klein powered up and soon had Shadow buried under a mound of earth. Fine. Peasants! Shadow skated away.

Thanks for the help guys. Ekyl raised his eyebrows. This from you, Violet? I'm surprised. Yeah, well, Shadow would have been trouble. It's cool. Klein interjected. Well, I've got to get going, I'm heading to the floating island. Linda? Yeah. Aren't you two splitsville? Looks that way. Ekyl let his head drop. Klein and Violet looked immediately sorry that they brought it up. Ekyl red-gloved hand closed slowly. He forced a smile. It happens. But you're upset anyway. Violet stated. It wasn't a question. Well, let's see, I've been with Rouge twice, Amy twice, Tikal, Sasha (Texas_Luver), Roxy (Violet_Rose), and Linda. That's eight relationships. It's gotta be me. Don't be so hard on yourself. Klein told him. Yeah, you'll meet someone. Violet told him. I hope so. If it isn't Linda, I don't know who?

Ekyl continued toward the island, thinking, and bumped into Tiffany. Sorry Tiff. He muttered. Don't worry about it, you've got a lot on your mind. She told him, helping him up. Yeah. Tiffany thought about Kurt for a moment. Hard to say how she felt about him. Maybe it's like a brother/sister thing. Kurt had wanted more, but who knew that he would disappear? Pardon me. I've got to go to the island.

Linda had been having thoughts of her own. She had loved Ekyl, she did love Knuckles. But she wanted something different. She missed Ekyl's quirks. She realized that the fact that he was different was what attracted her to begin with. Knux? Yeah? I think I miss Ekyl. Knuckles smiled knowingly. It never fails Linda. What's that? Soultouch. You know the band you have on your chest? Yeah, what about it? Well, when you were near Ekyl, or talked about him, it glowed green. The color of the emerald. You two were meant for each other. How come you didn't tell me sooner? I had to let you find out on your own. It's a guardian thing. But you'd better get him. I saw him with Rouge. Linda practically exploded with anger. That bimbo bat? I'll kill them both! She got up and darted toward Station Square.

Ekyl stopped by Ray's (he got shot, remember) room in the hospital. How are you Ray? Ekyl asked him. I'm alright kid. Thanks to you and Linda. How is she. Ekyl looked away. Ask Knuckles. She and him are; you know. Ouch! I'm sorry buddy. It's alright. I'll get over it eventually. I have to. I'll be out of the hospital in about a week. I don't know what I'll do with myself. I can't run a bar anymore. How about helping me out Ray? We always need more people. You sure you want an old guy like me around? You're *not* old, and you know what you're doing. I'm a clueless eighteen year old with no life outside of

fighting crime, and that s without a paycheck. You could help us a lot Ray. You built that bar by yourself, and it took direct bomb explosions to ruin it! Kid, first of all, I say yes. Second off all, I think someone else wants to see you. The man smiled at Ekyt and gestured at the door. There stood Linda.

54 - A Rock and A hard Place...

Ekyt looked sadly away. Linda strode over to him and firmly grabbed him. Linda, I've got to tell you something, I'm joining with Eggman. The taken-aback echidna sat down hard. You WHAT! Relax, I'm kidding. What can I do for you? You miserable tease! she exclaimed, laughing herself. I'm here to apologize and hope things can be the way they use to be. Ekyt, with all the calm and grace of a line-dancing rhino, embraced her, sealing it with a kiss. You bet! What made you choose? He asked before he could stop himself. Soul touch. Ekyt had read about it, but had never been part of it. Woah. That's, um, definite. You bet, I wouldn't have it any other way. About to kiss again, Flash (FlashtheHedgehog) and Blain (MrGimp) rushed in. We've got trouble, bigtime! What's that? Ekyt asked. Eggman's after the master emerald, and he's got Chaos! Not again! Get everyone away from there! I'll be right there! He and Linda nodded and hopped on her motorcycle. Despite the imminent danger and almost certain doom, Ekyt couldn't help thinking how beautiful she looked with her hair in the wind.

Klein and Shadow were still going at it. Shadow kept trying to force Violet to come with her. She was more receptive to Klein's help than Ekyt's (Old habits die hard), and maybe that's why she didn't step in right away. Finally, eyes half-lidded, she said Shadow, knock it off. Huh? Knock it off. I've got someone else. We could be friends, but if you threaten me again, obviously, if I don't do it, I have friends that will separate your head and your body. Alright? Nobody tells Shadow the Hedgehog what to do. I'm an ultimate life form. Nodding and Klein, she said How come he seems to be whupping you then? Give it up! Shadow and Klein stopped. Shadow looked at Violet, and said Maybe I should go back to the Doctor's side. Good riddance if you can't act civil.

Chaos ultimate&again. Ekyt was the only one here who had seen this before, she he caution everyone to stay away. Taking out his emerald, he let it's power wash over him. *Um, Sonic.* He thought. Immediately he ran incredibly fast, curled into a ball, and hit chaos. Chaos absorbed the blow, but Ekyt took an emerald, tossing it to Blain. He did it again, giving one to Sonic. The next time he took the master emerald, giving it to Knuckles. Shadow was racing up and Ekyt, trusting him to put personal feeling aside, tossed him an emerald. Shadow hit his super form, and started toward chaos, then went after Ekyt. Dad, have you lost it?! Blain shouted. He deserves it! Ekyt finally rolled away and bashed into Shadow. If it's a fight you want, you'll get it, once I deal with this monstrosity. Ekyt went back to attack Chaos 5, but Shadow grabbed him. I'm back with Eggman. Crack! He had Ekyt by the collar. Bash! And now& Sock! (Lame, lol) &I'm gonna.. Oof! &Make you& Brack! &PAY! Ekyt rolled upward, kicking Shadow in the face, but he felt his energy fading. Stay away everyone! Ekyt choked out. He was cornered between Super Shadow and Chaos, and his power was going fast&

55 - More Surprises

Shadow raced forward, with Ekyt sidestepping him. Chaos connected with its tail, sending the human sprawling. With the emerald draining him, he had one more chance & *Shadow* he thought. Chaos Control! Ekyt shouted, disappearing, and then reappearing inside Chaos, throwing the emerald s out to his friends. Inside of chaos, he yelled Chaos Blast! Chaos exploded, and Ekyt charged Shadow, who chaos controlled out of harm s way, landing behind Ekyt and kicking him in the head. Ekyt swept Shadow s legs and tried to get the emerald away from him. Shadow stepped on Ekyt, but Ekyt chaos controlled away and landed on top of Shadow, holding him still while punching. As Shadow instinctively covered up, Ekyt grabbed his emerald. At this time, Ekyt ran out of power. The two collapsed.

Ekyt and Shadow both crawled forward, reaching for the emerald that had landed. Shadow was going to get there first. He grabbed the emerald and grappled with Ekyt. Ekyt, using power he didn t even know he had, fought back. But Shadow was too much. Ekyt was blown back, drained of energy. Violet (Violet_Rose), against her better judgment, used her hammer to hit Shadow s hand. OW! he cried out. The emerald landed near the unconscious Ekyt. Linda forced the emerald into his hand. Klein (Shywander43), seeing Violet was in trouble, bought Ekyt a little time. C mon, wake up. the bloodied unconscious Ekyt now had a gun pressed to his temple. This ends here, human!

The emerald glowed and Ekyt sat up, punching Shadow in the face, causing his shot to go wild. But it appeared that was the last act he was going to get in. Chaos 0 was still a threat, and it proved it now by stabbing Ekyt with one of its long claws. He was suspended in the air, unable to move. Linda, grabbing a rock, threw it at chaos, breaking its grip. Ekyt fell back down in a heap. Everyone watched as a blue blur grabbed the emerald. Well faker, end of the line. Its just you and me. And if hes dead, you re gonna pay! Sonic snarled. Ekyt, barely alive, coughed out Its over faker! Linda forced him to lie back down. Shadow aimed the gun at Ekyt, who pushed Linda out of the way and rolled away himself. In his pain-laden haze, Ekyt saw Chaos going for the same stabbing move on Sonic. Ekyt grabbed its tail. Nope! Tails, ring me! Tails tossed Ekyt a power ring. That hit the spot! the newly healed Ekyt said. Now, to business. Sonic, once you re done with Shadow, I d like to have a turn. But right now, I owe this monstrosity for almost killing me! Ekyt charged, but Tikal appeared and stopped him. Huh? Tikal? Tikal had tears in her eyes. Please, hes only acting on my orders. The whole group made a sound of complete surprise. You ordered him to kill me? No, to protect Shadow. Hes important. Not important enough. Ekyt snarled. Please, don t make this any harder! She begged. Chaos stabbed again, and Ekyt jumped. With its hand caught, Ekyt jumped on it, snapping it off. Don t hurt it! Then call it off! If this thing means so much to you, call it off! Ill put it out of its misery! I cant do that Ekyt. You have to beat it. Fine. Any objections to me handling this while you handle Shadow, Sonic? Nope, Im good. Alright!

NEXT ISSUE: SONIC VS. SHADOW, EKYT VS. CHAOS 0, and TIKAL VS. LINDA!!!

56 - You Knew it Was Gonna be a Fight!

Sonic and Shadow were cooking at top speed. Trading punches, kicks, and insults. Klein kept an eye on Violet, while Linda and Tikal started to argue. And it got vicious. But perhaps worst of all was Ekyt's battle with Chaos. Even with 0 emeralds, Chaos as a match for the injured human, and he knew it. This was nearly suicide. Ekyt had been stabbed twice, and had broken a hand for sure. With black eyes and cut lip, he was really starting to fade. His swipes at Chaos were for nothing, it seemed. As the exhausted eighteen year old finally started to give in to fatigue, he was lifted up by Chaos, and thrown violently down the seven feet to the ground.

This is your fault! Linda snarled at Tikal. I am only doing what needs to be done, granddaughter. You're no ancestor of mine! Keep your guardian job! You're killing him! But history dictates. FORGET HISTORY, AND FORGET YOU! *THAT IS A LIFE!* It may not be for long. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me. Tikal said, eyes sad. If he dies..., Linda said, looking Tikal in the face, ..then my nice side dies with him! She left Tikal alone to cry.

Sonic had the speed and attacks. Shadow had the experience and the attacks. Everyone believed the battle would go to Shadow. But something welled up inside Sonic. It's something that only a true hero can feel, and it made its presence felt. With a yell of primal rage, Sonic grabbed onto the elusive Shadow, and drove him through trees, rocks, whatever was in the way. Both hedgehog's lay bleeding, exhausted. Sonic could stand, Shadow could not. The fight was over, and justice had prevailed. But that was one of two fights. The other fight wasn't looking so good for the heroes.

Being human, Ekyt could only take so much abuse. But he couldn't risk the other's getting possessed like Tikal. Chaos had one hand left, and could lift Ekyt easy. He slammed the human three times, before an unearthly voice rang out: Give up, human! Give up! You cannot beat Chaos! Says (Cough) you! I've done it before, and I'll; Ekyt was slashed across the face by Chaos' long tail. It held Ekyt down with one foot, and prepared the final blow to the nearly unconscious kid. One shot. Make it count! Ekyt had heard that before. Something struck Chaos hard enough to warrant its attention. Ekyt would have laughed. Linda had thrown Tikal into Chaos. Witch! That'll teach you to kill! Ekyt rolled away, and crawled onto the motorcycle that he and Linda had arrived on. Revving it, he was about to pull the most dangerous stunt ever for the second time. Taking a rock, he punctured the gas tank. Revving the engine created sparks, so Ekyt fired the bike forward, aiming for Chaos. Everyone took cover, seeing this happen before. Except Klein, who had an idea on how to make this work.

The ensuing explosion ripped Chaos to shreds. Tikal was fine, because that was a robot Tikal. Eggman was involved, but Ekyt didn't really register that. He registered the fact that he had blown himself up in the air. Or so he thought. He seemed to be floating. Klein concentrated, bring Ekyt down safely with his wind powers. Thanks bud. Not a problem. Klein said with an embarrassed grin. Ekyt propped himself up against a shiny green rock. The master emerald, but he either didn't notice or didn't care. Linda sat next to him, frantically waving over a pair of stretcher-toting EMT's. I'll walk. Ekyt slurred to them. One tried to force him, and Ekyt threw a punch. Sorry if I stuttered. I said I'll walk.

Linda dragged him to Ray's room, where Ray winced. I think you oughta be in here kid. He said, giving

Ekyt a wary look. I've had worse, if you can believe it. Ekyt said, smiling, then wincing, then actually saying OW as both gestures hurt. What the heck happened? Ray asked, concerned. I'll tell you when you're better. A fluttering of wings heralded the arrival of Rouge the bat. You okay kid? she asked Ekyt. Yeah. Thanks for everything Rouge. Um, before I go, I need to warn you I'm with Knuckles now. You convinced me to be good. Rouge said, batting her eyes dramatically. Rouge, you'll never be a hundred percent good. Linda said, smiling and extending her hand. Yeah, you're right, Rouge answered, shaking Linda's hand, But this is as close as I come. Treat him right, or maybe I'll develop a taste for humans. She said with a wink. Ekyt finally sat down. He was forced to by Linda. She gingerly sat on his lap, forcing him to stay still. You're going to relax if it kills you. She said flatly. Yes ma'am. Ekyt said. What else could he do? And don't even consider moving, you've had a hard enough day. Linda scolded him like a three-year-old. Ekyt nodded. Good. Now rest up. Ekyt did, but before he fell asleep, one thing bothered him: If that was a robot Tikal, where was the *real* Tikal? He had a feeling he knew, and he knew it was gonna be a fight to get her back.

TO BE CONTINUED:

NEXT ISSUE OF NEXT GUARDIAN:

EKYT HAS TO CHOOSE: SHUN TIKAL FOR DUMPING HIM, OR HELP HER OUT? SHADOW LEVELS WITH SONIC, AND KLEIN, EDEN, AND VIOLET DECIDE WHAT THEY'RE GOING TO DO IN THE NEXT BATTLE. DON'T MISS IT, CAUSE:

N.G. DOES WHAT OTHERS WON'T!

57 - The Kiss of Death

You win this round, blue! Shadow yelled. Yup. Why are you doing this again? Sonic asked him. It's what I have to do. What would Maria want? Sonic asked. Say her name again, and I'll.. I don't mean it that way Shadow. I mean, you know what she told you before she died. Think about how she meant it. Shadow chaos controlled away, thinking about it.

Finding Tikal turned out to be easy. Ekyt woke up. Apparently he had passed out from blood loss. He awoke, chained next to Linda. How does this keep happening? Ekyt asked her. Got me. You okay? You betcha. Uh oh, maybe not. Here came Eggman and Shadow. Shadow walked past both of them, to a prisoner Ekyt hadn't noticed before. Shadow tickled Rouge under the chin. Rouge tried to bite him, but he hit her. Hey dirtbag! Ekyt called out. He kicked Shadow in the face. Take this as a threat: If you hurt either one of them, or anyone else, I will rip your quills off. Eggman, with a metal glove on, punched Ekyt in the stomach. Shadow forced his head up. You're not going to win. If the doctor didn't have plans for you, I'd kill you. Doctor? Thank you Shadow. Now, Ekyt, you can cooperate, or, one by one, I kill everyone. Rouge, Linda, as well as Violet, Eden, and Tiffany. What did they do? They aligned themselves with you. And that miserable hedgehog, Sonic. And you know what, their killing won't be instant. I will break bones, one by one. If they have wings, I'll clip them. And then you'll be alone. And I'll let you live, so you can live with the guilt. Ekyt, stone faced, but clearly angry, snarled his answer.

Alright, what do I have to do? Not just you, everyone is going to their part. You and Linda are going to be my physical specimens, and Rouge and Eden are going to be my maids. Tiffany and Violet.. Well, I'll let Shadow deal with her. Do we have a deal? Do I have a choice? No. Eggman walked over to Linda and broke a finger. Alright! Deal! Fine! Just leave them alone! Eggman punched him in the face this time. You will show me respect, and speak when spoken to! Clear? Crystal. Ekyt muttered, watching Linda grit her teeth at the pain.

Eggman left them alone. Everyone okay? Eden asked. No. But I'll live. Was the response. Rouge was licking her teeth. Sharpening my fangs, I'm going to bite them on the neck. I'm part vampire you know. Ekyt gulped. Relax, we're on the same side, remember? Ekyt nodded, then turned to Linda. Are you okay? Broken finger? I've had worse, I'll be fine? she said, smiling in spite of the tears that were just drying. I'll make him pay for that. For all of this! Rouge, you're the accomplished thief here. Can you get something to pick the locks when he lets you out? Piece of cake. It's up to the rest of us to do what he says for now. They had all been freed from their shackles and were claiming the large room. Rouge found a bunk bed and claimed it, saying that heights calmed her down. Tiffany didn't need to sleep. Ekyt did, but decided not to since he was the chief target of Eggman right now. Eden curled up calmly in a corner. Violet paced angrily in the back of the room. That left Ekyt and Linda.

I can put the finger back in place, but it'll hurt. Ekyt told her apologetically. I'll do it. Linda punched the wall and her finger snapped back into place. You're tough. Ekyt said, grinning. Later, Tiger. Right now, we've got to get out of here. Wait. Linda, there's something you need to know..I-I-.. You love me? She said teasingly. Yeah. You knew that already. But the other thing.. I think I should stop trying to be a hero. Linda looked shocked. Why on earth would you do that? All of them Ekyt said, gesturing at the collection of creatures in the room are here because of me. I'm cursed. I'm the kiss of death. Linda kissed him while the others pretended not to notice. When it was over, she smiled and fixed his collar.

I'm still alive. Give it time. Ekyt said with a chuckle. oh, shut up. Besides, you need to take this, because I know you're gonna pull some hero stunt. She whistled and a small chao, her favorite, appeared beside her. Ekyt chuckled when he saw it had a trench coat like his. He started to pet it, but

stopped, remembering that Chao had a bad habit of biting him. Not this one. This one jumped onto his hand. This is new. Take what he's holding, it's for you. You gave me the emerald necklace, this is for you. The Chao dropped a miniature power ring into his hand. Stick it on your belt. It might just help you get out of a tight spot. Linda told him. Ekyt took off his coat and shirt and laid it down for her. He was embarrassed, never mind the fact that he was actually in decent shape. He was always embarrassed with Linda around. And usually around every other female too.

Eggman led him away the next day. After strapping him into a chair, he took a needle and jabbed it violently into Ekyt's arm. Good. You do feel pain. Eggman laughed. The little Chao with the trench coat popped out of Ekyt's pocket and grabbed a nail gun, nailing Eggman to the ground. Eggman swatted the little Chao. That was all Ekyt could take. He felt himself turning red, getting angry. Beyond anger. I warned you! I told you I would kill you if you harmed any innocent creature! Eggman frantically yelled for Shadow. The little Chao unconscious on the floor, the power ring Linda had given Ekyt surged. He snapped the bindings that held him down. YOU'RE MINE!

58 - The Great Escape, and the Vacation

Eggman bellowed for Shadow. Shadow chaos controlled in front of Ekyt. What are you doing? Shadow snarled. Making him pay for hurting innocent animals and people. Shadow smiled nastily. I can't let you do that. Who says I need your permission? Get out of my way! The ring glowed. You want a fight? So be it! Chaos spear! The spears hit Ekyt, square in the chest, but he walked forward. Chaos bla-.. Ekyt hit Shadow in the face, slamming him through a metal bulkhead. Eggman was cheering for Shadow. Ekyt turned toward him, eyes mean, and glowing gold. You're going to pay, fat boy! Eggman had gotten himself free and ran. Ekyt stood in front of him, arms crossed. If you wanna play, stay in the sand box! Ekyt yelled as he punched him, sending the overweight maniac into Shadow.

Next to him, Tiffany appeared, followed by Eden, Rouge, Tiffany, Violet, and- Sunny (A Violet_Rose creation, surprise!)? Where did you come from? Ekyt asked Sunny. The mouse responded. Nice eyes, they look like mine! But to answer your question, how do you think everyone else escaped? She said, smiling. I appreciate the help. For now, everyone take cover! Oh, and if you have an aversion to seeing these two hurt, cover your eyes. Rouge stopped him. Look, I'm good now. But can't you let them off the hook? I'll take your chaos to someone I know, he'll be fine. But you have to promise me not to lay a hand on Shadow unless he provokes you. Promise? Promise. UGH! Shadow punched Ekyt. Rouge had seen enough. Keep him here. She said, pointing at Ekyt. She sauntered over to Shadow. It looked like she was kissing his neck, but Shadow was actually yelling with pain. Rouge had bit him, the blood gushing from Shadow's neck and dripping down her fangs. Okay, I'm convinced. Ekyt took the suffering Shadow's emerald and handed it to Tiffany. We're outta here! She exclaimed! Chaos Control!

Well, that was a nightmare. Ekyt said to Linda as they all went their separate ways. But there's still a problem.. Ekyt said. And it's not one I can deal with. What's that? Linda asked, helping her limping human friend. Tikal wasn't on the ship. And, to be honest, I'm still upset over what happened. (Ekyt is referring to the Ekyt X Tikal and Linda X Knuckles issues- N.G.) Well, yeah, who wouldn't be? Linda commented, uncomfortable as well. Well, come on, we've got to get you cleaned up- again! How on earth do you do this?! Linda exclaimed, looking Ekyt up and down. Well, when you have more enemies than friends, and one is a genius, and one is an ultimate life form, you tend to.. Okay, I get the message wiseguy! But still.. You don't have to do that, you know. What? Take the huge risks. We already know you're one of us. No I'm not. He answered. What do you mean? Oh, the human thing? No, not that. Or not just that anyway. I'm just too frustrated with everything. I just need to clear my head. But there's no where to go.. Not anymore. How about the Mystic Ruins jungle? It's where I was born. Most people are too afraid to go there. Linda suggested. Sure. I'm coming along, of course. Naturally. Ekyt intoned. Well, hey, a girl needs her servant! I'm hungry, go get me food! she joked. Yeah. But I do need a break.. Okay. How do you want to get there? Linda rolled her eyes. Duh, you carry me! Piggyback! she jumped on. Alright, thank God it's only a mile walk! Hang on!

59 - Back to Normal? Hardly!

They arrived at the Mystic Ruins. I always wanted to guard the emerald. Ekyt said, running his hand down the architecture. It's like seeing Atlantis. Linda dragged him over to a grassy area on a hill, not far from what used to be a pond. It was more like a puddle now, but the effect was still cool. This is where I was born. My Mom and Dad were thrilled to have me, I remember playing with them. But they died before I even learned their real names. Next thing I knew I was on my own. She smiled sadly. That's awful! What killed them? Ekyt asked. GUN. They believed all of us anthropomorphic animals were evil and sought to wipe us out. I was captured and they ran tests on me. We were peaceful with the humans, but warred with other animals. But the humans didn't trust us. Linda stopped and laughed at the irony.

I just realized I'm explaining this to a human in my birthplace. I never thought that would happen! Yeah. Don't remind me I'm human though. Sometimes I wish I wasn't. Ekyt muttered, sitting down next to her, looking out across the ruins. Why do you say that? Linda asked, confused. Well, all the awful things humans have done. Not even just to our own species, to innocent animals. Sometimes it's a source of personal pride to be labeled an outcast like I was. Well, you're the least human human I know. Linda said, trying to be serious. But it was felt outrageous to say. Thanks. I think. Hey, what's up there? Ekyt asked her, pointing to the tower in the middle of the ruins. I don't know. Wanna check it out? Yeah, that would be cool. They climbed up the steps, seeing a serpent's mouth. It was open. Ladies first. Ekyt said. Oh, you're being chicken. Linda joked. Yeah, I am. She hit him on the shoulder and walked in. This is so cool! Ekyt followed her in. Cave writings, drawings of all sorts, and some old weapons littered the high-ceilinged room. I'm surprised no one's touched this stuff. Ekyt commented. Oh, it's supposedly haunted. But I don't believe in ghosts do you? Ekyt stopped, his pale white skin losing color. That depends on whether I'm seeing what I think I'm seeing. Linda followed his gaze. To a ghost. Oh perfect. Um, how do I fight this thing? Ekyt asked Linda. Have you tried prayer? The ghost swiped forward, slashing Ekyt's coat. Wrong answer I guess.

Knuckles Solo Story:

Sonic, can you ask Klein to guard the emerald for me? (Klein belongs to ShyWanderer43) Yeah, what's up? It's not like you to trust someone else to do it. I know, but I've got to find Tikal. It's an echidna thing. Aren't you worried about Rouge stealing the emerald. Why, should he be? Rouge swooped down. I'm going with him. She purred, nuzzling him. Sonic raised his eyebrows. Then the piercing scream was heard: SOOOONNN-IIIICCCC! Amy was running full speed. Seconds later, so was Sonic. Looks like things are back to normal, eh sport? Rouge said to Knuckles. Thinking of Tikal, Knuckles answered. Not quite yet.

60 - Worst Day Since...

Sure, I'll do it. Klein (ShyWanderer43) responded to Sonic's request. Thanks man, Knux is off on some mission, and I can't stick around. This hog's got an agenda! Like saving Station Square! I'd be glad to do it, guarding the emerald is always cool. Thanks. I'd better go.

Knuckles dug into the Egg Carrier. He could sense Tikal was here. She was in danger, though that was something he knew right away, he didn't need to sense it. He climbed up and in through a window, ducking into a closet as a robot sentry went by. Let's see. The jail would be down. But how to get there? Knuckles kicked the floor. Wood. He could dig through that. He started to do just that.

The ghost growled menacingly. Um, boy, how do I deal with this? What do you want?! Ekyt yelled.

Girl! the ghost answered. Not a chance, try again. Give me Girl! Forget it! Let us go, and we'll leave you alone. Hungry! the ghost yelled. What do you eat? Linda shouted. You! the ghost shouted back. Ekyt, out of pure frustration, slashed the ghost with his staff. To his surprise, it recoiled. Only then did he realize that it was too solid to be a ghost. Linda suddenly recognized the voice. Ekyt, wait a minute! She rushed forward and untangled the echidna inside- huh? This.. thing.. is my ex-boyfriend Staph.

Staph decided to rush Ekyt. Ekyt, taken by surprise, hit the cave wall. He rebounded quickly and jumped, but Linda stood in the way. If you're going to fight, fight someone who's worth your time. She said simply. What does that mean? the two boys asked her. She sighed.

Klein relaxed by the emerald. Beautiful day. Light breeze, sunny, but dark- wait, that made no sense. Klein stood up, staring at the group in front of him. Can I help you? he asked calmly. You the transforming freak that got in our way last time? the group leader said menacingly. Well, that depends on your- hands off! Klein transformed. Now that you've got my attention, what do you want? The gang knew better than to fight. Um, we was just lookin'. Klein nodded. That's what I thought too. Scram! Klein stomped and sent them scattering. He powered down and kicked back again. That felt Good.

Knuckles landed hard, misjudging how high the ceiling was. He landed at Tikal's feet, lucky for him. Also unfortunate, because Eggman was behind him..

Yeah, she was mine first, freak. Staph shot at Ekyt, throwing his arm around Linda. Calmly, Ekyt told him You will let go of her. She left you for a reason. At least I'm the right species for her. Ekyt laughed at that. I don't think she's into mouth-breathing rocks. Care to try again? Linda yelled Stop it! They both stopped. Staph, you know what happened. I loved you once.. As soon as she said that, she knew it was a mistake. She could practically *feel* Ekyt's disappointment. You know what I mean, right? She asked. Maybe I'm overreacting, but no. he said. Oh come on! She said angrily. Love isn't something that you can turn off like a light switch Linda. I know that better than anyone. I want your happiness. If Staph here feels I'm endangering you.. Yeah, I do, so do us all a favor and drown! Staph said. Linda didn't say anything. Ekyt shook his head. He left silently. Suddenly, a mist engulfed him and swallowed him. He woke up in a world that was apocalyptic.

What on earth? Ekyt muttered. You're just in time to meet the same end as them. Shadow's voice greeted Ekyt. He gestured to a pile of bodies. Sonic. Knuckles. Tails. Linda. Dead. This isn't

happening. Ekyt said, disbelieving. Shadow cocked his pistol as he walked down the pile of rocks he had been standing on. I m afraid it is. He shot. The bullet streaked toward Ekyt, who moved in time. What has gotten into you? I know you re evil, but this isn t like you! Ekyt yelled. I opened my eyes. Maria s dead and not coming back. Her final wish has almost been fulfilled. To save the human race. I need to save them from themselves. You re the last one Ekyt. I don t aim to let you get in my way. Shadow, think about this: I don t like humans anymore than you. Killing them isn t saving them. Shadow thought for another moment. No.. Maybe it s not.. If any have survived, they ll live. You however.. Shadow cocked the gun again, Are dead. Thinking about Linda, his family, and himself, he agreed. I m already dead on the inside. But you know the old saying Shads.. Ekyt called as he swept Shadow s legs before crouching defensively, ..The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. If you re into genocide, you re going through me, even if I m the only one left.

WHAT NEXT? EVERYONE S DEAD. IS THIS A DREAM, OR A FRIGHTENING REALITY? WILL EKYT SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS ALL THE OTHERS, WILL HE STAND UP TO THE TEST? OR WILL HE LET THE ULTIMATE LIFEFORM BE THE BEST? (LOL, SORRY, BAD SONG JOKE, I KNOW! DEVIL WENT DOWN TO GEORGIA IS WHAT IT CAME FROM) ANYWAY, DONTCHA DARE MISS IT, CAUSE NG DOES WHAT OTHER S WON T!

61 - BLAST! from the Past

Shadow was up in instant, but Ekyt was gone. Westopolis was in ruins. Shadow continued his journey at blinding speed. A leg shot out and caught Shadow. Miss me? Ekyt laughed. He jumped backward when Shadow took a swipe at him. A gun cocked. Shadow had chaos controlled behind Ekyt. Ekyt ducked down, stealing Shadow's motorcycle. C'mon, catch me if you can! Or I'll get to Maria first! *I Hope this pays off!* Ekyt thought. *If not, I'm done for!* Just as he thought, Shadow was frozen by the thought of Maria. Time to scout for survivors. Shadow chaos-controlled in front of him. The writings on the wall Ekyt. Chaos Blast! The mist engulfed Ekyt again. He landed with a hard PLUNK inside the cave.

Not friendly territory.

Knuckles turned to face Eggman and a slew of his new 200 series of robots. Knucklehead! Nothing if not predictable, my anthropomorphic friend! Watch who you're calling friend. Ya know, fat boy, Knuckles started, They say you can judge a man by the company he keeps. And you're looks like roadkill (From Evil Dead: Fistful of Boomstick). Besides, if I had a face like yours, I'd try to make up for it with some sort of a personality. Eggman was so mad he started to hyperventilate. You know, a little Prevental (Inhaler) will clear that right up. Or diet and exercise. Now get out of my way! he barked. Forget it! My new 200-series robots will annihilate you. Fat chance. Ohh, sorry, that must've hurt. Slim chance. Knuckles commented. Get him! Knuckles fought off the first five of the E-200 series, then one scored a shot with its rifle. A kick, followed by a blast of Water, Wind, Earth, and Fire, signaled the arrival of Klein (ShyWanderer43), the powered up version. Thanks Klein! Let's get Tikal out of here!

