

Years in the Future... *Sonic*

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Fast-Forward 25 years. Dictorial King and a masochistic queen. The original group of Freedom Fighters are still around, but now their kids take the more active rolls, trying to save Mobius from the clutches of the Evil king. 'Takin "Future" fan chars

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1 - Welcome to the Jungle

Ekyt and Linda-Su: Paula-Su (Age 12, echidna/human, mostly echidna) and Kurt (Age 10, hedgehog, adopted, part chaos emerald)

Sonic and Sally (Yes, you read that right! lol) (Age 10, hedgehog/chipmunk/ squirell)

Knuckles and Julie-Su: Lara-Su (Age 15, echidna, guardian-in-training status)

Tails and Amy Rose: No children

Bunnie and Antoine: No children

Shadow and Lien-Da: Stalker

Deaths:

King Acorn

Prince Elias

Queen Alicia

Locke (Sort of)

Kragok

Snively

Twenty five years in the future:

Sonic had lost a step or two, Ekyt was mostly the same, but his hair grayed slightly, but being a guardian, he could be immortal, barring any direct causes of death. Linda-Su was the same, as was and Julie-Su, echidna s didn t show their age so quickly. Knuckles was different, he wore a hat decorated with stars, and was missing an eye, replaced by an electronic laser eye. The big change was their nemesis. **SHADOW** enslaved the world, even Dr. Robotnik. Robotic sentry were everywhere. Sonic and Sally had married years ago. Knuckles and Julie-Su married as well. Ekyt and Linda were the first, at age 21 and 18, respectively. The original group of heroes was now the leadership. Paula-Su and Lara-Su, Ekyt and Knuckles daughters, were training to be guardians. A fact that Ekyt and Knuckles both relished and worried about. It was dangerous, but the mantle had to be passed along. But more important things were happening. Today was the day.

Sonic, though slightly slower, was going with Ekyt and Knuckles to confront Shadow. Rotor, Antoine, and Bunnie, all valuable despite their age, needed to be rescued. Which meant confronting Shadow. Ultimate life forms didn t age. Guardians *did*, and so did hedgehogs. It was time to say goodbye, in case things went awry. Sonic and Sally chatted privately, Sonic showing some of his old attitude. Knuckles and Julie-Su were solemn. Ekyt, still afflicted with his shyness, turned to his wife. Well, here we go.

Ekyt said. Yeah. Linda-Su didn't have her usual confidence. You know I'll be fine. Ekyt, you're facing *Shadow!* The last time, Sonic wasn't a match for him! This is suicide! she said angrily. Rather me than you or the kids. Ekyt said. Besides, twenty-five years haven't changed what a guardian does. A guardian guards, people and emeralds. We have few of either. Linda-Su exclaimed. Things can only get better. Besides, I have to try. Ekyt told her. He embraced his wife for maybe the last time. They had aged, but their love hadn't died down. (Corny!)

Shadow held the chaos spear in his hand. I asked you where they are now. He said calmly. I'm not going to tell. Never! Rotor shouted back. Shame. Chaos Spear! Spears struck Rotor hard, drawing blood. Rotor turned away. Lien-Da! Shadow yelled. Yes master? she said enthusiastically. Please convince these Freedom Fighters to see things our way. She stretched her whip. With pleasure! The three freedom fighters were hit relentlessly. Happily, Lien-Da turned to the last prisoner. Do you care to talk doctor? She asked Robotnik. I'll never sell my secrets! Some day it shall be *me* ruling the world, not that flea-bitten rodent! Wrong Answer. The whip glowed with electronic energy..

Lara-Su and Paula-Su looked up at the same instant. Our dads are heading out. Paula commented. Yeah. We're gonna follow 'em right? You bet! Thank God we're like our mothers! Paula-Su grinned. Yeah, we'd never have any fun otherwise. Let's go!

2 - "King" Shadow?

EDIT: PAULA-SU and LARA-SU are both 15 years old, not 12- NG

Ekyt and Knuckles were joined by Sonic later on. Ready gang? Sonic still had his attitude. Ekyt remained stoic, with a simple You bet. Knuckles held the mantle of guardian, but he showed some emotion with a Yeah! The three turned and ran out, heading for the ominous fortress in the distance. Shadow sat on his throne. Robotnik s scream made Shadow smile. Peasant. Eh? He saw the three heroes destroying robots with practiced ease. So, they ve come for another round? Even if they make it past the guards, they re no match for an ultimate life form. Using the technology built by Uncle Chuck, Shadow ordered the computer to show bios on the heroes (Pics will be up soon ;)

Name: Ekyt

Species: Human

Race: Caucasian (white)

Eyes: hazel

Age: 43

Height: 5 10

Weight: 123

Bio: A guardian by trade, the only human guardian of the chaos emeralds. Mysterious by nature.

Strength: hand to hand combat

Known Family: Kurt, age 10, hedgehog, Linda-Su, age 40, and Paula-Su, age 15

Name: Sonic (Title: King)

Species: hedgehog

Color: Blue

Eyes: Green/black

Age: 40

Height and weight unknown

Bio: Super speed, overthrew Robotnik's dictatorship, nemesis to Shadow.

Known family: Queen Sally Acorn, age 41, child, age 10

Name: Knuckles (Title: Guardian)

Species: Echidna

Color: Red

Eyes: Purple

Age: 39

Height and weight unknown

Bio: Guardian of the chaos emeralds, sharp knuckles and gliding ability

Known family: Julie-Su, age 40, Lara-Su, age 15

Shadow pondered the results. The guardians are just hitting their prime skill. Sonic should have lost a couple steps. Hah. This group was barely a match for me twenty-five years ago! They think they can stop me now? Shadow tossed off his robe and straightened his crown. So be it. I'll enjoy the workout. Paula-Su and Lara-Su followed their father's and Sonic. Geez, for some old fogeys they don't mess around! Lara-Su chipped in. Paula chuckled. Yeah, pretty much. I thought my dad would freak when I said I wanted to be a guardian! Mine *did* freak. Lara-Su said. Lara was dressed in a black leather jacket, white shirt, small sunglasses, black gloves, black boots, and had her pink hair parted. Paula wore a black and white vest, with matching sneakers, much like her father's. But she was mostly like her mother. She had to drop the black and red color scheme that Ekyt had trademarked thanks to King Shadow. The rebels all wore something with white now. Those that were left. We'd better catch up, if we want a piece of the action! Lara-Su commented. Good thinking.

Sonic, Knuckles and Ekyt broke through to find Shadow waiting for them. Let's do this! Sonic raced up. Shadow tripped him. Knuckles glided forward, and Shadow chaos controlled away. He landed behind Ekyt, who ducked and threw a kick of his own, but was tagged by a right hook from Shadow. Sonic spun in place, then darted forward, while Knuckles punched. Shadow chaos controlled again, near Ekyt, and threw him out the stained-glass window. Sonic and Knuckles watched just a moment too long, they too were hit hard.

Lara-Su and Paula-Su, watched Ekyt go flying. Dad! You alright?! Paula asked. You Okay? Lara asked as they helped him up. Yeah, I'm- wait, what are you two doing here? Ekyt asked, suddenly aware of who he was talking too. damn, busted. Muttered Lara. Ekyt smiled. You're your father's child, alright. Since you two are here, you free the prisoners while we have The king distracted. Free Robotnik too, the fat man just might prove useful. Now you two run for it, just in case. Gotcha Dad!

Paula said. Ditto. Lara replied. You re Dad s cool! Lara said to Paula. Yeah, if it was Mom she would have made us come home! Let s go prove our worth. Lara said. Hey, speak for yourself! Paula said with a grin. Lara rolled her eyes and gave her a yank. Come ON!

Shadow was having his way with Knuckles, Sonic, and Ekyt. Ekyt finally swung his staff, tagging Shadow across the face. Ekyt jumped on and kicked away Shadow s emerald. Sonic! You re up! Sonic, with a power ring, grinned. Oh YAH! Sonic jumped up, reaching for the high ceiling, then came crashing down on Shadow s stomach. Ekyt passed Shadow s emerald off to Knuckles. No! Shadow reached out and grabbed the emerald and started chaos con-.. No you don t! Ekyt whacked Shadow s hand. The emerald clattered over to Knuckles. Run for it guys! Sonic, you take the emerald back. Knux, go to the jail! I ll deal with Shadow! Shadow tried to retrieve the emerald, but Ekyt tripped him with his staff. Shadow kicked up, but Ekyt dodged and put Shadow through his throne. Picking up the nearby computer, Ekyt brought it down across Shadow s head, knocking him unconscious. Ekyt took Shadow s hover shoes, then ran to join Knuckles. Shadow woke up later, and cursed. damn it! I ll make them pay!

Lara opened the cell after Paula hacked the computer. Easy money! Paula cheered. Lara couldn t cheer at the moment. Rotor and Robotnik were on the verge of death. Knuckles came rushing up. We ve got to get them out of here! Lara, you get a Evac vehicle. Paula, you help me bandage them up. Ekyt arrived shortly after. Good, better than I expected. These ll speed things along. Paula, I know these are big and not your color, but try em on and get Rotor to Knothole fast! We ll have to chaos control Robotnik, he won t make it if he has to wait for the Evac vehicle. Whenever you re ready Knux. (In this future, guardians, as well as their children, can use chaos powers)

3 - Know Thy Enemy

Robotnik woke up in a strange bed. How did I get here? he said aloud. Perhaps I can answer that. Ekyt stood in front of the bed. And why would I care what you think? Because us good guys saved your life. And because if King Shadow doesn't get you, and you don't want to listen, I *will*. Ekyt didn't mean the last part, but in this case, some force was necessary. Alright, I'm listening. Robotnik said. Paula-Su yawned and stretched. `Morning Mom. She said sleepily. Good morning Paula. She seemed happier than usual. What's up? Paula asked. Well, I talked to your father and Knuckles, and they told me you can start training to be a guardian, along with Lara-Su. Paula pumped a fist in the air. Yes! When do I start?! Linda smiled. In an hour. Paula literally jumped. I can't wait!

Shadow woke up, angrily throwing the computer that was around his head aside. Those miserable creatures. I'll make them pay. And those fools, thinking that was my only emerald. Shadow pulled out another one from a secret panel in the wall. Once I start causing turmoil, those three insipid idiots will be back for more. And then they will know I was simply toying with them. They will realize the *true* power of an ultimate lifeform! Lien-Da! The echidna with the whip slid into the room. Years ago, she had tried to come on to Ekyt, only to be turned down. She still carried that anger, and, to some extent, the longing. She felt she was misunderstood. But she *did* love Shadow. Yes, my King? Contact the guards at the jail at once. Lien-Da attempted to, but there was no answer. Shadow smashed a table. Those miserable freedom fighters! They liberated the prisoners. And even Robotnik could be an asset, should he cooperate. We need to take action. Assemble my sentry forces and couple them with my battle-ready soldiers. It's time to scout my enemies. Lien-Da bowed and began to fulfill his orders. Know thy enemy. Shadow said with a smile. I know *you* all too well Sonic. And Knuckles, you and I have had our skirmishes. Ekyt, you are the one human who has proven himself a worth adversary. For now. But all three of you, your day of reckoning will soon be here! Nobody shall claim victory over Shadow the Hedgehog. *Nobody*.

Lara-Su and Julie-Su were cousins, but they felt more like sisters. They met up along the way to the chaos chamber, each going on about how excited they were.

4 - Dreams Come True (and So do Nightmares)

Paula-Su and Lara-Su were waiting for their dads in the chaos chamber. I've wanted to be a guardian for as long as I can remember. Lara-Su said thoughtfully. I thought I wanted to be a freedom fighter, but seeing our dads in action changed my mind. Knuckles entered the room first. Hello girls. Finally got your wish, huh? Knuckles said, smiling. The two fifteen year olds nodded happily. It's not all fun and games. Knuckles warned. And it's not all fighting. He finished. A voice spoke from a dark corner of the ceiling. It's about constant awareness, and knowing who to trust. Ekyt free-fell to the ground, grinning. History comes into play as well. While it may seem unimportant, knowing what happened in the past.. Prevents it from happening in the future. Knuckles finished. But, one knows instinctively the basic skills of guarding. Lara had a question. How do you know we have it. Knuckles and Ekyt exchanged glances. Paula, your mother and I are both guardians. It's in your blood. If it was your chosen path, I would not interfere. If it wasn't, I wouldn't have forced you to follow my footsteps. The choices you made determined that you were one of the few chosen. Ekyt smiled fondly at his daughter. Knuckles turned to Lara-Su. Lara, I was against you being a guardian, after the way my father forced me to be, breaking his family at the seams. But the bravery and passion you exhibited made it clear that I was being unfair and hasty in my decision. Knuckles told his daughter. Let's begin with some stretching. Linda-Su and her sister, Julie-Su, watched from Haven (The guardian's home) as the four worked. All those years ago, I couldn't get Ekyt to look me in the eye. And now look. He's the father of my daughter. I always told him one day, you'll crack that shell. Well, he did, somewhat. Linda said to Julie. Julie-Su agreed. Knuckles was bashful too. But strong willed and stubborn. But I think we both knew to some extent what would happen. They both rose from the table they were at. That reminds me, it's time to check our investment. Robotnik had grown impressed by the creatures around him. They cooperated, followed orders, and worked. Like a machine. Through his own technology, similar to that of his formerly most hated enemies, he was working on a battle suit that could turn the tide of the war. Shadow may have stolen some of my technical genius, but I'm still superior to him. There! Robotnik looked up at a twenty-foot tall Metal Sonic. Linda-Su and Paula-Su entered the room. They didn't treat him like a prisoner. He was free to leave. But they provided with meals, protection, and a place to live. If grateful had been in his vocabulary, he would have felt it. For now, he felt satisfaction. Nice work Robotnik. Commented Julie-Su. Yeah, this is the one thing that may just win the war. Robotnik agreed silently. A loud crack was heard behind Ekyt and Knuckles. Shadow stood above their only chaos emerald, about to smash it. If the emerald was smashed, so was their chances of winning the war.

5 - Thoughts...

Ekyt slid across the floor and held Shadow's shoe up. He was obviously straining, so Lara thought she'd help out by kicking Shadow in the chest. Ekyt swept the emerald away to Knuckles micro-seconds before being flattened by Shadow. Shadow aimed for Paula next. Lien-Da chose this time to make her entrance along with- Lara-Le? Seeing his mother made Knuckles freeze. Shadow tried to snatch the emerald, but Paula-Su thwarted him with a devastating right cross. Recovering, Ekyt stood between the two. Chaos Spear! Shadow shouted with a sneer. Ekyt, whose hands glowed green from the power a guardian gets from the emeralds, deflected his shot. Lien-Da's whip shot out at him. It cracked Ekyt smartly on the back. Shadow attacked Paula-Su, who, instinctively, deflected his attack the way her father had seconds ago. *I didn't know I could do that!* She thought to herself.

Knuckles, if you love me, you will let Shadow have the emerald. Lara-Le said to him. No. And if you're on his side, you're no mother of mine! By this time, Ekyt, Knuckles, Paula, and Lara were backed into a corner. Things got worse as Rouge the Bat and Scourge (Formerly the Evil Sonic) made their presence known. Just give it up. I'm king, and I'll stay that way. Shadow taunted. Not while we live. Knuckles spat.

Knuckles, I thought we had a talk: No more of this fighting without me! The calvary arrived in the form of Julie-Su and Linda-Su. The all paired off and fought again. Robotnik was drenched in oil. But satisfied; he had completed his monstrous metal Sonic. Now to put you to work. He said to his metal monstrosity. The eyes glowed red with life.

The guardians chased off Shadow and his crew. It was a hollow victory. I thought you were just training the kids, not forcing them into combat. Julie-Su said mockingly. If you were gonna party, you could have called us. Linda agreed. Ekyt and Knuckles exchanged glances. Yeah. Um, that's enough for today. You girls did great. Ekyt said, hugging his own daughter. Thanks dad. They said in stereo. Goodnight. The girls went off to their new room in Haven. Ekyt shook Knuckles' hand and gave Julie-Su a small bow before heading to the room he and Linda shared.

Linda-Su snuggled up to Ekyt, falling asleep almost immediately listening to/ feeling his breath on his chest. She had fallen asleep on his bare chest like that many times. The days they lived in offered little comfort from war; sleeping soundly was almost a luxury. He gave her a fond smile. *Twenty-five years ago I couldn't have been in the same room with her without blushing. Now here we are, sharing a bed. Things turned out okay, at least in my personal world. After all this time, she's as beautiful as she was when I met her. And innocent. History dictated that the next guardian would come from us. Knuckles and Julie-Su too.* Linda tightened her grip on him in her sleep. *Yeah. Boy, I love her, but this is still hard to get used to. We've been married for years, and I'll still can't believe her and I are..- huh?* Ekyt shook his wife gently awake. Linda. We've got trouble. He pointed to the monitor opposite their bed. A twenty-foot tall Metal Sonic was stealing their chaos emerald.

6 - A Huge Undertaking

Robotnik, this had better be a test run! Ekyt snarled. He hardly had time for his wife as it was, he didn't need another enemy. Stuff it guardian! This metal Sonic obeys me and only me! So, without further ado- crush him! Ekyt pushed Linda out of the way before vaulting aside himself. Attacking this thing alone was pointless. The most thing he could do was to contain it until help arrived.