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) started her walk around town. She had doubts about how she looked, probably due to something that happened in her past; she just wished she could remember. (See Shadowthe_Hedgehog's awesome remake of Shadow's game!- N.G.) She was lost in thought when a hedgehog hit her. I'm sorry! Oh Geez! he helped her up. Thanks. It happens, I wasn't watching where I was going. Tiffany told him. It was then she noticed the green hedgehog looked troubled. He closed his eyes quickly. Are you okay? she asked him, concerned. Unlike her stubborn brother, she did care about others. I-I'm sorry. Um, I'm Kurt. You have nice eyes. *Oh damn, did I really say that?* He wondered. Tiffany laughed good-naturedly. Thanks, you too! The yellow and red thing is cool! Oh, I'm Tiffany by the way. *Oh crap, Did I really say that?* Erh- it was nice meeting you! Kurt said enthusiastically. Same here! I'll see you around town, okay? T-That would be n-n-nice. Kurt stammered. As she walked away, he looked at his watch. 11:24 a.m. Kurt planned on being in this spot every day at 11:24

Ekyt sat up, shaking his head. He wished his eyes were deceiving him. They weren't. Linda was kissing Staph. Ekyt rolled out of the cave, and down the hill. That's weird...I- what the heck? Ekyt was his normal color, pale white, but now he had streaks of red on his arms and legs. That chaos blast.. could it have made me? Ekyt had to try it. Besides, it beat walking. Chaos Control! Ekyt aimed for Station Square. He landed a second later. Now *this* could be fun. He suddenly found himself hating his past, like a certain ultimate life form..

Linda pushed Staph away. You jerk! Look what you did! I told you to get away from me, not kiss me!

And if you touch me again, I'll cripple you! Your body says no, but your soul says yes.. Staph moved forward. Suddenly a blur bashed into him. Touch her again and you really *will* be a ghost (See last ish-NG). Ekyt? In the flesh. But better! Oh, Staph, I've been to Station Square and back, so I'd imagine my energy is just about gone. So, I'll leave you with this: CHAOS BLAST! Staph was rocketed into the cave wall. You okay Linda? She didn't bother to question him. Let's just go home. I need a vacation after this vacation! Corny ending, I know!

LOOK FOR MORE NEXT GUARDIAN SONIC X! ISSUE 62 IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER- NG

62 - The Next Stage

Ekyt was silent the walk home. Linda thought it was because he had hurt his jaw. Yeah, that hurt. But he was worried. All the old self-doubt that haunted him; the losses; was he right for her? Was he good enough? She was beautiful, and he was average. Linda, who by now knew something was up, knew him well enough to guess. You're fine. Don't worry! Ekyt looked up briefly, smiled, and put his head back down. Linda stopped. I know what's going through that little human head of yours. She said teasingly, wagging her finger. And you know it's not true. You could have anyone. *Anyone*. But I don't *want anyone*. You're fine. Now, c'mon sport, take it easy on yourself.

Tikal shook herself awake. She smiled serenely at the site of the master emerald. Then she saw the ruins. Father! she cried out. Not quite. Knuckles said with a small smile. Rouge fluttered down. Geez Knux, could you slow down a little? These million-dollar assets are tired. Ekyt and Linda walked up next. Linda had Ekyt so wrapped up that he didn't notice Rouge. They both looked up and jumped back, pointing. You! What do you want?! They said in stereo. Rouge calmed down first. Relax, I'm good now. Ekyt almost asked *what* she was good for, but bit his tongue. Is Tikal okay? he asked. As good as I've ever been. She answered for herself. But I've got to get home. I'm too weak. Knuckles was drained too. That left Linda, a guardian, but she was new to it. With a little help, though C'mon tiger, you're gonna help me. She said to Ekyt. Huh? She pointed at his arm, which was still glowing a little bit from the Chaos Control. Time to put that energy to work. Alright, whenever you're ready. CHAOS CONTROL! They shouted.

Tikal disappeared. But that's when the strange things began. Ekyt and Linda both suddenly grew white bands like Knuckles' on their chests near their neck. Huh? Can this be? Knuckles ran his hand down the master emerald, and the bands glowed green. It's never happened before, except once. But it can't be the same thing. Unless.. Knuckles pointed at Ekyt. Did you have contact with Chaos control lately? Ekyt nodded. Knuckles shook his head as the emerald pulsed. What's going on? Cut the gibberish and tell us Knux! Linda said, shaking his shoulder. Linda, we knew you were a guardian. But Ekyt.. It seems you're a guardian somehow. Ekyt actually smiled. I've always wanted to be a guardian. What happened? The first time, I mean?

11:23. Kurt sat impatiently. He was honest with himself, he wanted to see Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) again. He stood up and paced. They seemed to have so much in common. He couldn't help but smile at the goofy way he had introduced himself.

11:23. Tiffany walked quicker. That green hedgehog would be waiting. She never thought of herself as such a catch, but then again the Doctor *had* given her modesty. And that Kurt seemed to think she was perfect. They did seem to hit it off. So much in common..

NEXT ISSUE: THE FIRST INCIDENT, AND KURT AND TIFFANY TALK. DON'T MISS IT, CAUSE NG DOES WHAT OTHERS WON'T!

63 - The Truth?

Kurt sat up straight as soon as the big clock in Station Square hit 11:24. *Aw man, aw man, this is it! What if I say? Are my quills okay? Does she like the color green? Calm down, calm down, calm down.. I m okay, I m okay, I m okay.* He sat still and breathed confidently, eyes closed. I m okay. He opened his eyes. Gaaah! Kurt jumped straight up in the air.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) looked up at him. Uh, you okay Kurt? she asked cautiously. Yeah! Never better! He answered. Tiffany gave him a worried look. Uh-huh. There s one hole in your statement. Most people don t jump out of their skin for no reason. She questioned, eyebrows raised. You surprised me, that s all! Kurt said, turning furiously red. I ve just been thinking so much about the fire and.. is something wrong? Kurt asked. Tiffany had a distant look suddenly. Fire? *Sound familiar. Just like what I lived through.* (For more info, go visit Shadowthe_Hedgehog s gallery NG)

The last time this happened, two evil people were conspiring to steal the emerald. Knuckles finished. There s gotta be another explanation Knux. Linda said calmly. Ekyt nodded his agreement. I can t trust either of you! Get off my island! Knuckles exclaimed/ ordered. Ekyt and Linda exchanged glances. You re whacked. Rouge voiced everyone s opinion. I know that kid; he doesn t have it in him to be evil. And as for the girl, not a chance. There s gotta be something else Knux. Knuckles stopped and thought. There is the chance it could be overexposure to chaos powers. He said finally. Ekyt spoke up this time. Shadow has chaos blasted/ chaos controlled/ chaos speared/ chaos whatevered me more times than I can count. And most of those times, Linda was with me, or in the line of fire herself. Linda cocked her head. That does beg one question Knux; are there any side effects to this? Knuckles shook his head. No. The band will stay for a while, but beyond that, nothing. Ekyt nodded and left. Linda followed him.

Knuckles sighed his relief. I couldn t tell them the truth. He said. Rouge smiled. Oh, the whole soul-touch thing? That they re meant to be? That they ll get married and have a kid named Paula who will.. Yes, yes, enough already! I think it s best they find out on their own..

The next day, things were back to normal. Ekyt and Linda fought off a robbery, rescued a cat, and chased off some of Eggman s robots. But Linda saw something wrong. Ekyt looked and acted less sure of himself. He was paler than usual too. You okay? she asked after a training session that left Ekyt breathing pretty heavy. I-I m fine. Just really stressed out. Linda looked over at him. I ve known you for a while now Ekyt, and I think there s something you re not saying. Ekyt nodded, to her surprise. I don t know myself, but I think that it s anxiety.

Then Ekyt surprised her. Linda, this is difficult to ask, but.. Am I good enough for you? Linda actually laughed. Where did that come from? Ekyt couldn t answer that. Let me put your mind at ease. (Kiss) Ekyt s pale cheeks turned a vibrant red. I guess I am. Linda couldn t help but feel sorry for him. *He s so.. unsure of himself. Doesn t he understand I like him for what he is? He s got that I m-a-human complex going again, I guess.* Ekyt finally had an answer for her, in the form of a question:

Does it seem I m getting beaten up a lot? Linda coughed. *Huh? Oh boy, how do I handle this one?*

64 - Raising the Bar

No more than usual, why do you ask? Linda asked him. I'm always in pain, I guess. Look at Sonic, for example, and heck, everyone else. They all walk away from a huge battle unscathed, and I limp away. Even the ones that really aren't fighters don't get hurt. Linda had to admit he had a point. Before she could answer, he blurted out another sentence. I miss being an ultimate lifeform, even though I only did that out of desperation. I- wha? He pointed up. That's one of Eggman's! We'd better book! Linda nodded and followed his lead.

While they were sprinting, Linda had a bad thought. *What if things can never be the same between us? I did leave him for Knuckles.. I came back.. Are we still.. Aghh! Sort it out later, girl, you've got work to do.* Ekyt stopped. Eggman was running towards them. Don't attack me! he yelled. Ekyt looked at him stoney-faced. You've got 30 seconds to explain why you're here. He said coldly. I'll do better than that! Look at these! Robotnik thrust out some pictures. Grainy quality pictures of Eggman being chased by Metal Shadow. (Yup, he was junked a few issues ago.. but does an ultimate lifeform-bot go down that quick? Read on to find out NG) Uh-huh. Ekyt showed them to Linda, who gave him a look. They're fakes. Ekyt spat. What? There's no way you could have figured that out so quickly. Listen, mister 300-IQ, you're too busy being smart to realize that the rest of us aren't dumb. And besides, you created that metal monstrosity. Eggman put his head down. So you won't help me? Ekyt and Linda exchanged glances. Nope. Linda said. Eggman roared angrily. You've done it! Come, my metal minion! Eggman called laughing. I am *not* in the mood for this chubsy-ubsy. Metal Shadow landed in front of Eggman, looking menacing. Ekyt, not losing a step, looked it right in the eyes. Last time I saw something like you, I flushed it. Metal Shadow slashed out. Ekyt dodged backward. Linda vaulted over him. Metal Shadow put up his claws. Linda was impaled on them.

So your past totally sucked too? Kurt asked Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog). Yeah. (Read Shadowthe_Hedgehog's bios for more details NG). And what about yours? Tiffany asked him. My parents were killed in 2008 during the war by a bomb. So, I guess, Ekyt and Linda are my parents. Tiffany shook her head sadly. That is bad. I didn't have parents. Kurt got up. Well, um, do you want to go do something? Kurt asked. Aw snap, that was smooth! he said, hitting himself in the forehead. Relax, I didn't hear it. Let's go do something. Kurt nodded stupidly.

Ekyt stopped dead. *My God.. This isn't happening. I can't pull her off..* Metal Shadow did that for him. He caught her just before she hit the ground. A fierce wind signaled the arrival of Sonic. Sonic.. Please, take her. I've gotta finish this. Sonic gave him a look. What? I know you're tough, but-.. Then trust me and get her medical attention. Ekyt turned slightly and rode Metal Shadow into a building as he tried to rush. Ekyt kicked at Metal's claws. He succeeded in snapping one set off. He fitted them over his own hand. He hit Metal Shadow a few times before he was thrown across the street into a lamp post. Eggman laughed hysterically. It was then Ekyt noticed a remote control. *So Metal Shadow didn't do that himself.. It was Eggman?!?!* Metal Shadow came flying in for the kill. Ekyt rolled aside and dodged as Metal Shadow cut through the lamp post. It fell and hit the metal monster on the head. Ekyt rolled toward Eggman. Eggman kicked him. Big mistake. Ekyt thrust the claws down through his foot, trapping Eggman to the spot. With Metal Shadow out of his control for the moment, Ekyt pounded on Eggman until he was pulled off by the real Shadow. Get lost kid. Now! Shadow ordered. Ekyt pushed him aside

and dove back toward Eggman. Chaos control! Ekyt swore as he was suspended in the air. He killed her! I m gonna rip him to shreds! And if you try to stop me.. Shadow sighed. I m not trying to stop you. Just hear me out. Your girlfriend could be dying. And it s likely. You should be with her. Besides, I want to show Metal Shadow that there s only *two* ultimate life forms. Ekyt backed off. Where is she. I ll chaos control you there.

Sonic was sitting in the hospital room with Linda. Ekyt landed in by the door and walked in. Is-is she? No. But.. Sonic started, but was spared by the doctor. You re Ekyt? Ekyt nodded. The doctor flipped through some papers. I m afraid she s.. her chances.. aren t good. Ekyt couldn t move, blink, or even breathe. When he did, he let his breath out in one big puff. Anything I can do? Ekyt asked. The Doctor looked thoughtful. She s lost a ton of blood. If we could get her some, it would at least give us some more time. Ekyt nodded. I see. Alright, strap me in, pump away. Well, you re blood isn t filtered, and, being different species, it s unlikely that it ll be a match.. That s a chance we re gonna take. Ekyt sat down and pulled off his coat. Just do it.

65 - Odd Alliances

Ekyt was awake during the whole thing. It hurt, but he just kept thinking *c mon, this is a life you re saving*. About a half-hour later, they had drained about of his blood. He felt weak as heck, but it was a good weak. (makes a ton of sense, doesn t it?) The doctor removed his mask. Well? Ekyt asked impatiently. Amazingly, your blood was a match. This will give us time to sort out the problem. Now, I- Dear God! Shadow s unconscious form flew in through the hospital window.

Tiffany and Kurt took some time to enjoy themselves. But Tiffany got a telepathic message that made her blood run cold. Kurt, Shadow isn t going to make it. Kurt was suddenly all business. He was, in actual years, thirteen now. But both he and Tiffany were immortal. She was an ultimate life form, and he was a living chaos emerald. But he felt older. Okay. You know where he is? he asked, making sure there were no pedestrians around. Yeah. Alright. Go for chaos control. It s not over yet.

Sonic raced over to Shadow. Still breathing. He reported. The doctor checked him out. He suffered multiple lacerations. He s going to need blood. Ekyt volunteered, but seeing as how he was weak, the doctor said no. That left Sonic. Get crackin doc. It was times like these that made Ekyt admire Sonic. His arch-nemesis, and he s saving his life.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) and Kurt landed where Eggman and Metal Shadow were. Eh? Oh, if it isn t little Kurt! And you ve brought a friend. Eggman taunted. You can go ahead and destroy them now. Eggman said, almost bored. Metal Shadow slashed at Kurt. Tactically, it was a good move. Take away Tiffany s ability to harness chaos, and it would be a more difficult fight. The shot hit Kurt. Tiffany tried contacting Shadow telepathically, to see if he was okay. She had a feeling, without the emerald, she might need the backup.

Shadow woke up mumbling. gotta..-help..-sis. Easy Shadow. You won t be able to stand up for a while. The doctor told him. Where is she Shadow? Ekyt asked. TV-stuh-station. He choked out. Alright. You just relax. She ll be fine. I ll make sure of it. Shadow, mostly unconscious, managed to realize that it was pretty noble of the guy to help him. Especially since Shadow had tried to do him in more than once. Hang on Shads. Sonic said with a thumbs up.

Ekyt raced out of the hospital. He bribed the ambulance driver to get him to the TV station real quick. Alright, hang on back there! Good. You re gonna have a patient too. Ekyt called up front as the siren wailed. If you say so. You know who? Green hedgehog. Thirteen years old, but he looks younger. How do you know him? the driver called back. He s my son in the future. The driver his a garbage can. Huh? Run that by me again? Don t ask, long story. Besides, stranger things have happened. He s adopted, if that helps. The driver couldn t even answer.

Metal Shadow advanced on Tiffany. She could handle her own, but the fact that this thing had taken her tough-as-nails brother down worried her. That, and the fact that no matter how many times she hit the thing, it kept coming. That s when the ambulance came flying through. It stopped. Ekyt stepped out. Metal Shadow was too busy going after Tiffany to notice the heart paddles in his hand. *I always wanted to do this*, Ekyt thought. CLEAR! Ekyt put the paddles on Metal Shadow and Tiffany picked up Kurt and

dodged away. She handed him over to the ambulance driver. Get him to the hospital quick! Ekyt was still weak from blood loss, but the heart paddles had made Metal Shadow smoke. Ekyt knew he couldn't pack enough of a punch.. but a certain ultimate life form could. All yours Tiff! he called. She grinned and jumped high, kicking Metal Shadow's head off. Ekyt was totally drained by the act.

Noooooo! Eggman shouted. My masterpiece! OH! You'll pay! He cursed and flew off in his hovercraft. Metal Shadow started to glow. Oh crap, run for it! Ekyt yelled out to Tiffany. He couldn't move. Metal Shadow's body exploded, raining fragments down on the TV Station parking lot. Ekyt still couldn't move, although he did jump with pain as what was a quill hit him in the ribs. Bruised for sure. He choked out. Tiffany had taken cover. You all right? she asked him, helping him up. I will be, once I get something on these ribs.

Linda woke up with a moan. The doctor at her bedside smiled gently. Glad to see you're awake. You'll be just fine. He told her. I'll be better once my stomach quits hurting. What the heck happened anyway? she asked groggily. Well, it seems this young man-, pointing at Ekyt, Donated a quarter of his blood, then went out and helped destroy the robot that put you in here. He said he'd explain the rest. Nurse, let him in!

Shadow woke up. How ya feeling pal? Sonic asked. Hmph. Shadow tried to turn away, but Sonic zipped over to the other side of the bed. Come on, drop the genocidal thing for a minute. Shadow looked at him, and answered. I'm fine. Thanks hedgehog. Sonic grinned. Better than I expected. He said simply. Then he called out. Tiff, he's okay! Shadow sat up. Tiffany? Tiffany walked in, followed by Kurt, whose arm was broken in two places. I'm fine. Thanks to Kurt and Ekyt. Ekyt? Yeah, he zapped your metal friend with heart paddles, and then got hurt in the explosion. Ignoring that, Shadow said glad you're safe. You too. Get some rest. She answered. Kurt nodded at Shadow and left the room.

Ekyt told Linda about what happened. And your blood was a match? she asked. Sort of. Since you're a guardian, you're kind of universal. Anyone's blood would have worked. I was just the one handy at the time. Ekyt told her. Uh huh. Now how 'bout you tell me why *you're* all bandaged up. Ekyt sighed and explained. Linda burst out laughing, hurting her stitches in the process. You zapped him with heart paddles? Where the heck did that come from? Ekyt shrugged. No idea.

They would all live to fight another day. Good thing too.

NEXT TIME IN SONIC X: NG STYLE!

Sonic races off in pursuit of a chaos emerald, with Amy in tow. The master emerald is under attack, and Knuckles is in for the fight of his life. The Hornets street gang decides to repay the beatings Ekyt, Linda, Tiffany, Shadow, and Kurt had given them. With four of the group injured, how are they gonna stand up to a tough-as-nails group of maniacs? Find out next time!

66 - Room Service

No Amy, you can't come, it's dangerous! Sonic said for the millionth time. So am I! Amy exclaimed. Howzat? You're a pink hedgehog in a red skirt! Amy Rose rolled her eyes. Sonic, Sonic, Sonic, you've forgotten my most important accessory! She hammered his foot. Can I come now? she asked sweetly as Sonic hobbled in pain. Fine, that hammer of yours might be useful. Time to go Chaos Emerald hunting. Of course, Sonic wasn't the only one in the market for some chaos..

Knuckles was just leaving. It seemed since he had arrived in Station Square, he had loosened up a bit. He'd never admit it, but it felt good. He stopped leaving when he heard footsteps on the other side. Rouge was tearing up the steps. Oh, it's just you Rouge. For a minute I was worried. Knuckles told her. Keep worrying Knux! She pointed. Soldiers. They looked like trees. With mean eyes. And guns. Lots of guns. Get away from the master emerald. Dark Oak will be pleased with our acquisition. One said. Dark Oak? Rouge said, eyes widening. That means..Metarex!

Ekyt, Linda, Kurt, and Shadow were all in the same hospital room. It was a converted apartment complex, so it was a good-size room. Ekyt was hurt from the battle and giving blood. Linda was hurt from being impaled on Metal Shadow's spiked hands. Kurt had been slashed across the stomach. Shadow had lost an incredible amount of blood from the fight with Metal Shadow. Kurt was unconscious. Bad timing. His injuries meant that Tiffany (shadowthe_hedgehog) didn't have an energy source to use her chaos powers. And given the crowd of thugs in the doorway, this wasn't going to be a quiet day of recovering. The Hornets were back in town, and had bad blood with all the injured parties. And boy, was the blood gonna spill!

Klein (ShyWanderer43) was just taking a walk around town. People had heard of him, and how he had destroyed the Hornets. They seemed genuinely surprised at how laid-back he was. But that was Klein's style. And it worked, just ask the gang members and robots that crossed his path. *Sure has been quiet* he thought. His turns took him down a back alley behind the hospital. A leg was sticking out of a dumpster. What the-? Klein opened the dumpster. A semi-conscious nurse and an out-cold doctor were in there. Klein woke them up, and managed to hear *Bees..Gang..Ow. So, the hornets are back.. But a hospital? They usually stay away from drugs..* As luck would have it, a newspaper was in a garbage can. Klein read the headline. The picture was of Ekyt zapping a robotic Shadow with heart paddles. The others' stories were of Ekyt and Sonic giving blood, the critical condition of Kurt, located at the Station Square hospital. Klein didn't need long to put two and two together. He powered up and raced up the stairs.

Sonic stopped short of a big ravine. He kicked a rock off. Thirty seconds later the rock hit bottom. Sonic whistled. That's a long drop. Amy looked over the edge and gasped. Sonic, look! There was a ton of diamonds in the ravine. But one was glowing a little too brightly. A chaos emerald! Hang on Ames! He picked her up and started running down the ravine. Eggman's hovercraft was showed up. Oh no you don't! Sonic ran faster. It was a race to the chaos emerald.

The four injured parties, plus Tiffany, were relaxing. Ekyt hated it. Hospitals in general for that matter. A knock came at the door. Room Service. A voice called out. They all exchanged glances. This isn't a

hotel, and no one ordered room service! Ekyt called back. Janitor. Ekyt shook his head. Shadow looked over at Ekyt. Hornets? The only one s dumb enough. He said quietly. Grabbing a food tray, he answered the door. HI! the lead Hornet shouted. Ekyt broke the tray over his head and slammed the door. The door broke in. Ekyt swung for the fences with his cane, hurting his leg in the process. The blood he had donated was still taking a toll on him, making him susceptible to injury. And he was the only one who could get out of bed. That meant he had to suck it up. Tiffany was unharmed, but didn't have a chaos emerald. Fortunately, help was on the way.

67 - Hospital Hijinx

Will you sit down before you get yourself killed?! Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) told Ekyt. There are a lot of them. Raising his voice so the Hornets could hear, he yelled Moron s travel in packs! Ekyt looked around desperately for a weapon. Tiffany could handle herself just fine in 50-1 combat, but Ekyt was, well, human. His searches found him a bed pan and an IV stand. Not ideal weapons. But they would have to do.

Klein ran up the stairs. Fully powered up, he scared the life out of the medical personnel. Of all people, the cafeteria lady got in his way. Waving her soup ladle, she yelled I don t know who or what you are young man, but we do *not* go frolicking through a hospital! Klein rolled his eyes. He didn t want to have to explain. Suddenly, the ceiling gave way to a group of three hornets. Klein looked at them. They looked at Klein. Then they ran screaming to the nearest window where they jumped out. It was only the second story. Luck for them. He kept moving, he had to get up to the top floor.

Knuckles and Rouge had their backs to the master emerald. No matter how many they wrecked, they were outnumbered. The only advantage they had was height. They could punt the soldiers down before they got near the emerald. Hey Red, any ideas? Rouge panted, exhausted. I can hold out here. See if you can get help. I hate to say it, but we re gonna need it! Knuckles caught another one with a right cross. Angrily, he kicked the lead and knocked them all down the altar like dominos. Rouge took off, hoping to find someone.

Ekyt flung the bedpan like a Frisbee, managing to bang it off the head off one of the Hornets pouring into the room. Tiffany would have laughed, but she was kind of busy fighting for all their lives. Ekyt had the IV stand and charged forward, in effect clothes-lining a ton of them. It seemed his blood was flowing better. Or the adrenaline kicked in. Whatever the case, he and Tiffany were wrecking the losers when screams started to come from the other end of the hall. And they got closer. Ekyt, you watch the others! Whatever it is, I ll handle it! Tiffany told him. Ekyt said right! and backed up toward the four beds. Linda was just waking up. Shadow had been awake, but was too badly hurt to move. Kurt was still unconscious.

Klein had to force his way toward the door. He gave these clowns a chance to get away without violence. If they didn t, well.. He opened the door and had to step back as a coffee pot came flying at him. Tiffany charged out, then stopped. Oops. Sorry Klein. Klein looked at the dented coffee pot and held it up with a This was almost me expression. Tiffany shrugged. I missed right? Klein stepped in. To her surprise, he uttered What happened here? Tiffany started to answer when there was a tapping sound at the window. It was Rouge, and she looked panicked.

Sonic ran faster, holding onto Amy while reaching with his other hand. He snatched the- emerald? It s a fake? Sonic threw it down. Hah-ha, of course it is! Eggman shouted. It s the diamonds I m after hedgehog! I own this spot and I can do what I please. Now go away or I ll call the cops! Sonic muttered, but picked Amy up and zipped away. Is he telling the truth Sonic? Amy asked. Yeah. But what he s going to do with those diamonds is a different story.

68 - Altar-ing fate

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) threw open the window. Rouge climbed in and dusted herself off. Look, me and Red are in trouble. *Big* trouble. We need help! Tiffany calmed her down and asked her to explain. There s no time! Gimme the kid, we re flying! Ekylt looked over at them. Take care of them. I ll handle whatever this is and come back. Rouge picked him up and flew toward the altar. From a distance, it looked like ants were climbing up it, but upon closer inspection.

Klein (ShyWanderer043) and Tiffany didn t do much in the way of talking. Kurt was awake, and Shadow could sit up. Linda was okay, but dizzy from blood loss and her ribs hurt. She had taken to sitting by the window. Suddenly she hit the deck. A rock came sailing through the window. Tiffany caught it whizzing by her head. She peered down. A group of kids, probably in high school, were throwing rocks, and yelling insults. Go home freaks! Down with Echidnas! and so on. Klein looked down. The kids didn t know him. Yet. Forming a few dirt clods (He didn t want to hurt them seriously), Klein offered a couple to Tiffany. They started throwing back, covering the pests in a muddy landslide. Klein added water and presto- mud-sculptures.

Rouge landed with Ekylt. Knuckles was still fighting, but clearly losing steam. Ekylt ran over to an advancing robot and slid down the altar, taking all of them out on one side. Ekylt climbed back up. There were three more sides, and there was no way Ekylt could pull that stunt again. Rouge had an idea. Good think. Ekylt was out of them. She explained her idea and Ekylt looked down. This is gonna hurt. He said. Just you kiddo. Just think of it as a favor to your old flame. (LOL! That cracked me up for no reason- Random NG fact 3! flame as in girlfriend only **Nothing perverted**, btw)

Linda walked down the hall and back. She couldn t sit still. She had things to tell Ekylt. Things that she had only just realized herself. Shadow was restless too. He wanted revenge. And it burned him up to owe anyone anything. Kurt was too groggy to think very much. He was glad everyone was safe. He didn t know what was going on at the Floating Island.

Rouge held onto Ekylt. He was poised beneath her (In flying mode- NG) like a cruise missile. Knuckles threw Rouge and, in effect, Ekylt, like a paper airplane. Ekylt turned into a human battering ram as he and Rouge mowed down the Metarex. It bruised them both up pretty good. Rouge landed and dropped Ekylt. Oops! I m sorry! I m just so tired.. Knuckles rushed over to help her. Ekylt sat up, massaging his back. I m fine, thanks. He muttered. It looked like he was walking home.

Linda managed to go get food for everyone. She was making good progress. Ekylt stumbled down the hall, tattered coat and bloodied face. And countless scratches. Everyone shook their heads. Another fight? Tiffany asked, already knowing the answer. Yup. Linda got up again. Let s get you bandaged up. Linda said. Ekylt didn t bother protesting. Thank God only his upper body was cut. No alcohol. Ekylt said. His shirt had to be cut off him because of all the blood. Linda knew how to dress wounds. What crazy stunt did you pull this time? Linda asked. *Like a concerned wife..* Ekylt thought. *Oh my God, I sounded like a wife!* Linda thought. Uh, never mind.

69 - Caution! (Egg)Man at work!

Eggman wandered around his control room. With the Egg Carrier out of commission (Thanks to Ekyt's "joyride" in previous issues), he was hiding out on a small island off the coast of Station Square. "On the one hand, I have Sonic and his friends, constantly foiling me. On the other hand, I have Rouge and Shadow, whose allegiances turn on a dime. The only wild card is that confused kid.. Chris Thorndyke is easy enough to deal with, but this kid is older.. more street smart.. a fighter. I need him on my side.. I need more information.."

Amy and Cream, along with Cheese, were watching TV, some mindless cartoon show. Chris and Tails were on the computer, up to something. Ella was in the kitchen, Mr. Tanaka had the day off. Linda, Kurt, and Shadow were still recovering. Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) and Klein (Shywanderer43) were patrolling the grounds outside. Sonic was in his tree outside, and Ekyt had climbed up on the roof. As he lay on the rough tiles, he wondered how different his life would have been if he had taken the path of least resistance. He could easily have stayed out of the way of these fights, he guessed. But he couldn't help himself. When a cry for help came, he answered.

HELP!

Sonic heard the same cry. Ekyt hurried down the ladder he had set up and raced toward the cry. Sonic would get their first, no doubt, but Ekyt could provide the back-up.

The orange echidna edged backwards. "I don't know where you got them funny-looking chao, sister, but hand 'em over." The thug motioned for his two goons to come forward. The echidna stepped in front of the chao. "You can't have them." She said in a fierce voice. "And are you gonna stop us?" he asked. His cohorts laughed. Sonic came rushing through, stepping in front of the girl. "You guys need a life! Robbing some poor girl! Really, such a cliché!" They all knew Sonic, and in the underground, there was a price on his head. The goons reared back with their clubs. A human hand grabbed the goons clubs, and turned the two in such a way they nailed each other. Ekyt, with all the grace of Espio, reached into his coat pocket and grabbed a glowing power ring. He threw it to Sonic in the same motion. Sonic caught it and spun into the robber full-tilt. Ekyt grabbed the man by the jacket and dropped him onto his two henchmen. Now to make sure the girl was okay. Sonic gasped. He knew that girl!

A dark object suddenly blocked the windows at the Thorndyke mansion. Amy and Cream looked up. Outside, from opposite windows, Tiffany and Klein came flying in. They were both unharmed. Klein powered himself up and shot balls of water from the pool at whatever it was that was attacking. Cream and Cheese hid under the couch, while Amy held her hammer high, ready to bash anything that moved.

"Tikal? How did you get here?" Sonic said, shocked to see her. "I had to Sonic. My world is falling apart! My father is dead, almost all the tribes are gone! The past is ruined! The future will be affected soon!" "Oh man! And.. now what?" The attack on the Thorndyke mansion was being shown in a TV store window. "We've gotta juice! We'll take her with us!" Ekyt nodded. "Grab on and hang on tight! We're hitting super Sonic speed!"

70 - The Scrolls...

It turned out that chaos monsters were attacking the Thorndyke mansion. Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog), Klein (ShyWanderer43), and Amy were the only one's fighting. Then Sonic came zooming in, jumping from enemy to enemy as they exploded. Ekyt brought up the rear with Tikal. "Tikal, can you get everyone in the basement? That's probably safest." Ekyt said quickly, looking across the battlefield. Tikal nodded. "Well, Amy and Cream anyway. If I know Tiffany and Klein, they're already dealing out some punishment."

Tiffany and Klein were, in fact, dealing out punishment. Kurt and Shadow were still hurt somewhat, but eventually jumped in. Sonic and Ekyt mopped up the rest outside. "We need to get to a safe place and figure out what's going on." Tiffany piped up, slightly winded from the fight. "The Master Emerald is safe." Tikal said, tears in her eyes. Ekyt looked at her. "We'll fix this Tikal."

They sat around the master emerald. "Tikal, what caused this?" Sonic asked. "It all started after the scrolls that foretold the death of a human warrior came true." The glanced all turned toward Ekyt. He sighed. "Yes, that was me." Silence met that. Suddenly angry, Ekyt got up and walked off. The others seemed to understand and continued to plan.

Ray, Ekyt's friend who was a bartender by trade, had opened up a new place. "Hey pal, I haven't seen you in ages!" Ray greeted Ekyt. One look at Ekyt's downcast face curbed Ray's enthusiasm. "You okay kid?" Ekyt shifted his gaze to his friend. The sixty-something, gray haired Italian from New York City had been Ekyt's friend and confidant for over a year, and he knew the young man was a special case. "Apparently I'm supposed to die." Ekyt said bitterly. Ray coughed, hurting his ribs (He was shot by Rouge and a robot version of Chris in previous issues -NG) slightly. "What?" Ekyt looked him in the eyes. "Apparently, by not sacrificing myself in the past, I've ruined the future." Ray gave him a quizzical look. Then he pulled out a twelve-gauge shotgun and fired. Ekyt ducked down. One of those monsters that had been attacking the Thorndyke mansion was bleeding. Ekyt took the gun from Ray and fired at close range, making sure the thing was ruined. "Kid...don't go doing anything crazy." Ray said with a grin. "I've got to do something...Especially if these stupid things keep attacking..." Ray gave him a hard look. "You're not gonna pull that death stuff again are ya?" Ekyt shook his head. "No. I'm not dying for a cause I'm not even sure about. And definitely not intentionally." Ekyt left, with Ray shaking his head. He reloaded the shotgun. There would probably be more of these things.

The group sat around the master emerald, still discussing what to do. Ekyt returned. "There's only one way to stop this." Tikal looked up. "How? All hope is lost..." "Not yet... I think it's time for another trip to the past."

71 - Ultimate Choice and Ultimate Chaos

Everyone agreed that they needed to go to the past. Ekyt stopped them. "No, I need to go to the past. If we all go, there won't be anybody here to take care of Station Square." That was an excellent point, everyone conceded. "Good. Tikal, send me back. I promise things will be cleared up." His voice was flat and solemn, leaving no one any room to question him. He slipped a note to Linda, who took it with a quick hug.

Ekyt landed in the past, and was immediately in the fray. Spears, bows and arrows, and swords were everywhere. He joined in the fighting. He noticed that all the fighting stopped, save for him. Anyone who had been helping him was now staring at him with hatred in their eyes. He continued to fight, driving the creatures back. The chief of the remaining warriors ordered his men to attack to wound. Ekyt barked out a few words in the language Tikal had taught him. He hadn't learned all of it, but enough to make sure he wasn't going to be killed immediately.

In the present time, the fight continued. Angel Island was now a haven for the people of Station Square. Knuckles didn't like it, but realized there was no alternative. He smiled in thought of his friend Klein (ShyWanderer43). It was obvious that Klein liked Amy, who liked Sonic, who didn't like her in the way she wanted to be liked, which she didn't like, which Klein almost liked in a guilty way, except he wasn't like that, which both Sonic and Amy liked. (Sorry, couldn't resist the stupid puns –NG) Knuckles winced at the thought of their first conversation. Klein was painfully shy. Being different did that. But he was a good guy, and for the damage he could do, they were all thankful for that.

One of the leaders spoke English, so he communicated with Ekyt. "By refusing to die, you endanger us all." He said, almost a question. "I don't lack in courage chief, but I don't lack in brains either. I'm not stupid. Throwing away a life is dumb. Now, tell me just where these things are coming from." The chief nodded. "The Master Emerald has become...possessed. It must be destroyed. But such is its power, the seven chaos emeralds must be united to do so." "And where are the emeralds?" Ekyt asked. "Inside of Chaos. The beast must be slain."

Knuckles sensed a disturbance from the emerald. "What the hell?" was all Linda, who was the chaos guardian, had time to say before she was sucked into the emerald, into the time where Ekyt was.

Ekyt was led to the master emerald. He was given a translator, who could somehow speak to the maniacal gem. The emerald communicated by drips of water.

Translator: It says "Have you come to sacrifice yourself?"

Ekyt: Ask why it's doing this.

Translator: "Because history is being re-written. And it must be vindicated."

Ekyt: Ask it what I need to do stop this, short of sacrificing myself.

Translator: "Defeat the beast Chaos Ultimate, which will destroy its minions. And then you must destroy the Emerald itself."

Ekyt: It doesn't want to live?

Translator: "It wants the tribe to survive."

At that moment, Linda popped out of thin air, landing on Ekyt in a way that looked wrong (I'm sorry, I'm just in a random mood tonight –NG). "How did you get here?" Ekyt said in disbelief. Before she could answer, she was absorbed INSIDE Chaos Ultimate.

Ekyt looked up at it. "Great. Now I've got to slay the beast...Dammit! Why does history drag her into it?" Not realizing that Ekyt was talking to himself, the translator asked the emerald. He tapped Ekyt on the shoulder. "The girl is destined to die, as are you. If you don't give up, you and her will live, but the world will be destroyed. If you do, you two will die and the world will be right." The translator was emotional while saying it. Ekyt looked up at his girlfriend. She was fighting inside chaos, when a shock ran through it's body, hurting her in the process. "I'm going with the first plan of kicking this thing to kingdom come and destroying that damn emerald. This just got personal!"

72 - Lose/Lose Situation

Ekyt watched in horror as soon as he finished his sentence. Linda was electrocuted and dropped. He raced to catch her, making a diving catch. Linda's Her eyes flickered, giving him a sign. I'll make them pay Linda.

Ekyt needed the seven chaos emeralds&He decided to mimick his tactic of jumping inside Chaos and taking them, throwing them out side the monstrosity. He got a running start, when a tentacle flashed out from Chaos, tripping him and dragging him into it s mouth. Ekyt stopped struggling. The tribe cheered, thinking the human was finally going to sacrifice himself.

Ekyt jumped down the monster s throat. He touched the seven chaos emeralds. Chaos, in a last ditch attempt to stop him, send a shock through it s own body. As Ekyt gathered the emeralds, he was shocked before their power could fully kick in. The emeralds flew from Chaos' body, destroying it, but also hurting Ekyt, though the emeralds had taken some of the blow.

Linda sat up and tried to shake the cobwebs. She had been shocked with a 100,000 volt taser before, and this was about the same. She saw the seven chaos emeralds coming toward her. She heard Ekyt yell Put them in front of the Master Emerald! Destroy it. Aghhhh! A member of the tribe had thrown a spear at him. Ekyt ducked, but it hit his chest slightly. Maybe it was the electric shock, maybe it was the adrenaline, but Ekyt grabbed the spear and snapped the sharp edge off. He chased down the echidna who had thrown the spear and cracked him across the back, and then across the leg. Don't do that again.

Linda ran up to the Master Emerald, chaos emeralds in hand. It glowed an angry red. Hundreds of angry-looking chao surrounded her. Ekyt ran toward her, but the chao formed a wall. One bit him. He picked it up gently and held it eye level. It shook and fainted. Ekyt put it down gently, as the chao parted. Linda was hesitating. She fell to her knees, her hands to her head. Ekyt got down next to her. What happened?! Are you okay? He asked urgently. I-I can't do it! If I destroy it, all hope is lost for the world. Ekyt gulped. He took the emeralds. Don't do it! she called out. Ekyt looked at her with remorse. I have to. If we don't destroy it, the world is in danger, despite what it says. She grabbed his pant leg. I-if you do it, I'll-& She put her hands to her head again, obviously in pain. I'll break up with you! Ekyt hadn't expected that. He had a choice. Save the world? Or his love life? He knew his decision. He set the emeralds down, and reared back with his staff, destroying the Master Emerald.

He grabbed one of the emeralds. Linda, you've got to use Chaos Control! Hurry! he said urgently. No. she said, not sure why. Ekyt bowed his head. He hoped he could pull it off. CHAOS CONTROL! he shouted. The familiar energy took the two back to the present time.

NEXT ISSUE: UH-OH, TROUBLE IN PARADISE! WHAT EFFECT WILL THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MASTER EMERALD HAVE ON THE WORLD? AND CAN THINGS EVER BE THE SAME BETWEEN LINDA AND EKYT?

73 - Yesterday's too Long Ago

Ekyt landed next to Linda, immediately knowing he had messed up. Not that he had a choice in the matter. The shattered Master Emerald was causing a panic. Ekyt pushed through the crowd and put the Chaos Emerald he had used in its place, which stopped the island from plummeting. The panic ceased. Knuckles marched up to Ekyt.

"What did you do to the Master Emerald?!" he demanded. "It was either destroy it, or let Tikal's home world get destroyed." "You had no right to do that!" Knuckles exclaimed. "If taking the brunt for this means saving the planet, it's a sacrifice I'd gladly make." He watched Linda stomp away, wondering if THAT was a sacrifice he could handle.

Amy studied Klein (ShyWanderer43). She was strangely attracted to him. Not like Sonic would miss her. "Hi Klein!" she said brightly. Klein turned pale. "Hi." He choked out. Amy gently took his hand and led him toward Station Square, a confused, but pleased Klein trailing her.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) asked Ekyt what happened. "Chaos attack. I destroyed it and gave the emeralds to Linda. She said she couldn't destroy the master emerald, and that if I did, she'd break up with me." Tiffany winced as he continued. "I had no choice. It was either her or the world. She means the world to me, but I guess this is one bullet I have to take for the common good." Tiffany admired him for doing that. But in Ekyt's mind, he might have saved the world, but was it worth it? A world where him and Linda weren't together? As he laid to go to sleep that night, the image tortured him.

Dream Sequence:

Ekyt was bound in chains. If he moved, a chandelier of spikes would come down on either side of him. To one side was the Master Emerald. On the other side was a what looked like a globe. "Ekyt, you have to protect the emerald." Linda pleaded. She held his chains, despite being the one doing the begging. "I can't Linda." Linda let go of his chains and sobbed as he did the only thing he could: He moved to his right, causing the spikes to come down on the emerald, shattering it. He bowed his, accepting his fate. Linda stared at him, her face stern. "Well, we can't be together. I hope saving the world was worth it." She made a move to kiss him, but instead slapped him, and then slammed a heavy prison door in his face. The shattered emerald piece each held a memory. Most of them held a picture of Linda. The magically grouped together and aimed at Ekyt like missiles, before launching themselves at him. Ekyt was in chains, defenseless, as they hit him, piercing his skin.

End Sequence.

Ekyt sat up, rubbing his face where the emerald shards had hit him. Only they hadn't. But the thing with Linda...that was real. He thought about the dream, wondering if he made the right choice, all the while knowing he did.

No matter how painful it was to him.

74 - Making a Fool of History

Linda shot again, piercing the target through the forehead. "Take it easy Linda." Her supervisor, Carl, was telling her. "You're doing a great job. But...is something wrong?" Linda shot again, her finger yanking the trigger, rather than pulling it. "Carl, it's been great here, but is it all right if I go it alone? I don't want a squad. I need some time to myself." Carl shook his head. "I can't do that." Linda pulled off her badge. "Okay, I quit then." She stomped off, furious with everyone and everything.

"The chaos emerald can handle the master emerald's job." Knuckles was telling Ekyt. He wasn't angry, now that he knew the full story. "Knux, do you know what Linda got upset about? I did what I had to do." Knuckles flinched, which Ekyt picked up on. Knuckles didn't bother to lie. "Well, when her and I were together, she told me about her memories of the Floating Island. She was born here, when the Island was on it's last legs as a tribe. When she returned, nothing was like she remembered it. Except the Master Emerald. So, I guess she thinks you destroyed the last link to her past, whether you had a choice or not." Ekyt cursed to himself. "I guess I didn't have a choice. But still...Knux, how much more is the world going to ask of me?" Knuckles was surprised by Ekyt's sudden willingness to talk. "What do you mean?" Knuckles asked carefully. "I mean, I'm always fighting myself. In my mind, one half of me wants to throw in the towel and give in to the anxieties that I have to suffer every day. The other half wants to be a hero. It's never an easy choice. But I make the only one I can. And then there's the fact that if everyone in the Station Square Jail were free, they would come after me. And you know, I wonder if I belong here... I know I would never have made it where you come from. Heck, I'm not making it here. But I can't leave either. Like you guard the Master- Chaos Emerald, I feel like I guard the city. But I'm not necessary, and I know it. The city did fine before I got here, and would probably continue if I left." Knuckles really had no idea what to say.

"Gimme your money!" Some toothless thug was threatening Linda. "You picked the wrong day bozo. Take a hike before I have to hurt you." The thug chuckled. "Oh, you slay me! I'd like to see you try!" "Tut-tut, where are your manners?" Ekyt swung off the fire escape and onto the thug. "Threatening a lady? I should tell your mother! And as I recall, she's in jail. Time for a family reunion." Ekyt threw the man into the police station, dragging him to a cell which one officer held open. "Thanks Rob. See you tomorrow." Ekyt said in a falsely chipper voice, tossing the thug inside. "Aye, keep 'em coming." Ekyt nodded with a false smile. He walked back outside, to find Linda...staring at him. Oh boy. The look she was giving him was usually reserved for criminals. "Look, I get what happened Linda. You know I wouldn't intentionally hurt you. I had no choice. I hope you can understand that." Ekyt said. "The last link to the life I once knew...and probably my only hope to get home. You destroyed it." "If I didn't you wouldn't have a home to go to! If you hate me, I deserve it. I'll always feel guilty." Linda didn't answer. It was dark now, and the rain and streetlights made the meeting look like a 1920's film. Ekyt bowed his head and dropped something at her feet before walking off.

"Hmm?" Ray looked up, expecting see the rowdy bunch that usually inhabited his bar come in through the door. "Only a crazy person would come out in this weather." Ray said with a grin. "You got that right." Ekyt said flatly. Ray immediately dispensed with the jokes. "Hey, you alright?" Ekyt sucked his breath in. "Well, my girlfriend just broke up with me, I can't go home (He kind of lives nowhere. If he stayed in one place, the criminals he busted would find him -NG)... So, yeah, no worse than usual." Ekyt

said, eyebrow's raised. "You know, usually when the depressed guys come in here, they want alcohol. Drinkin' age here is eighteen, yet I've never seen you touch the stuff." Ray said with a small smile. "I grew up with stories of two grandfather's dying because of the way they drank. I swore I wouldn't touch the stuff. Nothing personal." Ekyt explained. "Between you and me, I stopped drinking after the liver transplant." Ray chuckles. "A bartender and his biggest customer, and neither one will drink a drop. That's gotta be a first." Ekyt laughed once, then turned as the door opened again...

75 - Nothing to Lose

A rowdy looking gang walked into the bar, staring down the solitary human sitting at the counter. "That's him alright!" one yelled, and the others agreed. Ekyt turned around slowly. "Hmm? Do I know you?" he asked, intentionally being irritating. "Yeah, I'm the guy whut ya threw in da slammer." "You'll have to be more specific, moron, there are a lot of you I've "Thrown in da slammer." Ekyt didn't care about the violence. No Linda...

"You little punk! We'se gonna tear you apart." Ekyt calmly sipped his drink. "Really. I didn't happen the first time, when I busted you. If you want round two, go for it. Just keep in mind, I have nothing to lose." The man marched menacingly forward. Ekyt tossed his drink over his shoulder, hitting the man and spreading ice cubes on the floor. Four of the thugs went down. That left about twenty more. Ekyt picked up the bar stools, one by one, and heaved them at the criminals. One threw a beer bottle, which hit Ekyt in the face, shattering. Blood streamed down his face, but Ekyt was too consumed by anger to even notice. Instead, he jumped over the bar. "Ray, how long until the cops come?" Ekyt asked. "Ten minutes." Ray answered. "That's not good. Alright. Put the damage on my tab." Ray chuckled at that.

Linda reached down to pick up what Ekyt had dropped. It was a piece of the master emerald, with a note. The note simply read "I'm sorry. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me; I was only doing what needed to be done. If not, then I hope you can hate me for the right reasons." She clutched the emerald shard, not knowing whether she could forgive him or not.

Amy walked around Station Square with Klein, who was silent except for answering her questions. Who knew, he could save the world, but not talk to a girl? Did that even make sense?

Ekyt tipped over a golf arcade game, taking four goons out of the picture. Only twenty left. Ekyt tipped over a table and rolled it at the crooks, forcing them to move out of the way. He steamrolled five before one got a hand on him. Ekyt grabbed a decorative hockey helmet off the wall and hit him with it, before throwing the helmet. Down to eighteen after the helmet broke one of their noses.

Linda and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) walked down the sidewalk, talking. Flash (Flashthehedgehog) caught up to them. "I just heard about this. What is going on?" Flash asked, exasperated. "He destroyed the last link to my childhood...I can't forgive him for that." "He had no choice Linda, you know that. Just wait until the bitterness goes away. You're entitled to be bitter, but imagine how HE feels!" Tiffany told her. "Yeah. That's be a heckuva choice to have to make." Flash agreed. They were walking by the bar when a huge man flew out the window. The three looked at each other and said as one: "Ekyt!"

They kicked open the doors to find one man stirring. Ekyt was crouched, focused on the man. He ran across the room and put his full body weight into him. He picked up another, semi-conscious man and threw him across the room. One last man reached for a chair. Ekyt watched, almost cruelly, before stepping on his arm. "You think you're gonna get that chair? Uh-uh-uh!" Ekyt threw him onto the bar. Comically, he slid him down the bar, through the glasses and bottles that were still on it, before dropping him off the bar. Seemingly bored, he ducked behind the bar, checking on Ray. "I would've fought kid."

"I know Ray. But you just got out of the hospital, try to stay out a little longer." Ekyt said, grinning. "You're gonna need stitches for that cut." Ray pointed to where the bottle had hit him. "Do you have any tape?" Ekyt asked. Ray pointed to a drawer. Ekyt dumped some water on the cut and then taped it closed. "The police will be here soon. Do you want me to stick around?" Ekyt asked. Ray chuckled. "No. I'll tell the police the vigilante wrecked them. Like they'd believe an old man like me could pull it off." Ekyt smiled. "Thanks Ray. See you later."

Ekyt stopped, seeing the three stunned figures in the doorway. He stared back, not saying a word. "Was that necessary?" Tiffany asked. "Yup." Ekyt said simply. Not unkindly, just quick. "Where the heck did these guys come from?" Flash asked in wonder. "Jailbreak." Ekyt said, again very quickly. "If you'll pardon me, I need to go find a new place to live." One man moved by the door. Ekyt kicked him, watching dispassionately as a tooth hit his shoe.

"Okay, that's not normal for him." Linda said, distressed by his actions. "Well, I'm thinking he was under so much stress, and the break-up kind of brought it to the surface." Tiffany pointed out. "It exploded from the surface. These guys will be lucky if they can ever move again." Flash mentioned, looking down at the twenty thugs that littered the floor. "I know that was self defense...but good Lord! This is carnage!" Linda exclaimed. Ray looked over to her. "I don't know the full story, but he said something about "Not having anything to lose." That made them all think.

76 - Hospital Visit

Ekyt needed a distraction. But he also needed to help people. He went to the hospital. He got rid of the mask, and asked who needed a visitor. "Well, we have a boy, about ten years old, he had a stroke. I don't know if he'll ever walk again. His Mother died giving birth, and his father just skipped town. The poor kid. He's got blonde hair, cut short, green eyes, and an inquisitive look." Ekyt thanked the nurse and walked to the room.

Greg Hillman sat in his hospital bed. He barely spoke beyond thanking the nurses for bringing food. A knock came at the door. "Come in." He said quietly, expecting the nurse to bring dinner. Instead, a guy- Greg couldn't tell the age- wearing a trench coat walked in. "You're Greg? I'm Ekyt. Nice to meet you." "Who are you?" Greg asked with childhood innocence. "Good question. I'm just someone who came to visit. I don't know what that means to you, but" "I never get visitors. How come you came?" Greg asked. "Are you coming to take me away?" Ekyt smiled. "No. I'm just...well, I could be a friend. You got a bad hand dealt to you." Greg rolled his eyes. "Tell me about it. I'd shake your hand, but I can't move my left leg." "It's okay. I heard your story. You're a tough kid." "Thanks. But I have no choice. Either I'm tough, or I'm dead." Ekyt cast him a sad glance. "You think the same way I do. I'll tell you a secret- well, not much of one anymore, I guess- I'm the vigilante that..."

"His frustration must have hit the boiling point. Although, if I know him, he was only doing what was necessary." Linda was thinking out loud. Flash (Flashthehedghehog) and Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) agreed. Ray piped up. "You know, something really got to him. I don't know what. But he mentioned something about the hospital to me."

"...That was you? I saw that on TV! I can't believe all those guys attacked you!" "It happens a lot. I don't get thrills from doing it." Greg sat up, a little more alert. "Hey, what's the matter with your leg?" he pointed at Ekyt's leg. "In a fight, you get hurt. One goon hit me in the leg. That's why I've got a cane. It's great for self defense though." Greg let his face drop. "They don't think I'll walk again, do they?" Ekyt was going to lie, but stopped. "How did you know?" "They baby me. And they talked about finding me a foster home. I don't want to go. But it's selfish to stay here." Greg cried a little while he spoke. "I have no one. But they don't take me seriously! If I tell them I want to walk, they smile and tell me how "brave" I am. I hate that! I know they're just being nice. But I can do it!" Ekyt gave him a rare smile. He looked around the glass room. It was nice, as hospital rooms went, but who would want to live here?

Linda looked through the glass. She was surprised to see Ekyt talking to the patient. Even amid her hatred, she could admire him for trying to help someone else. Flash and Tiffany exchanged glances; they knew she was still in love with him.

"Is being a vigilante cool?" Greg asked, sitting up against the headboard. "Kind of. I can't go visit my parents, I'd put them in danger. I can't go out in public without looking over my shoulder. And most people see me and run the opposite direction." "That sucks!" Greg exclaimed. "I used to have a girlfriend, but that...didn't work. But you know, there's one positive that makes it all worth while." "What's that?" "The satisfaction I get from helping people."

"I believe you." Ekyt said. "You'll be walking again." Greg looked up at him, his ten-year-old eyes radiating curiosity. "Why do you think so? You're not a doctor." "One tough guy to another, you can handle it. I've got to go." "Will you be back?" Ekyt stopped, his hand on the door. "If you like." "Sure!" "Then I'll be back...wait." Ekyt looked around. His cane was collapsible. He folded it up, and handed it to the kid in the hospital bed. "To help you walk. See you later." Greg looked at the cane fondly while Ekyt limped from the room. As soon as he was out of site, he let his shoulders slump. This was hard.

Linda walked up to him. "That was nice of you." She said quietly. "Thanks." After what seemed like a staring contest, Ekyt limped away. Both of them were tossing their feelings around. Difficult to say the least.

77 - Amazing and Depressing

"I'm tired of this. I'll stick around here until that kid can walk. Then I'm outta here." Sonic looked over at Ekyt. "Leaving? Look, just because Linda's a little confused, you don't have to go. Station Square is safer now." "I don't know Sonic. There's a good number of heroes here." "And when we get back to our planet, you'll be the only one left!" "It won't do me any good then. Linda will go back with you, and you'll battle on like nothing ever happened." Sonic admitted he had a point. "You'll work it out man."

"Greg, are you done?" Nurse Lodge asked. "Yes ma'am. Thank you." "Well, you're cheerful today! That visit did you good!" "He believes I can do it. He told me that us tough guys have to stick together." The nurse smiled at him.

Ekyt limped in. "Excuse me, sir!" The nurse came running up. "Thank you for cheering that boy up. He hasn't said so much to me in ages." Ekyt smiled solemnly. "I'm glad it helped him. I just told him what I'm sure everyone says: He'll walk again." The nurse frowned. "Please, don't get his hopes up. We promised his parents would come back. I don't think he can stand another let down."

"Linda, c'mon, you're miserable. Take him back." Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) pleaded. "I can't. He destroyed the last link to my old life." "He had no choice." Flash (Flashthehedgehog) pointed out. "Flash, would you go get us some drinks?" "Why me?" "Because this is gonna be girl talk and" "GONE!"

"Hey Greg, how're you doing man?" Ekyt asked. "I'm gonna walk." Greg said. "Good news from the doctor?" "No, just a gut feeling." Greg said with a broad smile. "I can make it up to the door! A week ago, I couldn't get out of bed!" Greg got up, using the cane Ekyt had given him. He made it to the door. "Tag!" He limped back to bed, but got up instantly. "Ekyt...there's no pain...but... I...I can feel my leg again!" Ekyt was amazed. "You can?" "Yeah! Get a doctor!" Ekyt nodded. "Hold on man, got a little something for ya." Ekyt handed him a package. "Open it later. Let me get that doctor."

"Listen, if you didn't love him, you wouldn't be so miserable." Tiffany pointed out. "I just can't forgive him." "He didn't do it maliciously. He saved the world! Did you think that maybe, if he hadn't done what he did, NONE of us would be here." Linda stopped stirring her drink. "I know. It's selfish. But I can't let go... I should get someone like me anyway. When I go back to our home world, he can't come." "Do you honestly believe he wouldn't?" Tiffany asked her. "Look, all I know is that you've got think this through."

Doctor Kornfield and Doctor Holmes checked the boy's leg. "It's amazing...Not unheard of, but rare." Kornfield said, amazed. Holmes was the more encouraging of the two. "You're a tough kid Greg. I'm happy for you. We'll find you a home, and you can go." He gave Greg a high five and left, amazed. "It's thanks to you Ekyt. You're a hero." No I'm not." "I had given up. I was never going to get out of here. You gave me hope." Ekyt smiled. "I do what I can. Hey, do you know anything about girls?" Ekyt asked, his face twisted. "Sure! When I was in school, I had a great girlfriend!" He handed Ekyt a picture of a young redhead in a white and blue blouse and a jean skirt. "Lucky!" Ekyt said. It reminded him of Linda. "So what's your trouble?" Greg asked. "If you had a choice between saving the world, and

keeping your girlfriend, what would you do?" Ekyt asked. He looked out the window; it was a nice day, few clouds and a great amount of sunshine. "I'd save the world." Greg said instantly. "That was quick! Why?" "Well, if there's no world for us to live in what's the point of saving just her?" Ekyt shook his head. "I've got a picture of my girlfriend...well, ex, I guess. Would you believe that I had to make the same choice I just described to you? She didn't take it well. Not that I blame her..." Ekyt handed him a picture. Greg raised an eyebrow. "Geez, chicks dig the vigilantes?" Ekyt almost cried when he said that, it was hilarious coming from a ten year old. "No, they dig the pathetic underdogs, like me. Well, she did."

A doctor walked in. "Greg, we have a home for you! Come and meet your family!" Ekyt watched from a distance as a middle-aged couple came in. The lady had blonde hair and was dressed to the nine's. The man looked like a hard worker, a flannel shirt and khakis. Greg walked over to them, the doctor commenting on his amazing recovery. Greg whispered something to the parents, who smiled and nodded. "You get packed up while we talk to him."

The doctor motioned for Ekyt to follow them. The parents introduced themselves as "Chris and Donna." "Greg was just saying how much you've done for him, visiting him. And, well, we talked about it, and we'd like you to be his Godfather." Donna said. "And before you say it, we know who you are, your past, and it's fine. You've got a good heart." Chris said. "I appreciate that. I'd be honored." Ekyt said. "Thank you. We'll tell Greg." "I gave him my address, in that package." Ekyt said. "Oh good. Thank you again." Ekyt nodded.

Good thing he was able to make someone else's life better. He wasn't doing his own any favors.

Sonic was chilling. With Eggman gone, there wasn't much to do. He spotted something in the distance. "Huh?" He got up. "I'm gonna check this out."

Eggman laughed. "That's it hedgehog...race right into my trap..."

78 - Cheesy Rider

“Ray, how’s the new hotel coming?” Ekyt asked. Ray glanced over the bar. “Kid, are you a miracle worker?” Ekyt laughed. “Hardly. A miracle worker could keep a girl.” “Point taken, but how many guys out there inspire a kid to walk?” “He did it, not me. I just happened to be there.” Ray chuckled. “To answer your question, the hotel’s coming along great.” “Cool. How much for a long-term guest?” Ekyt asked, his voice flat. “You? Tell you what, double as my security guard, no charge.” “Deal.”

Linda was mentally absent from the rest of the world. That became apparent when she walked into a kid leaving his high school. “Sorry.” She muttered. The kid was an average-looking fifteen year old, dressed in jeans and a black “Limp Bizkit” shirt. He had a leather trench coat on, and his hair was gelled; he looked like a biker. “Can I give you a ride home?” he asked, sounding genuinely nice. “That’s be nice. What’s your name?” Linda asked. “I’m Jeff. And you are?” “Linda.” “Charmed. Hold on.” He swung on the bike and kicked it.

Klein (ShyWanderer43) and Amy were just crossing the street when the bike roared by. The one driving it laughed. “Hey, pedestrians have the right of way jerk!” Amy yelled. Klein looked at the bike mildly, before he forced a section of road to stop it. “Road rage doesn’t suit you baby boy.” Amy taunted. Having Klein around made her feel brave.

Ekyt sat at the desk, looking out the window. “Excuse me sir.” A ticked-off looking woman was giving Ekyt a look. “Can I help you?” “I certainly hope so. I can’t get my car out because of that section of road.” “I can give you the phone number for the highway department and- wait. Section of road?” “Yes, it’s like a mountain. Please do something about it. And don’t tell me you can’t...HEY!” Ekyt pushed past her. That sounded like Klein’s work, and since he wasn’t the type to flash his powers around, that meant trouble.

“They’ve got a point.” Linda said (Referring to Amy.) “Hey doll face, let me handle this. HEY YOU FREAK! YOU WANNA TRY THAT AGAIN?” Klein was about to do just that, but Amy stopped him. “No, let him be. He’s an idiot.”