Knuckles was with Julie-Su when he saw the monstrosity. I knew it! I knew that lard-bucket couldn't be trusted! he threw on his typical clothes and tosses his hat on his head. His right eye had been taken out years earlier, replaced by a metal eye that enhanced his vision. As he ran toward the creation, he scanned it for weak spots. See anything Knux? Julie called out. Nada. Woah! Knuckles glided upwards as the deceptively quick Metal Sonic flashed behind him and swiped with its claws. They were as big as Knuckles.

Sonic was the next to arrive. Hey gang, thought I'd visit and- yeooww! Haven't we met before? Lemme see..oh yeah, it was in a junkyard. Sonic spun in place and hit the Metal Sonic. He bounced off and was saved by Sally, who pulled him out of the way at the last second. Hmm, tougher than I remember. Sonic said.

It was immediately decided to get the women and children to safety, no matter how competent of fighters they were. In the likely event the guardians and Sonic were killed, someone would have to continue the fight. Ekyt's next idea wasn't greeted as warmly. Forget it! That dude's bad news! Sonic said. No way can we trust him. Knuckles agreed. Ekyt took it all in and said Do we have any other choice? Shadow is hard enough alone, but what if he aligns himself with Robotnik? Ekyt ran a hand through his graying hair. This is a tough decision.. But you're right, we can't trust him. That means we need to two things. Sonic, you should get Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) and my son, Kurt. Knuckles, you keep Robotnik entertained. Ekyt turned around. Hold it, what are you gonna do? Say goodbye to my wife and kids and get ready for a huge sacrifice.

Okay Linda, you know the drill? She sighed. Yes, I do, but I still think it's nuts! Are you sure there isn't something else that can be done? Ekyt shook his head. No. If I don't do it, everyone dies. If you do it, *you* might die. I've got to risk it. Linda shook her head. I know. She wrapped her arms around him. He reciprocated. Well, hey, I'm not dead yet. We're gonna win this thing. He kissed her. Okay, strap me in. Linda did without a word. Paula-Su, his daughter, gave him a hug. She was used to her dad doing this sort of thing, but this seemed definite. Lara-Su paid her respects, as per guardian custom. Kurt, his adopted son, nodded solemnly. Tiffany thanked him for the help over the years. He thanked her too. Take care of yourself. And my kid too. He was all business again, looking every bit of his age.

Knuckles kept dodging, waiting for Tiffany. And Ekyt, whatever he was up to. *I don't wanna know. I've never been a poster child for restraint, but this guy's pushing it. Whatever it is he thinks he's gonna do.* A crack signaled Tiffany's arrival. Between the two of them, and Kurt, they had enough power to slow down this monster.

Okay, throw the switch. Ekyt said to Linda. This is stupid! There has to be another way! Linda-Su

argued. Mom, you know how hard-headed dad is; he's gonna do it anyway. Paula said happily. She was going to miss bantering with her father if things didn't go right.

Make no mistake about it, roboticization was a huge undertaking for Ekyt. Especially because they didn't know how to reverse the effects. But he'd have to worry about that later. Right now, as he watched his legs turn to metal, he realized that if they didn't win, it wouldn't matter if he was metal or not.

7 - Danger Zone

Ekyt sat up. Everyone's pale face greeted him. How do you feel? Linda-Su asked him cautiously. Good as it gets. He answered. His harsh, mechanical voice was chilling. Linda tried to make one last plea to his sanity. Ekyt, you're not a reckless teenager who hasn't found his place in the world anymore! You've got a wife; two kids; a whole ton of people who are following your example! Ekyt's new metal face twisted. His eyes closed. That's why I'm doing this. I couldn't call myself a husband or a father if I didn't do everything in my power to protect my family. And what kind of leader would I be if I made preserving myself the main priority? What kind of inspiration is that? he asked. Linda was beside herself. Paula-Su held onto her. Lara-Le was right! I never should have married a human! If we live through this, consider yourself divorced! Julie-Su grabbed her sister and escorted her out. Ekyt stood still. He shook his head, apparently trying to convince himself he was okay. Paula, please make sure everyone is evacuated. He told her. Paula seemed on the verge of tears. D-dad? W-What's gonna happen? She usually appeared older than her fifteen years, but now she seemed younger again. Ekyt knelt down. I don't know. He admitted. I do know that, no matter what, you're my daughter. And you're a guardian at heart. He told her. I mean about you and mom. She said. *I was hoping to avoid that.* He thought. I would do anything for your mother. If she meant what she said, I would do it for her. Lara-Su, Knuckles' daughter, escorted Paula away.

Come on, tubby! Can't that crate go faster? Knuckles taunted. Right on cue, Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) and Kurt arrived. Oh geez, that's a big problem! Tiffany exclaimed. Yeah. But you know what they say about big things. Kurt told her. Tiffany recited it with him: The bigger they are, the harder they fall. Kurt stared intensely ahead. Go for it. He said. Chaos Storm! Tiffany yelled out. The attack got the big robot's attention. Tiffany and Kurt dodged in separate directions. Chaos Control! she shouted. Kurt stuck a crowbar in the Metal Sonic's leg, taking out sensors before he was forced to run for it. Tiffany reappeared on top of Metal Sonic. Chaos Blast! Chaos Firestorm! she called out, raining attacks down. Metal Sonic swung his fist upward, hitting only its head. It managed to catch Tiffany's leg and it threw her. She landed on her feet and regrouped.

Ekyt ran down the hallway. The doors were just up ahead. He blasted through them. He immediately tried to cut Metal Sonic closer to his size. Ekyt was swatted away, but his new mecha-body held up. He blasted off the wall, landing a hard hit to Metal Sonic.

Sonic and Tails were guarding the women and children. In one corner, Linda and Julie-Su were talking. She was right! Why did I marry him?! a distraught Linda whispered. Julie gave her a sarcastic smile. Because you loved him. The JERK has used up my patience! He never does what's right for *us*, always what's right for *them!* she exclaimed. Julie forced her to sit down. Now listen sis! And listen good! You put him in a heckuva position, and you knew darn well what he had to do. And if you ask me, breaking his heart before a fight was a pretty crappy way of saying good luck and save us all! Julie-Su finished her talk, not hiding the fact that she was ticked off at her sister. A divorce! Geez, why don't you tell him to drop dead? Julie yelled, not realizing that it wasn't far from the truth.

Metal Sonic was spitting sparks from everywhere. Ekyt was up in the rafters. Between Tiffany's chaos attacks, and Ekyt's force, they were wearing Metal down. Ekyt shot off the beam, aiming for Metal. It

turned and batted him out of the air. Ekyt hit the ground hard, but started to get up. Metal Sonic rolled into a ball and made its spikes stand out. It hit Ekyt square, sending him into the concrete wall, which crumbled from the force.

Robotnik laughed maniacally. A guardian robot, and an ultimate lifeform! If my creation can handle both of you, then King Shadow's reign is over! Ekyt got up only to be created by a big piece of metal hitting him in the face. A vat of molten metal was beneath them. Metal Sonic stepped on Ekyt, who grabbed its foot and pushed up. The force continued down. *I want a divorce!* Ekyt let his guard down for a second, which Metal Sonic used to press harder. Ekyt tried to talk himself up. *If you die, there is no hope. Come on! Fight it! Fight it!* The pep talk didn't work. Ekyt's midsection crumpled. Metal Sonic lifted his helpless form up and bench-pressed him over his head. The vat of molten metal below was tailor-made to make robots. But it could destroy them too. Ekyt was awake, but he couldn't move. *I want a divorce.. divorce.. DIVORCE!* Ekyt still couldn't move, and now he was done for. He had given it his best. *God, I hope everyone else can escape. Paula, I'm sorry. Linda.. all these years together.. now it's come to this. No matter what, good luck, and take care.*

Ekyt felt himself being thrown. There was nothing he could do.

Good thing he wasn't alone.

8 - Death Warrant

Chaos Control! a familiar voice shouted as Metal Sonic threw Mecha-Ekyt downward. *I know that voice.. It can't be! Why would he help me?* A whip lashed out and grabbed his leg, pulling him away from the boiling vat of metal. Truth can be stranger than fiction, and in this case, it was. That didn't make it any easier for Ekyt to swallow. Shadow and Lien-Da had just saved his life.

A group had surrounded the fighting sisters. It's my life Julie! Stay out of this! Linda-Su shouted. Like heck I will! You're making the biggest mistake of your life! And you're being too stupid to see it! The crowd murmured and parted as Knuckles, flanked by Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) and Kurt made their way to Julie-Su and Linda-Su. The bunker went quiet. Knuckles knelt down, holding a scroll, which he handed to Linda-Su. She took it with trembling hands. dear God.. she managed, before the tears started flowing freely. Julie-Su picked up the scroll. Everyone, quite down! she commanded. Instantly, everyone stopped talking and speculating, they wanted to hear the truth. Julie-Su held the scroll up as Tiffany tried to console Linda-Su.

Shadow and Lien-Da strapped Ekyt in. A wave of light washed over him. The metal flaked away. He was human again. Lien-Da undid the straps, without making any of her usual comments. Shadow, still wearing the crown and cape, made his way over. How do you feel? he asked. I'm fine. Thank you. But what's the occasion? Shadow nodded at Lien-Da, who took a sip of wine before continuing. Let's move to the throne room. You need to hear what we have to say. Ekyt walked, noticing that there were no guards. A sign of trust. He decided to display the same.

A white cloth was laid over the empty casket. It's my sad duty to inform you that the first human guardian, Ekyt, has fallen in the line of duty. Knuckles stopped and let the crowd mumber before asking for their silence again. Beside him was Ekyt's wife and kids, in black. There was no body recovered. We have the video of his last acts, seen from his robotic eyes. (Ekyt was roboticized last issue) If you have young children, you would be well advised to shield them from this next part. It showed Ekyt thirty feet in the air, then falling toward the molten steel. The clips stopped. As is the guardian custom, his daughter will fill his role. Ekyt, not always popular at times, was never the less honored. As they lowered the casket into the ground, a cross made of steel was pushed into the ground by his friends and family. The only problem was, he was still alive.

So you see Ekyt, if we team up to stop this monstrosity, it will be over that much quicker. Ekyt ignored the glass of wine near him. I see. And why, per say, do you want, or even need, my help? You have a robot army of millions, as well as chaos powers. Ekyt challenged. You have dealt Metal Sonic damage, and, if we don't have your help, we don't have my sister's help. And you and your kids as well. It will take all our combined power to stop this menace, as much as I hate to admit it. Shadow finished. Ekyt leaned back, looking at the tattered throne room. It still showed signs of the Kingdom of Acorn, despite the many years that had passed. You understand, it will have to be the decision of our group, as a whole, whether we join you or not. Ekyt answered. Yes, fine! Ekyt nodded. I'll speak with them and have an answer for you in twenty-four hours. I'll meet you and Lien-Da at Mount Fate. Agreed? Ekyt said firmly. Shadow nodded. Lien-Da held out her hand. They shook. Agreed.

Ekyt made his way back. He ached, but not horribly bad. Or maybe he had gotten used to it. He got to Haven, only to find it empty. That s strange. Haven is never empty. Unless.. Ekyt looked around quickly, seeing the group gathered in the Great Forest, with a death warrant in Knuckles hand. Understanding immediately, Ekyt muttered Chaos Control and directed the energy toward the Great Forest. Hopefully, they wouldn t be hard to convince on the point that he was alive. He knew the alliance with the enemy would be a bitter pill to swallow. Part of him couldn t help wonder if the divorce was going to be final.

9 - Doin' hard Time

The casket was a dark cherry wood inside, outside it was scrap metal. Pretty extravagant considering the world had all but ended. Funerals typically bring out a feeling of hopelessness. Never was it truer than on this night. Despite the harsh words, Linda had never meant this to happen. She felt as if she herself had thrown him in the vat of molten steel.

Ekyt approached the group. He had a slash across his face that materialized after Shadow and Lien-Da deroboticized him. That meant he had his mask back. Nobody in the group saw him, amazingly, they were all too busy looking down at the casket. For some reason, Ekyt decided to dive down on top of the casket and tear it open. When he jumped back out, the crowd paled. Who the hell are you? one person called out. I m the guy you just buried. Ekyt said with a small smirk. But.. You re dead.. You can t be here! After Linda threatening to divorce him, something inside Ekyt had torn. Okay. I m dead. You got your wish didn t you? he said sarcastically. Linda-Su couldn t believe it. Wait- I never said-.. Linda remembered her conversation with Julie-Su. I can t believe I said that. She said. Yeah, I know. One of the last humans in the world, and you want me to be a fossil instead of a husband? Ekyt let his heart soften after that. We ll have to settle this later, in private. Right now, we ve got an even bigger problem. All eyes were on Ekyt.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) and Kurt. Only the people that had known them for the last twenty-five years could believe they were married. With good reason. Both were immune to the aging process, making Tiffany look Fifteen despite being older, and Kurt grew until sixteen, then stopped. Twenty-five years had passed since they had first met. Now they were married with two kids. They had an older boy, Kyle, who was black and red like Tiffany. He had chaos powers like his parents, and an urge to protect that impressed everyone. His sister, Tracey, was essentially a living chaos emerald, like her father. Kyle protected her above all else. Tracey was quite by nature, but spoke her mind when necessary.

(For pics, check out Shadowthe_Hedgehog s gallery. Now, for the legal mumbo-jumbo- Kyle and Tracey were created by Shadowthe_hedgehog in Dec 2006, (c) all rights reserved. Kyle and Tracey issued for use to NextGuardian in stories and pictures. Tiffany is owned by Shadowthe_Hedgehog and Kurt is owned by NextGuardian)

It comes down to the King and Queen. Knuckles pointed out. Yeah. So, King Sonic and Queen Sally, I ll meet with Shadow and Lien-Da in five hours. It had been an all-nighter for Ekyt. He was in so much pain mentally and physically. Linda hadn t talked about the divorce, and the cuts and bruises from battling that stupid Metal Sonic were really starting to hurt. Sonic, Knuckles, and Sally noticed this. Umm.. the thing is, we don t know if.. that is.. in your condition.

Ekyt s already frayed nerves snapped. In my condition? Don t you think pain is pretty much part of my life? Ekyt started. Now hold on, no one is.. Like hell you aren t! I ve given my life to this cause! And you don t think I can handle this little bit of diplomacy? Sally tried again. Look, we know how hard you re working and with the divorce.. we just want what s be-.. You want what s best? Give me my life back. Wait.. What s that, you say? I m older and my life s not worth a damn? Nobody s saying that! Sonic exclaimed. He had never seen Ekyt like this. I m going to talk to Shadow myself. Ekyt said. If

you do, you're going to jail. Sally said. That's a false threat if I ever heard one. You need all the fighters you can get, and now you're going to put one of the fewest with chaos powers in jail? You know as well as I do we need the fire power! This metal monstrosity is going to destroy everyone, and you know it!

GUARDIAN, STAND DOWN! Sally commanded. Paula-Su nudged her father. Dad, c'mon. Just go with it. Please. Ekyt stopped his tirade momentarily. In a hollow voice, he told her Sometimes you've got to follow your instincts. You'll understand someday. Aw heck, you probably do now. Ekyt turned back to Sonic and Sally. I'm going. You can arrest me when I'm done. Ekyt made a move to leave, but Sonic zipped in front of the door and Knuckles glided behind him. This is way past uncool. Give us time. Sonic, if you believed you were right, you would do it, wouldn't you? Yes, but this is out of hand! Do you trust me? If you do, let me do this. If you don't, call the guards. Sonic didn't. Sally, however, did. ANTOINE! Antoine came rushing in. Yes, your majesty? Arrest him for attempted treason. Oui Princess. Antoine sighed. I am sorry, mes amis. Eet is zimplly orders. Ekyt felt the familiar feeling of handcuffs. Antoine, restrain him while I speak, please. Sally said. Sonic whispered What are you doing Sal? to her.

She walked over to Ekyt, who had been forced to his knees. This is not a punishment guardian. It's a precaution. We can't have you hurting yourself and others. Ekyt looked her right in the eyes. Years of fighting.. If I had known a divorce and jail time were in my future, maybe I would be playing for the other side. He nodded coldly. Your majesty. He looked at Sonic and nodded slightly. Paula-Su was waiting outside. Paula, I'm passing the mantle to you. Ekyt said. What? Paula had dreamed of this day her whole life. But her Dad was in no state to do this. Dad, think about this. I have Paula. And I.. well, it's time you took over. He smiled, a tear in his eye. You've made me proud, while I've made myself a disgrace. Don't say that dad! What about what you told me in there? Do what you think is right?

That's what I'm doing. Paula took a deep breath. No. Ekyt cocked his head. No? This was your dream. No Dad. It was my dream to take over for you *when I was ready*. I'm not ready. I'm doing what I think is right. Ekyt shook his head in amazement. Paula, you're wise beyond your years. Paula turned away and walked down the hallway. She simply said I'm going to talk to Mom. And I'll be waiting for you to train me when you get out.

10 - Issue 10- Shocking Turn of Events

Ekyt paced his cell angrily. He was like a caged animal. Wounded, too. He had all but committed treason, but he felt no pangs of regret. He was doing what was right. Sonic seemed to understand. And while he understood Sally's point of view, it just made him all the angrier. *She's questioning my loyalty.. now? After twenty-five years of service?* The sudden sight of Linda-Su near his cell interrupted his thoughts. Ekyt, we need to talk.