Ekyt walked out, striding toward the group. The mask was back on his face. A new one, in fact. A solid black one. “Is something wrong?” he said in a growl. “Yeah, this freak just blew up the road for no reason!” “Hah! You almost ran us down, you brain-dead moron!” Amy shouted back. Klein and Linda shook their heads, embarrassed by this. “He’s not a freak. And if he put that road in front of you, he had a good reason.” “Screw you, sideshow! Me and this echidna babe are going cruising!” Ekyt grabbed him by the coat. “No. You’re gonna sit around and wait for the cops. And you’re gonna behave yourself.” Ekyt snarled. Jeff grabbed Ekyt by the coat. “Forget it. And if you’re gonna stop me...” “I am. Now relax.” Jeff pushed Ekyt. Linda winced. “Jeff, you shouldn’t do that...” “Mind your own business toots. I got this!” He threw a punch at Ekyt. Ekyt jumped and grabbed onto the lamp post, swing around it and down behind him. “I don’t want to have to fight you...” Another swing, another miss. “Stand still, you carnival sideshow!” His next punch landed. This kid had been in fights before, because the punch was a solid blow to the jaw. Blood dripped out from under the mask. It barely registered as he flew by Linda, delivering a series of kicks. Low, middle high. Ekyt balanced effortlessly. He blocked a punch with

his forearm, and retaliated with an elbow, which narrowly missed. The foot that followed up forced Ekyt to spin to the side, but that gave him momentum to kick. The other guy hit the dirt, going for a sweep on Ekyt's legs.

The fight was raging when Linda saw the back of Jeff's jacket. He was a Hornet. (Gang member- NG) No wonder he could fight...and Ekyt was in trouble, because that guy had a knife, if not a gun.

Ekyt had his back against the wall. Jeff flicked his switchblade. "End o' the line. I'm gonna score some big points for taking you down. The boss has been waiting for this for a long time." Suddenly, the thug collapsed after a sharp "Crack!" sound was heard. Linda was rubbing her eyes. Ekyt thought it was her. Instead, he was looking into Greg's grinning face. "You were right! Canes are great for self-defense!"

79 - The Beast Awakens

Rage, Fear, and Spike were the three members of the Hornets with the power to convince the head boss to do the full frontal assault. "You see, if we flood the city now, it's ours."

Linda, pressed against the wall, heard it all. There was only one person would believe her straight-out. She hated to go to him, though. She had heard rumors that he had lost touch when she broke up with him. But there was no choice. Sonic was helping Knuckles on Angel Island, as was Tails.

Ekyt stood on the closed overpass. It was almost midnight. (bold is Ekyt thinking) **It's been a week since the last time we met...Greg is doing great. I said I'd leave when he could walk. I didn't give any consideration as to where. If only the town could leave and I could stay...** Hearing a noise behind him, Ekyt spun to face his attacked, only to find a frazzled Linda. "We've got to talk...it's an emergency."

Ekyt knew when she said "emergency," she wasn't referring to their relationship. She spoke in hushed tones, telling him what she had heard. It was daybreak when she was finished. She saw that his eyes bore considerable pain; pain that he had tried to keep hidden. "I'll handle it. Just get everyone out of here." "Out of the area?" "No. Out of the city. This is something I have to do." "They'll kill you..." "I gave up everything except life to save the world...I'm going to handle this alone." He swept away from her.

"He's being stupid!" Linda told Tiffany and Flash (Shadowthe_hedgehog and Flashthehedgehog, respectively.) in an urgent voice. "If it's personal, we let him handle it..." Tiffany said, holding up a hand to ward off Linda's argument. "UNTIL he can't handle himself...then we'll step in." Flash nodded his agreement. "He's a tough cookie. Strange, but tough. I heard he's crazy." Flash made a face. Tiffany shot him a look. "You know perfectly well he isn't! I've got to find Kurt, he can help we warn the others."

Station Square was evacuated. The Hornets, thinking they had won, walked the streets. Ekyt stood alone at the corner of Eastman and Otis. The street light shining on him made him scarier. The gang stopped. They numbered a hundred even in Station Square. The thought that one guy was going to take them down was laughable.

Ekyt stared them down. His heart hurt. He was fighting for nothing other than the fact it was the right thing to do. He warily raised his staff. The gang laughed and out came the pipes and bats. Ekyt, seemingly nonplussed, stared ahead at them. He walked forward slowly.

The two forces clashed. Ekyt's staff had the longest reach, so he kept them at bay. He was hit with a pipe early. He stared at the person who through it. "He's not human!" "Why didn't he go down?!" Ekyt kept walking forward, ignoring it. The thoughts came back to him. **She dumped you because you saved the world...you're not accepted or respected...Isn't it time you moved on?...Quitter...Loser...Freak...** Ekyt burst forward, furiously attacking. Ten members went down. Then twenty. Then forty. It seemed that the anger had awakened something dark inside him. That pipe should

have hurt more...

"My God..." Linda muttered. She had caused this. And yet, she couldn't forgive him. She loved him, but she couldn't get over what he had done, no matter what was hanging in the balance. She watched as the pipe hit him in the head. A trickle of blood was the only thing that showed that he might have felt it.

Kick, punch, elbow, all in rapid fire succession. His staff blocked two strikes while his leg flashed out at another. He seemed tireless...But the caring just wasn't there. It occurred to him that caring was what was holding him back. By not caring about anyone or anything, he could demolish the opposition without a second thought...

80 - If I Fell...

The Hornets looked at each other, then at Ekyt. He attacked furiously, not stopping to see the damage left in his wake.

Klein (ShyWanderer43) and Amy looked on silently. Finally, Klein surprised everyone by talking: "That's not like him, is it?" It wasn't really a question. Linda shook her head. "Something's happened..."

Ekylt smiled cruelly as he walked at the last three remaining upright. He pulled his mask off, revealing a black eye, a cut lip, and a nice cut under his other eye that was bleeding pretty good. "You think this is your town? Wise up. You're as welcome here as I am." One made the mistake of attacking. Ekylt picked the man up off his feet and pushed him against a wall. "Don't make the mistake your friends did chief." Ekylt let him drop. "You get your gang out of here, or you'll be eating through a straw, on all fours, get my point?" Apparently he did, though he sputtered incoherently. "Fall back! Go! Out of the city! You heard the man...the NICE man!"

A cheer rose from the crowd. Happy, Linda trotted toward him, but he was gone-? "What the...Where did he go?" Linda pondered that while Kurt, Tiffany, Flash, and even Shadow chased the bad guys out of town. Frowning, Linda picked up the mask he had dropped, wincing at the amount of blood stuck to it.

Ekylt dropped into the sewers, following the route he knew to get back to his hotel room. He climbed up a maintenance tube and kicked out the heating vent in his room. He tossed his clothes aside and laid fresh ones out. He walked into his bathroom and turned the water on for the tub. He couldn't stand up any more.

Linda kicked open the door to his room and spotted his discarded clothes. She knocked on the bathroom door. "You in there?" Silence. "C'mon..." Silence. "I'll call the cops."

Ekylt climbed down the vent, jumping the last couple of feet. He slid his staff into his bag, collapsing it. He was standing in an abandoned part of the sewer system. He would have stayed, but the subway was too close. Instead, he took a few weapons and a change of clothes out of his bag and stowed it away behind a loose couple of bricks.

Linda charged the door, and saw the heating vent was ajar. Cursing, she leapt down it. She landed, and saw...nothing. Not a hint he had been here. How did he do that? And why?

Tiffany and Kurt were slumping in their seats, exhausted from chasing the hornets out of town. "HOOO-LEEEE!" Kurt jumped up on the table. "What?" Tiffany saw the manhole cover below her was ajar. She kicked at it. "OW!" a familiar voice said, followed by a curse. Ekylt pulled himself up, a bump on his forehead. "Pardon me." He said slowly, not breaking eye contact with either of them. He then found the nearest fire escape and climbed it, ducking behind chimneys and over the roof tops. Tiffany turned to Kurt. "Don't say it." Kurt said. Tiffany grinned.

Linda came up through the manhole cover next. Tiffany pointed at the rooftops. Linda sighed angrily and jumped up. "If she didn't love him, she wouldn't be chasing him across the city." Tiffany muttered.

Ekylt leapt across one more gap. He stopped momentarily. He was hidden behind a billboard. He hid a spare staff under a loose piece of wood. Then he looked sadly at the city and jumped off the billboard, hitting the ground running. He zig-zagged into the forest and climbed a tree. He put his whole bag up there. At the bottom, Ekylt used a rock to make a small "T" on the tree.

Linda followed his foot prints to find a- tree? First a billboard, then a tree?" She kicked the tree angrily. A sai (Martial arts weapon) fell from the tree, sticking in the soil near her feet. "What is he doing?" she saw a gray canvas bag hanging from a limb. "He's starting to scare me..."

Flash (Flashthehedgehog) wandered by. "Geez, you look lower than a snake's belly!" he said with a jovial flick of his hat. (I'd like to take the opportunity to mention Flash's incredible story: <http://www.fanart-central.net/story-43362.html>) "Well, I think my ex-boyfriend has gone crazy; he's squirreling away weapons like some kind of wacky squirrel!" Flash didn't seem surprised. "It takes all kinds. I wouldn't read into it too much Linda, in all honesty. He'll turn up." In a mock, sing-songy voice, Flash chanted "His love will carry you away!" "I'm not in love with him!" she yelled. Flash stopped, smiling at her in spite of the seriousness of what she just said. "It seems to me you just chased him all the way out here." He started with another song. "You are the wind beneath my wings! LA LA LA LA LA LA LA!" Linda shook her head. Flash could be the most brilliant person at times; and then, this.

His job finished, Ekylt walked around the back alley. He bought a pizza place from Ray. Renaming it "Crust 'n All Pizza, (Your choice for quality pizza- Birthday's, Barmitzvah's, weddings, bachelor parties, and every other occasion. We deliver! Call 754-7492. That's 754-PIZA!). Ray friend, Wayne, who was good with trucks, renovated a conversion van for deliveries. Ekylt thanked him and sat down, amazed.

"I've gone from vigilante to pizza maker. I lost that girl..." Some words from a Beatles song ran through his head:

"If I fell in love with you would you promise to be true,
And help me understand?
'Cos I've been in love before, and I found that love was more,
Then just holding hands"

Ekylt put on a hat that covered his hair, and a set of glasses made with thick glass so that they broke up the shape off his face. He stowed his coat and weapons into a cupboard, exchanging his white shirt for a shirt with a pizza on it. The shirt had a pillow-like lump in front, giving Ekylt a huge "stomach," and his shoes made him taller. No one would be able to recognize the worthless vigilante he once was...

Not until duty called...

81 - Come Back in May...

"No smoking." Ekyt said flatly to the two at the counter. "Right, sorry." Puff. He blew smoke in Ekyt's face. "Uh-huh. Glad we understand each other." Puff. "Maybe you didn't hear me..." Ekyt said, forcefully nice. Puff. Reaching below the counter, his hand found just what he was looking for. Puff. "I asked you not to blow the smoke in my face." Puff. FWOOOOSH! The fire extinguisher blasted the man off the stool, knocking him to the floor. The man ran, stumbling, out of the room, while the guy next to him chuckled. "You know, that's a good disguise." A familiar voice said. Ekyt reared back. "Relax. It's me; er, us." Espio and Greg..

"It figures a ninja would crack my disguise." Ekyt said ruefully. "Well, it was this kid here..." Espio pointed at a grinning Greg. "The point is, you can't hang up your coat yet. We need you." Ekyt reached into the man's box of cigarettes, snapping them in half angrily. "And what is it I'm needed for?" "You're not going to listen to us. So, we're going to stay here, train with you, and keep an eye on you, until you're ready to hear us out." Espio said firmly. Greg nodded apprehensively. Not seeing any point in arguing, Ekyt gestured toward the stairs. "Two guest rooms." Espio threw a knife, which Ekyt caught lazily. "That should cover our bill." Espio said as Ekyt yanked the money off it. "You're just lucky I can catch a knife like that!"

Linda twirled the sai absently. "This doesn't fit!" She said angrily, throwing the sai at a poster of Ekyt. She didn't realize she had. She stopped to read it. "Missing...Eighteen...American, Caucasian...known as "Eykt..." Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) Flash (Flashthehedgehog), Klein (ShyWanderer43), and Amy exchanged glances. "Um, how about some food?" Flash said hopefully, pointing at the pizza place.

Ekyt flicked the sucker (lollipop, whatever you call it personally –NG random fact!) as he noticed that joker's lighter on the counter. Suddenly he saw...pink? "Crap...I can't face her anymore..." Thinking quickly, he flicked the lighter, lighting the sucker at one end. "Help you?" he said jovially. He saw Tiffany's eye twinkle in his direction. She knew. "Yeah, we need..." Flash stopped. Ekyt yanked the sucker out of his mouth and threw it down. He pulled off the disguise. Everyone but Tiffany looked shocked. "Ho-boy...Akward moment...Uh, burgers?" Flash suggested. No one nodded this time. Linda pushed her way to the counter. She didn't look surprised either. "We need to talk...back alley...now!"

Ekyt strode outside; it was a nice night. Crisp air blew the scattered newspapers around. "How'd you know?" Ekyt asked. "I thought that the disguise would last more than two weeks." "I had help." She said quietly. Another Ekyt walked out from the shadows. "She needed to know." Ekyt stared angrily. "What do you want? She broke up with me, that's all she wrote. I did what I thought was right, now why can't the past rest?!" Ekyt spouted. "Because without the past the future will never come to pass." Ekyt heard himself say. The older him, as he saw now, flicked aside a toothpick. "That's not my concern." Ekyt said, waving a hand. "I think it is." "And I think you've got a big mouth." Ekyt said savagely. "Are you going to hit me? That would be your mistake." The older Ekyt said back. "Okay, c'mon, let's talk this out..." Ekyt normally would have listened. Instead. He tackled his older counterpart.

Without giving it any thought, the older him dropped down and monkey-flipped Ekyt over. He hit the telephone poll with a hard "THUD!" and slid down. "I didn't come ten years to fight you..." Ekyt's foot

answered. A block, followed by another throw, into a brick wall. Pain shot through Ekyt's body as he landed hard. "I'm you! I know everything you know, but I'm older! I know more! You have to trust me!" Ekyt answered with a punch. The older Ekyt went for a leg sweep, but stopped when Ekyt jumped, instead planting the foot on his chest, knocking him back again. Ekyt flung his legs out behind him as he hit the building, giving him a springboard. The older Ekyt side-stepped him and rode him into the fence. Ekyt went through the wooden fence. He got up again, bleeding from the lip and a gash across his back. "Are you done?" The older Ekyt asked quietly. "Great, I have a martial arts master to live up to now!" Ekyt kicked the dumpster in frustration.

Linda had watched quietly. Now she decided to say her piece. "Look, I know you're upset...give me time, maybe I can forgive you in a few months...May?" Ekyt smiled sarcastically. "Oh, so you're giving me a probable ultimatum. You said you can't forgive me; fine. But don't rub it in my face. You're beautiful. It's like I've told everyone, you could do a lot better than me...a scrawny kid who makes pizza. From a vigilante to a pizza maker...You made your choice. I can live with it, and I'm not blaming you. I'm outta here." Espio's knives tore into the hem of his coat; then the sleeves. It pinned Ekyt to the fence. "You're in on this too?!" Ekyt snarled. "You need to talk this out." Espio told him calmly. "No. Why do all of you insist on making me relive all this?!"

82 - The Cliff

Linda walked over to him slowly. His eyes were like knives.

Ekyt looked into Linda's shimmering eyes. They were as entrancing as they ever had been.

His lips were slightly apart, making him look more like the flustered, upset teenager he was, rather than the rock-hard vigilante persona he took on. Right about here, she thought, I would have kissed him. If things had been different...

She kept in shape, and her hair in the wind...this would have been perfect if he wasn't trying to avoid her...and everyone else...

"If you won't listen to any of us...Will you listen to him?" Greg stepped out from the shadows. "... Ekyt couldn't really say anything. "Listen, you're making a mistake...Could you give us a minute guys?" Greg asked quietly. When everyone had obliged, Greg sat down on a crate. "I understand, you know." He said quietly. "The girl I had left me...she met a cool "Twelve year old skater." He said with a face. "But I got over it, and met a new girl. You can come out now." It looked like a mini-Rouge. "This is Carla. I think you know her Aunt, Rouge?" "Carla" blushed and giggled. She was wearing jeans that flared out at the bottom, along with a white and green blouse, and had long white hair. (Picture Jackie from "That 70's Show." "Groovy" NG) "He's just like Aunt Rouge said!" Ekyt shook his head, not quite believing his eyes. "Well, you two have fun then. I'll see you later Greg." Ekyt pulled off his coat and yanked the knives out.

He walked below a streetlight. It was almost 2 in the morning, on the quiet side of town, so there was no traffic, no nothing. An angry rage got to Ekyt as he kicked at a telephone pole, cracking it with a loud curse.

Ekyt walked home, above the store. He leaned out the window with some black paint. "Crust 'n All Pizza" had changed its name to "Vigilante Pizza."

Linda saw this outside. "I can't forgive you..." she said quietly, "Not yet...but this is a step in the right direction...Take it easy kid."

"Vigilante Pizza" was closed for a couple days. Ekyt tossed some more weapons into a bag. "You're not going anywhere." His older self again. "Listen, I'm doing what I think is right. Get out of my way or I'll..." "You'll get your butt kicked again. Listen, I'm not trying to hurt you, far from it. You've got to talk to her, or lose her forever..." Ekyt looked up sadly, his jaw set. "She could do better than me...I want what's best for her...and it's not me." "Spoken like a true moron! Get a clue! She likes you!" his older self snapped. "If that was true, I'd be with her, wouldn't I?! Instead of arguing with you! The fact is, she dumped me." "Okay, let's go. Greg, you help me here." Espio, Older Ekyt, and Greg dragged Ekyt up to the roof. Linda was waiting.

"For God's sake, let it die!" Ekyt blurted out. He pushed away from Espio, Ekyt, and Greg. He reached

into his bag, putting a belt on and tossing his two curved swords into the belt, putting his staff on his back. (Here's a pic: http://trainingblades.com/store/images/blades_pc_bkris.jpg They're called "Kris", for the record.) "Don't move!" Espio said firmly. "Or what?" "Look, we're not against you!" Older Ekyt shouted. "Bite me!" Ekyt shouted back, yanking two sais from his bag. "When you figure out that I don't want any help, that my life is already in ruins, and that you're stepping on the pieces, I'll turn up. Sayonara until then!" Ekyt jumped off the side of the building. "OH MY GOD!" Linda yelled. Tiffany was below, ready to catch him. Instead, his sais dug into the building. Hanging on with one hand, he slashed a clothesline and jumped, swinging to the ground. "What on earth?! Are we sure he's human, and not a ninja turtle in disguise?!" Flash asked eagerly.

83 - Bad Side Of Town

Ekyt heard the police sirens in a distant part of town. This side was dark, and abandoned except for the riff-raff. Suddenly- "Help! Police!" Two masked men ran out of the store, brandishing pipes and baseball bats. "Outta the way kid!" one yelled, swinging menacingly. Ekyt jumped backward, a smile on his face. "You guy's don't know who I am? What a relief! Now, be nice and give the money back to the nice owner..." "Forget it freak!" The pipe hit Ekyt in the leg. At the word "freak," his anger flared up. He shrugged off the blow from the pipe. He swung with his Kris', cutting the pipe in half. The guy's buddy swung for the fences with the bat. "Oops! Close!" Ekyt said, dodging backward. "Ohhhh, another miss, better hit the batting cages slugger!" Ekyt sheathed the blades and vaulted with his staff, knocking the bat away. He grabbed the man by the shirt and flung him into a garbage can. He kicked it down a hill, where it hit a telephone pole, trapping the man's arms to his side. His friend turned tail and ran, dropping the money. Ekyt picked it up and handed it to the owner. No one knew who he was, and this side of town was just begging for attention. Perfect!

Ekyt picked out an empty shack that had barbed wire fencing around it and a huge padlock. He kicked the gate open and went inside. He found an old place, unused for years, and a beer truck? It was a conversion van, converted (No pun intended) to be a beer truck. After Ekyt tossed out the tanks, he realized that this was a great opportunity. He could use another delivery truck and...no, this would be for him. Maybe he needed to get away for a while, where no disguise was necessary. On this side of town, there were enough criminals to keep him busy for a while, and he could be close by to keep an eye on Greg. With a grim nod, Ekyt took off his coat and got to work on cleaning out the van, which ran perfectly. He added a huge couch, bolted down, in the back, along with a weapons rack. It was starting to take shape. "If they won't respect me, then they can fear me, I guess."

The van was gray, with a black stripe around it, and a couple darker gray stripes around it. The windows were tinted, but Ekyt had them rolled down. He didn't care. "Hey scuzzbucket! Stop right there!" he yelled out at another couple of bank robbers. How many of these guys were there? He swung himself out the door and hit the pavement, running after the two. He overtook them easily, holding them by their shirts. They were a couple of junior-high punks. He tossed a rope around both of them, tying them back-to-back and hung them from the outside of the bank. The police put them in the cars. Ekyt watched with a grim satisfaction as the reporters swarmed around, all jockeying for position to get a shot of the crooks. Safely concealed on a rooftop, he turned to face- himself?

"You again?! Get away from me!" The older him tried to grab him, but Ekyt danced out of range. "Look, how long are you going to fight us?" "As long as it takes." Ekyt shot back. "What are you trying to prove?" "I've got nothing to prove, and I'm not really interested in one of your lectures. So save it. You can tell all my friends that I'm just over here visiting. Greg's the only one who can find me now." Ekyt jumped off the roof, swinging onto the top of the bank. With his swords, he cut the rope. The two punks fell into the hands of the police. Before any cameras could focus, Ekyt jumped off the top (A short hop), jumped into the back of the van, yanking off the license plate, and kicked it into gear, aiming for the other side of town.

"How'd it go?" Linda asked anxiously. Older Ekyt shook his head. "He's not getting it. He's too

blinded emotionally. But...hey...on the news...I don't remember doing that!" They all watched, noses to the screens at what Ekyt had just did. They were the only one's who could pick him out. "I never did that! He must've split the timeline!" Older Ekyt exclaimed. "What's that mean?" "There's at least three time lines...The one I'm from, the one where I died, and now this one..." Linda shook her head. "It's all my fault...But I just can't do it! I can't forget him smashing that emerald! My only way home." "Maybe he destroyed it so we would all stay here..." Tails pointed out. "No." Knuckles and Sonic had returned. "He's not that selfish. Even if he couldn't come with you, he wouldn't have done that." Knuckles answered. "He's just blinded by anger." Sonic said. "He'll come around, but we've got to keep an eye on him."

84 - Viciousness

Ekyt put the padlock on the chained-up criminals. "Great job punks. You got my attention. Time to go home." Ekyt used a pay phone to call the cops and scampered up a building to watch. The Cops took the three of them into the squad car and took off. Reporters chased the car in vain, trying to get a shot of the criminals. Ekyt grinned, but felt a presence behind him. He ducked low and spun. An angry gang leader had swung a pipe at him. Ekyt ducked and drew his swords. "Okay whackbag, whatever you want!"

"Look over there!" Tails spied something on his binoculars. Ekyt and the gang leader fighting. "We've gotta get over there! Tails, you take the Tornado and Linda! Klein can get Amy over there with that wind trick of his, I'll run, Knuckles can glide and Ekyt can..." "I can use chaos control. Tiffany and Kurt can too. I'll take Greg and Carla with me."

Eggman was this too. "Perfect! Prepare my ship! I'm going to watch!"

Ekyt and the two exchanged blows. "Looks like your friends came to watch!" the gang leader said with a laugh. "I don't have any sleeze ball. Better watch your head!" As Ekyt said that, he kicked the man in the shin. "Sucker!" He kicked him in the face. The leader staggered, but held on.

The older Ekyt chaos-controlled to the building. "Oh man! You stay here!" He told Greg and Carla. He chaos-controlled on the building.

"Perhaps you need persuading to give up! Now, gentlemen, if you please!" Thirty gang members jumped up. Ekyt sheathed his swords and drew his staff. He needed the range. He jumped toward them, blocking and striking. Four pipes came at him. He blocked them all, sweep-kicking the offenders. He rolled backward, avoided knives, then charged forward, stepping over the injured and knocking ten others out. The remaining members ran for it. Ekyt tied up the fourteen he had caught and hung them from a streetlight. He grinned behind his mask. This was fun. The grin stopped as he saw himself again. "Scram!" Ekyt swung the staff at him.

"HA HA HA! THEY'RE FIGHTING EACH OTHER! THIS IS RICH!" Eggman roared. Sonic and company looked apprehensive. "I hope he can talk him down. Anyone have any ideas?" Sonic asked as a chunk of building almost hit him. "Linda makes up with him and we live happily ever after?!" Flash answered. "I can't do it! We can't get Rouge to seduce him anymore..." "WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!" Knuckles yelled. "Relax, Red, I'm yours." Rouge said comfortingly.

On the roof, his temper flared again. "Stop stalking me! I don't need you!" Ekyt yelled, kicked out. He landed a shot to his counterpart's side. He grunted and returned it. It caught Ekyt in the temple. He was so tired, he couldn't roll with the blow like normal. He hit the ground, bleeding from the forehead as his mask fell to the ground below. "Fine. Have it your way." Ekyt got a running start and jumped again. Tails caught him in the Tornado. "Will you leave me alone?! I need some time to think..." "We can help you." Tails said comfortingly. Ekyt looked at him. "I don't need help, because there's nothing wrong! I'm doing my vigilante bit a little different, but that's it!" The Tornado was still low, and Ekyt spotted his

van in the alley he had parked it in. "Thanks for the ride!" Ekyt leapt off the Tornado.

Tiffany and Klein tried to use their respective powers to catch him, but Ekyt maneuvered himself through the air, dodging both attempts. Sonic raced underneath him in a bid to catch him. Ekyt's hand flashed out and his sai dug into a building. He hung on and pulled himself into the shadows. "Good riddance." Espio grabbed him. "That's it ninja! You're driving me up the wall. Or, you're driving yourself into the wall, actually. Ekyt seized Espio under the chin and threw him over his shoulder. Espio hit the wall hard. "Sorry Esp, but I don't like being grabbed from behind." Ekyt got in his van and roared off. A knife punctured the back left tire. Sonic was running up furiously and Espio had thrown the knife. Ekyt couldn't control the car, and now the accelerator had stuck. He was headed for a meeting with a wall that he wasn't going to win...

85 - "Maybe I'm Amazed"

Ekyt kicked the door open and rolled out. He coughed from the smoke as his van hit the wall and burst into flames. "Crap!" Ekyt sliced open a fire hydrant and let the water take care of the problem. Then he remembered why he was in this predicament. Flash, Tiffany, Klein, Amy, Tails, Kurt, Sonic, Knuckles, Greg, Carla, Rouge, and Espio were all advancing toward him. His older self jumped off the building and landed in front of him. "We want to help." He said quietly. "Get away from me. I used to think that you can't trust anyone, now I'm SURE you can't! You almost killed me, destroyed my van, and...that was my new home you just wrecked. I can't even get upset about that. I'm too busy wondering how to deal with you..." "Whoa, you sound like a villain!" Sonic said, stepping forward. "Perhaps he is rodent!" Eggman's hovercraft landed in front of Ekyt.

"Think about it. Women, Money, Cars, Fame, er, infamy. The vigilante who saw the error of his ways and helped build the Eggman Empire!" "I have no interest in any of that. The one woman who I thought was perfect for me...that didn't work...cars...just got wrecked...infamy...already got it...money...don't want stolen money. I've worked to stop you." Ekyt said this so calmly that everyone was surprised when he slashed the hovercraft with his blades. Turning to Sonic, Ekyt said "This should tell you where my loyalties lie. Now, I'm going to go back to what I was doing before." "Wait...look, I can't convince you, but please, just talk to her!" Older Ekyt asked him, pointing at Linda.

Linda strode forward, staring him down. She was the one person who could still unlock his shyness. Not breaking eye contact, she forced him to sit down on a stoop with her. "I'm sorry...I didn't mean to rip your heart out...I just...I know I'll never get home without the emerald...I have no reason to go home anyway..."

Ekyt had lost his mask from the fight on the roof, so she could see his sad eyes. "In all the chaos, I forgot to give this to you. It could get all of you home. I'm sorry I didn't think of it sooner." He pulled out a box and tore it open. He handed her a glowing green cross on a gold and silver chain. "It's a chaos gemstone cross. It can get you home if one of you can use chaos control. HEY! COME HERE, FAT STUFF!" Ekyt snarled the last part at Eggman. "Have everyone touch the chain and then use chaos control."

They all grabbed part of the chain. "Hold on a second." Linda stopped them. She ran over to Ekyt's rapidly fading back. "You amaze me." She told him. "Thanks." He said, trying to sound "brave," not that he knew what that was anymore. "I'll never forget you." Linda said, emotion creeping into her voice. "I won't forget you either." She kissed him on the cheek and got back to the group. "Chaos Control." Tiffany said, somewhat somberly. A brilliant flash, and they disappeared.

Ekyt nodded. "That took guts." His older self again. "At least I can have that time to think now. And she'll be happy." The older Ekyt vanished, looking slightly worried.

Ekyt leaned against the brick wall, as some song words ran through his head. "Amazed, huh?"

"Maybe I'm Amazed" by Paul McCartney

**Maybe I'm amazed at the way you love me all the time,
And maybe I'm afraid of the way I need you.**

**Maybe I'm amazed at the way you move me out of time,
You hung me on a line.**

Maybe I'm amazed at the way I really need you.

**Maybe I'm a man!
Maybe I'm a lonely man,
Who's in the middle of something he doesn't really understand.**

**Maybe I'm a man, and maybe you're the only woman who can ever have me. Maybe, won't you
help me understand...**

**Maybe I'm amazed at the way you're with me all the time
And maybe I'm afraid of the way I need you.
Maybe I'm amazed at the way you help me sing the song,
You right me when I'm wrong.**

Maybe I'm amazed at the way I really need you.

86 - Spare a Thought for Me...

A vigilante is, by nature, a lonely person. Very few can get close to an individual. This was true of Ekyt. And almost all those who had were gone...

Gone...

Linda too.

The human on the building across from the Thorndyke mansion gave a sigh, audible only to him. The first time he had been here, a breeze had tossed his coat around. Today, there was no breeze. It was brutally hot. Crime didn't take a day off, and neither did this human.

Ekyt knew it was going to be like climbing Mt. Everest to get over Linda. You didn't forget your dream-girl overnight. Ekyt usually showed all the emotion of a rock, but even he had lost some of his trademark stoicism.

"I'm glad I did it. It's what they wanted." Ekyt told himself firmly for the millionth time. "HE DID IT! GET HIM! IT WAS HIM!!!" Ekyt looked down. A crowd, two hundred strong, had pressed themselves against the building. Ekyt didn't need to really think hard as to why they wanted to gut him...