Sonic raced to Mount Fate. *Man, Sal really threw the book at im. Ah well, probably better he calms down first.* Shadow was waiting with Lien-Da. Sonic. He greeted. Shadow. Sonic nodded coldly. Let's get right to the point. Right now, we need each other's services. After this, well, all bets are off. Shadow said, wasting no time. Agreed. Shadow suddenly realized Ekyt's absence. Where's the human? We need his chaos powers. Sonic sucked in his breath. Welllll, Sally kinda jailed him for treason. Shadow chuckled, but pondered that. I never picked him to be the treasonous type. Well, I'm next, because I'm at this meeting, I'm essentially committing treason too. Sonic admitted. I see. Well, you'd better get him freed hedgehog. We need all the chaos powers we can get. Jailing a freedom fighter is a bad idea at this point. Sonic agreed privately. We'll meet at the gate to Robotropolis in one hour.

Just like old times, huh? Linda asked Ekyt. Usually it's you doing the arresting. But let's skip that and get right to the point, shall we? Ekyt said, no trace of a smile. I know. I didn't mean what I said Ekyt. I was just so worried something would happen. I've lost you once, I don't want it to happen again. Ekyt softened. I understand. As long as you're not divorcing me.. Well, your daughter here got a hold of Kurt, and they brought me to my senses.

Kurt and Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) came in, followed by Tracey and Kyle (Shadowthe_Hedgehog and NextGuardian). Hi Grandpa. Kyle knew that Ekyt hated that. It had become kind of a game between them. Hey yourself kid. Ekyt said with a small grin. Hello Grandfather. Tracey, always respectful. Guys, don't worry about calling me grandfather and everything. Just call me Ekyt. I don't call you Grandkids one and two. He had said this before, and they knew better, but, well, they wouldn't be kids if they didn't razz him a little. Right now, our priority is getting you out of here. Sonic gave the word, but you're needed in combat. Ekyt nodded. *Grandpa? What the hell? I am that old?*

Shadow, Sonic, Ekyt, Tiffany, Kurt, Lara-Su, Paula-Su, Julie-Su, Linda-Su, and Lien-Da met at the gates to Robotropolis. Shadow, Tiffany, Ekyt, Lien-Da, Julie-Su and Linda-Su were going to attack Metal Sonic head-on. Kurt, Paula-Su, Lara-Su and Knuckles were going to raid Robotnik's complexes. Sonic was going after Robotnik. In case they all failed, Kyle and Tracey were in charge of protecting Knothole and the Floating Island. (The two are now neighbors, thanks to the dimensions wearing down. NG)

Okay, Shadow and Tiffany, you've each got your emerald. You two attack from a distance with chaos. Lien-Da and Myself will get closer, since our chaos powers are less developed. And Linda and Julie, as soon as Metal Sonic falls, rip out any wires, sensors, anything you can get a grip on. He's not gonna go down with one shot. Any objections? Ekyt asked. No one spoke up. Good. Here we go.

Shadow and Tiffany immediately started. Chaos Blast! Chaos Storm! Chaos Blast! Chaos Storm!

Chaos Firestorm! Metal Sonic started smoking. Apparently Robotnik hadn't repaired all the damage from last time, as Metal Sonic fell quickly. Ekyt and Lien-Da attack at close range, with concentrated attacks. They focused on the head. Linda, you're up! Ekyt called. Linda and Julie drove home a pair of crowbars, popping circuits and wires. Metal Sonic stirred. Okay, fall back and regroup!

Deroboticizer-keeper. Nanite journal-keeper. Robotnik's journal.. Lara-Su said. Paula-Su spun around. Lemme see! Lara rolled her eyes. Not really dimbulb! Let's get this stuff out of here. How are you doing over there Kurt? Kurt was setting charges. All set, one more building to go.

Curse those meddling upstarts! I sure could use Snively right now.. SNIVELY! Snively came running. Yes, Master? he said meekly. Send some SWATbots out! Let's gum up their operation. Snively went to the control panel and hit the buttons. Um, Master? It seems they're all out of commission.

WHAT? HOW COULD THAT HAPPEN? I don't know sir.. Snively responded. But I do, Ro-Butt-Nik. Sonic smiled, tossing a SWATbot's head to himself. Hedgehog! I'm surprised at you, aligning yourself with Shadow. You're the greater evil Lord Lard. Bah! We'll fight another day hedgehog! Robotnik escaped in his hovercraft with Snively.

Metal Sonic fell once again, but this time it couldn't get up. Everyone moved in for the kill, ripping it to shreds. Thank God. Everyone collectively said. Yeah. Good work. Sonic raced to join up with the group. Everyone filtered out. Ekyt had climbed up on top of some broken rocks and metal, staring at the sky. *Things are back in order.* Shadow joined him next, followed by Sonic. Thanks human. Sure thing. Ekyt said. Now what. Back to war? Sonic chipped in. Looks that way. Shadow said in a voice Ekyt didn't like.

Shadow's pistol barked twice. Sonic and Ekyt fell, side by side, on the rubble, while Shadow stood above them, a smoking pistol in his hand. Good riddance to both of you. Ekyt and Sonic were awake. *d-dammit!* Ekyt muttered before falling back down. Sonic grunted and got up to one knee, before he fell again. Shadow laughed. For a little too long. Knuckles and Lara-Su attacked him. Paula-Su was near Ekyt. C'mon Dad, snap out of it! You're tougher than this! Kurt was trying to wake Sonic up. It's no good Paula. We've gotta chaos control them back. They did. Paula wheeled around. Shadow, I'll make you pay for this! You and me- we're gonna duel! If you've got the guts, you'll meet me at Mount Fate tomorrow! Shadow smirked, having thrown off Knuckles and Lara-Su. You'll fall just like your father. But I have no problem being rid of a guardian a generation in advance. Paula leapt at him, but he chaos-controlled himself and Lien-Da away.

11 - Paula's Fight

I must say, you do resemble your father. Knuckles commented. Nearly three decades ago, Ekylt himself had fought for Linda-Su's honor. Now his daughter was fighting for his. Currently, he was barely awake in a hospital bed. Knuckles, as her godfather, was protecting her and taking care of her. *Ekylt's gonna kill me when he hears about the duel.* Paula-Su stepped back and admired herself. Black tanktop, the loose black pants similar to the one's her father had worn. What can I say Knux? I look good in anything. She smiled, albeit grimly. Hey, how about letting me talk to Lara-Su for a little bit? Calms my nerves. Sure, but I'm staying. Knuckles said firmly. Suit yourself mate, if you fancy girl talk. Knuckles almost ran for the door.

Linda-Su watched her husband and Sonic come in and out of consciousness. Ekylt.. Things shouldn't have come to this. Ekylt had his eyes closed. He turned, which hurt, but he could hear, and see with one eye open. They had removed the bullet, and he wasn't in any danger. Just in pain. But, the last twenty years had been brutal, so it was hardly anything new. All the time we spent apart, it sickens me. She was still talking. Ekylt wanted to see where this would go. Now our daughter is dueling Shadow and.. What the?! Ekylt sat up so hard he knocked over the monitors near his bedside. She's fighting Shadow? Oh, not good, not good! She's a great fighter, but this is too much, even for her! Ekylt jumped out of bed and threw his clothes back on. Are you crazy? Linda exclaimed. Crazy is as crazy does. And right now, crazy is her fighting Shadow! Ekylt shot back. You can't get involved. Linda said. You know the protocol. Protocol be damned, that's my daughter! And, maybe I don't need to be involved.. He bolted for the door, knocking over the doctor. Loyal if nothing else. Linda whispered.

Paula stood, unwavering, across the ring from Shadow. I must admit, I've never fought a girl before. Well, save my sister, Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog). I hardly know what to expect. He said, bowing mockingly. Paula repeated the gesture. Expect to be humbled Shads. And expect that, if you're feeling anything, a whole lotta pain. Shadow darted forward after the verbal jab. Paula rolled to the side, her leg flashing out. Shadow blocked and returned with a punch. Paula ducked that and spun behind Shadow, slapping his head a couple of times, ticking him off, before trying to sweep his legs. Shadow jumped and kicked, forcing Paula to bend backwards into a handspring, then bouncing off the sand for momentum. Shadow spun and his foot caught her in the stomach. Shadow bent down to hit her, but she grabbed his arm and put her leg up, flipping him over. She got up quickly and stepped on Shadow's face. Shadow spat out blood and tried a homing attack. Paula put up her hands, controlling his forward momentum. She redirected it so he was pushing her in the air. She jumped, throwing his attack of balance, before stomping downward with both feet, driving Shadow down into the ground face-first.

Sonic awoke. Sally was at his bedside, talking to a doctor. Ye-ow! he yelped. What the heck are you doing? Someone had stuck a needle into his quills. I'm sorry, I thought you were sedated sire! the nurse exclaimed. It's cool. Sonic sat up the rest of the way. Sally dismissed the medical personnel. You were right Sonic. I lost my temper. It's so frustrating not having control! I'm supposed to be a ruler, and I let the opportunity to put away the enemies go. I'm sorry I didn't listen to you Sonic. She said. It's cool Sal.

Ekylt stormed to the site. He was bandaged up, and forced use a cane. But alive. As far as anyone knew,

he had died.. again. Anything short of death wouldn't have kept him away from this, however. Pardon me. Excuse me. Thank you. Everyone parted silently. The combatants didn't notice Ekyt. Good. Hey, no cutting chump! a dog-like creature told Ekyt, kicking his cane out from under him. That's my daughter. Ekyt said by way of explanation. Yeah, yeah, I'll let you know when I care. *Okay, looks like we're doing this the hard way.* Alright tough-guy. Are you gonna move, or do I have to hurt you? Ekyt snarled. Linda tapped him. Ekyt, might I remind you that you just got out of the hospital? It's alright. I can handle pain. What I *can't* handle is not seeing my daughter. The dog didn't move. I'm not moving aside for some crippled human. Ekyt punched him, sending a stir through the crowd that reached Shadow and Paula.

Dad? You're alive? Thank God! she said fondly. I sure am. Do me a favor honey. Beat him back to the black hole he came from. I really don't feel like fighting with any other idiots today. Linda-Su kissed him on the cheek. Paula knew they were together again. Shadow looked over. Ekyt? You aren't dead? Hmm, I must have missed your spine. And the hedgehog? Shadow inquired mockingly. Alive and well. Your days are numbered Shadow. When my daughter's through, it's *my* turn. All eyes were on Shadow. I see. Missing was a mistake. A mistake I won't make twice. Shadow drew a pistol and aimed it at Ekyt. The judge disqualified Shadow. That didn't help. Shadow threw the judge aside and stormed toward Ekyt. Ekyt pushed Linda behind him. He put his hands behind his back, as if surrendering. One glowed green with chaos energy. Ekyt aimed his hand quickly, getting rid of the pistol. It burned Shadow who instinctively tossed it away. Planning to use that on my daughter? Just shows that you're desperate. Ekyt woke up the referee. Restart the fight.

Paula saw what Ekyt was doing and immediately followed suit. She tackled Shadow and put one foot on his head. She grabbed a quill and yanked. It came free. Shadow got up and rebounded, hitting her in the face. Linda winced. Paula laid still. She suddenly flipped up and slashed Shadow across the chest with his own quill, drawing blood. She dropped the quill and rammed Shadow again. She scrambled on top of him and pinned him. It was the upset of the century. As soon as the referee awarded the match to Paula, Ekyt vaulted into the ring and raced toward Shadow. Shadow chaos-controlled away, humiliated, but still in control.

Nice job Paula. Ekyt said with a grin. I learned it all from my old man. Paula said with a grin. Funny. Ekyt turned to Linda. I've got to apologize to you. For being rash in my actions. And for never being the good boyfriend or husband I should have been. Linda smiled and ticked him under the chin. Yeah, well, once hopeless, always hopeless. Ekyt looked surprised. What do you mean by that? She kissed him. I can't believe you missed that cue! You're still hopeless!

NEXT ISSUE: BACK TO TRAINING, AND A KYLE/TRACEY SPECIAL!

12 - Future meets the Past (Pt 1)

It was hard to believe. In this day and age of war, where enemies banded together, something as trivial as bullying was alive and well. Kyle had been spared somewhat, because of his parents and grandparents. Tracey had the problems, being the living chaos emerald.

Tracey stood quietly as the older kids insulted her. And that family! No wonder she turned out like that! one joked. Kyyle saw this and walked over casually. I d be quiet if I were you. He said. Yeah, okay small fry, you just try and make me. One of the bullies taunted. You asked for it. Chaos Spear! Using his sister s energy, he used a small version of chaos spear to set the bully s shoes on fire. Ah, you freak! Freak?! Kyle started after him, but Tracey stopped him. Please Kyle, let it go. She asked quietly. You re right sis, I shouldn t have let that get to me. I ll be in enough trouble once Mom and Dad find out I was using my chaos powers again.

Knuckles was directing Lara-Su. Now, concentrate hard! The emerald started to glow. Lara raised a few inches off the ground. Then she fell down. That was great! Good job! Knuckles told her. For a first time especially! Paula, you re up. Ekyt stepped forward. Remember what we talked about Paula. Just concentrate. Leave the war behind.. Go! Paula drifted almost immediately. She floated, then hit a wall and came crashing back to reality. You okay honey? Ekyt asked his daughter. Sure. She said offhandedly. Good job girls! Now, you ve been training for months. Knuckles began. Ekyt continued.

It s time you had a mentor as Knuckles and I did. A fire-ant is a guardian s best friend. A bamf sound heralded the arrival of Archimedes. He was older now, but for a fire-ant, age was hardly a consideration.

Ekyt, Knuckles, good to see you. It s been a while Archimedes. Ekyt said. Indeed m boy. I can assume you ve summoned me to assist the new guardians. Ekyt looked over at Knuckles, who nodded.

With Sabre s death (Sabre is a member of the Brotherhood, a group of echidnas who keep balance-NG) we ve decided it s time for us to assist at Haven. Archimedes scratches his chin. Big undertaking. Let me contact Haven..

Kyle, this has to stop. Kurt told him. I know Dad. But I m so sick of her getting picked on! Kurt could relate. But what kind of a parent would he be if he let it slide? Kyle, I understand, more than you know. But your chaos powers are for emergencies. And you don t know what effect using her energy might have on your sister. You could be taking Tracey s life energy. But I ll tell you what. I ll talk to your mother, and we ll see what we can do. For now, you go play. Kyle obeyed and Kurt sat back for a moment. Tiffany (shadowthe_hedgehog) came in, right on cue. Kyle s been playing with chaos again. Kurt said. Much like his mother. Tiffany gave him a look. I used it when the time was right. That s something he ll have to determine. Times have changed Kurt. For better or worse, we ve got to keep them under wraps. Kurt ran a hand through his quills. I still have a hard time stomaching the fact that we have to safeguard our kids like this. A sheltered existence.. I just doesn t seem right. Tiffany sat down next to him. You know we re in for a number of rough years. There s only a small group of us with chaos powers. And I shudder to think what would happen is Shadow somehow program chaos powers. The thought of our kids in combat.. she trailed off. Kurt nodded. You re right. The less Shadow knows the better..

Okay, you two. Here s the scoop. Only one of you is needed in Haven. Knuckles, that s you. Ekyt, you re to remain as a mentor to the guardians in training. Ekyt nodded. He was happy for Knuckles, but he wanted to be the next one in Haven. It had to be him being a human. Ekyt turned to Knuckles,

extending his hand. Best of luck old friend. Ekyt said. May Stepenwolf guide you. Knuckles returned. With that, he was off, to become the unseen entity his father had been. Ekyt turned to the two girls. A quick round of meditation and we'll finish the day, okay? The two girls looked up at him. Dad.. I have a question about Haven. Paula said nervously. Why is Haven so important? Ekyt looked over to Archimedes and nodded. I think it's time these two had a sanctuary of their own. If Haven is for retired guardians, maybe we need living quarters for the sub-guardians. Archimedes, if you'll contact Knuckles, and ask for permission to use the Grand Conservatory.. With pleasure kid. Paula and Lara exchanged glances excitedly. The Grand Conservatory was a well-guarded secret. Only guardians had access. They had always wanted to go. Now they had the chance.

NEXT ISSUE: KING SHADOW GOES AFTER KYLE AND TRACEY, SONIC AND SALLY CLEAR THINGS UP, AND THE GRAND CONSERVATORY IS UNVEILED. KEEP ON READING, AND SEND THOSE LETTERS TO ARCHIE COMICS (SEE MY PROFILE).

NG DOES WHAT OTHER S WON T!

13 - Family Reunion

When he was working, Ekyt was okay. But when he was doing anything but, no matter where he was, his mind was playing tricks on him. Had all the years of war and hatred unhinged him? No, he was certain of that much. Next to him, Linda-Su stirred, tired after the day's work. It had been almost a year since they were in command, while Sonic and Sally patched things up. (want to hear more? Let me know and I'll do a special- NG) It was stressful, but rewarding. And now he had managed to tick off Queen Sally, get arrested, get shot, help his daughter win a fight against Shadow, and not get the job he had hoped for. That was a lot to swallow. He sighed. Linda, sensitive, sat up. You haven't slept in two days Ekyt. Relax. She said. He hadn't told her yet. Sorry. Just thinking. He said quickly. You can do that anytime. Sleep isn't always possible. Now go to sleep! Yes Ma'am. Ekyt said, forcing a smile.

He was up early the next day. BAMF! Ekyt, I can't help but notice something's wrong. Archimedes said. Is it that obvious? Ekyt countered. Not to the others maybe, but to me, you're wearing your emotions on your sleeve. Ekyt turned his head sharply. I'm happy for Knuckles Archimedes, but I'm started to feel unwelcome.. I guess some things haven't changed over twenty-five years. Archimedes was sitting in Ekyt's hand. With only Tobor remaining, they needed the help in Haven. But they also need someone to train the guardians here. Archimedes began. I thought that was your job Arch (Pronounced Ark). Ekyt said with a glance. *Assisting* is my job. *Training* is yours. Think of it as a promotion. It's a far cry from all the times the Ancient Walkers had me killed to test me. It's not like I'm Knuckles, where I was born to this. Am I setting my daughter up for failure? Her connection with me can only bring her trouble. In the annals of history.. In the annals of *our* history, there were two humans. Robotnik and you. One evil, one a guardian. No one will ever confuse you two, lad. Ekyt thought for a moment. Yeah, but there's a hole in your theory. One's a guardian. An *infamous* guardian. I'll be remembered all right.. Thank anyway Arch. I appreciate what you're trying to do. But I guess I'm beyond hope.

Shadow watched as the two known as Kyle and Tracey played. Lein-Da, that girl's energy signature.. is that not pure chaos? Shadow called out. It is! Could there be another living emerald? Kurt.. I remember him, and he married my sister.. of course.. it makes sense one of their offspring would inherit the powers of each parent. Perhaps it's time they meet Uncle Shadow and Aunt Lien-Da..

Sonic was talking with Tails when Sally strode in. Sonic, we need to talk. Sonic nodded to Tails. He left, leaving the two alone. What's up Sal? Sonic asked her. I'm worried I was rash with Ekyt. Jailing him for that might have been harsh.. You were doing what you thought was best. Personally, I would have given him an escort. But he did try to disobey you.. So you think it was justified? Sort of. I think we should have handled it better. I should have spoken up. I- hold on, incoming transmission.. from Angel Island. A large screen dropped down to give the royal couple a view of Knuckles. It's been a while True Blue. I'm here to update you on the status of the floating island. Go on Red. The Dark Legion is being kept in check. After Kragok's run-in with Ekyt and the Chaos Syphon (Want to hear more? If you command it (A special), so it shall be done- Next *Lame plug guardian*), he's been weakened. Lien-Da's too busy with Shadow's plans to give the Dark Legion the attention it needs. And I'm in Haven now, along with Tobor, since Sabre's death. Sally smiled. Congratulations Knuckles. You are your father's son for sure. Thank you Sally. Something's up with Ekyt thought. He's training my daughter and his daughter, but he's.. distracted, for want of a better word. His injuries have healed well, and

there s been no complaints of pain. He s not drinking or doing drugs either, I put Linda-Su (His wife) on notice for that, but he s clean. Sally slammed the table. It must have been my actions. It s not that either, your majesty. That s water under the bridge. But he has visited the former site of Mount Fate. And.. Wait! Hold on! I m getting some strange readings.. There s a chaos signature in the area.. it matches Shadow s. And there s another. Tracey.. Shadow s going after Kurt and Tiffany s (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) kids! Sonic stood up. Is anyone in the area? Checking.. Ekyt. Well, send him! Sally ordered. In his state, your majesty. Sonic pointed at the screen. Knuckles, this is an emergency! Those kids are the future! Whack bag or not, he s the only one around there! You send him, I ll contact Tiffany. Kingdom of Acorn out.

A shadow loomed over Tracey. Wh-who are you? she asked shyly. Don t you know Tracey? I m your uncle, Shadow. And this is Aunt Lien-Da. Kyle came jogging over. He didn t see Shadow right away. He turned to see what was blocking the sun and gasped. Tracey, that s Shadow! Mom s brother! he said excitedly. So you ve heard of me, Kyle? You bet! Kyle said. And, if you re smart, you ll get out of here. He said viciously. Shadow narrowed his eyes. I had so hoped this wouldn t get violent.. He raised his arm. Ekyt charged and rammed Shadow with his shoulder. Forget it! You re not getting your greedy hands on them! Ekyt turned to Kyle and Tracey. Run you two! He s dangerous! Ekyt turned back only to be hit by Shadow s homing attack. Ekyt fell hard. Lien-Da held him down with her chaos powers. Kyle stopped. Oh no you don t! Chaos Storm! he shouted. Shadow fell to his knees. Little monster! He who invents it knows how to prevent it. Chaos spear! Kyle dodged to the side. Uh-uh. Mom invented that! Ekyt threw Lien-Da off. Kyle, go, now! I ll deal with this! Protect your sister! Kyle ran after Tracey this time. Ekyt spun back to Shadow. You re reduced to picking on kids? My Grand-kids no less. Have you forgotten I m still alive? Ekyt spat. Shadow smiled nastily. You re a footnote in history guardian. I m the headline! You re gonna be in the obituaries if you keep screwing with my family. You ve got five seconds to leave and take your bimbo wife with you before I reduce you ashes! Ekyt was suddenly from behind by a force powerful enough to flip him over entirely. Have you forgotten.. I m not history yet guardian.. So many have come before me.. and my grandchild, Lien-Da, one of the few worthy. Ekyt got to his feet. No.. You were dead.. I know it.. I was there.. Fool! I m immortal! Eleven chaos emeralds are within me! So speaks ENERJAK!

WHO IS ENERJACK? ARE KYLE AND TRACEY OKAY? WHAT ARE SONIC, SALLY, AND KNUCKLES GOING TO DO ABOUT EKYT? AND WHAT IS IT THAT LINDA-SU KNOWS? FIND OUT NEXT TIME!

14 - Self-Worth vs. Self-Preservation

In his horrible mindset, there was no way Ekyt was going to win. Being hit from behind fired him up for a brief flurry of offense. His thoughts kept getting in the way. He tagged Shadow with a solid right hand (Am I good enough?), before paying the price with a left hook. He swept Enerjak's legs (What's the matter with me?), then was flipped over by Shadow. He tackled Shadow (What happened to me?), but Shadow turned it around into a homing attack. Ekyt shifted his weight into Enerjak, knocking him off his feet, into Lien-Da, and charged Shadow. (I wasn't good enough..) Shadow saw this distraction and nonchalantly tossed his emerald to himself. Ekyt was lost in thought, and couldn't block it the way he should have. At least Kyle and Tracey (both Shadowthe_Hedgehog) were safe. CHAOS BLAST! Ekyt flew into a tree and slid down. He was quickly hit again, going through the tree, finally unconscious. Lien-Da looked down. Kill or capture? she said with a nasty smile. Neither. Let him rot there. His own thought will be the death of him. Enerjak looked down. You were simply a stepping stone. Well, I stepped. HARD. Looks like Angel Island has one last pest to deal with.

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) skated by the landscape. *Hope those two are okay* she thought. Kyle and Tracey came running the other way. mom! Thank God! Kyle exclaimed. Tracey hugged her. Are you okay? she asked them. We're fine. But Ekyt.. Kyle grimaced. He had seen a lot of the beating. He had Tracey hide as he climbed up a tree and watched. Where'd he end up? Tiffany asked urgently. I don't know. I didn't watch the whole thing.

Ekyt got up on his own and was sickened by the blood loss. Not unusual. But, for once, he felt no sense of accomplishment. And he was wondering just how long he could keep up this I'm a guardian, nothing bothers me charade. He wiped his face off with a huge leaf from some tree that was wet from the rain. When he was younger, he loved being a guardian. Now, today anyway, it was more of yes, I'm a guardian. How long until retirement? He knew he was breaking a rule, but he chaos controlled to the chaos chamber. His daughter was waiting for him.

Tiffany hadn't gotten there in time to talk some sense into him, but she had seen the confused, almost pained look on his face. She shook her head. Definitely something going on there.

Ekyt arrived and landed on one knee. He got up and shook his head. Another fight Dad? she asked pleasantly. She knew what was going on, but wasn't about to let on. Nothing serious. Where's Lara-Su? Present! she said amiably from the doorway. Allright, let's get on with it then. In this day and age, you never know when you'll be needed. You've got to be on your guard. And you've got to know that every action has a price. (Yeah, like I should be teaching them. I can't even take care of my own business.) Let's start with.. He shook his head. Archimedes! Ekyt said in an urgent whisper. BAMF! What's up kid? Arch, can you handle this? I've got to get fixed up. My back is killing me, I just got jumped. Archimedes knew he was telling a half-truth, but said Sure, I'll handle the kids today. Thanks. Ekyt turned and walked out, leaving Paula-Su with questions that had yet to be answered.

Ekyt went home and got cleaned up. Anything you want to tell me? Ekyt turned around to see his wife, Linda-Su. Nothing to tell. I got jumped. She had her arms crossed as she was leaning in the doorway. Uh huh. I've known you for too long to swallow that. *Oh crap.* It's nothing, really. I'll get over it. Ekyt

assured her. She looked worried, but had to trust him. If you say so.

Ekyt went to his special spot. He climbed down the maintenance ladder into a basement of sorts. He sat down and closed his eyes. *I've haven't done this in a long time. Not since I was first made guardian .. When I was leading the resistance with Linda, I was in control. Now that we've got two kings and queens, and someone else in Haven.. I don't know what I'm worth anymore. Am I any good at what I do? Was I ever?*

15 - Never Turn Back...

Kyle and Tracey (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) told Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) about the fight. Kyle had hidden Tracey, and used Chaos Storm, then Ekyt came charging in. Tiffany raised her eyebrows at the Chaos Storm part. What was it we said about using your chaos powers? Tiffany asked. mom, it was an emergency! Tracey nodded shyly. She was never one to lie. Okay.. but be careful. The kids ran off to play as Kurt walked into the room. Something s up with my dad. Oh? Yeah, it like, all of a sudden, he s questioning something..

Ekyt watched Shadow s robots patrol. He was safely hidden in a tree. Raising the rifle in his arms, he picked off a few, freeing the smaller animals inside. His heart wasn t really in it today. Once the supply of robots dried up, Ekyt jumped down from the tree. He hadn t seen Tails and Amy in a long time. Or the Chaotix. Maybe it was time for a visit.

In the days since the war, the Chaotix worked with Ekyt s old group, an outlaw band of freedom fighters. The original cast was Ekyt, Colin (An echidna he had rescued from a fire, along with Linda-Su s help), Mitch (Colin s brother, their technical whiz), Tiffany and Kurt (They were on a leave of absence, now fighting with the main group.) and Tails and Amy. The Chaotix dwindled down to the original group of Mighty, Charmy, Espio, Vector, and Ray. Julie-Su was now in Haven with Knuckles, running the floating island. That reminded Ekyt of what sent him into this swirling torrent of a personal hell.

Colin and Mitch were different as day and night, but both incredibly loyal to each other and the cause. Both were now in their late- thirties. But still energetic as kids. Colin had met an echidna nurse, the daughter of the nurse who had helped treat his burns in the hospital, all those years back. She was a pretty, young-looking 35 year old red echidna with Silver bangs, named Molly. Mitch hadn t met anyone yet, but he had a pretty good crush on Blush, Rouge s daughter. They had a lot in common, their fathers had both died when they were young, and both resented their mother. Rouge had been way to flirty and flight for Blush s taste. She had inherited her mother s beauty, but had let her white hair/fur grow long, and disdained the leather and pink her mother wore. She dressed as well as anyone could in these times of war. Mitch was a red echidna, but he had a crop or military-cut white hair on his head. He also wore glasses, but they weren t for any vision problem. They were all cameras and computers, designed by him.

Tails and Amy were both 37 now. They still looked incredibly young, though Tails longer whiskers showed his age a little more. Amy wasn t the perky fangirl of old, the war had matured her into a fighter. It saddened Ekyt in a way. Vector was dating Rouge (C mon, who saw that coming? NG), but the rest remained single.

Tails was the first to greet Ekyt. Man, I haven t seen you in a while! How re things? Tails stopped there, seeing a look of pain in Ekyt s eyes. Not as good as it s ever been. Ekyt told him truthfully. Amy came over next and hugged him. Good to see you again. Same here Amy. He shook hands with Mitch and Colin, and was introduced to Blush and Molly. The youngest ones whispered with him around. To some people, Ekyt was a legend in his own time. To others, he was as hated as Shadow was in this day and age. So everything s running the same around here? Ekyt asked. Yep. But you know, we re not getting

any younger. Tails said, obviously headed somewhere with this. Uh huh. Where are you going with this Tails? Ekyt asked. Well, we could use some younger blood around here. Or at least, have some waiting in the wings. Colin was on a mission the other day, and he got out by the skin of his teeth. Ekyt stroked his chin. Well, maybe my Grandkids, Kyle and Tracey. One s a fighter, and the other is a living chaos emerald. They work off of each other. Kyle, he s got some impressive power. And Tracey, she doesn t talk too much, but she s as smart as anyone. She watches everything, and picks it up. They sound good. Mighty can train them physically, Espio can help with the spy stuff, and Mitch can give them a crash course on the tech we re using. Ekyt nodded. Anything from Robotnik? Or Shadow? (IS THIS COOL WITH YOU, Shadowthe_Hedgehog? If not, let me know NG)

As if by fate, Shadow and Robotnik were meeting. You see, Shadow, It would be in your best interests to work with me. Why, I can triple your robot production, and give you access to technology never before seen. Shadow considered it, before sticking out his hand. You ve got a deal doctor.

Ekyt returned home. Linda-Su was waiting. We re gonna talk. Now. She said. Okay. You ve been moping around for the past week. Something s going on in there (pointing at his head), and if I m gonna help, I need to know what. Ekyt sat down on the bed, tossing his coat off. It s just the old self-doubt. Knuckles is running Haven, Shadow got the drop on me. I m wondering if I m losing my touch.. or if I ever had the touch. She sat down next to him. You just need your confidence back. As she laid down next to him, burying her face in his chest, he knew that truer words were never spoken:

Easier said than done.

TO BE CONTINUED

16 - Out of Control

Note: bold is Ekyt thinking- NG

In the early days of the war, I was vital. A leader. I look at myself now and shudder. I've become a shell of my self, the person I once knew. With the current leadership deciding to trust me less and less, and with all the problems in the world & I can't help but wonder. Where has my vitality gone? What happened to the Ekyt of old? The one who would fight for anyone, anytime? I realize he is gone; dead and buried.

Ekyt looks out across the horizon of the battlefield, depressed by the carnage.

Sonic and Sally belong leading us. Knuckles belongs in Haven. I belong on the battlefield. A nameless pawn in a senseless war. A war that may not be winnable. A war that is a loss for both sides.

Ekyt shifted his position, and shakes his head as more lives are lost.

In a way, I feel selfish. Sitting here, brooding, while others are risking their lives. They know the importance of the war, and are willing to do whatever it takes to win it.

Ekyt got up, running a hand through his graying hair. Five o'clock shadow had started to grow on his still young-looking face. He moved with an unconcerned grace, like a cheetah stalking its prey. Silently, he climbed down into a shelter, looking at all the faces of those injured. Dying. No help for them. A few saluted him, recognizing him as a guardian. Not that it mattered anymore. There wasn't much to guard these days. Regardless, he had an obligation, and, depressed or not, he was going to fulfill that obligation.

In the chaos chamber, the two eager girls waited. Paula-Su, age fifteen, Ekyt's daughter, questioned Lara-Su, also fifteen, Knuckles' daughter, about Haven. What's it like? she said enthusiastically. Monitors, weapons, countless rooms. The place rocks! she said grinning. Ekyt walked in silently. We'll get to work in just a minute. Ekyt said vaguely. Lara nudged Paula. Hey, what's with your dad? Paula shrugged. I'm not sure. He's depressed about something. Maybe it's a human thing. Lara grunted.

Ekyt looked up at the monitors. He and Knuckles had been friends for years. Now, Ekyt's personal depression seemed to create a rift between them. Knuckles appeared on the monitors. Update? he

said simply, his voice cold. Ekyt nodded, then proceeded. Both are developing chaos powers to rival Shadow. Knuckles smiled. That is good news. Ekyt nodded. Well, back to work. Knuckles said. Wait. Ekyt bowed his head. I need to apologize. Knuckles understood, and waved it off. These are hard times. You're entitled to be upset. Haven't you?

Paula and Lara looked at each other. Heya teach! Lara called out. Ekyt turned to face her. You and my old man thinkin' clearly? Ekyt rolled his eyes. No. But things are a little better. Now, where were we?

Linda-Su met with Sally and Julie-Su. It seems you have it in for my husband. Linda said quietly. Sally nodded. I see where you might think that way. And I can't blame you. But the circumstances were dire, and I acted in the best manner possible. Each female represented a different section of the resistance. Linda-Su represented the normal soldiers, Julie-Su represented the floating island, and Sally represented Mobius. They all deferred to Sally. Normally. You see, the trouble is jailing him when he's helping the cause. Not a good thing. Linda said coldly. Julie-Su nodded in silent agreement. He's one of ours. Consult us in controlling him next time. Sally raised an eyebrow. I know I always have to be the dog here, but someone has to be in control. And right now, the best person for that is me. No one wants this war to go on, but we've got to put personal feelings aside. Linda-Su had heard enough. Respect is something earned. She said to all of them. They all got the message.