Sonic and company landed. They were home! "YEEE-SSS!" Sonic shouted, pumping a fist in the air, jumping up and doing a Sonic Spin to let off his feelings. Tails flew toward his old workshop. Flash (Flashthehedgehog) followed Kurt and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) to a place to eat. Chaos control had taken a lot out of Tiffany, and Kurt, being the power source (He's a living chaos emerald), was bushed too. Knuckles was back on Angel Island, happy to be home. Eggman laughed, and tried to attack with one of his Eggpawn robots. Amy smashed it, a sour look on her face. "I can't believe Klein didn't come...But he had his reasons. I'll see him again some day."

Linda went home. She hadn't been home for a year, but that was by earth's time. In this world's time, she had only been gone for about three months. Her mother and father would still be worried...She had so much to tell them, too. She paused, sparing a thought for Ekyt.

Ekyt jumped backward, avoiding a punch from an angry shop owner who had made it on the roof. "YOU SENT OUT HEROES HOME!!!" "THEY WERE HAPPIER THAT WAY, YOU FAT, SELFISH, PIECE OF TRASH!" Ekyt shouted back. That earned a rock to the face. This looked bad. Ekyt decided to leave. He took a running start, aiming for a tree. The tree was just out of his reach. He was going to fall, and at this height, he was buzzard food...

"Linda? Honey! My God, are you alright?!" Mari, Linda's mother, a gentle-looking echidna woman, ran over to her daughter. "I'm fine Mom! I can't wait to tell you about" "There's my Lil' girl!" Linda's father, a burly, muscular echidna with a thick mustache, crowed. "Where've you been honey?" "I've been on earth!" Linda exclaimed. "Earth! Wow, must have been quite an experience!" "It sure was! I even had met a great boy...aw snap." Linda hadn't planned on mentioning Ekyt yet. But her parents

looked happy for her. "That's wonderful Linda! What's he like?!" "Well, I broke up with him, he destroyed the master emerald. He had to, but I thought I'd never get home. He's the perfect height, muscular, not overly-muscular, athletic. He's got dark brown hair, and dark brown eyes." "What else honey?" "Well, he always wears this trench coat, and..." Linda's parents seemed slightly unnerved by that. "He's a vigilante..." Her parents looked more upset. "...He was human..." Her parents stood up as one. "HUMAN?! YOU WERE KISSING AN...AN...EGGMAN?!" "NO! HE'S NOTHING LIKE EGGMAN! HE'S RISKED HIS LIFE FOR ME, AND HE'S THE ONE WHO GOT ME HOME!" Linda yelled back. She wasn't sure why she was defending him. She guessed that some part of her was still in love with him.

Ekyt seemed to float to the ground. "Huh?" Ekyt saw Klein (ShyWanderer43) motioning to him from the bushes. "Follow me." Klein told him in a hushed tone. Ekyt nodded. They crawled through the bushes, finally reaching Ekyt's hotel room. Only Ray would be here at this hour. Ekyt snuck inside. Ray smiled. "That's my buddy, making the headlines. But you'd better go to your place upstairs, before they come bustin' in here, looking for you!" "Thanks Ray."

Linda's parents sat in stunned silence. Their little girl had always been perfect, and had never lied to them. "If you think he's good...we have to agree honey. Do you have a picture?" Linda nodded. She had grabbed her files from the police department before she left. They had only taken one picture together where Ekyt had posed. He had a very slight smile on his face, despite holding his staff. Linda was wearing her normal clothes that day, and was blushing slightly in the picture. She had her right hand on his shoulder, her left hand forming a peace sign. Mari smiled at it. "He looks like a nice boy." "Yeah. He is...was...I was hard on him at the end. After he destroyed the emerald, I didn't want to hear that about it..." A tear trickled down her cheek. She had always been trying to make life more fair to Ekyt; to help him come out of his shell. She had undone all her work with one fell swoop...

Ekyt sat up with a start. "Another dream...she's still haunting me." In this dream...

DREAM SEQUENCE:

Linda was tied to a stake, a pile of straw beneath her feet. It was glistening with gasoline. A torch was about to be placed on it. "WAIT! I'LL TAKE HER PLACE!" Ekyt heard himself yell. He was suddenly on the stake...but the stake went **through** his stomach. He couldn't feel any pain, but the site bothered him. The torch was lit. Ekyt looked up at his executioner. An unsmiling Linda dropped the torch. "Rest in Peace...You were the one..." Ekyt just watched as the flames licked at him. He couldn't do anything else. He felt himself burning. Just before everything went black, the master emerald shards pulled together in front of him, and formed a laughing face.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

Ekyt sat on his bed for a while. He wished he could go home, not for the first time. But he couldn't put his parents in danger like this. No, he was going to stick it out. He remembered Shadow saying once "If the world becomes my enemy, I'll do what I've always done...Fight!" Ekyt agreed with the statement, and nodded his head, as if sealing some agreement with himself. A knock came on the door. Ekyt slid it open cautiously. Greg darted in. "We've got problems!"

87 - Abused...

"Well, I have a problem anyway..." Greg looked seriously troubled. "What's the matter?" Ekyt asked. "Well, I was getting bullied the other day, and the guy took a swipe at me. So I kicked him, and now they want to expel me!" Ekyt ran a hand through his hair. "I think I can help. Show me this school..."

Outside, the crowd was now sharply divided. Most had realized Ekyt had done what Sonic and company wanted, so they weren't going to gut him anymore. Others were mad about Sonic not being around, and were shouting for Ekyt's dismemberment. And yet others were gathered just to see what was going on. Ekyt stepped out. He made eye contact with the crowd. They quieted, an uncertainty in the air.

"C'mon." Ekyt nudged Greg. **His first angry mob...I wonder if his parents want this on tape?**

Mr. Wilder, the elementary school principal, sighed. "I hate to make an example of that young man..." "Then don't." A sharp voice told him. "Sir! You have to- hey!" Ekyt pushed past the secretary, earning a glare. "Can I help you?" the frustrated principal asked with a sigh. "Yes. Yes, you can. Greg Hillman. I heard what happened. You can't expel him for defending himself." Mr. Wilder stood up. He was about Ekyt's height, but with a bigger stomach. He poked Ekyt in the chest several times. "He violated school rules. I run the school, I decide the punishments. You got that?" The principal aimed a fat finger at Ekyt. It hovered about a 1/8 inch away from his nose. Ekyt stared back, before grabbing the principal's finger. "Don't poke me. Look, I know what you're thinking, and it would be stupid. Waster potential. And you'd make a lot of enemies...Greg...his parents...his friends...and me." Ekyt snarled the last word, glaring at the principal. "I'm not here to scare you. I'm here to make sure you don't make a stupid mistake...One that might bite you later. So you let him back into school, and do the right thing. Can I count on you to do that?" Ekyt placed a hand on Mr. Wilder's shoulder. "S-sure." "Glad we talked. Any more problems, let me know." Ekyt gave a smile and swept out. Greg walked, his mouth open in surprise. "That...was...COOL!" Ekyt grinned. "Yeah, it comes in handy being the "scariest guy in town." I hated to do that, but he seemed awfully keen on kicking you out." Ekyt stopped. "Greg...Has anything else gone on at school?" Greg hesitated. "You can trust me Greg. I'm not going to do anything to hurt you. If something else is going on, I need to know." Ekyt knelt down, looking Greg in the eye. Without a sound, Greg pushed back his hair. There was a series of bruises. But they weren't kid-sized. An adult's knuckles had hit Greg at least three times. "Who did it Greg?" "He'll kill me..." Greg murmured. Ekyt felt his eyes enlarge. "C'mon, we'll talk to the police, okay? They can help."

"...And then Mr. Brackter hit me..." Greg finished. He looked up at the adults in the room. One police officer scratches his head. The other shook his head sadly. "Greg, thank you for telling us. We need to speak with Mr. Brackter. We won't tell him you said anything..." "I don't think that will work." Ekyt, who was standing behind Greg, had a hand on his chin. "He'll know it was Greg. How about this: I'll go in and tell his I saw everything..." "If you're willing to try it..." Officer Piota told him. "You bet. I don't know if Greg should see this..." Greg laughed. "I want to see it. I can handle it. I laid in a hospital bed for a long time. Besides, it's not like I haven't seen you fight before."

Mr. Brackter looked up at the knock on his door. "Come in." He was grading test papers. He was a smaller man, with wavy blonde hair, gelled stylishly, and glasses with black rims that made him look like he was back in college. "Hi. I'm here to talk to you about Greg Hillman. You're Mr. Brackter, right?"

“Yes. Please, call me Tony.” “Okay...Tony. How is Greg doing in school?” “He’s one of my brightest students.” “Any bullying, anything like that?” Ekyt asked. “No, not at all. He’s a little clumsy. He fell down the stairs the other day, and if I hadn’t...what?” Ekyt had stood up. “Stairs...leaving a fist-shaped pattern on his forehead...what are the chances?” Mr. Brackter looked up. “I don’t know what you’re suggesting...” “I’m suggesting you hit Greg. Who else have you abused...Tony.” Mr. Brackter took off his glasses. “You rotten kid!” He threw a piece of chalk at Ekyt.

Linda laid awake on her bed that night. Just as she was about to drift off to sleep, she managed one more thought about Ekyt. Maybe that’s why she had a dream about him...

Ekyt started in his normal clothes, fighting. “You okay? Hang on back there!” he was driving a motorcycle, dodging potholes in the road. The road seemed endless. Then, things suddenly changed.

Ekyt was wearing a suit. His shirt had been torn open, and someone whose face Linda couldn’t see had him by his tie. That image faded too, and to another one.

Ekyt had on jeans and a white shirt. He looked like a normal high school senior. He seemed to be hitting on some girl. She watched in anger as he stroked her back, and then her butt. She knew Ekyt wouldn’t do that, and never had. Another part of the dream took its place...

Ekyt wore a long, white lab coat. He was holding a needle, about to put it in a struggling...echidna? “Easy with that thing doc! I’ve got to get back to the master emerald!” Linda shook her head. It disappeared. It was replaced by the last, and most disturbing image.

The master emerald was tied around Ekyt’s leg, like a leg iron. A sullen, older Ekyt sat silently. “It’s time to end this.” Eggman walked around the table. “C’mon Ekyt, fight!” Eggman walked around Ekyt. “No family...you’re going to die alone...at my hands...no one here to save you...just the way I pictured it. Goodbye, you royal pain.” This Ekyt did nothing. He lowered his head. Eggman punched him, cracking the mask. It fell to the floor, broken in half. He broke every bone in Ekyt’s body, while the human did nothing. He never opened his mouth as though to scream. Eggman laughed as he lifted the human up and threw him off a cliff...

“Okay, you’re guilty!” Ekyt spat, dodging the chalk. “Tony” grabbed a ruler and swung wildly. Ekyt stepped to the side and led Tony swing. He leapt toward Tony, and threw him into the hallway. He skidded across the hall and into a locker. He tried to get up and run, but Ekyt had him in an instant. He slammed him into the lockers. “Hitting kids was a mistake...Attacking me was a good one, too...but hitting a defenseless kid...you’re a coward.” Tony kicked Ekyt in the shin. Ekyt ignored the blow and slammed Tony’s head again. “Keep struggling, and I’ll turn over what’s left of you to the cops in a pencil case.” Tony kicked again. Ekyt dragged the man outside by raking him across a set of stairs, using his face to open the door, and kicking his leg out from under him. The police rushed up and handcuffed Tony Brackter. “I should’ve killed you, you little squirt!” He snarled as he struggled. Greg’s face morphed into a mask of fear. Ekyt leapt at Tony, punching him until he was restrained. “If you threaten him again...So help me...” The police restrained him. “It’s okay, he’s going to get what he deserves. Thanks for the help.” “My pleasure.” Another two policemen escorted Mr. Wilder out. “He and Brackter were in it together all along! Planned on kidnapping eventually, after they had intimidated the kids.” Ekyt nodded with a quick thanks. Right now, he knew Greg needed his attention.

88 - War Stories

"Thanks for helping me Ekyt." Greg said with a sigh. "It seems like you're always doing that... You helped me walk, and now you've saved my life twice." Ekyt grinned. "It's what I do. You know, you've saved my life too. When you whacked that guy over the head with that cane when he was about to skewer me...that's not something every kid could do." Greg beamed. "Thanks. I still wish I could help you more, though..." Ekyt pointed across the street at a little girl who was being bullied. "You can. Let me know when things like this happen...HEY! PUNKS! LEAVE HER ALONE!" Ekyt took a hard step toward them, sending the two older boys scattering. The girl was shaking. Greg jogged over. "Hey, it's okay. He's cool! My name is Greg, what's your name?" "Tasha." The little girl said with a sniffle. "That's an awesome name! Hey, where's your mom?" Tasha pointed to a house behind them. "But she's asleep. She worked all night, then all morning at her other job. She has too...I don't have a daddy anymore...mommy says he's asleep, but he won't wake up...we had to bury him in the ground in this big box..." Ekyt stepped back a little as Greg talked to the little girl. She stopped crying and was actually smiling. Greg pointed at the girl's house. "Can you get your mom? I want to meet her, is that okay?" Tasha nodded, and skipped off to get her mother. Ekyt looked at Greg. "You know, you've really got a gift for that." Greg looked at Ekyt. "Huh? All I did was tell her things would be fine..." "But how you said it made all the difference."

Tasha's mom, twenty-six year old (Tasha is about 5) single mother. She hated her no-good-rotten-college-sweetheart-boyfriend for leaving her and Tasha. But she worked as hard as she could. She listened intently as Ekyt told her what happened. "Thank you for helping...I'm just so tired..." "Thank him." Ekyt pointed at Greg. "He calmed her right down." Tasha's mom smiled at Greg. "Thank you sweetheart."

Sweetheart? Ekyt thought of "her" again. Linda. **What will it take to get over her? No more relationships, no point, I know she was the one...but what if she wasn't? NO! I can't betray her, no matter what she thinks of me!**

Linda was shaken by the dream. "You just thought about him for a second...relax...breathe...good. Okay. You're home. He's probably got a new girl." The thought did nothing to comfort her. "Mom's right. I WILL get over him." She told herself firmly. She would have to very quickly...

"Tails, how's that thing coming?" Sonic asked urgently. "Almost done Sonic! I can't believe Eggman is going to attack us already!" "We need all the help we can get! We need Ekyt. You said that since humans aren't common here, some of Eggman's traps won't affect him." Tails nodded. "Yeah. I've almost got it...Done!" A huge blast rocked the whole place. "Oh man! I'll go find him! You keep everyone else hidden!" Tails pushed Sonic back from the machine. "It's going to explode!" The machine did just that. Tails coughed. "Oh man! By the time I fix this, we'll be done for!" Sonic formed a wise-guy grin. "Whaddaya mean, done for? We haven't lost yet pal!"

Ray served the guy with the goofy eye another beer. "This is your last one pal." Ray warned him in a friendly manner. The man smashed out the beer bottle. Ekyt was walking by with Greg when he heard the glass. He looked inside. "Whoa!" He ran toward the guy. His goofy eye caught Ekyt running. The

man ducked under Ekyt, sending him into the air. Ekyt landed hard on the bar. He rolled off with a moan. Ray punched the man in the face, dropping him. "You okay kid?" Ekyt got up, shaking his head. "Yeah. What was up with that?" "Oh, that happens every Friday. Would you just kind of lay him on the pool table?" Ekyt and Greg dragged him over. "It's not like you to miss like that...Linda on your mind?" Ekyt nodded. "Yeah. Always. But I'll get over it." Greg looked at his watch. He didn't want to leave, but he had to get home. He said goodnight and left.

Ekyt watched him go. "You know...I think...you remember the first time you were in here with her? How she forced you to get cleaned up?" At Ekyt's nod, he continued. "I remember telling her she was the first one to give you an order...I remember wondering where the heck you found an echidna. I dropped a glass when she walked in with you. I shouldn't have been surprised...And all the others...my point, kid, is that you're a good guy. And you know what's right in your head and in your heart. Heck, when I was in Viet Nam, I found a family of innocents. Standing orders were to kill anything that moved (THIS IS NOT A TRUE IDEAL OF THAT WAR). I raised my rifle, but I stopped. I couldn't do it. And you know, when I took a closer look, I realized that they were scared. They didn't want anything to do with the war. They fed me, and I left. I still keep in touch with them...Anyway, the point I'm making is that you're at war with yourself, just like the US was with Viet Nam. You aren't into creating casualties, same as the story. My story is set in stone, I'll never see Kim again, she died just before you came. YOUR story is still being written. You've got a lot of blank pages left kid. Don't end the chapter on your love life just yet..."

Ekyt thanked Ray. He was in an emotional knot. Part of him wanted to forget the last year all together. Another part of him would have done anything to get Linda back. Even the sensible part of him (Rarely used XD) was chewing at him, telling him it was his fault. He finally got up to his room on the tenth floor. He laid in bed, staring at nothing, trying to clear his mind.

It didn't work.

Back on Sonic's homeworld, things were critical. Sonic and company were fighting a losing battle. They had to form a plan. Shadow had an idea. He wanted to freeze time. He and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) would keep up the chaos control (With Kurt as the power source) until more help could be found. With the resistance effort all but done for, everyone agreed. But things could go wrong, and they did...

89 - Akward...

Despite Ray's advice, Ekyt kind of drifted. He hated to think of himself as moping, but he guessed it was permissible. Almost a year with the girl; one he could have sworn was "The one." It all ended in one fell swoop. One that he himself had caused.

It didn't help that his best efforts didn't seem to be helping the crime rate. Fresh in the wake of being blamed for Sonic and friends leaving (Which he admitted to himself was true, right or wrong), the crime rate spiked. He was the only one left to fight it. And he was, though he hated to admit it, human.

So he trained harder. At least Greg stayed with him. Greg got into the training too. Every morning, they ran, doing stairs and leaping over any obstacles in their way. It was getting hot, so they took to running on the beach.

Greg and Ekyt were getting in great shape. To the point where two girls, one about twenty and her twelve-year-old sister, gave them the eye. Ekyt smiled tolerantly as Greg jogged in place, cutting a muscular pose. He gave Ekyt an innocent "Who...me?" look. Ekyt shrugged as a way of saying, "suit yourself." The older girl got up and gave Ekyt an interested look. For his part, Ekyt raised a questioning eyebrow, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

It did.

"It's you!" she exclaimed. Ekyt cursed under his breath. "Freak!" She slapped him across the face. He turned with the blow, saying nothing. "You're the one who sent Sonic home! I hate guys like you!" Ekyt, losing his temper, finally shot back. "And I hate girls like you. The ones that aren't too fussy about who they" "Ekyt!" Greg wagged a finger. "C'mon, man, this tramp ain't worth your time." Greg said with a laugh, tossing his sunglasses to the younger of the two girls, who blew him a kiss. Ekyt stifled a laugh. "Get out of my sun! I'm trying to get an all-over tan!" The girl who had slapped Ekyt yelled at him. "That's asking a lot of the sun, isn't it?" He returned, while Greg laughed. She got up, pointing a finger in his face. "How dare you say that to my face?" "I'd say it to your back, but my car's only got half a tank of gas." Greg was now crying, he was laughing so hard. The girl sputtered incoherently, while her little sister laughed. "Have a nice day!" Ekyt called back as he and Greg ran off, Greg roaring with laughter.

On Sonic's World (Henceforth "Planet Freedom"), things had reached a critical point. Shadow and Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) geared up to use chaos control. Two Egg pawns (Eggman's robots) marched in. Tiffany moved, but one shot Shadow. "Shadow!" Kurt tried to get to him, but Tiffany held him back. The two robots were suddenly hit from behind. Knuckles burst his way into the room. "Eggman's almost here!" "Without Shadow, I can't do this!" "Find Ekyt! Any fighters! Hurry! I'll hold them off!" "Chaos Control!" Tiffany called, just as a group of bullets strayed toward her and Kurt.

Ekyt was working with his swords, while teaching Greg how to fight with a staff. "Good job! I- what the" People in the street were crowding around a flash of light. Ekyt could see a panicked Tiffany at the center. "Tiffany? How did she get here?" He noticed the chaos gemstone cross around her neck. He

and Greg pushed their way through the silenced crowd. At the same time, Klein (ShyWanderer43) came from the other side. "We need you guys! Planet Freedom is almost done for!" Tiffany exclaimed. Klein seemed happy (A chance to see Amy) while Ekyt looked determined. "I'm ready. Greg, you head home and" "Like heck I will, I'm coming too!"

Linda dodged in between soldiers, firing her own weapon, taking out the advancing robots. Only her and Sonic were really holding back the invasion. But they were outnumbered, and even Sonic had limits. She heard a blast, and ducked low, throwing her gun arm over her eyes and opening her mouth so the pressure from the backblast wouldn't destroy her eardrums.

When she opened her eyes, she gaped in surprise. Ekyt, Greg, and Klein were fighting back the invasion. Ekyt and Greg's staff attacks were driving the robots back, while Klein's elemental devastation ripped through them. The robots were ordered to retreat.

That's when Ekyt and Linda saw each other. It was awkward, to say the least. "Hi." She managed. "Hi." He returned...

UH-OH! AKWARD MOMENT, AND MORE TO COME! WITH EKYT AND LINDA BACK ON THE SAME PLANET, WILL THEIR LOVE REKINDLE? AND THE WAR ISN'T OVER, NO WAY! STAY TUNED!

90 - Welcome to Planet Freedom

Mercifully, their forced conversation was cut short. Ekyt pushed her out of the way, while dodging himself, as more robots piled in. "They've got Knuckles!" Sonic shouted. "I'm going after him! Ekyt, can you and the others hold the robots off?" Ekyt looked at the distance they had. There was a football field-sized amount of land separating Eggman's force from Sonic and friends. "I'm gonna try." Ekyt told him. "Good luck." Ekyt told the fast-fading blue hedgehog.

Ekyt went to run, but found himself slowed. "What? What's going on! Ugh!" One robot had taken a shot at him. Ekyt had leaned backward to dodge it, with the beam barely missing. Greg was slowing down too. "The atmosphere must be affecting us!" Ekyt called. How the heck was he going to fight off a hostile takeover when he could barely move?

Sonic used his homing attack in rapid-fire succession, robot parts flying all over. An unconscious Knuckles was up ahead, being dragged by two robots. Sonic ran in a circle around the two robots, confusing them. The blue whirlwind he created swallowed them up. He slung Knuckles over his shoulder. Then Sonic gulped. He had to get back through a seemingly endless sea of robots. "Knux, c'mon man, wake up!"

"What's wrong? They're not fighting!" Shadow looked furious. "We haven't had humans here, save for Eggman, who was born here. Maybe the atmosphere is bothering them...Any ideas Tails?" Tiffany asked. "I have the answer, but we can't do them without getting hurt! Unless you can do chaos control?" "I can't pull it off again, not on that scale." Tiffany admitted. "I'll do it." Klein said quietly. He took the packages from Tails and ran out of the lab.

The robots marched forward, mercilessly, their gears grinding in an incessant whirring motion. It irritated Ekyt to not be able to do more than dodge. A furious wind blew, creating a column in the robots. Klein threw the packages at Ekyt and Greg. They tore them open. "Shoes? You're picking now to criticize my wardrobe?!" Greg yelled. This was frustrating for him, even more so than Ekyt. He liked movement, after being in the hospital bed for so long. "Try them on, then complain!" Ekyt called, strapping on his own. He breathed a sigh of relief. He could move again, and slightly faster, thanks to the weird gravity. "Thanks Klein! Time to push these guys back!" Ekyt tucked his staff under his arm, so he could run faster. The robots programming jammed momentarily as they had to decide how to combat the latest threat. It took them too long. Ekyt, joined by Greg and Klein, crashed into their front line, demolishing them.

Because of the narrow opening to the mountain base, the robots could only march in rows of five. That meant they could be fought off with a smaller number. Holding their position was the best move. If the robots broke through, they were done for, because they had nowhere to run.

Knuckles finally woke up. "What? Sonic?" "Red, no time now! Hang on tight, I'm going to juice over these robots!" Sonic ran up the mountain, his speed allowing him to maintain a foothold on the sheer terrain. The robots now faced two threats, overloading their programming temporarily.

Sonic and Knuckles returned, and they were soon joined by Tiffany, with Tails flying the X-Tornado overhead, crippling the robots with an EMP wave. Still, there were hundreds.

Ekyt hit the dirt. Because of the gravity change, he misjudged his landing, hitting his ribs hard on something. "Is that a chaos emerald?" He picked it up, curious. Suddenly, he wasn't sure why, he gripped it harder. As if he couldn't control it, he chanted "Chaos Vortex, come to me!" He felt something strike him.

"Oh My God...How did he...invoke the chaos vortex?" Knuckles couldn't believe it. "When he destroyed the master emerald, he must have retained some of its power, and could only access it on Planet Freedom!" "What'll it do to him?" Sonic asked, getting ready to attack. "The Chaos Vortex grants immense power for a thirty-second span. It'll take a lot out of him, but he can turn the tide of the war!"

Linda was tending to the injured fighters when she heard the crackle of power outside. "Chaos energy? But the emeralds are back on Station Square...Ekyt...but he doesn't have chaos powers...does he?" She found herself smiling. "Like him or hate him, that boy is amazing."

Ekyt somehow knew to hold his staff in front of him and swing. He destroyed ten robots as fast as he could destroy one (5 seconds in). Fifty lay, nonfunctioning (20 seconds in). Ekyt threw his staff, mowing down twenty more. He held up his hand, and the staff...came back to him? (29 seconds) Instinctively, he ran back to the others, taking cover in a small outcrop of mountain as retaliatory fire was shot at him. He sagged, suddenly completely drained.

But the tide of the war had turned. Eggman pounded on his master console, yanking his moustache. "Ready the EggAmoeba!" He yelled to his small maintenance crew of robots. "I'm going to wipe them out!"

Ekyt started to get the feeling back in his legs first. Then arms, chest, back, and head. He got up, normal. He had to recharge, for want of a better word, for five minutes. Back to the fight. Good timing. Eggman's newest machine had just sucked up everyone but him and Sonic.

Eggman's machine was a pale-blue glass structure, with appendages that acted like vacuum cleaners. They could see Eggman in the cockpit. But he was out of reach...

"Time for a tactical retreat!" Sonic called. He and Ekyt ran for it. "Any ideas?" Sonic called over to Ekyt. "If we could get up that mountain, we'd be eye-level with Eggman's machine..." Ekyt thought aloud. "Hang on to me, then! I can get up there!"

Once up the mountain, they saw Eggman's laughing face. "You'll never break the glass seal! Never!" Ekyt handed Sonic the chaos emerald he had tripped over. "What? A chaos emerald? How did you...but there's no way..." Ekyt had grabbed Sonic's arm. He spun around, the energy of the chaos emerald Sonic was holding giving him enough strength to throw Sonic.

91 - Cosmic Enternity

Sonic hit the cockpit's windshield, only cracking it. Eggman laughed. "Where's your emerald now?!" Then he saw Ekyt. He vaulted with his staff, while curling up into himself. The he flung his legs outward, breaking the windshield. "Noo! You little freaks will pay!" He yelled as he dove into his escape pod as the container holding all Sonic's friends evaporated.

Unfortunately, Ekyt was now free-falling 100 feet. He braced himself for the impact, planning to compact his knees so that they wouldn't be broken. Just before he was set to hit the ground, something stopped him. "What the..." He found Linda holding him.

She smirked at his surprised expression. "What? You think I'd let you go splat?" she asked. "I'm surprised you'd save me." Ekyt said. In surprise, Linda dropped him. "What made you say that?" "You probably hate my guts, and rightfully so. I sure do." He admitted, dusting himself off. "I don't hate you! Not being boyfriend/girlfriend doesn't make us enemies!" she exclaimed, surprised at his words. "I admit, I was furious at first. But I'm over it. You got me home. That really means a lot." She told him. "Yeah..." he was clearly at a loss for words. "Hey, how about meeting my parents?" Ekyt wasn't too fond of the idea, but didn't want to hurt her feelings. "C'mon, you can bring Greg too!" she coaxed. "Sure, that'd be nice."

"Mom? Dad?" Linda called. "Where have you been?!" Her father questioned. "I fought in the war. It was the right thing to do. But, later, later. I want you to meet the boy I told you about." Linda's father was about Ekyt's height, but more muscular. "So you're this human she hung out with?" He looked mean. "Yes, that was me. She's a great girl." Ekyt told the man. Greg winced. "She is. Thanks for taking care of her while she was away from home." Ekyt hadn't expected that reaction. "You probably thought I'd want to kill you on site!" Linda's father said with a laugh. "Yeah, I did." Ekyt told him. "Linda's never made a bad choice in her life. If she decided that you're a good guy, then you are. You're the one who got her home."

Linda's mom walked in. She was a tough, but good-looking echidna. "What?" She drew a pistol on Ekyt. "Whoa! Mom, this is the boy I told you about! Don't kill him!" Ekyt would have found this funny under different circumstances. "I'm sorry about that sweetheart!" She holstered the pistol carefully. "You're Ekyt then? I'm Mari, and this is my husband Leo." "It's nice to meet you both." "Linda has spoke very highly of you, and...who's this?!" She had noticed Greg, who was trying to remain stoic like Ekyt, but failing miserably. "I'm sorry! That's Greg. He's something of a miracle." Ekyt told them. "Is he your son?" "Oh, no, my Godson." Ekyt told them the story of how he had been there when Greg could walk. "Linda's everything you said. I've got to say, the trench coat worried me." "Sorry. I'm sure she told you I'm a vigilante of sorts. The coat's kind of my trademark." "So why did you come here?" Leo asked. "To help fight in the war. And, I should mention, your daughter saved my life a few minutes ago. I cracked open Eggman's cockpit (They've heard about the war), but wound up free-falling 100 feet. She made a nice diving catch." Ekyt looked at a clock on the wall. He had been here long enough to be polite. "I'm sorry, but I've got to go find someplace to hide out. I doubt the war's over." "Hey, Ekyt, can I stay here?" Greg asked, re-emerging with Linda. "Sure. Probably better, safer. See you later amigo. It was nice to meet all of you. Thanks again for the save Linda."

Ekyt holed up in the loft of what looked like a barn. The inside was buzzing with the sounds of technology, and lights were flickering. The loft itself had a high ceiling, a mattress on the floor with a blanket and a couple of pillows. There was window at the far end that was designed with a metal cover that could slide over it. Ekyt laid on the mattress, thinking that he was glad he had come. But he was ready to leave. Things were just too awkward between him and Linda. She was acting like they had never been boyfriend/girlfriend. Ekyt couldn't forget it; he had been so sure she was the one! He turned on his side, his staff and coat next to him. He tried to let his mind rest for a while, while waiting for Eggman's next strike.

Linda couldn't believe it. "He's a nice boy Linda." Mari told her. "Yeah...I'm just surprised that he was so...stoic. I mean, he's like that, but with me, he was always more open. I guess I thought that he would have been over me by now..." Linda's mom smiled. "I think you know that's not his nature. He doesn't forget easily. He hasn't forgotten, but he has forgiven."

Ekyt looked out the window, looking at the dirt and mountains, and the stream that navigated itself through those obstacles. The terrain looked suited for Sonic's speed. Ekyt was confused. He didn't want to be here, but he didn't want to go to Station Square. It was so disturbing. He finally strode outside, climbing to the top of the mountain that he and Sonic had fought Eggman on earlier. A pleasant wind was blowing around the debris from the battle. As Ekyt contemplated the scene, he thought he saw something interesting...