With a yell of effort, the two girls attacked Ekyt. He defended himself, pulling his punches as the two attacked relentlessly. At the ten-minute mark, they stopped, exhausted. Ekyt closed his eyes. Paula exchanged worried glances with Lara. She walked over and hugged him.

In the OSS, Kyle and Tracey (Both Shadowthe_Hedgehog) were learning fast. Kyle had taken a liking to the physical combat, while Tracey preferred the more intellectual side. Colin had become something of a mentor to Kyle, while Mitch had taken Tracey under his wing. Kurt and Tiffany (Shadowthe_hedgehog) listened proudly as Tails explained to them that the two were fitting in great.

Ekyt left the room, his coat swishing behind him. He climbed a metal ladder that led to a maintenance room. He sat down on one of the boxes that had been packed away.

I look at the two girls, and I know that they are the future. No doubt. I wonder if I should be training them. They deserve better. I have no confidence, and I don't want them to get that. They don't need it. Not when we're at war. I feel like I'm fighting a war on two fronts. One on the battlefield, the other in my mind.

Ekyt kicked angrily at a box, cursing silently.

I never thought I would sink this low. I'm hiding away& from what? Myself? It must be. I can't call myself a man anymore. Maybe I should just give it up. Take my family into hiding. No&Paula and Linda love their work. Everything I've done is to ensure a safe world for them. I have to follow through. I-

Ekyt looked down at the box. A pair of hover shoes and two power-ring wristbands sat on the floor. Ekyt stared stupidly at them, before realizing the potential they had. He slipped them on and raced out the door, in the middle of the battlefield.

He skated hard through the enemies, destroying them as he went by. He jumped over one, landed on another, and sprung off. At this point, the resistance from the wind pushed his arms back. Hundreds of robots destroyed in minutes. Ekyt turned and made his way back to the safety of the Freedom Fighter bunkers.

That was plenty of damage for one day.

At home that night, Ekyt lay in bed, thinking. It seemed that doing all that damage had given him a new lease on life. Linda walked into the room. Without talking, she snuggled up close to him as she crawled under the covers, exhausted. Hard day? she asked her. Nothing a good night's sleep won't cure. Damn, it's cold! Ekyt knew it was, the fallout from the bombs had left a cloud of pollution, which hampered the sun's effects on the entire world. She moved closer to him and slid her arms around his thin frame, her head on his chest. He still hesitated when simply hugging his wife, but he did so now. This war needed to come to an end. But for now, that was at the back of both their minds. There would be time to fight later.

NEXT ISSUE: PAULA AND LARA'S FIRST MISSION, AND KYLE AND TRACEY STAR IN: LIFE IN THE OSS! ROBOTNIK AND SHADOW FINALLY DECIDE THEIR PLAN OF ATTACK- WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR OUR FAVORITE FREEDOM FIGHTERS? FIND OUT NEXT TIME, RIGHT HERE, WHERE YOU CAN EXPECT NOTHING LESS THAN PURE CHAOS!

17 - Linda's thoughts

Note: Bold is Linda-Su thinking –NG

Since not landing the position at Haven, Ekyt's been distant. It's like he knows nothing but loyalty. But that's even starting to wane. Sometimes I'll see him sitting...staring...nothing else. It's like his mind is working overtime, trying to singlehandedly correct the problems of the world.

Linda-Su watched Ekyt playing with their daughter. They were close; always had been. Linda smiled slightly. She was beautiful now, but when she was done growing, Paula-Su was going to be quite a catch for some lucky guy.

She looks nothing like him. Except for the hair. Just the way he wanted. Some fathers would have hoped for their children to look like them. He was the opposite. He didn't want her to be saddled with being a half-human, half-echidna. In this day and age, there are ways to control things like how children look.

Linda sighed. **It's depressing. He's so loyal, but the world seems to want to screw him at every turn. He's given everything to be accepted. And yet... he has nothing to show for it. It's so damn unfair!**

And our daughter...God, she's grown. She was never the type to be sentimental. She was always looking toward the future. Even today, at fifteen, everyone knows she's a leader. The future. The hope. Some much will lie on her shoulders, if all the evil isn't done away with while Ekyt and I live. I want the world to be better for her... she looked at Ekyt, somber again...For us.

Linda-Su was a young looking forty-something these days. She and her sister had always compared notes about their husbands. But laughter was something that was rare. Knuckles was berated for the Dark Legion still existing, and the problems with Shadow and Robotnik. Ekyt was always singled out, subject to the "human" remarks. These two, shunned by their own people, the one's they defended. It was a paradox to the two female echidnas, who were both well liked and respected. But even their influence wasn't enough.

Tails flew up high, dodging the balls of energy that Kyle (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) shot. Finally he anticipated Tails direction and speed, noted the altitude, and caught the two-tailed trainer in the stomach. "Good work! Nice shot!" Tails exclaimed.

Mitch and Rotor, meanwhile, were doing tests on Tracey (Shadowthe_Hedgehog). She was quiet, except for answering their questions. "It seems the chaos energy she gives off feeds her brother. And without hurting her. If you two are in contact, you're virtually unbeatable." Mitch explained. Rotor nodded his agreement. "You have chaos powers too, but for some reason, they're locked away in your mind. It might not be in your nature to fight."

Linda watched Ekyt come back from the fight. She knew he felt like he was reduced to a grunt, that all the work he had done meant nothing. But today, she saw a gleam in his eye, rings on his wrist, and hovershoes on his feet. "I dug these up and leveled the playing field." He said simply. "I don't think the people are gonna like this one. Too much like Shadow." Linda commented. "They hate me anyway. I'm done trying to win their support. I'll protect them to the last, that hasn't changed. But if they don't like me after 25 years of fighting, I don't think they ever will." Linda gave him a comforting hug even as she thought of something depressing herself: **I hope he's wrong. What will it take for him to be accepted? All the blood, the sweat, and maybe even tears...all the longing and sacrifices...Were they all in vain?** As she held her husband tight, she thought she knew. **No. The fight will go on.**

To Be Continued!

18 - Checkmate

Ekyt charged ahead, aiming to finish the fight himself. He navigated through Robotnik and Shadow's defenses, easily outpacing them. There was Shadow and the fat man himself. Ekyt sped up and slammed into the two of them. Robotnik hit the wall hard, while Shadow turned around in the air. "You! I should have known only a human would be foolish enough to face me!" Ekyt didn't answer. His face was grim with concentration, as he attacked. The two dueled; in a way, it was a vulgar dance of sorts. Ekyt snap-kicked Shadow in the stomach just as Shadow landed a hard punch to the side of the face. Ekyt ducked under it and aimed for Shadow's stomach; Shadow dodged backward and swung a leg around toward Ekyt's head. Ekyt leaned back and rolled forward, his arm coming up just as Shadow's was coming down. Their elbows cracked together, forcing both participants to roll away.

S: I see you've been training. But where are your backups?

E: What are you getting at?

S: You always have someone to bail you out. We've fought hundreds of times, and that's always been the case.

E: Really? And I suppose you don't count robotic minions as backup?

S: Shadow sneered. I never cared about honor. I only care about getting the job done. And right now, you are in the way of that!

Shadow surged forward. Ekyt put up his hands in defense and swept to the side.

The huge chamber they were dueling in was an old church. Broken stained-glass windows leaked in light. The rest of the room was dark. The pews that had once sat families were destroyed and splintered, their dark wood forming daggers. A blood-red carpet decorated the floor, and banners, once extolling virtues, now extolled Shadow.

Shadow landed a savate kick to Ekyt's face, and followed up immediately with a bone-cracking slash to Ekyt's stomach. Blood rained freely from Ekyt's nose. He was on one knee, catching his breath. I couldn't do it. Are they right? I'm worthless... With that, Shadow grabbed Ekyt by his coat lapels, and held him up against a beam.

Did you really think you could do it? Did you honestly believe I would just go away? You proved a worthy opponent, I'm not above conceding that. But did you really, truly believe that you, a human, could defeat an ultimate life form.

...

You and those pathetic freedom fighters. Ha! Belmont couldn't finish of Dracula, and you couldn't finish me.

...

Speechless? I'll make you a deal. You become my servant. And Lien-Da's. You give your life to my empire, and I spare your life.

Could he be right? It's not like I haven't thought I've been playing for the wrong side. They don't appreciate me...No! That can't be right!

I'll even let that dog that you call your wife come with you. Eventually, all your loser friends will be dead, or roboticized, or agree to my cause! You can't hope to win!

Ekyt was enraged by the threat, and his hands found Shadow's throat. "Go to hell Shadow. I'll never bow to you. I'd rather die than forsake my cause!" The two were in a stalemate, before Shadow displayed his true strength. He threw Ekyt into the balcony. He landed hard. He got up slowly. Shadow chaos-controlled behind him; grabbed him around the neck and waist, and threw him into the giant bell that hung in the rafters. It rang, and it felt to Ekyt as though it rang inside his head. In a haze, he grabbed the rope and climbed down, aware that a fall from that height would kill him.

Shadow followed with chaos control again, and he followed up even more viciously. Using chaos control, he threw Ekyt into the seats. The splinters pierced his flesh with daggers. Shadow smiled. He raised his hand. "Chaos Spear!" Ekyt was now stabbed from both sides. Shadow raised his hand for the final blow, when the window EXPLODED!

A plane, old and bearing the old Freedom Fighter Crest, divebombed Shadow, dropping off two of its passengers. Kyle and Tracey (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) landed side by side. Kyle started toward Shadow while Tracey pulled Ekyt off the spikes.

Shadow laughed. "You expect to defeat me? After I crushed your leader?" Kyle smiled wickedly. "No way Unc. I don't need to beat you. I just need some good aim." Kyle fired a chaos blast at the ceiling. The power ate away at the beam, which crashed down on Shadow. A chaos emerald flew from his hand. Kyle scooped it up. "Thanks. See you at the Christmas party." The plane took off, leaving a barely-conscious Shadow to wonder what just happened.

Ekyt was fine, just in a lot of pain, and a little dizzy from the blood loss. Sally called him to her chambers, where he had to debrief. "What came over you?" she asked, shaking her head. "I've been made fun of, bullied, I haven't been excepted. I had to do something." "You nearly got yourself killed!" she exclaimed. Ekyt was depressed, more than before, and answered with a flat "Happens all the time." Sally shook her head. "You're one of the most loyal Freedom Fighters we have. I don't want to lose your abilities in a fruitless fight! We're not ready to take on Shadow!" Sally was being kind, but Ekyt heard something else, and he spoke up. "So, you didn't think I could do it either?" Sally looked taken aback. "No! But if you, Sonic, and Knuckles couldn't finish Shadow, why would you think you could on your own?" Ekyt bowed silently and left, furious with himself for being an idiot.

He walked slowly back toward the floating island, not sure he wanted to go that way. It was no longer the vibrant paradise it had been. It was now charred with flames of war.

Ekyt felt the scar on his leg. To him, it was a memory of his ineptitude. The fight would go on, and Ekyt knew he'd be back in it. But for now, he needed to regroup mentally and physically.

19 - Introducing Rage

Ekyt trained Linda-Su and Lara-Su without any problems. They could tell he was trying, but too hard. When he missed an easy attack, he punched the wall and cursed. "Damn!" he said, massaging his hand. "That was a good dodge Lara." He said over his shoulder. "Thanks." Her usually chipper voice was saddled down by confusion. Like why her kind, but tough as nails trainer was losing control. "Great job today girls. Lara, if you don't mind, I'd like to talk to Paula for a moment." Lara nodded and gave him a hug and then marched out, running a hand thoughtfully through her hair. Paula looked at her dad. "Paula, I think you need to know how the politics work." He said, not beating around the bush. Paula's nose wrinkled in confusion. "Politics...okay, shoot." She said, leaning back. Ekyt sighed.

"Look, because you're my daughter, you're going to get a lot of flak. Either people respect me, or they hate me straight out. Because you're a guardian, you'll get respect..." "But you're worried how I'll react to the others?" Paula finished with a smirk that only a fifteen-year-old know-it-all who truly did know it all could pull off. "Yeah." Ekyt admitted, slightly taken aback. "It's good to have you back dad." She said to him. He narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean by that?" he questioned, though he was sure he knew the answer. "Well, you weren't yourself. And then attacking Shadow. It's like you'd lost your will to live or something." She commented. "Point taken." He said with a grin. She grinned back. "I suppose now might be a good time for you and Mom to meet my boyfriend?" she said hopefully, a mischievous twinkle in her dark brown eyes. Ekyt looked over his shoulder. "I trust your judgment Paula. Just keep in mind, I don't react well to surprises."

Paula ran up to the room she shared with Lara. Lara was sitting Indian-style on her bed, reading about echidna history. The bottom of a magazine was showing out of the bottom. Paula glanced at the magazine. "Whoa! That is a nice looking echidna!" she exclaimed. Lara snapped the magazine shut and tapped Paula on the head with it. "You're taken, remember?" she said sarcastically. Paula snorted in amusement. "I'm only fifteen, I can play the field." Lara gave her a look of comic disgust. "So, when do I get to me Rags?" she asked. Paula playfully smacked her on the head. "It's "Rage", Lara. R-A-G-E." Lara grinned again. "Okay, when do I meet him?" "How about in ten minutes? I'm taking him to meet my parents." Lara actually laughed out loud at that. "You'd better make sure your dad isn't armed." She warned. "No, Dad's cool. I mean, he married outside his species. Why can't I date outside mine?"

Rage was the bat's nickname. He never knew his real name. So Rage was his only name. He looked at himself in the broken glass of a mirror. He had black fur, red tips on the dreadlocks. His face was echidna-ish, but his black eyes reflected the other half of his heritage. He spread his long black wings, folding them into a slightly more comfortable position. His clothes were tattered, a vest and jeans, both black, along with black boots. He had no one. He never knew his parents. Just as well. He didn't have a need for anyone. Except maybe that echidna girl. The only one who didn't treat him like a freak. He was one, granted, but she didn't seem to care. Rage's eyes were half-lidded, as though he didn't care about anything. In battle, he was indispensable, able to attack from the sky and ground. He didn't live anywhere; he had no emotional attachment to any place. He saw Paula-Su approaching him. "Hey." She said amiably. "How 'bout meeting my parents and my roommate?" He shrugged. "Lead the way." He said, in a voice devoid of emotion.

UH-OH! HOW ARE EKYT AND LINDA GOING TO TAKE THIS?

NEXT ISSUE: KYLE AND TRACEY LEARN ABOUT THE OSS. THEY NEED THAT KNOWLEDGE
PRETTY QUICK...

20 - Issue 20 Special- Putting out the Fire

Lara-Su stopped reading the magazine she had been for the last hour. Mostly focused on one echidna dude in particular. She couldn't really focus, as she was looking forward to meeting Rage. It would be interesting to see how Paula-Su parent's reacted to this. When she heard them approach, she quickly sat back on her bed, trying to look like a shy, innocent girl. As if. She could probably whup him in three seconds flat.

Kyle and Tracey (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) stared in amazement at the huge room that was the operations center of the OSS. Everyone seemed so incredibly tough. Kyle grinned as he saw a weapons training area. Tracey had her head down, though her eyes shyly casted glances around. Tails and Colin walked over to the two. "You must be Kyle and Tracey. It's good to meet you." Tails commented. Colin spoke next. "It's great to have you here. We need all the help we can get, and you two are perfect." Kyle flushed with pride, while Tracey managed to look up and nod shyly. "Well, let's introduce you to the rest of the gang." Colin pointed. "That's Molly, my, um, friend. That's my brother, Mitch, the brain trust of our group. Next to him is Blush, Rouge's daughter. You already know Amy. That's Vector, next to him is Rouge, That's Espio, Mighty, Charmy, and that's Ray." Colin finished.

Here's a list for reference:

Founder: Ekyt

Leader 1: Colin

Leader 2: Tails

Rouge

Espio

Vector

Charmy

Ray

Mighty

Molly

Mitch

Blush

Amy Rose

"Lara, this is Rage. Rage, this is Lara-Su, Knuckles daughter." Rage nodded and mumbled "Nice to meet you." Paula gave Lara a look that plainly said "be nice... or else." Lara got up and extended her hand. "It's nice to meet you two. Where are you two headed?" she asked amiably. "We're off to meet my parents. You wanna come?" Paula asked, her eyes pleading. "Sure, why not?" Lara answered.

Ekyt sat in the darkened room, eyes closed. With a sigh, he gave up. That meditation stuff hadn't worked for him years ago, why did he think it would work now. He decided to get up and walk for a while,

just to do something. He had been barred from active duty by Knuckles after his attack on Shadow. Whatever. His heart just wasn't into this stuff. He had been the decided loser in the fight, and it ate him alive. He wouldn't get a chance for a rematch; that much he knew. And a part of him agreed. As he got up, Linda-Su walked in, a strange expression on her face. "Paula wants us to meet her boyfriend." It was almost a question. Ekyt had almost forgotten. "Yeah. I tried to give her the politics talk, and she turned around and threw it in my face, in her own inimitable way." Ekyt smiled fondly. "She's your daughter." He said. Linda gave him a playful smack. "Sure. I'm just as powerful, so you watch yourself." She said with her eyebrows raised. "Let's go meet this guy."

Rage stood silently next to Paula. Her parents were apparently a big deal around here. He understood her father was a guardian, but not a popular one, and that her mother was just as powerful, but well liked. It wasn't his place to judge. Ekyt walked in, holding the door for Linda. Rage's wings suddenly shook. He knew Ekyt. Ekyt looked up and his eyes conveyed the same message. "Rage, it's been a while." Ekyt commented to the bat/echidna. "How are you?" Rage didn't answer. Paula and Lara exchanged glances. "Wait, wait, wait. Hold on. You two know each other?!" Paula exclaimed. Ekyt nodded, as did Rage. "It's been a few months. Rage was one of those rescued in the big raid on Shadow's prison." (In the first few issues of this series –NG) Rage smiled slightly. "I never did thank you for the help." He said in a voice that seemed to deep for his age. "Not a problem. I was probably unconscious." Ekyt said with a wave of his hand, as though discussing the weather. Lara and Paula laughed. "I should have known! That's when I met him!" Linda extended a greeting as well, thinking that this wasn't as bad as it could have been. She knew Paula was like her father in some ways, and she was half expecting her to bring home a human.

After all that was discussed, it was time for training again. The enormous set of monitors that were in the training center were on, Knuckles grim face on the screen. "Ekyt, we need to talk. There's been a mistake." Ekyt didn't like his tone of voice. "I can be there in two minutes. Just let me get the girls started." Knuckles shook his head. "They're needed too." He said somberly. Ekyt didn't like that either. "Okay, we'll be there in about 30 seconds." The monitors shut off. "Chaos Control." Ekyt said without enthusiasm. Lara and Paula followed suit, wondering just what was going on...

Ekyt met Knuckles and the two shook hands. Ekyt felt no anger toward Knuckles, who was only doing what he was told. "Girls, would you give us a few minutes? I need to speak with Ekyt privately." Lara and Paula didn't crack any jokes, they left quickly and quietly, leaving Knuckles to talk with Ekyt.

"...I'm sorry Ekyt. I really don't know what to say." Knuckles said, his one good eye searching the stoic human before him. "No need to say anything more Knuckles. You're only doing what you're forced to do." Ekyt said, trying to keep some life in his voice. "All I ask is you let me be the one to tell my daughter." Ekyt said, head bowed. Knuckles agreed. "I'm Really sorry old friend." He said after a moment's silence. Ekyt nodded his head slowly. "As am I. Keep in touch."

Outside, Paula and Lara sat quietly. The door opened and their father's came out. Putting an arm around her, Ekyt steered his daughter away. "Honey, they think the time has come for you to assume the mantle of guardian." Ekyt said straight out. Paula searched her father's eyes. "There's something you're not telling me Dad. I'm a big girl, I can take it." "I know you can, and here it is: As of now, I've been...retired from guardian duty." Paula let a small breath escape her lips. "But why? You haven't done anything!" "I know. It appears that a mistake was made by the brotherhood. And you're the chosen one. Ordinarily, they would tell you once you turned sixteen (Paula will turn sixteen in two

months.) But because of the war, you're needed." "But what about you?" Paula asked Ekyt. "No worries. I can still fight. As long as I can do that, they'll keep me around." Ekyt said, trying to lighten the mood. Paula didn't buy it. "Dad..." "There's no point in arguing. I can always go back to the OSS. And, to be honest, I couldn't be more proud of you." He said, beaming. His words left Paula taken aback. "I had always hoped you would choose a more wise path than I did. And you've done everything right."

Paula gave her father a hug. He returned the embrace, giving away no emotions. "There's just one more thing..." He said. He reached down his shirt onto his own chest and pulled off the white stripe that had signified his position. He held onto it for a brief moment, before handing it to her, with a bow. She took it, her hand trembling. She was wondering why her tough-as-nails father was just letting it go. As if by magic, he answered her. "I might have fought this harder, if I wasn't so sure you were ready. And if you weren't my daughter." The stripe was on her now. Ekyt turned to thank Knuckles and Lara-Su, and then left. "What about my training?" Paula called out. "You'll have to talk to Knuckles. I'm not allowed to know this stuff anymore." Ekyt didn't want to leave her, but he wasn't given a choice in the matter. Knuckles walked out with him.

"You know, you could appeal this." Knuckles said. "No point Knux. They're working against me." "So their prediction was wrong, big deal. So you weren't the "chosen one," you still have done good work." "That's not how they see it." Ekyt replied. "You've been a model guardian. You're just going to let it go without a fight?" Knuckles intoned. "Yes. My daughter is getting the position, and I couldn't be more proud." Ekyt replied sternly, ending the conversation. Knuckles shook his head. "Well, it's been twenty-five good years..." "Yeah. Thanks for everything." Ekyt said. "You too pal."

21 - hellfire and pain

Accounts varied over the next few weeks. Several people, all of whom hated Ekyt, claimed he had been killed by Shadow. Others claimed this was a hoax. The only ones who knew for sure were Ekyt and his family. And even his family couldn't be sure. For three weeks, a gaunt looking man replaced the Ekyt of old. Silently, he went about his business. Anyone who questioned his motives earned a hard look, but nothing more. "He's lost his nerve." Some said. "It's a trick." Said others. Elsewhere, other's were wondering.

Aurora, Athair, and Locke discussed what had happened. "How is it that we overlooked such a grave matter?" Locke asked. "Grandson, even the most impregnable fortress has it's weak points. Perhaps we were blinded by his loyalty." It was no secret Athair was displeased that Ekyt had been removed swiftly and unjustly. Aurora too held a soft spot for him. "He took death upright for our cause. We had no right to ask anymore of him. And now this is how his loyalty is repaid..." Locke stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I think we need to watch. Perhaps some damage has been done..." "Of course there has! He's just had his world rocked!" Aurora exclaimed. "But he didn't appeal." Locke's answer was part statement, part question. Athair shook his head sagely. "No. Perhaps because his replacement was his daughter."

Shadow sipped at his wine thoughtfully. "Hmm...What do you make of this Lien-Da?" Lien-Da peered at the screen and snickered in delight. "Something knocked that kid down." Shadow pointed. "Hmm...I know that look...he has forsaken something dear to him...but what?" Lien-Da looked closer. "Merits investigation." She said. Shadow smiled. "Indeed it does. Shall I leave it to you?" "Please do." She said with a joking bow. Shadow's smile grew more broad. "I'll dispose of that annoying triumvirate. Sonic, Knuckles, and Ekyt...something's happened to the resistance. I must remember who and congratulate them."

Ekyt had all but disappeared again. When he came back, his mask was on his face. Through the holes for his eyes, pain radiated from his eyes. He wore all black now. Those that questioned him were often startled, as he would be there, staring. He would say "Rather than consider my loyalty, where does yours lie?" He would whisper it with such ferocity it gave them shivers.

Paula-Su had been well-received as guardian. And her father seemed genuinely proud of her, even though it meant a loss for him. She and Lara-Su still trained together. No one said anything about her suddenly being in charge, other than "congratulations." She guessed they were showing approval.

Linda-Su was greeted by the sight of Knuckles one night. "May I speak to your husband, Linda?" Linda nodded tersely. "It wasn't my decision Linda." Knuckles said evenly. "I know. It's not you." Knuckles raised an eyebrow. "What, has Ekyt met with Shadow again?" Linda shook her head. "No, but..." she stopped as he appeared from seemingly nowhere. "How can I help guardian?" Ekyt's voice was distorted slightly by the mask. And it was without emotion. "I've got a meeting tonight, and I need security." Knuckles waited for the enthusiastic reply. None came. "If that's where I'm needed." Knuckles raised an eyebrow again. "Are you okay?" Ekyt took off the mask. "I'm fine. Just a little tired." That made sense to Knuckles. "Let's go then." "Is my daughter involved?" "No, this is just you,

me, Shadow, and Lien-Da...are you sure you're okay?" "I'm fine. Let's go."

Tiffany (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) and Kurt watched proudly as Kyle and Tracey (Shadowthe_Hedgehog) excelled at their training. "They've got their first mission." Colin informed the two. "When?" Kurt asked, slightly alarmed. "Tonight." "What? You can't be serious Colin!" Tiffany exclaimed. "I'm afraid I am. And it's a matter of some delicacy, so it's best if Kyle and Tracey are involved...I'm afraid it concerns Ekyt." Kurt and Tiffany exchanged glances. Colin, one of the youngest of the group, looked older as he rubbed the bridge of his nose. "It seems there's concern over his behavior the past few weeks. I can't go into detail, because I don't know any. But we're hoping that if something is going wrong, the sight of his grandkids will act as damage control."

Knuckles approached the sight of the meeting. It was to discuss terms for the Dark Legion to leave the island. There as little hope for the matter to be resolved, but it was worth a shot. Silently, Ekyt traveled next to him. Knuckles knew something was going on. But Ekyt had been okay with Paula becoming guardian...So what WAS going on?

Shadow and Lien-Da arrived at the site. "Let's cut to the chase. What will it take for you to leave the island?" Knuckles asked immediately. "You'd have to explain what I have to gain from leaving." Shadow replied. "I'll remove my foot from your @\$\$. " Knuckles responded. "Sarcasm doesn't become you guardian." Lien-Da said, a mischievous tone in her voice. "Nor does it become you." Ekyt was standing beside her, and he whispered his words. She jumped backward. "What the hell happened to you?" Shadow looked closer. "Two guardians? Almost a match for me." Shadow said calmly. He grabbed Ekyt by his shirt. "Don't do that to her. Do you understand?" Ekyt's shirt ripped, revealing that his band, which signified he was a guardian, was gone. Ekyt grabbed Shadow's wrist and pulled it off, staring back at Shadow. "You disgraced yourself so greatly that your own kind betrayed you?" Shadow meant the comment as a joke. "You could say that." Shadow was taken aback by Ekyt's answer. "You know your group is not the only one around." Ekyt nodded.

"I've thought to myself more than once that I was playing for the wrong side. Maybe it's time for us to bury the hatchet Shadow." Shadow smiled and extended his hand...

22 - Neutral Corner

Ekyt had thought about it. He didn't want to desert his daughter. But his life had been flipped upside down... Did he have any choice. "No." Ekyt heard himself say. "No?" Shadow repeated. "Too bad, seems like you had your heart set on changing things. Now you'll die a mere footnote in history, if you're lucky. And be content with the fact that I'm letting you live another day. Remember, without that stripe, you don't have two things: immortality, and a prayer!" Shadow left as Ekyt swiped at where had been. He walked away without saying a word.

Ekyt got back to his home. No one had dared say anything to him, for it was obvious his anger had come bubbling to the surface. He couldn't take it anymore. He was removed from his family (Linda-Su and Paula-Su live in Haven, where Ekyt can't go anymore –NG) He didn't want to stay on the Floating Island anymore either, if he couldn't see his wife and kids. Mobius was out too. Too many friends and memories... Ekyt and Linda had talked about what he would do, and he had made his decision.

Kyle and Tracey (both Shadowthe_Hedgehog) followed him. Ekyt seemed unaware, until he turned around. "Well, hi!" Kyle gave Ekyt a high five while Tracey gave him a shy hug. "Look, Gramps, um, they want us to watch you." Kyle said uncomfortably. Ekyt nodded. "I expected as much. Go ahead. But I'm not easy to keep track of." "Grandpa, what are you going to do?" Tracey piped in. "I'm going to drop off the radar. Tell Colin that our cause needs some hope, and that's what I'm doing. Okay?" They smiled and left, happy to deliver a message that was so obviously secretive.

Aurora, Locke, and Athair stood in front of Ekyt. "You want to do WHAT?" Aurora asked incredulously. "I think our cause needs a martyr of sorts. So, you turn me into an animal- echidna, hedgehog, whatever- and they think I've died, which means the people that hate me will be more willing to fight." Athair spoke to Locke and Aurora, before Locke gave his ruling: "Motion denied." Ekyt didn't argue. "Whatever." Aurora tried to console him, but Ekyt stopped her. "I don't need any damn sympathy. And I'm not going to get any respect. So I'm going into business for myself." Aurora warned him that he might get in trouble. "I'll let you know when that registers on my "give a damn" meter." Ekyt nodded, leaving their red circle. The last time he had seen them, he had been dead. It was a special trip to go there. He left, having enough.

For the next week, Ekyt was seen rarely, and never in the same place. Knothole one day, Angel Island the next, then the Great Forest, then the Mobian Badlands. When Knuckles and Sonic made contact with him, Ekyt sneered at them with anger. "Yeah, I'm such a big asset to you guys. I'm doing my own thing." Knuckles tried to reason with him first. "You have a wife and kids..." "...That I never get to see because they're living in Haven." Ekyt finished; a point that Knuckles couldn't argue. Sonic tried next. "You could do so much good with the freedom fighters." Ekyt laughed at that. "Remember when you tossed me in jail for trying to end the war?" (That was in ish 9 –NG) "I'm doing my own thing. I'm not with Shadow, so you don't need to worry about me." "We need to know who you're fighting for." Knuckles pointed out. "I, personally, don't think you need to know, nor do I feel like telling you. Thanks for the years of loyalty guys. I'm outta here."

23 - Point Blank

Paula-Su made her move quickly, striking at the shadow. She missed it by inches. Considering she was blindfolded, that was pretty good. “Not bad.” Knuckles commented. “Damnit!” she swore. Knuckles gave a half-smile. “You’re a lot like your father.” Paula gave him a glare so incredibly wicked it would have cut holes through someone less tough than Knuckles. Knuckles didn’t say anything else. He turned to his own daughter. She gave him a look too, though it was softer than Paula’s.

Linda-Su and Julie-Su had finished the days business early. It seemed that their two families were being forced apart. They were still close. “I can’t believe this happened!” Julie exclaimed. Linda nodded. “If he was an echidna, there wouldn’t be a problem.” Julie nodded, sipping at her drink thoughtfully. “So...what happened to him anyway?” Linda shrugged. “He’s kind of a free agent, I guess. He can’t be in Haven anymore, so he’s kind of...nowhere.”

Sonic followed Ekyt. Ekyt had always looked up to Sonic, but all he felt was anger. “Look, I get it, we were wrong!” Sonic exclaimed. Ekyt turned around, taking off the mask for a moment. “No. You weren’t wrong. I was wrong. Look, I’m not going to jump ship. I’m part of the resistance, I will be until Shadow is stopped or I’m dead.” Sonic shook his head. “I know, but” “But after twenty-five years, you’re having doubts. I’m not going to sell out our cause. I just decided to be my own person. My family is gone (Parents are still alive, but hidden to protect them, and Ekyt can’t go back for fear of exposing them), my job is gone, and I’m surprised my freedom isn’t gone. Well, anymore than it is already.” Ekyt shook his head, eyes closed before continuing. “You have your family, your job, and respect. I have nothing...not even my pride. There’s nothing left for Shadow or Robotnik to take, except my life, which I will sell at a high price when the time comes.” With that, Ekyt clapped Sonic on the shoulder for a brief moment, and walked off, leaving a befuddled Sonic to sort out what he had just said.

Paula continued to glare at Knuckles. “I didn’t do it Paula.” Knuckles told her firmly. (He’s referring to removing Ekyt from being a guardian –NG) Paula sighed. “I’m sorry Knux. I don’t belong here yet. It should be my dad.” “Paula, you’re great! I’m sorry about what happened to your father, he could have protested. But he knew you were ready.” Paula looked at Knuckles searchingly. “Can I meet the “new” Ancient Walkers?”

Linda left Haven to find Ekyt. She found him on Mount Fate, staring down. He didn’t seem to be moving. Just...staring. “Hey, you’re not gonna jump, are you?” she asked, a little bit of trepidation leaking into her voice. Ekyt turned to her. He didn’t have the mask on. He smiled slightly. “When have I ever taken the easy way out? No, I’m not ready for that Linda. I’ve got life in me.” She moved closer. “You didn’t appeal the decision. You did it for your daughter, right?” Ekyt nodded. “Well, right now, she needs her father.” Linda said calmly. Ekyt cocked his head, saying “She can always come to me.” Linda shook her head, no. “No. Her father is gone. What she has is some...assassin. Some madman that’s nothing like her father.” Linda put a hand on his shoulder. “She needs her father back. I need the man I married back.” Ekyt looked at her sadly. “I’ll try. But I know I can’t go back...”

“Why can’t he come back?!” Paula exclaimed incredulously. Athair spoke. “We made a mistake. He isn’t the chosen one.” Locke and Aurora nodded solemnly. “O-Kay,” Paula began with exasperation

that only a fifteen year old could show, “he’s not the chosen one. Why can’t he just be “guardian?”” Aurora stifled a laugh at the obvious surprise on Locke and Athair’s faces.

Kyle, Tracey, and Tiffany (all three Shadowthe_hedgehog) met with Colin. “He’s not going to do anything. He’s working on his own.” Tiffany told him. “Is that really the best thing though?” Colin questioned. Kyle spoke up. “Yeah. You know, when you’ve been yanked around like that, you lose trust. It happens.” Tiffany marveled at that. Just where had Kyle come up with THAT answer?