Bounding down the climbable side of the mountain, Ekyt checked out the gleam. Another chaos emerald? Ekyt picked it up cautiously. He felt nothing strange, no chaos welling up inside him, nothing. Ekyt pocketed it, figuring it would be useful later.

Eggman positioned his robot minions around the mountain. They were setting charges, ready to go off. Ekyt, who had climbed back up on the mountain, heard Eggman's orders. "I want you to blow that mountain, and kill anyone who comes out." Ekyt lowered his body to the ground, crawling away. He didn't lack bravery, but he wasn't stupid either...he had to tell Sonic.

92 - Culture Shock

“...And they’re going to blow up the mountains.” Ekyt finished. “What should we do?” Amy Rose asked. “Evacuate everyone, and stop them.” Ekyt offered. “We need someone to evacuate them...” “Tiffany and Kurt can do that. Chaos Control them someplace else.” Knuckles stated. “I can diffuse the charges, but I need someone to watch my back. And, someone else has to guard the city.” “Ekyt, you should go with Sonic. I’ll guard the city. If the city falls, Angel Island is next.”

Sonic and Ekyt made their move, running. Sonic would take care of the enemies while Ekyt cut the wires to the charges. Ekyt had learned that there were ten charges. Set to go off in ten minutes. They defused 8 of them when they hit a snag. A small ambush that took time to fight off cost them precious time. Ekyt cut the wire to the ninth charge. With five seconds left, and everyone evacuated, there was no way for him to reach the last charge. “Sonic...run. The mountain will still be standing with only one charge. I can’t keep up, and besides, I have an idea.” “But.” “Go!” Ekyt gave Sonic a shove, while running back toward the city. Without thinking, he pulled the chaos emerald he had found out of his pocket. Somehow, when the charge went off, he knew to say “Chaos Shield.” A see-through pink shield engulfed him as the rocks bounced off it. When they stopped, the shield evaporated. Eggman and a small task force marched up. Sonic, Knuckles, and Ekyt were the only ones.

“If it isn’t the good doctor. You’ve put on weight.” Ekyt said, stony-faced. “Shut your mouth, you little punk. I don’t now how the fall didn’t kill you, but since it didn’t, I will.” “Fat chance. Oh, sorry, that was a low blow. Slim chance...oh, that’s still kind of insulting. How about...no chance? Yeah, that works.” Ekyt’s anger finally came spilling out.

Eggman’s task force shot at the three, who scrambled in different directions. Knuckles glided into the robots from the right, Ekyt attacked from the left, and Sonic bounded up the middle. The small task force couldn’t contain the three, who ran all over the place, dodging and attacked. Eggman cursed, he wasn’t going to win. He piloted his ship away, making a break for it.

“That loser will never give it up!” Sonic laughed. “He hasn’t won yet!” Knuckles added. “That doesn’t mean he’s not dangerous...and he took that defeat a little too well...like he knew what was going to happen.” Ekyt said thoughtfully. “You’re paranoid, he never changes his routine!” Knuckles shot at Ekyt. “I could be wrong, you’d know better than me.” But Ekyt had a sinking feeling that Eggman was up to something...

Linda was also up to something. She swung out in front of Ekyt. “I think we need to talk.”

Sitting on top of the mountain, Linda made him hear her out. “Look, I understand how you feel, and why. I don’t blame you. But...you’ve got to get over me. It’s not like you’ll never meet someone else.” Ekyt looked at her mildly, his eyes half-lidded. “I understand how YOU feel, and why. I’m not over you. I don’t suspect I will ever be totally over you. But I respect you enough to not pester you over it. Before I met you, I swore I’d never get mixed up in anything that’s remotely love-like. That I’d fight for people, but never waste my time looking for the good in them. Then I met you, and you helped me figure out there’s some good in the world. You kind of validated my ideas, made them plausible. I can never thank

you enough for that. But I was better off in my shell...I hope it's not too late to go back." Linda winced; he was really trying to hold his anger in. He closed his eyes for a brief moment before he jumped down the mountain- right into an ambush.

"Oh crap." Ekyt muttered, jumping over a set of blasts from the weapons the mechs had. He landed on the shoulders of one of them, wrapping his arms around it and wrenching the head off. He swung the head around, knocking one robot's weapon into one of its comrades, destroying it. That left two more. Ekyt threw the head like a Frisbee at one while swinging his staff around at the other one. He jumped again as a stray blast singed his arm. He gritted his teeth, but said nothing. He instead reached out and grabbed the weapon's muzzle, kicked the robot holding it, and shot. He broke the weapon against the rocks.

"Did I just snub him again? Tell him to get over me? What kind of whiny princess does that? When did I become that?"

Ekyt stayed silent, listening to the others crack jokes about Eggman's defeat. He ignored them eventually, busying himself with bandaging his arm up. Eventually, all eyes fell on him since he was the only one who didn't seem to find the jokes amusing. When asked why, he told them bluntly that "They're not taking Eggman seriously" and that "Eggman is more dangerous than you're giving him credit for." They laughed it off as paranoid suspicion.

Linda fingered her chaos gemstone cross. **He DOES care. I must have said the wrong thing. I'm being so...airy. Like I'm too good for him. I've got to do something...but what? After that last comment, I'm not sure what to think...** She heard a voice behind her. "I'll take that!" The voice belonged to Eggman as he ripped the chaos gemstone cross off her. "If I can't conquer this world, I'll go to where there aren't any heroes..." Linda, still in shock, ran off to tell the only person who would believe her.

Linda finished her story. Ekyt stood up, running for the door. "Where are you going? Do you know where's he headed?" Ekyt called back to her. "Yeah, Station Square. I'm going back. NOBODY follows, except Greg. He's left some robots here. C'mon Greg!" "Catch ya later!"

"Tiff, you've got to send me back!" Ekyt came flying into the room. "Eggman's on his way there. Just send me and Greg back, and tell the others to stay put!" Tiffany looked sideways at him. "I can't do that...I have strict orders not to let you leave." Sonic stepped out from behind her. "I'm going back Sonic. If I have to fight you to get back, I will." Ekyt warned him, knowing it wasn't going to be a fight he would win. "If you want to go, I'm not stopping you. But Linda thinks, and I'm agreeing, that you're leaving because of her." "Think whatever you want! Just let me get back before there's no Station Square left!" "No. Not until you sort this out." Sonic insisted. "Grab my coat Greg." Ekyt said quietly. "Don't do it..." "Chaos control!" Ekyt was gripping the green emerald he had summoned the chaos vortex from.

"He did that on purpose! He IS avoiding me!" Linda exclaimed. "I don't blame him. I don't blame you either, though. But, he belongs there, we belong here, I guess..."

93 - Prisoner of Peace

The city was in ruins as Ekyt and Greg got back. "Greg...you make sure no one's hurt...I'm going to..." his voice trailed off, despair taking over. "I don't know what the hell I'm going to do." The tell-tale flash-sizzle of chaos energy forced Ekyt back on guard. Linda stepped out, followed by Shadow. She marched up to Ekyt, who was confused as all get-out now.

"Listen here! You've been avoiding me since we broke up" "Linda, this isn't..." "I want to know, right now, what the deal is" "Linda, I" "Give me an answer. A REAL answer." "Look around you! Station Square is ruined! Do whatever you want to me, if I'm alive after I take back the city! Yell at me then, tell me it's my fault, tell me to rot in hell! Right now, I've got one last duty to perform, no matter what the cost." He closed his gloved hand in emphasis. He ignored any reasoning inside his mind and marched ahead.

The streets were deserted and dark, save for the odd streetlight left standing. Ekyt strode briskly to the mayor's office, where he had a sneaking suspicion he'd find someone familiar in the mayor's chair.

"Okay, fat boy, turn around!" Ekyt snarled, spinning the chair around. "Eggman? There's a surprise!" Ekyt muttered sarcastically. "Get him!" Two robots ambushed the already-exhausted Ekyt. He fought valiantly, but the two were huge and incredibly strong, and had overcome him in minutes. Panting heavily, and bleeding from the battle, Ekyt stared with hatred at Eggman.

At that moment, Shadow burst in, followed by Linda and Greg. "We'll take that!" Shadow yelled, pulling Ekyt away. Ekyt jerked his arm away. "I promise you Eggman, I WILL bring you down. Mark my words, you'll pay for this..." "Oh please, your friends are doing you a favor. If you must know, I've already cut a deal with "Planet Freedom." I don't attack them if they let me have Station Square." And they agreed to it?!" Ekyt was enraged. Shadow stunned him with a chaos spear between the shoulder blades as Linda quickly handcuffed him. "I'm sorry Ekyt, but you're under arrest..." CHAOS CONTROL!

As soon as they landed, the concerned face of Sonic was looking at them. "Glad you got him back. Welcome home buddy!" Sonic exclaimed. "This isn't home for me. It never will be, especially if I'm a prisoner here!" Ekyt struggled fruitlessly, wanting to kill SOMEONE, but not caring who. "We had no choice. Eggman would have had us beat!" Sonic argued. "So everyone in the city is collateral damage to you? That's it?" Ekyt snarled, still pushing against the handcuffs. "I didn't say we wouldn't be going back. We've got to regroup!" Sonic argued. "Yeah, just like the prisoners he's torturing and killing! Let's talk over tea while people are dying! Sounds like a BLAST!" at the last word, Ekyt pushed away from Shadow. Linda grabbed him. "You aren't going ANYWHERE until we've talked this out!"

"Like you let me talk it out to you when you broke up with me? Understand this, I have nothing left but my job. And I sure as hell am not gonna give that up without a fight!" Ekyt shot back. "I deserved that..." Linda told him. He softened for a moment. "But I can't forgive you. I hope you understand." "No, I don't. But don't bother explaining it. I don't want to hear it. I have nothing to say except that I'm going back to Station Square, with or without help. And I'm going now, whether you have these handcuffs on me or not!" "You've totally given up on our relationship?" Linda whispered to him. "What am I

supposed to think? You dropped me like a bad habit, gave me an impossible ultimatum, and criticized me for saving the world. And above all that, I pushed that aside and helped you get home. Now's your chance to never have to worry about me again. Let Shadow do Chaos control so I can save the city."

94 - Ekyt Snaps!

Shadow got in Ekyt's face. Ekyt, his hands cuffed behind his back, stared ahead defiantly. "Did you think that you could handle that yourself? Did you HONESTLY think that. You MUST be as dumb as you look. Human's look stupid to begin with. YOU, however, look AND act the part." Sonic looked at Ekyt and gulped. "Shad...you should stop..." "No. This kid is worthless, he needs to know. You're all too polite to tell him, but I'm not!" Klein (ShyWanderer43) looked at Ekyt too, wondering what was wrong. He winced too. "And here's another thing: Maybe all those rotten people SHOULD die? You want to kill yourself? Why don't you take solace in the fact that we think your worthless @\$ is good enough to litter our planet." Linda shook her head. She'd knew Ekyt better than any of them, and this wasn't good..."

Shadow put his finger in Ekyt's face, then grabbed his chin. "You think you're better than us? That mysterious crap is nothing but smoke and mirrors. The fact is you're afraid of me. Of us. You know you don't belong, so you hide, that's right, HIDE in the shadows. You're a disgrace. You deserve to go get yourself killed. Why don't you grow an ounce of common sense and give up on ever being something. You're not a hero, and you never will be. What you are is worthless! You suck. I'd kill you, but I'd be wasting a bullet on your worthless @\$." Shadow spat the last word. Then HE saw the look on Ekyt's face. Even Shadow was intimidated. Flash (Flashthehedgehog) shook his head and wrote in the air, holding his finger like a sparkler (For more on that, check out Flash's awesome story!). He traced "Duck and Cover!" in the air, before pulling hat down over his eyes and covering his ears.

Ekyt threw his head forward! CRACK!!! The sound of two heads colliding was followed by the sound of everyone in the room groaning. "I'M NOTHING? THEN NOTHING JUST CRACKED YOUR HEAD OPEN!!!" Ekyt laughed, watching the blood come out of Shadow's head. He felt the red plasma run down his face. "I'M GOING BACK! I'M NOT WELCOME HERE, AND I SURE AS HELL DON'T WANT TO BE HERE! IF YOU DON'T LET ME OUT OF THESE CUFFS, YOU'LL WISH EGGMAN WAS BACK!" He shouted, kicking over a table as some people he had never seen before ran to try to restrain him. "GET THE HELL AWAY FROM ME, I'LL KICK YOUR TEETH RIGHT DOWN YOUR THROAT IF YOU SO MUCH AS TOUCH ME!" Ekyt had lost it. After losing Linda, being in pain, and feeling responsible for Station Square, he had enough. Shadow's insults had pushed him over the edge. One of the luckless slobs to get a hold of Ekyt found himself flying through the window, courtesy of Ekyt's right foot. After a couple more head butts, Ekyt was like a bull in the center of the ring. "COME ON! I'LL TEACH YOU TO SCREW WITH ME! GO FOR IT!"

To Ekyt's surprise, his cuffs broke. He grabbed the emerald and performed Chaos Control.

As soon as he was gone, everyone in the room breathed a sigh of relief. "Good job Shads. I think you snapped him out of his depression..." Shadow agreed. "Yeah. Good, he can go save the city and prove me wrong. Then he'll quit being moody." "So what will it take to stop you?" Amy Rose asked sweetly, earning some chuckles, including one from Klein.

Ekyt ducked behind a building. **I'm nothing, huh? I'll kill him after I free the city!** A robot on patrol wandered by. Ekyt, to his surprise, lifted it up and slammed it on the sidewalk, destroying it. **THAT**, he

thought, **Is JUST what the doctor ordered.**

Ekyt barged into City Hall, leaping over the two guard robots and onto Eggman. He knocked him out of his chair, sending them both spilling to floor. Ekyt punched, elbowed, and kneed, then rolled down Eggman and grabbed his ankle. He twisted it in awkward directions, until he heard a crack. He clamped down again, aiming to tear his foot right off. Behind him, he heard the robots coming. He picked up Eggman's chair (Heavy armchair, about 30 pounds) and swung it, knocking one robot down. His staff took care of the other one.

Ekyt grabbed Eggman's arm and put him in an armbar, before grabbing him around the neck and pulling backward. "I'LL BREAK YOUR NECK UNLESS YOU GET OUT OF THE CITY NOW! AND IF YOU'VE HURT *ONE* PERSON, YOU'LL BE LUCKY TO BE BREATHING! YOU FAT PIECE OF CRAP!" Ekyt dove back down, forcing Eggman to his feet. He was wired with adrenaline, so he picked Eggman up and slammed him down as hard as he could on the mayor's desk. "LET THEM GO AND I'LL LET YOU LIVE...IF YOU'RE LUCKY!"

95 - Open Season

Ekyt dragged Eggman to his hover craft, throwing him inside. Quickly identifying what controlled the ship's steering, Ekyt whipped out his staff and demolished everything else. "Now you pile you hunk of junk computer slaves in here, and get the hell out of my city." Ekyt slapped him across the face. Even Eggman could tell he was holding back. Ekyt stomped toward Eggman, who jumped inside and hit every button within reach that wasn't already destroyed. "You haven't seen the last of me!" Eggman yelled. "Get bent!" Ekyt shouted back.

A flash-crackle signaled chaos control. Ekyt whipped toward it, intent on kicking the crap out of anyone hostile who came out. Five Animals he hadn't seen before dove out, grabbing him. "GET OFF ME!" Ekyt started fighting with them, only stopping when Shadow, Sonic, Linda, and someone else came out. "Ekyt, stop. They're only doing what they're told." "THEN TELL THEM NOT TO FREAKIN' TOUCH ME!" Ekyt shouted back, throwing a headbutt at one of the ones that didn't back off. "Look, we don't want to argue with you!" Sonic shouted, trying to calm Ekyt down. "Look, I don't want to have to sedate you, but I will." Sonic said quietly. Ekyt stopped struggling. "You've got thrity seconds to tell me why I shouldn't rip all of you apart." Ekyt spat.

They told him Shadow only said those things to rile him up. Ekyt seemed to consider that. "So, what you're telling me is that this was a setup?" Everyone nods. "So, I'm easy to read? Fun to manipulate? Don't consider me a real threat, do you?" "We're not saying that." "THEN DO YOU WANT TO TELL ME WHAT THE HELL YOU **ARE** SAYING?" Ekyt shouted, struggling again.

They restrained Ekyt with rope, chain, handcuffs, anything they could get. "Such a terrible temper..." the Animal who had come with Linda walked cautiously forward, holding a glass of wine. "And who are you, pray tell?" Ekyt spat, not liking this guy on sight. Something about this panther just rubbed Ekyt the wrong way. As soon as he opened his mouth and spoke in an annoying, "I'm rich" voice, Ekyt pretty much decided that he hated this guy. "My name is Anthony." (Anthony belongs to Alchemest1. Thanks for letting me borrow him A1!) "Well Tony" "*Anthony* please. "Tony" sound so blue-collar." "Well *Anthony*, I'd say nice to meet you, but then I'd be a liar." Ekyt snarled. Anthony chuckled. "If I had a face like yours, I'd laugh too. Maybe no one would notice." Ekyt spat. Anthony chuckled. "My apologies, dear boy. It's just that I have a difficult time imaging that darling girl (Nods at Linda) condescending to date you." Anthony, it what looked to be on purpose to Ekyt, tripped slightly and threw his wine in the restrained Ekyt's face. "Oh! Dear, dear, the mess I've made!"

Shadow was watching all this. "Why are we letting this idiot humiliate Ekyt if he's on our side?" Shadow questioned. "Oh, that was an accident Shadow. He's really a gentleman. I don't think he'd do something like that on purpose." Linda said with a shrug. "I don't like him. I'd like to take those chains off Ekyt so he could kill "Anthony." Shadow muttered.

"If you had any sense of class, you would still have that lovely young lady at your arm." "She dumped me. Fine. I loved her, still do. But I figured she'd at least do **better** than me. You're an insult." Ekyt said, shrugging the best he could with the chains on him. Anthony smiled. Coming from him it wasn't an encouraging gesture. "You would do well not to sass me if you wish to remain friends with her." Ekyt

strained the chains. The guards around him leapt forward to restrain him further. "Is that a threat? Because if it is, you're playing a deadly game with me. Oh, and, it's not "sassing you" if it's true." Linda walked over. "Ekyt, come on. Can't we all get along here? He's really a nice guy once you get to know him."

Ekyt's face contorted into a vile look. "This little pussycat is ticking me off. Guess what? You're screwing with someone who has nothing to lose. You can keep taking shots at me. I guarantee, it will come back and kick you right in the @\$\$\$. Keep talking, because the gloves are coming off." Ekyt was now restrained with his hands cuffed behind his back. Anthony cocked his head. "You and I aren't so different. We both know our worth, and apparently have the same taste in women." Anthony gave Linda a gentle hug around the shoulders. This infuriated Ekyt enough to get him to throw off the guard and get right in the panther's smug face. "Let me tell you right now. The fact that Linda likes you means that you're a part of their team." Ekyt nodded at Sonic and Shadow. "And normally, that would be good enough for me. But I'm going to tell you this up front. I can't trust you, so I'm going to watch you. And if you put one claw out of line..." "You'll what? You see, dear boy, the facts are such: You are restrained, I am not. You are unarmed, I am armed (extends claws). YOU are alone, (Another squeeze to Linda), I am not."

Shadow couldn't take it anymore. "Chaos control." He muttered darkly. He had frozen everyone but Ekyt. "Shadow? What the he" "Look, I hate this guy too. So I'm going to undo these cuffs. For once, you and I are on the same page. When I let you go, DON'T attack him. No matter what. You'll get your chance, just not now. Understand." Ekyt didn't, but he nodded his consent.

At Anthony's "not," Ekyt broke his grip on Linda. "I might not be her boyfriend anymore, and I might not have a thing to do with this group, but I NEVER stand by and let an innocent get hurt. Like I said. I'm watching you. Linda may like you, but I sure as hell don't. So...watch you back, and get ready to run." Ekyt warned, smiling in a scary manner. "Because it's open season on pompous asses."

96 - Pure Heart

“Get him!” Anthony shouted to the guards.” “Skate!” Shadow shouted. Without thinking, Ekyt did. Apparently, Shadow had slipped a pair of hover shoes on him. Ekyt took off, blazing fast. No one but Sonic or Shadow had a hope of pursuing him. Shadow wasn’t going to, and Sonic was stunned enough to let Ekyt get a head start.

“Hey! C’mon pal, don’t make this any harder!” Sonic took off, but Shadow blocked him. “Sorry. I have my reasons.” Shadow said darkly. Sonic started a race with Shadow, trying to reach Ekyt while Shadow kept stopping him.

Ekyt bolted for Forest Hill, a small mountainous area that would conceal him until he figured out what to do. He had lost Sonic and Shadow. As he stopped in a clearing, he silently thanked Shadow for his help, promising to return the favor.

“Oh dear! It seems he’s given us the slip!” Anthony said, unconcerned. “Linda, my darling, would you mind finding me a suitable room? I have some urgent matters to deal with.” Linda agreed, though she couldn’t shake the feeling that Ekyt running from a fight was wrong. **How well DO you know Ekyt, then? You can’t trust him! Anthony is a blue-blood!**

“Now what?!” Ekyt said to himself. He heard a sound behind him. He vaulted to his feet. It was Tikal. “There’s not much time Ekyt. You need to hide! They’re going to find you! Come with me!” Ekyt ran after her. “But you’re not supposed to mess with the time stream! How can you help me?” “That horrible panther can’t win! If you die, he wins, and we’re all destroyed. Past or present won’t matter! Now, listen! I’m taking you back to my time. The only way to fight chaos...” She gestured to the Master Emerald. “...Is WITH chaos. The servers are the seven chaos, power enriched by the heart. YOUR heart is pure. Your time has come to take your rightful place as a hero. Sonic and friends mean well, but they are blinded by their own loyalty to Linda’s happiness. You have seen through it. And you alone can act on it.” Ekyt was actually despairing. “How do I do that? I can barely take care of myself anymore! I’m a wreck without Linda!” Tikal put a gentle hand on his shoulder. “The seven chaos will guide you. But you must put your trust in them. Believe you can do it. For I see you not as a broken man, I see you for what you truly are...something Linda can see as well. It is my job to ensure that you take this mission. You were asked because your answer is already known...” Tikal smiled and gestured to a statue. Of Ekyt. “I will do what it takes to ensure that evil is driven from our world.” Was enscribed on the bottom. “Wait, how can I read this?” he asked suddenly, realizing that the writing was Ancient Echinda, not a language he was overly familiar with. “The time stream has decided you are the hero. And it will bend to make you that way. However, it has it’s limits...” Ekyt nodded. “Alright. I will do what it takes to ensure that evil is driven from our world.”

Ekyt was going to stay in the past to heal his injuries and get cleaned up. He was only going to stay one day. But it occurred to him that he never wanted to leave. But he had to. He didn’t belong here; he belonged in his own time. You always have to keep moving forward; even when going backward is a better prospect.

He left the next day. "Tikal...after the world is safe...can I come back?" Ekyt asked. He had asked her once before, and knew what her answer would be. Or he THOUGHT he did. "You can come back and stay as long as you like...but you won't want to..." Tikal told him with a knowing smile. Ekyt knew she was never off with her predictions, so he hugged her and said goodbye.

Ekyt left, and Shadow immediately appeared. "He took the mission?" Shadow asked. Tikal nodded, worry etched on her face. "Don't worry. If he can fight off an ultimate life form, then he can handle that stupid aristocrat."

Klein (Shywanderer054), Flash (Flashthehedgehog), and Amy saw the disturbance. "What is that?" Amy asked. Klein shrugged. Flash pointed. "It's chaos control...but I don't recognize the Chaos Wavelength..." "Chaos Wavelength?" Amy asked. "Yeah. Everyone's got a special "path", everyone who performs chaos control anyway. This one is different...It's not Shadow's, it's not Tiffany's (Shadowthe_Hedgehog), and it's not mine..."

Ekyt hit the ground running. A wall of earth shot up in front of him. "I don't have time for this Klein!" he snarled. "Just hear us out, okay?" Flash asked gently. Ekyt looked at them, but decided to listen. "You have your reasons...but we don't want Linda to get hurt again..." "I'm not after Linda. If I don't stop whatever is going on, the whole world is ruined. I don't want anything but her happiness...if it's not me that will bring it to her, fine. I can live with that. What I CAN'T live with is letting the world get ruined..." Klein looked at Amy and Flash, and put down the wall of earth. Ekyt nodded and skated, feeling like was picking up speed. He put a hand in his coat pocket. Seven chaos emeralds were in there.

"I trust all is prepared?" Anthony asked. Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, and Shadow were bound to the master emerald with chaos energy. "You won't get away with this!" Tails shouted. "Manners, lad, manners." Anthony said over his shoulder. "Good, good. Prepare it..." "HEY!" came a shout. Anthony looked down. Ekyt was standing there.

"HEY!" Ekyt raised his eyebrows mockingly. **I've got to throw him off his game...force him to make a mistake...** "What's new pussycat?" Ekyt quipped. "Guards, please seize that annoyance." Anthony said calmly. Ekyt looked around. Robots? "So, it's you and Eggman, is it? Then I guess I can count on shoddy workmanship!" Ekyt grinned and concentrated on the emeralds. They rose out of his pocket and formed a circle around his head. "The servers are the seven chaos...Chaos is power enriched by the heart..." Ekyt grinned and slapped his butt in a "Kiss my @\$@" gesture. "Come and get me then. I'll wait right here. (Making fun of Anthony's accent) It's the only sporting thing to do."

The robots started to attack. From underneath the master emerald's alter, a huge ship began to take form. A ship powered by- Seven chaos emeralds? Ekyt looked up, seeing his seven emeralds still floating around him in a circle. "I'll worry about that when I get there..."

"Is the girl safe?" Anthony asked, keeping his cool. "I sent her away; I truly have feelings for her. However, they can only manifest themselves after I win this battle..."

"Come on already! I'm growing a beard over here!" Ekyt called. The robots got close enough. "Finally!" He concentrated on the blue emerald. It gave him speed. "Now I understand...MY seven chaos emeralds are custom-made...They each represent someone I've come in contact with..." Ekyt smiled wickedly. "You're days are numbered "lad"!" Ekyt shouted, thumbing his nose as he ran. He

jumped up high and jumped off three robot's heads. He ran into a cave. He zipped out almost immediately with a squadron of Animals chasing him. "Oh, come on! Give it up guys!" Ekyt called back. One caught him with a net. "GOTCHA!" Ekyt rolled his eyes and took off, dragging the unlucky animal behind him. He ran straight toward a tree, then stopped at the last second. WHAM! Ekyt freed himself from the net and ran back.

"Dear, dear, he IS making a mess of things, isn't he?" Anthony said, seemingly unconcerned. "Sir, half our task force is gone!" one Animal yelled, panting. "Please, he's ONE human. He'll wear down soon enough." "He's got chaos emeralds sir!" THAT shook Anthony up a bit, but he recovered quickly. "Does he know? This should prove interesting, considering SEVEN have the power I need...what could I do with fourteen? Please consult Dr. Eggman, Griffith." Anthony took a sip of the rich brown liquid in his glass. He watched as Ekyt kept bouncing around, dodging attacks while eliminating his task force.

"Yes, of course. You feel the need to put up a fight. A great show. Fruitless, however. But I'll give you credit for the effort, lad. But your time is up, I'm afraid." Anthony reached for his cell phone. "Get ready to deploy the vehicle. Anyone not on board is staying."

97 - Crucial Choice

Ekyt heard the sound of a humongous engine revving. "He's gonna launch that monstrosity! I don't know what he plans to do, but I'm gonna ruin it!" Ekyt gripped the red emerald and grabbed onto the ship. He climbed to a hatchway, and, using the red (Knuckles) emerald's power, he ripped it open.

Inside was a forged steel environment. A boiler room, of sorts. Ekyt thought he might as well start here.

A siren blared, irritating Anthony. "Please see what that is. I'm in no mood to deal with a headache." Anthony motioned to one robot. The siren continued to blare. "Very well, I will check myself." He muttered to himself.

Anthony walked carefully down the stairs (He didn't want to spill his drink, a fine wine from the 1830's). He stopped at the bottom of the stairs. The boiler room was destroyed. The robot he had sent to check was stuck inside one of the boilers. Anthony put an arm up as it exploded, showering metal all over the room. "A mere pinprick." Anthony murmured. "I wonder what...or who...caused this..."

Ekyt went up to the next floor. This looked to be a kitchen. "Hmm...Anthony, old bean, maybe your drinks need a little dash of vitamin "E"." Ekyt dumped out all of Anthony's wine and replaced it with a horrible mixture of hot sauce, horseradish, and vinegar. "Cheers, old boy!"

"I need a drink..." Anthony made his way to the kitchen. A drink always cleared his mind. He poured some liquid into his glass. He took a sip and started to cough. "What a vile concoction! (cough) This certainly is NOT Dom Perignon!" It seemed every bottle had been hit. "Someone is trying my patience...Fortunately, they will crack before I will."

The next floor was the (newly reformed) Master Emerald. Ekyt saw Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, and Shadow tied to the emerald. He looked at them, their eyes clearly saying "Untie me!" since their mouths (they're gagged) could not. Making eye contact with the other three, Ekyt untied Shadow. "Good move. I'll untie the rest of them." "I'm going to the control room to see what I can destroy. Get them out of here, this thing is going to explode or crash if I have my way."

Anthony sat back down in the control room. "Interesting." Studied a monitor, which showed an angry Ekyt racing through the halls. "He's made it so very far...it's a pity he won't survive to gloat about it! Deploy robot forces A-D 481...Let's see what you make of that. You've been formidable thusfar..."

Ekyt was suddenly face-to-face in a narrow hallway. Thirty robots all had their weapons pointed at him. "This sucks." Ekyt dove back around the corner, as bullets ricocheted against the wall. "Which one...One of these emeralds will protect me...yellow is Tails...Red is Knuckles...Blue is Sonic...Purple is Rouge...Green is...Shadow...I'm going to enjoy this..."

"Surrender-now-and-the-master-will-be-charitable-in-victory." "Okay, ya got me!" Ekyt said mockingly. "Chaos Blast!" he yelled. The robots exploded. "Good stuff! Glad I caused it." Ekyt walked through the corridor, seeing a steel industrial door.

Ekyt opened it cautiously. "I've been expecting you Ekyt." Anthony stepped out from the shadows. "Have you now? I wouldn't want to disappoint..." Ekyt stared toward him. "Before you make the mistake of striking me, look around." Ekyt did. It seemed like everything was glass. There were palm trees, and a view of a lake that Ekyt knew was holographic.

"Of course, the scenery is quite captivating, is it not. But what I'd like to call your attention to is this. Linda!" Linda walked out of one of the side rooms. "Linda? You've got to get out of here! This thing is going up!" he exclaimed. Linda looked shaken; like she was torn. "Dear me, it appears you have a choice to make." Ekyt brought his staff across the control panel he found. Sensors started beeping angrily. "Linda, I don't care if there's nothing between us. You've got to get out of here. I can help, then you can go back to hating me."

"Dear girl, I can give you everything that this commoner cannot. And I certainly care for you." "So do I!" Ekyt snarled vehemently. "If you did, why did you go against her wishes? If you cared for her, wouldn't she come first?" Anthony said in a mock questioning tone.

Linda stood between the two of them, looking nervous. "I have to what's best for me...But which one..." "You know who you want to trust in your heart Linda." Ekyt said quietly. "Linda, darling, I fear out time will be up if we stay here. We must go now." Linda looked over her shoulder. "I'm sorry...But I pick..."

98 - Chaos Out of Control

"..Ekylt...I'm sorry." Linda went to Anthony's side. "A wise choice darling." Ekylt was fuming, but trying to hide it for her sake. "Well, it seems you've ruined my plans. Of course, you'll have to hurry if you don't want the chaos emerald's power to cook off...Then there is the matter of your seven meeting MY seven...I do believe that this may be the last time we meet. It was a pleasure." Anthony gave a bow. Ekylt gave him the finger, which was a surprise. "I'll have another round with you Anthony...we're not done yet..." Ekylt closed his eyes, relatively sure that his own life was forfeit. But he had to keep the emeralds from exploding.

Ekylt grabbed the blue emerald, and raced back to the center of the ship. He grabbed the chaos emeralds. He could feel their power surge. He jumped out a window and ran down the ship, hoping to reach the ground before the explosion.

"He'll never make it!" Amy shouted, covering her eyes. "C'mon Ekylt, run!" The wind resistance forced Ekylt's arms back as he ran straight down, holding the emeralds. "I need a burst of speed...but how?" Ekylt grabbed the second set of emeralds. "Help me out!" he shouted. No dice. The emeralds were going to explode. He stuffed his seven into the hull, then threw the other seven as he could. He jumped as his power ran out, knowing that this HAD to be it. What could he do? There was no reason for him to try. He had fulfilled his destiny, but felt he lost the war.

"You're kidding!" Shadow skated toward Ekylt's rapidly falling form as fast as he could. "CHAOS CONTROL!" He shouted just before Ekylt hit the ground. "Thanks Shadow." He muttered. "Hmm." Shadow just grunted. The chaos control wore off and Ekylt landed on his feet.

The rocket exploded, sparks and metal raining down. But nothing that would do any damage. "He did it!" Amy exclaimed, hugging Sonic. "I can't believe he pulled that off." Rouge said to Knuckles in awe. Tails was having his left tail checked by Cream.

Ekylt dragged himself up the altar. He was alone, the others were celebrating. The words so poignantly sang by Alter Bridge ran through his head. "I've been defeated and brought and down. Dropped to my knees when hope ran out. The time has come to change my ways. On this day, I see clearly. Everything has come to life. In this place, in a broken dream. And I'll leave it all behind. I'll never long for what might have been. No, regret won't waste my life again. I want it back, I'll fight to remain. Not a chance, to achieve this dream, and no chance to feel the love. Fear will kill me, all I could be. Lift these sorrows, set me free." Ekylt recited them to himself. "What crap." He looked down the edge of the altar. It was high up, but he found he couldn't care. The coward's way out would be to jump.

That wasn't Ekylt. He had just seen everything in his life blow up. All he could was pick up the pieces and hope that things worked out. He didn't think they would. All he could do was keep...existing. That alone would annoy his enemies.

"How quick can this get cleaned?" Ekylt asked the clerk at the dry-cleaning store. "'bout a half hour." She replied, bored. She tapped out her cigarette. "Thanks." Ekylt answered, walking out without his

coat. He had made it through the battle without too much damage. Well, physical damage. Mentally, he was fried.

“Gimme your money freak.” Two guys with knives “asked.” Ekyt, not caring to give in, turned around and beat the stuffing out of them. Then he handed them each 20 bucks. “If you’re honestly that desperate, try asking around before you pull a knife on someone who’s looking for a fight.” Ekyt went back to pick up his coat.

He pulled it on, turning the collar up against the brutally cold air. Sonic and friends had gone home. They had offered to take Ekyt with them, but he told them no. Someone had to watch Station Square.

“I’m worried about him Klein. This isn’t like him.” Klein nodded his agreement to Amy’s statement. “Sorry Kiddo, not much we can do.” Rouge said airily. Shadow nodded. “He’s not to thrilled with us right now. I don’t blame him, for once.” Sonic shook his head. “He called the shots on that Anthony guy. But one thing bothers me...Why would Linda go with him?” Sonic muttered. “Maybe it’s psychological. She’s upset with Ekyt, the fact that he’s right is making it more difficult for her to accept.” Tails said. “I wonder what he’s up to right now?”

Ekyt sat at the end of the bar at Ray’s. “Kid, you’re alive! You saved the world! And...you’re miserable...The girl thing, right?” Ekyt nodded and told Ray how Linda had picked Anthony over him. “I don’t even want a relationship at this point; Just her happiness and safety. It might not be with me, but it is NOT with that arrogant piece of crap panther.” Ekyt put his head in his arms, looking, for once, like the vulnerable teenage he was, rather than the tough-as-nails vigilante he wanted- and needed- to be.

“Hey, what happened to the chaos emeralds anyway? I know I grabbed one, but what about the other six.” “Well, I have one.” Amy held hers out. “Me too.” Tails added, holding his out. Klein held his out. Flash (Flashthehedgehog) held his out. “And I’ve got one.” Knuckles put his in too. “You idiots! The seven emeralds coming together is what started everything!” Shadow shouted.

Too Late.

99 - Fear, the Greatest Weakness

Ekylt sat down, tired from...nothing. No threats to the city. Then he remembered: Tikal! His shoulders slumped as he realized that he couldn't do that. His place was here. Much as he didn't WANT it to be. If someone else could watch the city, he'd be gone in a heartbeat. Since he didn't HAVE a heart anymore, this wasn't a problem.

Anthony sighed. "I fear we have a short trip coming up darling. You may wish to hold on to something." Linda nodded, gripping the leg of a desk. Anthony braced himself in a doorway. Somehow, Chaos Control had happened again, and they were all bound for Station Square.

BLAST!!!! Ekylt was shot backward. He landed on his feet and rolled around the corner. He knew that disturbance. The blinding light, the blast...chaos control. "Great, they're back. Well, I'm not going anywhere. This is MY turf now, and they're stuck here against my will and their's."

Sonic. Shadow. Tails. Knuckles. Amy. Klein. Flash. Tiffany. Cream. Cheese. And the rest. Everyone spilled out into the street. Then Anthony and Linda landed. Everyone was too dazed to fight. Even Anthony seemed slightly off-balance from the impromptu trip. "Everyone alright? I'll ask what happened when it's obvious all of you can stand up." Ekylt asked dryly. Then he saw Anthony. He strode over to the panther and grabbed him.

"Don't wrinkle my suit, you peasant." Anthony spat. "Give me one reason I don't knock every fang out of your mouth..." Ekylt snarled, still holding him. "Because Linda would be SO disappointed in your conduct." Anthony smirked. "And if I didn't give a damn..." He saw Linda shaking her head. He dropped Anthony. "I DO give a damn. You're lucky. I'm tempted to kill you, but it's not what she wants." Anthony straightened his suit out. "Disgusting vermin touching my clothes. I DO hope you manage to take some manners away from all this." "And I hope to take away your ability to stand up." Ekylt shot back. He left, leaving the others to sort out what was going to happen next.

Ekylt felt something snap inside him. He found an abandoned parking garage and sat up against one of the support beams. He curled his legs up into his chest, looking around savagely. He felt like he had lost touch with reality.

"We've got to go find him!" Sonic exclaimed. "I can go in the X-Tornado." Tails offered. "I'm going to keep an eye on the rest of them. They're helpless." Shadow said with a look over his shoulder. "Hey! I resemble that remark!" Flash called. Shadow smacked himself in the forehead.

Is THIS what it feels like? Everyone out to get you? I got lazy...It can't happen again...would it really be so bad if Eggman took over? Why do I care? I don't...I don't care. Ekylt walked to one of the brick walls and felt along the darkness, finding a door handle. He turned it, finding that it opened into a stairwell. He climbed up it after locking the door, finding it empty. This was as good a spot as any. He trudged up the stairs, ducking below the windows. He hit the floor when he heard the X-Tornado whiz by. His coat had camouflaged him, so Tails hadn't found him. Good. He continued the climb up the stairs, hiding.

"I say, he positively fled!" Anthony chuckled with delight. "Well darling, before I was rudely interrupted, THIS" he forced a box into her hand, "is for you." Inside lay the most beautiful bracelet Linda had ever seen (Right Alchemest?). "It's beautiful Anthony! Thank you!"

Ekyt curled up again at the top, willing himself to go to sleep. But he didn't feel safe, despite the fact anything short of a nuclear explosion couldn't hurt him in this concrete bunker of a stairwell. **I've got to get a grip!** one voice told him. **Why? Doesn't this hurt less?** Another voice answered. The first voice piped up again. **You've got to be tough!** The second voice returned. **You owe it to yourself...haven't you had enough pain? Wouldn't you like to forget, at least for a little while? Let her go, but make the panther suffer...** Ekyt smiled. He had found a new reason for living.

Anthony lazily pointed at bottles in the liquor store. "That one. That one...no, you rube, up a shelf! I wouldn't give THAT to my worst enemy!" Anthony looked at the bottle in disgust. He leapt back suddenly. He SWORE he saw Ekyt's face on the bottle, smiling at him. When he looked again, the face was gone. "That boy was a formidable foe...no doubt he's cowering somewhere." Anthony laughed, slightly nervous.

Eggman paced on top of the Master Emerald Altar. "Where is she?" he said aloud. "Hold your horses, lard ball. Here I am." Rouge was floating above him, holding shards of the Master Emerald. "Ah, yes, yes, YES!" He reached for them. "Uh uh uh." Rouge snatched them away. "I want my fee up front. Sorry Doc, but anyone in the business this long knows how it works."

Anthony went across the street to the hotel he was staying at. Linda had the room next to his. Both suites. He walked into the bathroom and rubbed some water on his face. When he left the bathroom, he saw something on his chair. "What is this?" He held it up. "Linda, a moment please!" he called. She opened the door between the rooms, her concerned face in the doorway. "What's the matter?" "Is this yours?" he asked, holding up something black and red. "No...That's Ekyt's mask." Anthony dropped it suddenly, shaking his head. "How did it get here?" he wondered aloud. But he didn't think any more of it.

Sonic spotted Ekyt. "Hey! Ekyt!" Ekyt ignored the call, continuing his walk. "C'mon pal, what's up?" Sonic ran after him. He saw Ekyt dart into a narrow alley. Sonic raced in after him, finding the alley empty. He looked up, not seeing him either. "Huh! I must be imagining things." Sonic zipped off.

Ekyt sat down in the stair case again, running a hand through his hair, a borderline insane smile on his face. "I warned you not to screw with me. That I had nothing to lose." He muttered to himself. He got up again, stretching his neck. He decided to take another walk.

This time, Tails spotted him. "Hey! Ekyt!" Ekyt took off. Tails flew after him, looking down in the crowd. It was no good, Ekyt was moving too fast. Tails reached for his headset. "Amy, he's headed toward you and Klein! Cut him off!"

Ekyt saw Amy and Klein. He made a sharp turn down an alleyway, causing Tails to lose sight of him. He heard Amy and Klein coming toward him, but he ran for it, zipping into an old motel room that had long been abandoned. He heard Amy run by. He gave himself a small pat on the back for getting away yet again. He would reveal himself when the time was right.

Anthony decided to have some wine to calm his nerves. He reached for his favorite bottle, but found it empty, save for something at the bottom. "What is this now?" He up-ended the bottle. A note fell out. In an untidy scrawl, it asked a question: "A Coffin or A Casket?" He turned the note over, finding one other chilling sentence. "My flame can't be doused, this is what pain's about..." Anthony sat down hard, not understanding. "No, someone's playing games with me. They will learn not to trifle in my affairs, WHOEVER it is."

Chris was the next to have an "Ekylt sighting." "Hey, wait up!" he called. Ekylt walked on, unconcerned. Chris caught up. "Ekylt, are you okay?" An insane-sounding laugh met Chris' ears. "Kids. A tisket, a tasket..." Ekylt turned around, as Chris looked on in horror, "A coffin or a casket?" Chris ran for it. Ekylt pulled off his black mask, hoping he got his point across to "leave me alone."

"Perhaps a game of tennis today?" Anthony asked Linda, tickling her under the chin. "Sure!" she said happily. Anthony turned to go get ready. He gasped and fell backward. "Look!" he pointed at the TV. He SWORE he saw Ekylt's face, laughing at him...taunting him. "Anthony, you should relax a little. Stay here, you'll be alright in my room. I'm going to get some water." Anthony shook his head. "You're right. It must be the late nights catching up with me. Besides, he's no threat." "Oh, I'm not?" Anthony whipped around. He heard Ekylt's voice, but didn't see him. "Please, your games are growing old!" Anthony called out. "To YOU perhaps...watch your back, old boy!"

Eggman stared gleefully at the pieces of emerald. He ordered his robots to get Anthony, his touch was needed to initiate the project. "I'm looking forward to seeing them all suffer!"

Sonic and friends were stunned to see Ekylt walk in. "Don't touch me." He snarled before they could move. "Eggman is up to something. And I think I've got that stupid panther right where I want him. So, I'm here to help. BUT. If you try to restrain me, I'll attack. I'll tell you the same thing I told Anthony: You're messing with someone who has nothing to lose."

"I give you, the Egg-cannon!" Eggman shouted with a laugh. "Impressive...powered by the shards of the Master Emerald?" Anthony asked. "Indeed. And it will mutilate any pathetic attempt at resistance." "Don't count on it lord lard!" Sonic was tapping his foot impatiently. "GET HIM!" Eggman yelled to his robots.

Anthony couldn't help but chuckle. "Linda, isn't it marvelous?" he asked. "No. It's horrible. I want no part of this Anthony." Linda had come to her senses. "You ungrateful wench! After all I've done for you..." Linda suddenly broke into a smile. Anthony turned to see what she was smiling at. "Hi Ant." Ekylt was standing right there. "You! You were stalking me!" Ekylt laughed. "So I was...but I think it got my point across...Now, if you were to touch her, THAT would be a mistake." Anthony let his claws out to their full extent. "You have made a horrible mistake. Your attempts to frighten me have only made me wish to make you suffer even more." Ekylt grabbed him around the neck and threw him off the altar. Anthony landed on his feet. "It will take more than your petty parlor tricks to ambush me!" Ekylt raced down after him.

All around them, the fight was in full swing. Sonic and friends vs. Eggman and Anthony. If that canon was fired, it was all over. It was up to the them, the last line of defense, to hold Eggman off. Ekylt, however, had his sights set on Anthony...

100 - 100- Winds of Change

"It's all over for you. The thought of torturing you, keeping you awake, making you *suffer*, that was the only thing keeping me going. Was I crazy? Or was I in control the whole time? I can't see the future Anthony, but the crystal ball in my head is saying that I should whip you big time for what you've done. Linda and I may be through, but now that I've broken you two up it's given me the hope I needed. You see, I have something you'll never have." Anthony chuckled. "And what might that be?" Ekyt tossed his mask aside. "Integrity Tony. Integrity means keeping your word, taking the high road, being the better man. All things that, compared to you, I can do better. MUCH better." Anthony swept his fur back. "You can certainly try, and your effort will be commended..." Anthony's tail flicked back and forth as he prepared to pounce. "...But your life will be ended!" he slashed at Ekyt with his claws. Ekyt dodged to the side. "I don't know what Linda saw in you..." Ekyt blocked another strike, returning with one of his own that narrowly missed, "...but the attraction is gone. And I'm sure she won't mind me handing your @\$ to you. Not anymore."

"Agh! You little blue pest! Every last time! You do this to me! Why can't you curl up and die, rodent?!" "What can I say? I die hard." Sonic said with a smile. "My friends and I can MORE than handle you." Eggman laughed. "Perhaps blue boy, but you CAN'T handle this!" Eggman deployed his new robot, the "Egg Prometheus."

It was monstrous. It was thirty feet tall, with just about every part of its body being used as a weapon. "Take cover!" Sonic yelled as it opened fire. He dodged the bullets and ran into it, using a spin dash. He bounced off. "Ugh!" he wobbled. "Hah! Eat this!" Eggman yelled. The robot's foot was coming down.

Linda watched as Ekyt and Anthony fought it out. Anthony had the speed, strength, and agility on his side. Ekyt's only advantage was desperation. It wasn't an advantage he ever wanted to have again. It made him go on the offense, attacking as if every move was his last. He burned Anthony with a quick right jab, but had his legs swept as he moved in for further blows. Linda realized that she couldn't be a spectator. No matter how hard it was to leave these two, she had to help her friend win. If that cannon was fired, it wouldn't matter who won between Anthony and Ekyt. Evil would have won.

Ekyt and Anthony fought up the altar. It was twenty feet tall, a perilous drop that could claim Ekyt's life easily. Anthony slashed Ekyt across the stomach. Ekyt rolled with the blow and caught Anthony with his shoulder. They both rolled toward the edge of the altar.

At that point, neither played defense. They grappled and jockeyed for position. But Anthony landed a critical strike to the midsection, following up immediately with a right cross. "Sorry dear boy, but I'm afraid you've lost." Ekyt got up again, swinging for the fences. It backfired. Anthony grabbed his coat enough to throw him off balance, then shoved him. Ekyt fell off the altar...

Sonic was about to be crushed. Knuckles glided across and pulled Sonic out of harm's way. "Thanks Knuckles!" "No problem! Let's finish this!" Knuckles glided upward, depositing Sonic in the X-Tornado. "Ready Sonic? Tails asked. "Ready and willing pal! Let 'er rip!" Tails shot a power ring out over the top of the robot. The X-Tornado could supply Sonic with power rings. Sonic jumped out of the plane, his

hand reaching for the ring. He caught it and spun in the air, faster and faster. Then he streaked down toward the top of the robot.

THUD! Ekyt hid the ground hard. Linda raced over. "My God...this is all my fault...why did I go with Anthony? Why did I break up with him...If I had known this was the last time I'd see him alive." She felt his neck. "He's dead, darling." Anthony was behind her. He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and dropped it across Ekyt's face. No movement. "Such is life. Linda, dear, you deserted me. You must pay the price, I'm afraid."

Ekyt sat up. He saw the situation and got up silently. He crept up behind Anthony as Linda held her ground, ready to fight. "I'll have your head for killing him! We might not be "together" anymore, but he the best friend I ever had!" Linda tagged him across the face. A fang fell out, hitting her shoe. "You ungrateful wench! You scarlet woman!" He slapped her across the face with his claws out.

Ekyt had seen enough. He didn't need another reason to want to kill Anthony, but he had one now. He stepped HARD on Anthony's tail, and grabbed him by an ear. He yanked him forward and punched him in the back of the head. He repeated this three more times before measuring the panther up with a kick. THWACK! Ekyt's foot hit Anthony's head.

Sonic hit the robot at full speed, putting a hole in it's armor. But the power wore off fast, and he jumped out. "I owe the doctor one." Shadow and Knuckles dove inside while Sonic raced down the hull. "Eggman! Nice little toy you got! Are you sure you can work it?" Eggman pounded on his controls. "You insolent little pipsqueak! I'll crush you!" And he tried to. But his robot had stopped working. Whatever Knuckles and Shadow had done had affected the 'bot. Eggman panicked and called for more robots while he tried to repair his defeated robot.

Ekyt got a running start at the stunned Anthony, drop-kicking him from the back into the stone wall that was part of the altar. Anthony hit the wall with an audible, dull-sounding THUNK.

Ekyt fell to one knee, closing his eyes. "C'mon. C'mon, you can do it!" Linda cheered him on. She helped him to his feet, taking it slow so that he wouldn't lose his balance. He had five huge slash marks across his chest and stomach. "I've got to stop the bleeding..." Ekyt was obviously out of it, running on instinct rather than brains. Linda pulled off her vest and wrapped it around his heavily-bleeding torso. Her black shirt was now decorated with blood stains, but she was too relieved to care.

Anthony pounced, his claws aimed at Ekyt's neck. Linda kicked him aside. "Come on! One more fight! One more round!" she begged him. He got to his knees, then to his feet. Anthony tackled him at high speed. He was trying to drive Ekyt into the wall. Ekyt grabbed Anthony around the waist and spun around so Anthony hit the wall face-first. Ekyt, who had held on, threw Anthony backward over his head. Anthony landed on all fours and sprang back. He knocked Ekyt down and sunk his fangs into Ekyt's leg. Ekyt kicked with his other leg, hitting him under the chin. Anthony held on, so Ekyt kicked again. He grabbed him around the neck and kicked upward again, sending him flying. Ekyt dove on, but Anthony slipped out from underneath him.

Eggman realized the situation was hopeless. "Anthony! ANTHONY! Time to fall back!" Eggman yelled.

Anthony heard the call. He and Ekyt were standing across from each other, panting and bleeding. "So

sorry...(pant) But we'll have to finish this at a later date...(pant) duty calls." Anthony ran for it. Ekyt chased him up the altar. Anthony dove into Eggman's hovercraft and escaped. Ekyt cursed. "I'll make you pay Anthony! Sooner or later! You're just buying a little time!" Ekyt looked over at the master emerald. It had reformed, which was a miracle by itself. Ekyt looked at the others.

That emerald caused the whole problem between Ekyt and Linda. If he hadn't destroyed it, the world would have been destroyed. He did destroy it, and lost Linda in effect. He remembered how it ate him up, but that he was willing to do it; willing to take the it for the good of everyone else. If the price for saving the world was a break-up, Ekyt had been willing to shoulder the burden.

"Do it." Linda told him firmly. Ekyt smashed the emerald to pieces and knocked the shards away from each other.

Everyone sagged, exhausted. Ekyt was in a tremendous amount of pain. Everyone stopped licking their own wounds and looked at Ekyt and Linda. Flash winced and covered his eyes with his hat.

Linda started towards him, not sure what she was going to do. He was on one knee, breathing heavy from the pain. "I want to know how you haunted Anthony like that...but it can wait...you need to heal...and I need to..." She got down on her knees and hugged him. "Thank you. Thank you for taking the fall, for eating the heat with me, thanks for saving my home world...and me. You are special, and I'm amazed I could ever tell you different." She was almost crying, leaning her head over his shoulder. He embraced her back. "Thank you for making me realize that every choice you make has consequences. And for giving me my sanity back. After everything was said and done, I think this meant the most."

"Are we...okay now? I mean, no hard feelings?" Linda asked. Ekyt looked away. "I don't know where you're going with this...but I'm going to be honest. I'm hurting. And I'm worried for both of us. I'm not safe. I cracked, and I shouldn't have." It was Linda's turn to be confused. "Are you saying we're not..." "No, I'm not saying that. I'm just telling you...I'm different. And I don't know how safe I am."

Linda smiled and sat on the grass next to him. "I'll take the chance...I'm not exactly "Bambi" myself...I can handle you." She moved to kiss him.

But Ekyt pulled away. "I can't...not yet...give me time...I don't know who to trust...I don't even know if I can trust myself..." Linda understood. "I understand...I've been horrible to you. I shouldn't be asking for your forgiveness when I didn't offer mine when you asked."

Ekyt's heart softened. "I'm not sure if this is how "trust" is supposed to work...but I owe it to you. We've all made mistakes, and this is one I'm going to correct."

They finally kissed. After the months of fighting, the two had finally put their differences aside. They couldn't say they were in a "relationship" yet (Neither one could honestly tell what a relationship was), but they couldn't doubt that the attraction was back. No. It had been there the whole time.

After relinquishing the lip lock, Linda gave him a mock stern look. "NOW you can tell all of us how you haunted Anthony like that."

NEXT ISSUE: HOW DID EKYT STALK ANTHONY? AND WHAT ABOUT THE MASTER EMERALD

SHARDS? AND WILL SONIC AND FRIENDS FIND THE CHAOS EMERALDS AND BE ABLE TO RETURN HOME? WHAT ABOUT EKYT AND LINDA? FIND OUT NEXT TIME!

101 - A New Chapter

“Tikal helped me jump dimensions with precision.” Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. “It’s a shame you couldn’t have just killed Anthony.” Shadow said ruefully. “Anthony?” Ekyt suddenly felt engulfed by anger. “Forget this!” he sprang up and skated off full speed after Eggman’s ship.

“My God Shadow! It’s like he’s become you!” Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) exclaimed. “He’s not me.” Shadow murmured. “Discuss it later! He’s gonna kill himself if he goes after that ship alone!” Sonic yelled, putting words to action and taking off. Shadow didn’t move. “It’s his fight. If he wants to fight, I say let him. If someone did that to me, I would kill them. No matter WHAT the cost.” “Well, he’s not you! He’s not an ultimate life form, this’ll kill him!” Linda shouted.

Ekyt wasn’t crazy, not anymore. In his mind, there was good, and there was evil. There was no gray area, no leeway. No trust, that was for sure. Suddenly, he had to put on the breaks as Sonic zipped in front of him. “Hold on pal! I know you’re mad, but getting yourself killed isn’t the way to deal with this!” “Who says I’d get killed?!” Ekyt returned, aiming to around Sonic. “You’re not one to act tough, you know what would happen! Anthony almost killed you, and this time you’d be fighting on HIS turf.” That seemed to his home with Ekyt. “You’re right...I guess he wins...” Ekyt said, incredibly downcast. “Hold on, I didn’t say” “I know what you meant Sonic. I’m just saying what I mean.” He cast a glance up at the rapidly fading airship. He forced his eyes closed. “I need some time...” He walked off with an expression on his face that plainly read “Do not touch.” “Tell Shadow he’ll know where to find me in an emergency...but don’t freakin’ have any.”

Back in his staircase, Ekyt sat on the top step, hoping no one had followed him. “Is this it? He beat me? I didn’t lose the fight, but that’s how it feels...” For once, he couldn’t train to escape, and he couldn’t turn to his “friends.” He had no idea what to do next. So he did nothing, hoping no one came looking for him.

Linda couldn’t believe he had actually walked off. Then again, everything was so awkward between the group and him. She guessed that when she walked off with Anthony, that had pulled at him pretty good. “It’s okay Linda, he’ll figure things out!” Amy said perkily. “You know he’s not the type to just quit.” Linda gulped. “Everyone has their limits Amy...and I wonder if I pushed his...”

All this hit Ekyt like a train. He couldn’t believe she had broken up with him, gone evil, and came back. He couldn’t believe how narrowly he avoided death. He decided he couldn’t stay here anymore. A tear trickled out, followed by another. **I know it’s hard to see what is meant to be, but this can’t be it. I’m supposed to be a punching bag? Or some damn scratching post? Screw this whole thing. Sonic and his little bastard friends can watch the place. I can’t deal with it anymore. It’s not worth having another mental breakdown.** He knew how to escape, and he was going to do it. Tikal could help him.

In her time, Tikal was the daughter of a tribe of echidna warriors. They were among the most feared, and the most powerful. They held the seven chaos emeralds and the master emerald. They lived in a paradise, save for when it was time to go to war. Tikal couldn’t believe what she was hearing from Ekyt.

He told her the whole story. She couldn't believe it. It was all so...surreal. "And that's why I'm hear...I can't deal with it anymore. I lost my sanity, and almost my life. I can't go back." He was practically shaking with emotion. "Maybe my father will initiate you as a warrior...then you could stay here." Ekyt would have done ANYTHING at that point.

"There are certain qualifications a warrior must have..." Ekyt rolled his eyes. "Where do I start with my credentials?" Ekyt explained a few things, even going so far to lay on the tips of some spears. When THAT didn't seem to shake him, they decided to welcome him to the group. Tikal looked over at him, a small smile on her face. "Didn't that hurt?" Ekyt shrugged. "I'm kind of numb right now, I guess." He liked Tikal. She had always been honest with him. He swore himself in as her protector.

"He ran off. I don't believe it." Linda said, shaking her head. "Well, a lot drove him there, I guess...But it's not like him to quit...or be so hostile." Tails pointed out. "You morons put handcuffs on him, what the hell did you expect?" Shadow commented dryly. "Yeah...He already doesn't think he belongs, and I'm sure that didn't help..." Sonic admitted.

"But how do we get him back?"

102 - The Realization

Anthony looked at the airship's computer. "It seems Ekyt's run for it. Some place untraceable. Well, I'll give the lad credit for knowing when he has been bested." Anthony raised his glass. "You were a worthy adversary human. I'm almost sorry to see the battle end..." Anthony took a sip, then realized **Maybe it doesn't *have* to end...**

Ekyt was in the past, talking with Tikal in the chao garden near the Master Emerald. "Chao?" a tiny sound came from a white chao with a gold halo above it. "Huh? Tikal, is this MY chao?" Tikal smiled and nodded. "Yes. Tyke here has missed you so much. But I explained everything to him, so he harbors no ill feelings for you." The chao crawled up onto his shoulder. Things were going great. But he still harbored a ton of guilt about what happened. He hadn't given Linda a straight answer, and he felt like he had lost the fight. But things had taken a definite turn for the better.

Shadow skated by, thinking hard about where Ekyt had gone. Anthony (Alechemest1) popped out. "Shadow, my dear boy!" he said in his most charming voice. "What do you want you?" Anthony offered Shadow a glass of wine. Shadow tossed it over his shoulder. "I believe I can help you remember who you are. You see, I, too, was on the ARK all those years ago. Professor Gerald was a great friend of mine." Shadow was sucked in. "You can help me?" "Everything has a price, my boy. Bring me the human, and I will tell you everything, sparing nothing." Shadow wrestled with himself. Should he or shouldn't he? "Fine. I'll have him for you."

Ekyt laid back in the grass. He had taken off his coat in favor of a deerskin vest that the natives had given him. It was a show of good will by both sides. Besides, it wasn't uncomfortable, as long as he wore it over his t-shirt. Otherwise it itched horribly. **Would it be so bad to stay here forever? No more awkwardness between Linda and I...I've got a great thing going, the inhabitants like me. And...wait, what's that? Chaos Control?** Ekyt got up, taking a cautious position in case whoever was coming out was hostile.

It was Shadow. "Ekyt, I need you to come with me." Ekyt didn't raise his voice or protest. "What's up?" Shadow explained. "Anthony's just trying to get you to do his dirty work! He wasn't there!" But Ekyt could see his face drop, so he agreed to go along with it. "BUT, I need an out. I'm going to come back here. Can you chaos control me away?" Shadow agreed.

Ekyt and Shadow put on a convincing show. "My my! You DO have poor taste in acquaintances." "How about I get you acquainted with my fist?" Ekyt muttered. Anthony chuckled. "You ran from me." "YOU did the running pal! We could have finished our fight...now, I guess we'll never know who the better man is. Well, I know, it's me, you're a pompous @\$\$. " Ekyt said with a shrug. Anthony's smile didn't even waver, which annoyed Ekyt even more. "Such strong words...well, let's just start the interrogation then." Shadow stepped in front. "You're giving me my answers first." "Certainly: I lied." Shadow's eyes glowed red. Ekyt had seen this before. He dove under Anthony's desk and covered his ears. Anthony wasn't sure what to make of it. "CHAOS BLAST!" Anthony was thrown backward. He hit the wall, denting the metal and laid flat. "Let's go." Shadow hauled Ekyt to his feet. "I can chaos control you back now." Ekyt looked back. A few robots were chasing them. "I'll help you mop these up first."