24 - The Afterlife pt. 1

This was it. Ekyt had the war won. Shadow was down, a victim of a missed electrified whip-crack from Lien-Da. All Ekyt had to do was finish him. Suddenly, he was yanked upward by an unseen force. “What the hell?” Shadow, Ekyt, and Lien-Da all said at the same time.

Ekyt landed in the familiar red area, except he was alone. Usually Aurora was waiting. “Did I just get killed?” Ekyt wondered. He saw three paths. One was as good as the other. He picked one and ventured down it carefully.

Linda-Su and Julie-Su had finally hit their breaking point meanwhile. They were sisters, and they loved each other, but their loyalty to their husbands was a stumbling block. “Knuckles could have done something!” Linda shouted at Julie. Julie yelled back with “It’s not my fault your husband wussed out!” Two hot-headed females in a volatile situation. Not a good thing, even though they were sisters.

Ekyt felt the walls. It was a squishy-feeling thing. All of a sudden his legs were sucked into the ground. “What the hell? Damn!” he swore as a four-legged dog breathing fire came barreling at him. If he wasn’t dead yet, he was now. He had his arms free, but that dog could roast him at will. Or so it seemed.

Colin felt older. Ekyt had just...disappeared. Shadow had been on the edge of defeat. Maybe he couldn’t do it? Ekyt hadn’t struck him as the type who could kill, no matter what the circumstance. Maybe Shadow had blown him up. Not a good scenario. “I’ve got to track him. Mitch, get Kyle and Tracey (both Shadowthe_Hedgehog) ready! We’ve got a mission here!” After issuing the order, he let his shoulders drop. “damn. What happened? C’mon Ekyt, pull it off...”

Ekyt swung out with his left hand, catching the dog off guard. With his right hand, he grabbed the dog’s collar...Why the hell did it have a collar?... and flipped it over. It disappeared. Ekyt’s legs were freed from the jelly-like substance. “Man, this isn’t how I remembered the afterlife (Ekyt’s been dead before – see The Next Guardian –NG). He kept walking, reaching another fork in the road. He strode down the right path. He felt the walls. Not jelly this time. They were radiant, glowing gold. Somehow comforting, it made Ekyt feel...powerful. Which was good, considering he was staring down a number of nasty-looking...whatevers with wings.

Shadow got up. “Are you alright?” Lien-Da asked him. “I’m great! What did you shoot him with?” Shadow asked. “What are you talking about?” Lien-Da shot back. “Ekyt. He’s not here. How did you kill him?” With a little crack in her voice, Lien-Da told him: “Shadow...I didn’t kill him...I thought you did...” They exchanged glances, wordlessly agreeing to see if Robotnik knew anything.

“Take it back! You know he wouldn’t do that!” Linda shouted. “You would know better than I would! At least my husband isn’t an outcast to society!” Julie taunted. They both stopped, aware of just what they were saying.

Ekyt stared at the leader of the... “What are you guys?” “We’re Pherinx (Pronounced Fear-inks).”

“That tells me what. Good. Now, what do you want?” “A meal.” The leader said viciously, reaching out a long, clawed hand. Ekyt knocked the hand away and touched the wall. He had already figured out that by keeping in contact with the wall, he would have some sort of power. He just hoped it would be enough...

25 - The Afterlife Pt. 2

The Pherinx attacked ruthlessly, their long nails aiming for Ekyt's neck. One managed to pierce his leg, but it healed instantly. Ekyt swung for the fences, hitting them with incredible force. He suddenly felt all of his forty-three years. The Pherinx took advantage, rushing him. Ekyt reached a hand out to touch the wall, certain that it was the one thing that could save his life.

Lara-Su was summoned to the Afterlife by Paula-Su. The two were in council with Aurora, Locke, and Athair. Their conversation would have mystified anyone who wasn't aware of what was going down. A black and white video of Ekyt over the years. It was comparing timelines.

Athair: In this time (points to the screen) Ekyt was killed years ago...
(View Screen:

Ekyt fought his way in to Robotnik's lair. "End of the line lardball." Ekyt coughed out. A deep chest puncture all but spelled the end of him, but for each one that dies on one side, it must be so on the other. "Wrong." Robotnik slashed out with the butt end of a rifle, knocking Ekyt backward. He rolled behind a piece of machinery as Robotnik shot. "Noooo! Curse you! I'll have your head for this! My Roboticizer..." Ekyt rolled out and tried to hit Robotnik, but only managing to knock the rifle away. Ekyt rolled away again. A computer voice that seemed to echo in Ekyt's mind counted down the seconds until a self-destruct mechanism was activated. 10...9...8...7...6...5...4...3... Robotnik buried the knife inside Ekyt's chest. But he was still alive. "You lose guardian." Robotnik sneered. Ekyt's hand clenched around the knife that was buried inside him. It was a vain maneuver, he knew. As he drew the bloodied weapon from his own body, he threw it down at Robotnik's feet. "No. You die with me." ...2...1... BOOOM!

End Viewscreen)

Athair: In the current timeline, the death has not occurred, indicating that history has been changed. But we are unsure of where.

Lara-Su: Oh, for God's sake! Didn't you hear Robotnik?! "Guardian?" He's not one! That's where the timeline changed!

Paula-Su: And there's no undoing it.

Aurora: For better or worse, she's right. Time has changed...

Ekyt touched the wall and immediately felt his energy rebound. He grabbed the lead Pherinx around the neck and went to punch, but it disappeared. Then the world turned gray and Ekyt dropped into a shimmering green tunnel. He was greeted by the site of two echidna's he hadn't seen in years...

Kyle, Tracey (Both Shadowthe_Hedgehog), Colin, and Mitch stood at the base of Mount Fate. Ekyt had

disappeared here, and Mitch's tracking device indicated that he was alive, but apparently straight up.

On one side of the shimmering green chamber was Hawking, Knuckles Great, Great, Great Grandfather. On the other side was a sneering Kragok, the former leader of the Dark Legion. Hawking spoke first. "It seems you have a choice son." Ekyt stared, dumbfounded. Kragok spoke. "You know things could be different. Imagine the power you could possess if the Dark Legion was at your command!" Hawking countered "Imagine the lives that are in jeopardy. Deep down, you know why you are here." "No, I don't!" Ekyt snarled. "I'm tired of the "Magical Mystery Tour" here! Why am I here, and what do I need to do to leave?" Hawking put a hand to his head, sending a single subconscious image to Ekyt's brain. It was an old family picture. Ekyt, Linda, Paula, Kurt, and Ekyt's parents. Kragok imitated Hawking's movement, sending Ekyt a picture as well. This one was of Ekyt, a crown on his head, a black cape, and servants kneeling around him. "You can only have one of these. Which will it be? Family?" "...Or power?" Kragok finished. Ekyt gulped. "I see the point. This is a test, isn't it? You want to see what I'll choose. But it's obvious, and I think you already know the answer Hawking." Ekyt reached out to Hawking, who handed him his ring, a power ring with a chaos emerald on the top. "Welcome back...guardian."

26 - Echinda, Human, Hedgehog

Julie-Su and Linda-Su had finally come to blows. The two sisters had each other in headlocks, and were rolling around, destroying furniture. The younger soldiers couldn't help but just watch (That line was for you Flash, lol), while the older soldiers jumped in and held the two angry females apart. "My husband made yours everything he is! Or was!" Julie fired. Linda retaliated with a "You know something? Better he should have married a stump than you! Probably the same effect! And your hair looks like a lightning rod!" (Julie-Su has metal in her hair –NG)

Ekyt stood still. He had been around too long to believe everything he heard. "What?" he said quietly. From behind him, his daughter appeared. "You did it Dad! I told them you would!" she exclaimed, hugging him. "Paula? What?" "I set it up! You're not the chosen one, but why can't you just be guardian? I asked them, and they conjured up this test, and you passed it!" Ekyt looked almost mad for a second, but it was really surprise. "Thank you Paula. It means a lot that you would go to all that trouble." Paula, along with Lara-Su, gave him matching smart-@\$\$ looks. "Geez Dad, I'm just your daughter!" "And I'm just your daughter's best friend, and the hottest girl on the island!" Ekyt shot her a look of mock disgust. Lara shrugged. "It was worth a try." Paula tapped her on the head.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ekyt saw Kragok get up and push Hawking over. Hawking was confined to a wheel chair, and could do nothing about it. As if in slow motion, Kragok drew a pistol. Ekyt's eyes widened as he pushed the two girls out of the way as the pistol barked. Ekyt rushed forward, swinging for the fences. Kragok caught his hand. Undeterred, Ekyt swung his leg around, hitting Kragok in the side. Ekyt wrestled the gun from his grip and kicked it away. Kragok's metallic eye shot something at Ekyt, which hit him in the chest. It felt like someone was holding a torch to his skin. Ekyt kicked Kragok hard enough to knock out a couple of fangs before Kragok disappeared.

Lara looked at Ekyt's back and nearly lost her lunch. "Dad...you're bleeding." Paula said. "Oh my God. We've got to get him to mom!" Paula exclaimed. Ekyt felt his back and his vision went fuzzy. "My God. Let's get out of here. Can you two handle the chaos control?"

Linda and Paula broke away from the soldiers and started fighting again. They rolled over a chair and one of the hapless soldiers, who seemed to enjoy it. Unfortunately for him (lol, I'm sorry, that's another one for Flash. That comment cracked me up! If no one understands what I'm talking about, read Flashthehedgehog's comment a couple posts down –NG) Ekyt chose that moment to appear, along with Knuckles. Knuckles pried the two apart. Knuckles then grabbed the soldier by the shirt.

"Did you enjoy that?"

"What?"

"You think that's funny?"

"What?"

"Entertaining?"

"What?"

"Two women, rolling around?"

"What?"

“Give you a thrill?”

“What?”

Ekyt shoved him away. “If you ever look at my wife, or her sister, that way again, I will personally make sure that you are never lucky enough to give her that perverted stare again. You get me?” “Y-yes.” “Good. Now you get out of here.” Ekyt gave him another shove as the soldier bolted for the door. Ekyt was mild-mannered normally, but his mother had always taught him to treat women with respect.

“What happened here?” Knuckles asked the two angry women. “She insulted you!” they said in stereo, pointing at their respective husbands. Knuckles and Ekyt exchanged glances. “There’s no hard feelings here Knux.” Ekyt said, smiling as the white band reappeared on his chest, visible through his shirt. Linda smiled and hugged him, and then Knuckles shook his hand. “Linda, Julie, c’mon, we’re family. I didn’t cause him to lose the Guardian title, and he was cool with it.” Knuckles said. Linda and Julie exchanged glances, their anger leaving them. “I’m sorry sis.” “Me too.” They both said, hugging. Funny, every soldier in the room turned away at that.

Ekyt suddenly dropped to his knees. Lara and Paula got back just in time. “He’s hurt! He just got shot by Kragok!” they both screamed. The name “Kragok sent chills down all of their spines.

Shadow. Robotnik. And Now, Kragok. “For their triumvirate to be counter-balanced, we must form one of our own. The Dark Legion. Swatbots. And Disciples of Darkness.” Shadow said with a smile. “The Echinda, the Human, and the Hedgehog. They’ll be eliminated. And this group, echidna, human, and hedgehog, will succeed.”

27 - Update from the Island

“Damn it! Paula, give me your knife!” Ekyt was unconscious, and mercifully so. “Mom, what the hell...?” Linda had stuck the knife into Ekyt’s back. Her question was answered a second later when the bullet popped out. “Julie, can you help me bandage him up.”

“Tell us what happened.” Sonic said. “Are you crazy?! He just got shot, let him rest!” Sally told him. “It’s okay. (cough) Kragok shot me when I was getting my stripe back. Before I passed out, I heard Shadow talking: “For their triumvirate to be counter-balanced, we must form one of our own. The Dark Legion. Swatbots. And Disciples of Darkness.” Shadow said with a smile. “The Echidna, the Human, and the Hedgehog. They’ll be eliminated. And this group, echidna, human, and hedgehog, will succeed.””

Ekyt finished and everyone flinched again. “He’s- back? But he’s...dead...no one could have survived that!” Kragok had come back, but was thrust into the zone of silence where he and Knuckles had fought. Knuckles had won, and had just barely escaped as the zone collapsed. It was horrible to think that all that was for nothing.

“He’s back...aligned himself with Shadow...Robotnik...And why am I sitting here?! I’ve got to get back out there! Kyle and Tracey (Shadowthe_hedgehog) were following me, and God knows who else from the OSS!” Several pairs of hands pushed Ekyt back. “I’ll get them. They’ve been waiting outside to see you.” Tiffany told him firmly. Ekyt looked around and realized that he was in his own bed. Linda sank down next to him. “Does your chest hurt?” she asked. “No.” “Good.” She laid her head down, tired after all the excitement. He stroked her hair.

“Grandpa!” Kyle bounded in, followed by Tracey, who looked around at all the people shyly. “Kid!” Ekyt called back. “Don’t call me Grandpa!” “Grandpa!” Kyle shouted back. Kurt shook his head, smiling. “Well, that’s my son. My daughter, on the other hand...” “GRANDPA!” Tiffany stuffed her fist in her mouth to stop from laughing. Colin came in next. The twelve-year-old Colin would have been surprised, but the thirty-seven year old Colin looked just concerned. “Just a bruise.” Ekyt said with grin. “A bullet nearly slicing your spine isn’t a bruise.” “It’s just a day in the life.” Ekyt said with a wave of his hand.

Paula’s Thoughts:

I’ve watched my Dad age, like, a million years in a few weeks. Not landing the position in Haven, and then being removed from being a guardian, and now he gets shot just as things are looking up!

My Mom, the support beam, is starting to waver. It isn’t fair to her, or him. Thankfully I can keep an eye on him, and the other way around. Whatever he thinks, I still need him. I’m not ready to be a guardian on my own.

Ah, what can I say, my Dad grew on me, like a wart! But a lovable, trench-coat wearing wart!”

He’s too nice a guy for all this. I’ll get Kragok for this...

EXTRA! Ekyl lay on the floor, his shirt now his bandage. Two young female soldiers gave him a look of longing. "WHAT THE HELL! THIS ISN'T A PEEP SHOW! HE'S TAKEN!" Linda-Su yelled at them. The two girls ran for it. Linda heard from down the hall: "Man, why'd that hot guardian marry that dog?!"

28 - Death's Beckon

Ekyt got up out of bed, forcing his way past everyone. “How is the OSS going Colin?” Ekyt asked. Colin gave him a look, eyebrows raised. “Shouldn’t you be recuperating?” Colin grinned. “Anyone with sense would.” Ekyt said. “So, no.” Colin shook his head, laughing. “Well, the kids are doing great. Tails and Amy are just the best pilot-gunner combo we have.” “What’s that?!” Ekyt interrupted him.

Ekyt ducked cautiously outside. His heart leapt into his throat. Shadow, Kragok, and Lien-Da were standing opposite him. “It’s been a while since we last met.” Shadow said, in a would-be friendly voice. “It has. Best time of my life. What do you want?” Ekyt said, glaring at the three. “To fight!!!” A chaos spear shot toward Ekyt. Three with chaos powers against one with chaos powers. “Colin! Scram order! Get everyone to safety and alert the new brotherhood!” Ekyt paused, making a hard decision. “And tell my daughter. She’ll be here of her own accord anyway.” He didn’t want his daughter here. But she was a guardian, and he had no choice.

Ekyt deflected the chaos spear. Three more shot at him. He swept to the side, standing his ground. “You can’t win!” Shadow crowed. Ekyt dodged another attack. He waved his hand in a circle, forming a shield as more spears hit. “Neither can you. All the more reason this fight is pointless!” A spear struck Ekyt under his left eye. It burned, but adrenaline took over. In this day and age, every guardian has their own special chaos attack. Ekyt’s was particularly devastating. “CHAOS INFUSION!” His veins filled with green plasma. The white part of his eyes turned green. “Chaos strike!” Ekyt waved his hand in an arc. He knocked the three off their feet with the attack. “Chaos Blast!” “Chaos Shield!” Two chaos attacks, used simultaneously.

The results were catastrophic. The two attacks met, twisting in the air, a battle of their own. Ekyt’ green energy vs. Shadow’s red energy. An EXPLOSION ripped the ground to pieces, setting trees on fire and wildlife, what little there was, scurrying. It knocked all the participants in the battle off their feet. Ekyt crawled to get up. Shadow did not. Was it really over?

Paula-Su charged to her father’s side. She hauled him to his feet. “Are you oka-...” Her voice trailed off at the site of Shadow lying motionless. “The explosion did it. I was protected by my Chaos Infusion. Shadow...wasn’t so lucky.” Paula pointed at his eye. “C’mon, we’re going home. They can bury their own dead. Rest in Pieces, dirt bag.” She muttered.

The new brotherhood consisted of Knuckles, Tobor, and Thunderhawk. “I never thought...Shadow...dead? It can’t be true.” Knuckles said, barely coherent. “It is. How long he **stays** dead is anyone’s guess.” Thunderhawk said dismissively. Ekyt was helped in by Paula-Su. He pulled his mask off with difficulty. He had his hand over his left eye. “No signs of life. My chaos shield, powered by my chaos infusion, deflected his chaos blast.” Ekyt coughed out. “Remove your hand.” Tobor ordered. Ekyt did so, slowly. “My God...That must be where...no one could have...” Thunderhawk sputtered uncharacteristically. Ekyt’s left eye felt heavy. But it was underneath his eye that was the problem. A long, thin burn developed there.

“We should send him on medical leave.” “For how long?” “Forever.” Knuckles said suddenly. “We do

not tolerate death. Our aim is to protect, not kill.” Ekyt forgot the pain in his eye. “You’re kidding. He killed himself! I’m only alive because of the chaos abilities!” Knuckles nodded. “I’m sorry...I just can’t think...Shadow, gone?”

Lien-Da and Kragok stood above Shadow. “Well played Shadow.” Kragok murmured. Shadow sat up. “Fools. They’ll rejoice, and let their guard down...Then it’ll be too late...”

29 - I Do's and I Dont's

“Congratulations Ekyt.” Queen Sally told an unusually somber Ekyt. Upon seeing this, she questioned him. “What’s the matter? You’ve just ended the war!” Ekyt raised his eyes to meet her gaze. “I don’t think you believe that anymore than I do.” Sally sighed. “You’re right...but we can’t tell the people that...they’ve had precious little to celebrate about in so long...” “But if they drop their guard...” Ekyt began. Sally shook her head. “Sonic and I discussed it. It’s better to have a raise in morale.” Ekyt conceded her point before heading home.

He went into his office. It was glass and steel, the two most abundant resources in the war stricken day and age. He sat down and booted up the computer, to see if he could find something interesting. He leaned toward the screen when a window popped up, showing a black screen with a green grid, with what looked like a pulse monitor (In hospitals, the thing that beeps when the person is alive.). This meant an outgoing transmission from an enemy’s satellite. He printed the data and made a call to the OSS.

“Colin here.” Colin, a 35 year old echidna that adopted Ekyt as a mentor answered his field mic. “Colin, it’s Ekyt. I’m sending over some data. We need our tech guys to pinpoint the source.” Colin grinned. “By “tech guys” you mean Mitch gets an all-nighter.” Ekyt chuckled. “Yeah, pretty much. Rotor’s tied up, and Mitch is the best bet at this point. You heard about Shadow’s death?” “Yeah. You don’t sound like you believe it.” Colin said, in an interested tone. “I don’t. And I have a feeling he’s going to crash the party that he knows we’re going to have.” Colin stroked his chin. “Alright. Send the data. And Ekyt...” “Yeah?” “Me and Molly are getting married. Can you come?” Ekyt grinned. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world buddy. See you tonight.” Colin smiled at the irony. The world was just the thing that might make him miss the wedding.

Mitch showed up at the wedding, with this laptop and glasses, muttering in the back until the ceremony began. Then he strode up to the church, taking his place as “best man.” Ekyt was sitting in the back, keeping a weather eye out for trouble. Linda was next to him, and Paula was next to her.

The wedding went off without a hitch. After the I Do’s were said, a cheer went up.

That’s when it happened. The windows of the church broke in, robots surrounding the congregation. With a curse, Ekyt told Paula to up the balcony. He strode forward into the center. “Everyone, head toward the exit.” He said calmly. “Well, well, well, what have we here?” Shadow stepped out from the crowd. He was followed by Robotnik and Kragok. “You thought I was dead?” Ekyt shook his head. “Only the good die young. You’ll probably live forever.” Shadow shrugged off the verbal blow. “Before you stands the ultimate triumvirate.” Linda grinned. “Really. All I see is an old hedgehog, a hooded freak show (Kragok), and a fatass wanna-be scientist (Robotnik). Shadow hit her with a chaos spear. Ekyt charged him, barreling into him at full speed.

With everyone else gone, this didn’t look like a good day for the resistance. Shadow threw Ekyt off. He picked up the human again, slamming him into the wall. Before Ekyt could recover, Shadow had him by the neck. “Let me introduce the newest member...I believe you know Silver?” Ekyt stopped struggling.

“Leave him to me Shadow.” Silver the hedgehog used telekinetic abilities to control objects, and in rare occasions, time and space. Ekyt was trapped by his abilities. He was a helpless punching bag, until chairs started raining down from the balcony. Distracted, Silver let Ekyt go. “Nice shot Paula!” He called up to his daughter.

Ekyt took the distraction as a sign to attack. He saw that the candles were still lit. “Mind if I smoke?” he muttered. Ekyt took a long candle, holding it like his staff. He set fire to Robotnik’s cape, then to Kragok’s robes, and to Shadow and Silver’s quills. They screamed with pain. “CHAOS CONTROL!” Shadow shouted. With a crack, they all vanished. Shadow’s head reappeared. “Hmph! Lucky victory! You and your pathetic resistance effort will be crushed when I release my army of 100,000 robots in two days time.” “You go ahead and think that Shads. My Dad will kick your...” “He’s got the message sweetheart.” Linda said. She turned to Shadow’s head. “Flake off, jackass!”

Ekyt had innumerable cuts on his face and body, but he was alright other wise. He had also burned his hands on the candle he used as a weapon. The dripping wax turned his hands a shade of angry red.

In bed that night, Linda asked Ekyt if he thought “Shadow meant what he said.” Ekyt looked at the ceiling. “I think he is. And I hope the Freedom Fighters are going to be ready to head them off. Because I heard...” Ekyt stopped. Linda made an encouraging gesture. “I heard that the resistance is dying. No more volunteers. That the next stand will be our last. It’s either we win the war and end it all in our next major offensive, or we’re crushed. We’ll have to surrender and hope they don’t execute us.” Linda looked into her husband’s eyes. He still looked young, but his hair was graying every day it seemed. In most places it kept its dark brown shade, but around the temples it was gray. Linda slid over. Ekyt did too. “Do you have enough room?” Ekyt asked. Linda shook her head. “I swear, you are clueless! I was moving closer because I **wanted** to, moron!” She ran her hands down his chest, laughing inwardly as he blushed. It was hard to believe something as simple as having your shirt off, even with only your wife present, could embarrass her rock-hard husband after twenty-five years of fighting.

NEXT ISSUE: A FULL-BLOWN BATTLE! THIS WILL BE EPIC! IT’S EITHER CONQUER OR BE CONQUERED! IT’S THE LAST THE STAND FOR THE RESISTANCE!

30 - One Word (Is all you need)

It was 2:00 am when Ekyt heard the tell-tale clang of marching robots. "Linda...it's time." Ekyt dashed over to the radio. "Sally! Now's the time to get everyone ready! Their target is definitely Knothole at this point." Sally's concerned voice came across the radio. "Understood. Kingdom of Acorn out...wait. I'll see you there guardian." There was a hint of a smile in her voice. Ekyt shrugged on his coat as Linda pulled on her boots. "Ready to do this...one last time?" She said, smiling, making her look younger in an instant. "Ready as I'll ever be. Here's to a victory...or else."

Ekyt combat-crawled across the great forest. There was a set of intricate trenches dug deep into the ground. This was the last stand. Sonic sped up to him in the trench. "The meeting's this way." They ran down the bunker, Linda and Paula-Su in the wake.

"It's now or never...we win, or this is our last day of freedom." Sally just finished up her speech. "Sonic, anything to add." Sonic grabbed the mic. "C'mon, this is just like the old days of beating the stuffing out of ol' Ivo (Robotnik.!)!" The group cheered, raising their weapons, mostly home-made, in a salute. Then their eyes fell on Ekyt.

A surge of hatred hit Ekyt as the crowd was silent. "Whether you like me, hate me, or don't know me, we've laid our cards on the table. It's time to put aside our differences and unite under a common goal. We've got three, very dangerous enemies to face, each with their own army. If they can unite, so can we." Most people were too stunned to speak. Most had never heard the guardian talk, let alone make a speech. The seriousness of the situation grasped them. It was time to fight.

Ekyt, Sonic, and Knuckles led the charge. They were face to face with Robotnik, Shadow, and Kragok. "Time to take your medicine. Your pathetic war ends here!" Shadow declared. "If you say so Shads! But it looks to me like we've got a bunch of hoppin' mad weapon-holders who beg to differ!" Sonic rubbed his chin, mocking Shadow. "Knuckles, I'm going to finish what I started. Enerjak's noble work will continue!" Kragok declared. "Take a tuck in your lip, turkey! You ain't got a prayer!" Knuckles retorted. Robotnik stepped aside so Silver could talk. "You may have gotten lucky, but I will defeat you!" Ekyt smirked, lifting his mask, and leaned close. "You know, your corny lines get old real quick. Just like your attacks." Colin joined Ekyt, and added a hearty "and just like your mom!" The resistance leadership roared. For the first time, Ekyt attacked, unproved. He knocked Silver unconscious with a single right hand. "That's the first shot." Ekyt said solemnly.

The battle wasn't looking good for the resistance. They had been driven back, and Knothole was in sight behind them. Mitch scurried up to Ekyt, who was taking a rest in the bunker. "I've traced the source." Ekyt glanced up. "Any energy readings?" Ekyt asked, his eyes narrowed. "Chaos emerald gold." Mitch said with a rare grin. "We've got to send Sonic...he and Knuckles hitting their prime forms are the best chance...Yes...no other choice...I'm going out front one last time." Ekyt stood up and marched toward the bunker. "LISTEN UP!" Ekyt shouted to get attention. "Listen. Mitch has traced their energy signals to their base. Sonic, if you can get their chaos emeralds, you and Knuckles can hit your power forms." "There's no time!" argued Sonic. "I'll make the time. You know it's our best chance." Sonic nodded. "Fine. You have my permission to make any more plans to pull this off." Ekyt nodded,

and continued.

“All of you have to take cover up in the trees.” Ekyt pointed at one group with firearms. “The rest of you hide in the bushes and attack when they get close. I’m going to cause a distraction.” Everyone scrambled to obey.

“Paula, it’s time for you to face another challenge. And this one...you may have to face with your mother.” “What are you rapping about Dad?” Paula asked in a worried, but cheerful tone. “If I don’t come back...you’re in charge of the rest of the resistance effort.” “No Dad!” Ekyt hugged her. “I can’t say if it’s my time or not...but this is a sacrifice I have to make. A guardian guards, and protects. It’s time for me to quit sulking, and do just that.” He let go of her. She nodded, a sad smile on her face.

“Linda, I’m going to go cause a major disruption.” “I’m going with you.” Linda said. Ekyt shook his head. “Someone needs to take care of Paula...just in case.” Linda understood, but didn’t want to let go. “It has to be done.” Ekyt assured her. “I know...I just wish it wasn’t you.” She wrapped him in a fond hug, trying to remember what he felt like, just in case this was their last moment together. “You were always the one...” They kissed for a brief moment. “Go get ‘em sport.” She said.

Sonic raced across the countryside, aided by a power ring. He found the base, and found the chaos emeralds. But now he had to wait for the distraction Ekyt promised.

Ekyt climbed up out of the trenches, alone. He strode toward the enemies, unarmed. “Have you come to announce a surrender?” Shadow sneered. “No. I’ve come to remind you of something Shadow. But before I do...Robotnik, you are the fattest, ugliest greaseball I have ever seen. If you were a genius, as you claim, I wouldn’t be here. Kragok, we’ve had our battles. Let me say this: For someone with chaos powers so fully developed, it seems like you lost a lot... And Shadow...I have only one word for you...”

Sally and Linda heard this through Ekyt’s radio. “My God...he’s...he’s...oh no. I know what he’s going to do.” Linda said, flustered. Sally nodded and held her hand. “I know. He’s building them up. Over the years, he and Shadow have fought, because Ekyt knows the one word that can cause Shadow to turn the world upside-down...”

Tiffany, Kyle, Tracey (Shadowthe_hedgehog) Flash (Flashthehedgehog), and Kurt all heard this too. Kurt shook his head. “No way he’s my biological father (He’s not, for the record, Kurt was adopted), I would never have the guts to say THAT word to Shadow...”

The world rolled off Ekyt’s tongue. “M-A-R-I-A.” Shadow grasped his head and fell to the ground. Before anyone could move, Ekyt seized Robotnik’s moustache and threw him sideways into Kragok. Ekyt gave Robotnik an extra shove, which made him land on Kragok. Ekyt took Shadow’s crown and stepped on it. In the dirt, he drew “MARIA” with his finger. Shadow grasped at it, as if that would get Maria back.

Sonic raced back with the emeralds. He had heard what Ekyt had said. “Knux, we’ve gotta do this quick! The guy’s toast if we don’t get him out of there!” The chaos emeralds and power rings caused a beam of power to erupt. Super Sonic and Hyper Knuckles were ready for action.

Ekyt stepped onto Robotnik, kicking the gun out of one of Shadow’s soldier’s hands. It didn’t move.

"It's programming must be controlled by Shadow's thoughts..." Mitch figured that out quickly. Into his radio, he yelled. "Ekyt! Waste the robots!" "ATTACK!" Ekyt yelled. The robots were being destroyed.

Shadow got up angrily, his eyes glowing red. "YOU SON OF A dog!" he swiped at Ekyt, who dodged away. "Nothing if not predictable Shadow. That's always been your biggest weakness." Shadow punched as Ekyt dodged again. "Try again sucker!" Ekyt said cheerfully. Shadow finally hit his boiling point. Just what Ekyt had thought. He braced himself for a whole lot of pain. "CHAOS BLAST! CHAOS SPEAR! CHAOS BLAST!" Ekyt protected himself with a chaos shield for the first attack. The chaos spear hit him in the arm, breaking his concentration. The Chaos Blast knocked him off his feet. He felt like he was on fire. Ekyt landed a good hundred feet away. Shadow chaos-controlled next to him. Ekyt regained his footing and swung around with a kick. He might as well have pinched Shadow for all the good it did. Shadow had him around the neck. "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to rip out your damn throat. I'm going to hang you by your intestines. I'm going to grind your body into powder! And I'm going to enjoy it. No matter what I've lost today, I can die in peace, knowing I've killed you..."

31 - How Did THAT Happen???

Ekylt smiled grimly. "Shadow...you've lost your focus. You could have won the war...you'll never know just how close you were...instead, you kill me, and everyone else lives. Sounds like a hell of a deal to me." "SHUT UP! YOU LITTLE BASTARD! I'M GOING TO KILL YOU! I'M GOING TO GRIND YOU INTO LITTLE BITS. I'M GOING TO RIP YOU DAMNED HEAD OFF!" "Inefficient Shadow. You've let your emotions run wild." Ekylt's calmness was pissing Shadow off, something they both knew. "Your army has been destroyed. Your only victory- a hollow one, whatever you pretend- would be my death. I'd gladly die for all of them, and you know that. So it's not a victory is it."

Ekylt was still suspended in mid air, but by chaos powers. His words were hitting home. No one could move or speak. They had seen so much in the years of war, most of it from Sonic and Knuckles. Now, the one that most WANTED dead, was dying to help them. Egging on their chief enemy, buying time.

Linda, Julie-Su, and Sally could only shake their heads. "It's suicide." Sally muttered. "No...he's a martyr." Linda-Su said. Julie-Su shook her head. "No. He's not dead yet. Either way, he's a hero."

Super Sonic and Hyper Knuckles saw Ekylt floating, looking very calmly at Shadow, and speaking softly. They both blasted into Shadow, freeing Ekylt. As soon as he hit the ground, Ekylt was grabbed by Colin and Molly and dragged to safety.

Shadow looked around and realized he was defeated. "This isn't possible...the ultimate life form...thousands of robots...destroyed...destroyed, but how?" Knuckles punched forward. "Chaos control!" Shadow said, quickly but sullenly. Sonic and Knuckles didn't pursue him.

Ekylt was on one knee, panting. He seemed most unhurt, save for the cuts, bruises, and scrapes that were to be expected. He looked as though he had aged rapidly. Which, everyone was reminded, he probably had. True to his form, Ekylt refused medical help, or any help getting to his feet. Warily, he stood up. Normally, everyone would have congratulated Sonic and Knuckles for saving the day. But no one dared. After what they had just seen him do, they had emerged from the war with a newfound respect, and subsequent fear, of Ekylt. No one could take abuse like that, no one would dare take a direct stab at Shadow's past. But he had.

"Victory." He said softly. His single word carried across the forest. A huge, deafening cheer went up.

Families were re-united, friends meeting again. The dead properly buried and mourned. All in all, it was a happy time. A time of closure. All those years of war and suffering had ended with the defeat of Shadow. King Sonic and Queen Sally took their rightful thrones to thunderous applause.

It seemed like Ekylt had been forgotten. He stood in the back of the ceremony, his left arm in a sling, his right arm holding a cane close to his leg. There was gauze under his eye, healing the scar from Shadow's last Chaos Blast.

Ekylt remained stoic, but inside him, he felt like Rambo. He had been given this mission to fail. No one

really expected him to succeed, and the fact that he HAD was just a bonus. He was angry suddenly, feeling that he had a right to be. He limped out of the hall where the celebration was being held. He wasn't in the mood for it. His mood rapidly progressed from depression, to pain, to anger. He limped across the battlefield, the countless small crosses and hastily dug graves in his wake. With one arm, he managed to shimmy up the vine that would lead him back to Angel Island.

His wife, daughter, and (adopted) son were waiting for him. "All you did for them...and this is how they repay you." Kurt said sadly. Paula looked at her mother. "Ekyt...honey...I'm not sure how to say this...um..." Ekyt reached for her hand. "Tell me. What's wrong?"

Linda smiled at him. "I think I'm pregnant."