At that point, Sonic and co (Linda included) ran up. "Okay, I'm set to go back. Please don't tell them where I went..." "Chaos control!" Ekyt leapt into the portal and went back to the past.

Ekyt returned, landing crouched. Tikal welcomed him back, genuinely glad to see him. "We need to talk Ekyt. It's very important." She led him over to a big hill with a single tree on it. "I need to know...what's the REAL reason you're here?" The question caught Ekyt offguard. "I'm not sure," he admitted, "I thought it was because Anthony could beat me in a fight, now I wonder if it's because of how awkward things are between Linda and I." Tikal put his chaos in his hands. "Go back to her. Fix things. If things don't work, then come back. You need closure Ekyt. You've got my support." Ekyt knew she was right. "If you ever need me, I'll be here. Just let me know."

It was time to go home and face Anthony. A fight that worried Ekyt. But he was more worried about Linda's reaction...

103 - "Lo Sciopero Critico"

Linda looked across the trash-strewn street. "I drove him away...damnit, what have I done?! What if he's dead?" A gun shot rang out, narrowly missing Linda's head. She ran toward an alley, taking cover inside. "It's been too long darling." Anthony smiled down at her. He nodded his head. Two thugs in suits grabbed her and held her mouth shut. "Make Haste, dear boy...the girl will not live much longer..." Anthony backed in the alley way, a pistol in his hand. "And you were very cooperative sir." A small man in a suit, with widely darting eyes, nodded. "You served your purpose well...but I'm afraid you have seen...a little too much than is healthy for you." A wire came around the man's throat. He kicked wildly, making noise. Too much noise. Anthony shot him in the temple, ending his struggle. "I hope I will not have to resort to such...vile western means...with my chief adversary."

Ekyt landed back in a deserted Station Square. The rain had driven everyone away. **I've got to change my look...at least for now...I might be back, but I'm not sure how I am mentally...I just need to throw everyone off for a little while...** He saw a store across the street. He slipped inside, quickly buying a white dress shirt and a pair of black dress pants. His rain coat would do. He grabbed a pair of dress shoes as well, black in color. Finally, he picked out a fedora, a black one with an even darker band around it. He turned his collar up against the rain and walked out of the store. He had also purchased a pack of cigarettes and a lighter, neither of which he intended to use. But they would throw everyone off his trail all the more.

A rock came crashing through the Thorndyke window, shattering glass all over the oriental rug that lay on the floor near the hearth. Chris picked it up with a shaking hand. "Guys! You've got to read this!" Everyone rushed over as Chris read it aloud: "Dearest acquaintances, I hope this letter finds you all do well. To be brief, I have Linda and I will return her only when Ekyt meets my terms. Tell him to meet me at Salvatore's on 35th, if he fancies seeing her alive. He will have until 7 o'clock to answer before his lack of haste will cost the girl her life." Every exchanged glances. "Find Ekyt!" they all shouted at Shadow.

Ekyt saw Sonic running up. He quickly lit a cigarette, just holding it, his head down. Sonic didn't seem to notice him. All the better. Ekyt continued his solitary walk, taking an alley way shortcut. That didn't last long, as he was confronted by two thugs who had mistaken him for an easy victim.

"What do you want Anthony?" Linda asked, a defiant expression on her face. Anthony offered her a drink. Linda knocked the glass away. Anthony sighed. "It must always be the hard way, mustn't it?" Anthony paced around the room. It was most wood, a big desk and bookshelves the center of the room. "I wanted you. However, it is obvious to me that you do not harbor the same feelings for me as I for you. So, it is not so much YOU I need..." Anthony circled around to her other side, kissing her on the hand, much to her dismay, "...As Ekyt. He and I have a score to settle, you see. And you are serving as the perfect lure. The rube will never see it coming." He held the pistol, gripping it almost fondly. "He'll kill you." Linda said with a smile. "He'll rip your throat out. Gun or not." Anthony smiled. "His rage will work against him, darling. For if he makes a move on me...you'll find my aim will drift elsewhere..."

"Check out Michael Corleone here!" one thug said with a laugh. Ekyt understood the reference, but

didn't appreciate it. "I'm not in the mood for your crap tonight guys, can't you kick your own @\$\$?" The two thugs stopped laughing. "You little punk. You don't know who you're dealing with." "And I don't care. Get out of my way." One grabbed Ekyt from behind while the other moved in, taunting Ekyt. Ekyt made no move...then, suddenly, put the cigarette he was holding over his shoulder, grinding it into the goon's forehead. As the man screamed, and the ash blinded him, Ekyt grabbed the other crook and held him against the wall. "I would suggest you run. Even I don't know what I'm capable of."

Shadow had been to the past and had talked with Tikal. "He left two hours ago...didn't he meet up with you?" she asked. Shadow shook his head. "No." Tikal narrowed her eyes in thought. "Look closely...he seemed troubled when he left, so he might be disguised."

Shadow and Sonic had met up, neither one having any luck finding Ekyt. "Tikal thinks he might be in disguise." Shadow informed Sonic. At that moment, someone in a trench coat walked by. He had a hat on his head and was holding a cigarette. "That's him." Sonic whispered. Shadow nodded his agreement. "Let me do it." Shadow skated after him.

"Ekyt." Ekyt kept walking, risking a glance over his shoulder. "Shadow?" Shadow nodded. "Come with me." Shadow dragged Ekyt into an alley and handed him the letter from Anthony. Ekyt's face dropped. "He's got her?" Shadow nodded. "I can't beat him...I can't do it...I guess I'll have to see what his demands are." Ekyt pocketed the note and headed to Salvatore's.

Once inside, Ekyt grabbed a toothpick to put in his mouth. He still held a lit cigarette. No one seemed to notice. Ekyt DID notice, however, Anthony sitting at a table in the back, with a POed Linda next to him. Ekyt walked up to the table and sat down. "Can I get you something to drink?" A waitress asked. "Nothing for me, thanks." She gave him an uneasy smile and left.

Anthony: Glad to see you have come.

Ekyt: this isn't a social call Anthony.

Anthony: Of course not. You want to get to the point.

Ekyt: Yes. What will it take for you to release her?

Anthony: I want the shard of the master emerald you're carrying with you.

Ekyt: Fine.

Linda: No!

Anthony: (aims pistol at her) It would be wise to ignore her, if you like her the way she is...breathing.

Ekyt: ...Alright. I'm going to put the emerald on the table. Linda gets out the door first, though. Then I'll put the emerald down.

Anthony: (Smiling) Yes...yes, I see now that I've beaten the fight out of you. Look at you, hiding in disguise like a child! Ha! This was rather...pathetic on your part.

Linda looked at Ekyt and was saddened. He wasn't fighting back. He was just sitting there, taking all that abuse. Was it for her sake? Or was Anthony right?

Ekyt: Do we have a deal or not?

Anthony: Go ahead Linda.

Linda walked away cautiously, heading for the door. Anthony suddenly hit her in the head. Ekyt got up

and threw the table aside, tagging Anthony in the face with his right fist. They two grappled momentarily before Anthony threw Ekyt backward. Ekyt landed on his feet, a dawning horror in him as he realized what was about to happen.

The world became black and white to Linda. Anthony's hand flashed up, a pistol in his grip. Ekyt tossed his chair backward and pushed someone in the line of fire down. As he turned to do that, the pistol in Anthony's paw barked. Ekyt was blown backwards by the force, his hat falling off his head as he landed in a heap on the end of a table, which tipped forward at the sudden addition of his weight.

Anthony smiled. "It appears I've emerged the victor. Farewell!" He bolted from the restaurant upon seeing Sonic, Shadow, Tails, and Knuckles all rush in.

Linda leapt down near Ekyt's side. "Oh my God! I...I killed him. I might as well have pulled that trigger. It was all my fault! If I hadn't gone with Anthony...If I had just picked him instead...then he would have fought Anthony off." She allowed tears to fill her eyes as she pushed his coat to the side and unbuttoned his shirt. High up on his left chest was the bullet wound. It wasn't a sucking puncture, but chest wounds were never good. She had seen a lot of this on when she was a police officer, but it had never been so...personal. She ran her hand down his chest, pulling back as she neared the worst of the blood. She settled instead for kissing his forehead while stroking his chest.

No one made a sound. The rain outside proved an eerie soundtrack. It's pitter-patter now seemed a tribal rhythm, a rhythm that held death.

"It's not your fault Linda." Sonic told her, gently pulling her to her feet. "Yes it is! I as good as pulled the trigger!" Sonic turned pale. "Oh My God...I don't believe this." Linda turned as well. Ekyt was getting to his feet. He picked up his hat and put it on his head, and put the toothpick back in his mouth. He looked down at his chest. "Oh damn." He grabbed a tablecloth and wiped the blood away. He had been hit just above his heart, but on an angle, so the bullet had just grazed his chest. It hadn't even really hurt, but the bullet's velocity had knocked him backward and he hit his head on the table.

No one moved. Linda finally ran at him, jumping up and forcing him to catch her. She then kissed him in what would be considered a one-way make out. Ekyt was too dizzy from the pain to register the fact that Linda was kissing him. He was holding her up somehow, though. Probably instinct.

"I can't believe it! You're alive!" Ekyt nodded slowly, but no trace of a smile. "Yeah." He said. "I'm sorry, about everything! Now I know who my REAL friends are." He put her down gently, only to be hugged by her again. She had her head on his shoulder, her hands around his waist and upper back. He stayed stiff for a moment before gently stroking her hair. "I'm fine." He assured her. He pushed her bangs out of her eye, admiring their shimmering green hue for a moment. He kissed her on the forehead.

"So...what are we now?" he asked. "I mean...relationship-wise." Linda shrugged. "How about we go back to the way things were...before this whole mess started...something between friends and boyfriend/girlfriend?" she suggested. He nodded, holding a hand to his chest. "That bastard panther is gonna pay for that." Linda shook her head. "Why DID you hit him, anyway?" "He hit you. You don't hit a lady." Ekyt said, as though it was the most obvious thing in the world. Linda couldn't help but roll her eyes as his innocent logic.

104 - Spingerlo il Limite

“Rouge, dear, I believe you have information that could help.” Rouge spun around to find Anthony (Alchemest1) smiling at her. “Sorry, my information comes at a price. And besides, he just helped save my home world. Not for love or jewels!” she said, pouting stubbornly. Anthony gave a heavy sigh. “It’s a shame...I have this enormous diamond, and I fear that I have no one to give it to.” Rouge’s eyes widened. “He goes to a place, “Ray’s” on 42nd. He doesn’t drink, but the owner is a friend.” Anthony stroked his chin, then smiled deviously and pressed a button. A long black car rolled up. “Perhaps you could show me where this...establishment...is?” He opened the door for her. “You know how to treat a girl. Sure thing.”

“I think you’d better lie low for a while.” Ekyt got up against the protests of his friends and his body. “He didn’t kill me...his mistake.” Ekyt muttered. “At least go back to the disguise thing!” Tails exclaimed. “Alright. I’ll see you later.” “Like heck you will. We’re coming with you. Mr. Tanaka will drive us.” Chris said. “I should handle this alone.” “Alone nothing! Face it, we’re coming.” Linda gave him a steely look. “Get used to that look if you’re gonna hang around with me.” she warned him. “I look like an @\$\$\$. I look like Anthony.” Ekyt said in disgust. He normally didn’t mind the suit deal, but since he had met that pain-in-the-@\$\$ panther, it had been different. Linda kissed him on the cheek and gave him a swat on the butt. “You’ll do fine honey.” Then she cursed as she realized everyone was sitting right there. “Honey? What are ya, newly weds?” Sonic quipped. Ekyt gave him a flat look. “Don’t make me kill you.” Black shined shoes, black dress pants, black suspenders over a new (non-bloodstained) white dress shirt, and even a black tie and sport coat. Over that he wore not his trench coat, but an actual, semi-dressy raincoat. Top that with a fedora and a white handkerchief in his pocket, and you had a completely different looking Ekyt.

Linda looked at him, thinking how handsome he was in this getup. **Is this the Ekyt that could have been?** Linda decided he looked like a mobster. But a sexy, innocent mobster. ‘Cause that made so much sense.

“Linda, you should disguise yourself too.” Amy said aloud. “Yeah, I guess!” “Alright, makeover time!” Amy grabbed Linda and charged, followed by Cream. Ekyt saw this and turned to the other guys. “Is this normal?” he asked. “Yeah, you get used to it. I forgot that you didn’t live here.” Sonic answered, laying on the windowsill. Klein (ShyWanderer043) shrugged. Knuckles rolled his eyes. “Still have the hots for Amy Klein?” Klein gave him a look like he farted in church. Knuckles put his hands up in mock surrender. “Relax, it’s a joke. Man, your wound tighter than Eky...I mean, a cheap watch.” It was Ekyt’s turn to give Knuckles a violent look. Cream came running back down as Tails snapped to attention. Amy joined her next, forcing Klein to look alert again. “Okay, you ready Ekyt? You’re gonna flip!” Amy gushed. “I already know she’s beautiful, so I hardly think...” Whatever it was he thought disappeared quickly as his jaw damn near hit the floor; or would have. His eyes most certainly were alive.

Click. One black high-heel hit the ground, a shapely pink leg in view. Knuckles suddenly had to smooth his dreadlocks while Ekyt just stared. The other leg came into view. Then a waist came around the corner, a semi-modest black dress on it that fell just short of the knee that was on the middle of the very nice legs. Finally, a chest and head came around the corner. “Don’t forget to breathe.” Amy muttered

darkly, wishing she garnered this kind of reaction. Of course, she did, but Klein was hard to read.

Linda fully came around the corner, sporting a slightly embarrassed smile. She still had her hair over her left eye, but was now sporting a ponytail, along with some light blue eye shadow and red lipstick. "Whoa..." Three voices in unison said. "You sure it's Linda grinned and not too...I don't know...not me?" "You look beautiful." Ekyt managed. Linda smiled, shrugging shyly. "I know it's not exactly "rebel," but it could be worse. At least I know I look different."

They all piled into the jet-black limo, headed for Ray's. Since Ekyt had gotten shot, everyone had been very protective of him. It was a nice gesture, Ekyt thought as he walked inside. He nearly tripped when he realized Linda was holding onto his arm. "Ray, how's it going." Ray broke out into a big smile. "Kid, it's been too long. Everyone, would you give us a moment?" Ray and Ekyt went down to one end of the bar. "I see you got her back...Christ, has she gotten better looking?" Ekyt nodded. "Yeah." "I see from the way she was hangin' on you, that you're all buddy-buddy again." "It's a relief." Ray grinned and put a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Nice getup kid, you out for a mafia hit?" Ekyt smiled and turned his fedora forward aggressively.

Rouge walked in. Everyone greeted her. She put her ears down and bolted. "What the hell?" Ekyt and the gang hid behind the bar. Four pairs of hands grabbed Ekyt as they all saw Anthony walk in.

"Greeting...you must be Raymond." "Ray is fine, what'll you have?" "I rather dislike these salty brews...have you a good Bourbon." "5 bucks a glass." Ray said, really not liking this guy. He turned to fill up the glass at Anthony's nod. Rouge was back on his arm, rubbing against him with a grin on her face. Anthony raised his pistol and took aim.

"Oh damn!" Ekyt and Linda both raced out. Ekyt's hand knocked the gun aside just in time. "You were dead! DEAD!" Anthony was unglued. Ekyt slugged him across the face. "Dead guys don't kick your @\$\$. He informed Anthony tersely. Rouge went for his neck, but was thwarted by Linda's high-heel. She had taken them off and bounced one of Rouge's head with a throw before cracking her in the teeth with the second. "You fools! GET THEM!"

A number of Animals, all dressed in suits, rushed in. Ray had too many bars get destroyed; he threw three glasses with incredible accuracy before smashing one of Anthony's "bodyguards" across the head with a beer. Sonic and Knuckles jumped out and started cleaning house.

Anthony was so shocked by Ekyt's sudden return that he dropped his pistol. When he realized that, he went for it. Ekyt stepped down on his hand HARD, breaking at least one bone. He punched with his left fist, again hitting the shocked panther. The punch hurt like hell, since that was the side he had gotten shot on. So he stuck with his right hand. Anthony got his bearing and knocked Ekyt over the bar. He turned to grab Linda, hoping a hostage would diffuse this situation. She kicked him "below the belt" and punched him, the image defying the dress and makeup she was wearing. Ekyt took that opportunity to come flying back over the bar, scooping Anthony up and slamming him down through Ray's pool table.

"They're all done!" Sonic called. "C'mon Ray!" Ekyt called. They all raced out the door, back to the limo. Ekyt, who had taken Anthony's pistol, shout out all four tires on Anthony's car. "Good idea, stopping him from coming after us." "Nah, I wanted to piss him off." Ekyt said jokingly with a small grin. He tossed the gun out the window as they drove for home.

105 - Run! take her and go!"

Anthony examined his car. "Shooting out my tires. Not clever. Effective, for the moment. Now, if I were a filthy little human vermin, what would my next move be?" Anthony smiled in realization.

"No Way!" Linda responded defiantly. "Linda, please, it's the only safe way." Ekyt said. "I don't lack the courage to fight, you know! Just because I'm a girl, that doesn't mean I can't fight!" Ekyt looked around, frustrated. Finally, he got down on his knees and held her hand. "Linda...there's no other way...please...I'd never forgive myself if you were killed...never."

Linda looked down into his nervous, pleading eyes as he gently gripped her hand. "That's why you need to go. I know you'll be safe there. But you have to trust me." Ekyt's eyes turned harder, determined. "You know I've never bowed to any mortal Linda. But I'm before you, on my knees, begging you to do this for your own safety." Indeed, none of the others had ever seen Ekyt humbled like this. Linda softened. "Okay. If it'll make you feel better. Ray and I will hide at" "Don't say it! Whatever you do, don't say the name of your destination. That prick panther could be watching and listening right now."

It seemed to everyone that Ekyt had become paranoid. He was never without a weapon, and had hardly slept in the three days since they had attacked Anthony. Now, out of character, he begged- BEGGED- Linda to hide. Ray was to go with her. Ekyt knew that Sonic and Knuckles could take care of themselves, and with Klein watching Amy and Cream, he knew they too were safe. Tails and Chris had taken off in the X-Tornado. Linda clutched his hand, genuinely worried. Not for herself, but for him. "I'll be fine." He assured her. Linda still looked at him awkwardly, but helped him to his feet. "I know you're serious, and I'll do it." "One last thing...should anything go wrong, stay at the safe place for a few days, then head here." Ekyt handed her an address and a map.

The door began to splinter at the Thorndyke house. "It's him! Go! Take her and go! I'll hold him off!" Ekyt shouted to Ray. (Sound familiar Harry Potter Fans?) The door finally gave in. Ekyt was alone as Sonic and Knuckles had gone to their destination with Linda and Ray to protect them.

Anthony strode in. "Very nice abode...Of course, it isn't yours..." Anthony tapped a Ming vase with one finger, breaking it. "Nothing is going to stop me from defending Linda's honor...and my own...there's nothing that strong." Anthony smiled and chuckled. "You sound like a perfectly ignorant child who has just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar: you are denying your fate." "Fate has nothing to do with it! It's a matter of what must be done...and the one WILL do it." Anthony sneered. "You speak as though you know something of honor...ha! You will die as nameless as you are now!" "Death doesn't frighten me Anthony, my time will come, I'm not afraid to admit I'm mortal. My only fear is failing to protect those who care for me. If you're trying to break my spirit...you've already lost the war." Anthony again laughed coldly. "I seem to remember you had given up on yourself." "I seem to recall that I snapped out of it. My guilt is gone...replaced by a burning desire to protect...and to attack..."

Anthony and Ekyt began to circle, neither predator nor prey. "I know of your plans, my human friend." "You know nothing!" Ekyt returned, not entirely believing it. "The thing about humans is that they are

unpredictable by nature. However, my analysis of you has led me to believe that YOU possess certain qualities that have since been...frowned upon, for want of a better term. Qualities that make you unpredictable to humans and mere animals, but a being with intellect could tell that you're one trait that will give you away, each and every time...is love." Ekyt managed to maintain his guard. "Love?" "Love. You sent your loved ones away, to protect them. Foolish. YOU are the last line of defence. You have simply bought them more time. Time that is pointless. You will be hailed for dying a hero's death, approaching it upright I daresay, courage is a trait that I do not doubt you embody."

Ekyt wasn't liking this. "It's ironic...you've evolved, more so than most of your human counterparts...but you retain the most primal trait..." Ekyt was suddenly furious. Anthony stopped circling. "Perhaps it is better for this battle to take place where the stakes are higher..." Ekyt knew he was bound for the past. "I can beat you here just as well as there." "I think I would prefer to settle this where you, no doubt, hid your companions." "I think it would be better if you shut up and started worrying about your own life." Ekyt snarled. His back was to the wall. He knew he would have died for Linda, and now he had the chance to put that theory to the test.

106 - Carpe Diem

Anthony looked viciously at Ekyt. "You do realize how foolish this is...romantic, perhaps, dying for your loved one...I should write a novel. Perhaps I could title it 'An Infidel I once Knew'." Ekyt didn't respond. Under his breath, he muttered the phrase Tikal had given him to get to the past with her help. With a crack, he disappeared, landing in the past.

"Ekyt? What's happened?" Tikal, Linda, and Ray were all sitting in a makeshift hut. "You've all got to hide! He's coming here!" "Kid, we can help!" Ray tried to reason with him. "No. This is between him and I. Enough innocent lives have fallen casualty to his cruelty. It must be me that does this. No matter what happens, no one interfere! This is where fate will take its course."

Anthony made sure to destroy the Thorndyke house, in case he could blame it on Ekyt later. Then he departed for the past, having obtained a prisoner who could help him. "I'm only doing this so Ekyt can kill you...and I'll destroy whatever's left over." Shadow muttered "Chaos Control" and Anthony was on his way to the past.

"There isn't time! He's coming right now! GO!" Ekyt gave them a push in the direction of a cave.

Anthony came bounding toward Ekyt. This time they minced no words. It was the rich, pompous, however talented and cunning panther, against the street-wise, scrawny kid, who had nothing to lose anymore. Anthony, in his arrogance forgot the cardinal rule of fighting. You never take your eyes off your opponent. Ekyt took the opportunity to strike with his left hand; his weaker hand, to see how distracted the panther truly was. Anthony dodged to the side and whipped his tail around. Ekyt leapt deftly over the tail, landing on it and kicking low, landing a critical strike.

Anthony sneered at the development and gave the human a hard shove away. In the same motion, he followed through with a straight right hand that forced Ekyt to turn away from, exposing his back for a hard shot on the shoulder. Ekyt fell and rolled as Anthony's paws slashed into the ground where he had been milliseconds earlier. Ekyt rolled onto his feet, stepping to the side again as more strikes followed. Ekyt blocked low with his forearm, then brought his elbow down across the nerves in Anthony's arm.

"Enough of these fool games! I have let you live too long child..." Anthony leapt forward so quickly that Ekyt didn't have time to react. In a split second, he had a hypodermic needle injected in Ekyt's arm. "You have an hour to live!" Anthony declared. Ekyt swore, running a worried hand through his hair. "Afraid to face death?" Anthony taunted. "No...My time was coming, I knew it...I worry for those who are living..." Ekyt felt his chest tighten as the time counted down. "Surrender the others...Admit I was the better of us...and I will give you the antidote." Anthony held out his paw. Ekyt swatted it away. "I'd sooner die than bow to you, you son a dog. You'll rot in hell someday." Anthony laughed again. "Fruitless taunts, you are simply wasting the time you have left. You'll find that I am sporting, rather unlike your species." Anthony said smoothly. "You may use your remaining time to be with your loved ones." Ekyt opened his mouth to argue, but could not.

"Fine. Leave them be for the 50 minutes I have left."

Linda, Ray, and Tikal were forming a desperate plan when Ekyt came in, looking pale and gaunt. "What happened?!" Linda asked the question first. For the first time since she met him, Ekyt, her "tower of strength," didn't look all that strong. She had seen him survive countless injuries, and knew something bad must have happened.

"Listen, quickly. I'm going to die in 45 minutes. I'm only here to say goodbye and to tell you what to do to escape." Ekyt spoke in such a low tone that it was impossible for even Anthony to hear. He told them the story. "Give yourself up! Save your life!" Linda exclaimed. Ekyt shook his head. "I can't do it. I can't bow to him. He's got his followers, by power or fear. I will never be among them." Linda sat down hard on a slightly moist rock in the cave they were hiding in. Ray and Tikal both bowed their heads, wondering what you say to someone who has chosen death.

"Kid...I don't care what anyone says, myself included: You're the toughest SOB I've ever met. And, ya know, I hope I was some help to you..." Ray and Ekyt shook hands, thought that turned into a hug, both emotional despite their usually stoic appearances. "Ray, you were the first human to accept me. And the last, it seems. Your advice brought me and Linda together, and helped me get her back, and to help shape me as a person. I could never thank you enough." Ray backed off, letting Tikal say goodbye.

"I'm so sorry things had to be this way! I never knew!" she exclaimed, sobbing onto his shoulder. "It's okay, you couldn't have known. You've saved me more times than I can count, this time it's my turn. You were there for me in my hour of need. That's not something I'll ever forget." Ekyt took his chao out of his pocket. "If you won't mind taking care of him again..." Tikal nodded. She walked away suddenly. Ekyt couldn't hear her cry anymore.

But that was pushed out of his mind when Linda got up. "I-I'm sor" "Don't be. How could you be expected to like me when I didn't like myself?" Ekyt said with a smile, a hand under her chin. "How can you smile? You're dying..." She couldn't help saying it. "Because I know I'm saving lives in the process. You know me too well Linda. I'm going to do as much damage as I can. You and the others escape." The two embraced, neither one having any real words to say. She held him tight for ten minutes, no one speaking. "I-I...I love you!" she blurted out, burying her head in his neck. "I love you too." He said, strangely calm. With his death impending, he had no fear of anything anymore. What was pain in the large scale of things? What mattered was who you were and what you did with the time you had, not how long you lived.

With time running out, Ekyt said his final goodbyes. His body was already protesting, but he wasn't going to die cowering in a cave. "I can only give you protection for a few seconds...run for it. Get to the master emerald."

Ekyt stepped outside and immediately charged the waiting Anthony, throwing his coat over his eyes and jumping on his shoulders to hold it in place. He scissored his legs around Anthony's neck while holding his coat in place. Tikal ran for the emerald, when it hit her. "I've got it!" she exclaimed. "Ekyt! Follow us!"

Ekyt ran after them, not knowing why, dodging between trees and rocks. Anthony leapt over the rocks, catching up. "What am I running to?" Ekyt shouted. "The chao pool! Drink the water! It has restorative powers!" Ekyt and Anthony exchanged glances. "You won't make it lad." Anthony said calmly. Ekyt

reached into his pocket. "I think I will." He was holding up the shard of the Master Emerald from his time. With 30 seconds left for him to make it, Ekyt TOOK OFF.

Linda and Ray turned around and nodded to each other once, firmly. They each grabbed the end of a tree limb lying on the ground. As Anthony ran by, they picked it up, tripping him, giving Ekyt crucial seconds.

Ekyt dove into the chao pool, lapping up the water. When he surfaced, his cuts had healed, his bruises had faded, and his head felt clear. He saw Anthony slash at Ray, who got aside just in time. Linda punched Anthony square in the face, then swore as her knuckles broke. Ekyt bolted over, ramming Anthony into a tree with his shoulder.

"Shadow! Assist me if you will!" Anthony called. "I think I won't. You don't have a hostage anymore. So I'll do what I like. CHAOS BLAST!" Anthony was thrown backward violently.

"Back off." Ekyt said simply. Everyone looked questioning at him. He strode over to Anthony. "You've lost Anthony. You've got a chance to escape with your life, live to fight another day." Ekyt pulled the panther to his feet. "Can you send this prick home?" He asked Shadow. Shadow raised a questioning eyebrow, but muttered "Chaos Control," sending the stunned panther back to Station Square.

"We should stay the night here." Ekyt announced. Everyone was too tired to argue. Ekyt made sure they were all comfortable before he sat up on a hill that overlooked them.

Linda watched, thinking how nicely the moon outlined him. The inquisitive expression, the protective nature...she felt like she could trust him with anything. Her deepest desires, her darkest ambitions (Not that she had any). She trudged up the hill, intending to talk to him.

Ekyt heard the stranger coming. He didn't move immediately; he tried to guess the appearance. Moved lightly, young male or female. Slight rustle of fabric, probably jeans. No evidence of sneaking. Ekyt kept his expression stoic, as though he had heard nothing.

Linda tossed his coat in front of him. "You've really gotta take care of yourself, you know." She said, grinning slightly. "Yeah, no more poison for me." She put a hand on his shoulder. "Ugh, you're all wet!" Ekyt raised an eyebrow. "Good thing I brought your coat. Why don't you go get out of those wet clothes, and wrap yourself up in your coat?" At Ekyt's quizzical look, she rolled her eyes. "I'm not gonna watch!" Ekyt ducked behind an outcropping of rock, tossing his wet clothes over them. With his coat firmly in place, he walked (carefully) back out.

Linda couldn't help but smile at the shyness. "Here...I thought you might like to have this..." Looking him in the eyes, she put a chain around his neck. The chain itself was warm, gold, like a power ring. On the end there was a tooth. "Taken from a rare species- Pantherous Pompous Assess. To us, Anthony." Ekyt gave her a rare smile. "Did you mean what you said? About loving me?" Ekyt nodded silently, continuing his vigilante staring. "It's funny...we're both rebels...I was a police officer, you were a vigilante...I guess opposites attract. I meant it too." She moved closer to him. "I don't know why you're attracted to me. I mean, you're out of my league. We're not even playing the same game, I guess." Ekyt muttered, his eyes closed. "I'm not exactly the easiest person to get close to...but you managed it...how did you do it?"

Linda wished she had an answer. "Magic, I guess. For now, you'd better get some rest." Ekyt laid on his back, the cool grass on the back of his head beckoning sleep. "I guess..." Linda gave him a hug. "Good. If anyone deserves rest, it's you." She proceeded to curl up next to him. Whether she knew it or not, that was sure to keep him awake.

"I hope they're all right." Sonic muttered. "I can feel it...they're near the master emerald in the past...there doesn't seem to be any sadness..." Knuckles returned. "There will be! Sonic, Klein, look!" Amy shouted. The TV had gone fuzzy, and then it was replaced with Eggman and Anthony.

"Greetings Station Square. I am Dr. Eggman, your new, benevolent ruler! I have here the president, hostage, and he has agreed to give control of the city over to me. Any attempts at resistance will be crushed! Anyone found revolting will be destroyed! You have twenty-four hours to deliver to me your precious heros...then the town is yours again. Once I have them, I can bend them to my will! Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha!"

So while Linda was curled up near Ekyt, trying to force herself to rest, Sonic was being restrained by his friends.

Something had to give.