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by Michael Teitelbaum

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HEDGEHOG™

FRIEND OR FOE?

BY

MICHAEL

TEITELBAUM

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY

GLEN HANSON

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Chapter

1

Princess Sally of Mobius strolled through a field of wildflowers. She smelled the sweet summer air. In the distance she heard the sound of children giggling as they played.

Sally paused by a crystal-clear stream. She knelt down and listened to the water rushing over the rocks. She smiled and thought about how lucky she was to live on a planet as peaceful and beautiful as Mobius.

“Sally!” a deep but gentle voice called from a distance. “Sally!”

She recognized the voice at once. It was her father, the good King of Mobius.

Sally stood up and saw her father across the field

of wildflowers. As she ran toward him, she noticed a long piece of paper dangling from his hand.

“Good morning, Father,” called Sally. She was always glad to see the wise and loving king.

But as he drew closer to her, the king began to fade from sight. Sally stopped short and watched her father disappear.

Suddenly, in his place stood the evil Dr. Robotnik, clutching the same piece of paper her father had held a moment before. Sally could now see a long list of names written on the paper.

“Is this what you're looking for, Princess?” cackled Robotnik as he tore the paper to shreds. His sinister laugh drowned out all other sounds.

The wildflowers in the field wilted before Sally's eyes. The green grass turned black beneath her feet. Overhead, gray thunderclouds blocked out the sun.

“No!” shouted Sally. “Father! No!”

“Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha,” Robotnik laughed loudly.

But far away, Sally heard a gentle voice. “Princess,” it called softly. “Princess, please wake up.”



Sally felt a hand on her shoulder. She opened her eyes and realized it had all been a dream.

Her head rested on a table covered with maps and charts. Sally's hand clutched a piece of paper with a list of names. She raised her head and saw Antoine, her friend and guardian. His hand rested gently on her shoulder.

“Oh, Antoine,” said Sally, rubbing her tired eyes. “I must have fallen asleep again.”

“Yes, your highness,” replied Antoine.

“I dreamed about Mobius,” she explained. “The way it once was, before Robotnik took over the planet. Before Robotnik's factories polluted the air and water, and before he outlawed books, music, and fun.” She paused, her eyes filling with tears. “And before he captured my father.”

“Your highness, you have been working much too hard lately,” said Antoine. He felt very protective of Sally. He had once been a guard in her father's palace.

Sally wiped the tears from her eyes. “Ever since we found my father's list of Freedom Fighters

hidden in Robotnik's fortress, I haven't been able to rest,” she said. “This list proves that our little group here in Knothole Village is not the only group of Freedom Fighters on Mobius. We now know there are others trying to stop Robotnik. There are others who want to rescue his prisoners, and rescue my father too.”

Sally thought of her father again, and of her hope to restore him to his rightful place on the throne.

She then thought about all the Mobius citizens who had been captured by Robotnik's army of mechanical SWATbots. They had all been roboticized – turned into mindless robotic slaves.

Sally's thoughts were interrupted by a sudden gust of wind. *We're in an underground hideout beneath the Great Forest, Sally thought. How can there be any wind?* Then she smiled, realizing what was happening.

Sonic The Hedgehog came zooming up to Sally, raising a whirlwind of dust as his slim blue body screeched to a halt. He folded his arms and tapped one of his bright red sneakers on the ground impatiently.

“Yo, Sal,” Sonic began. “Still playing with your maps? When do we get some action around here?”

“I'm not playing, Sonic,” replied Sally. “I'm studying the list of Freedom Fighters and planning a search mission to find them.”

“All right, a mission!” exclaimed Sonic. “Way past cool! Now you're talking my language!”

“And what language might that be?” asked Antoine.

“Now don't you two start bickering again,” warned Sally.

“No prob,” said Sonic. “It just goes in one ear and out the other.”

“That should be a rather short journey,” cracked Antoine.”

“That's enough,” said Sally. “Sonic, take a look at this map and help me plan the mission.”

“Plan, schman,” said Sonic. “We don't need a plan. We need to juice!”

“Juice yourself over here and help me, please,” said Sally.

Sonic sighed. Sally was the leader of this group of Freedom Fighters. Sonic knew she was right about most things most of the time. “Okay, Sal, what have you got there?”

“This list of Freedom Fighters doesn't give their exact locations,” she explained. “It just refers to general areas on Mobius. The place closest to Knothole is in the Caverns of the Mountain out in the Great Unknown. It makes sense to me to begin our search there.”

“Sounds thumbs-up to me,” said Sonic. “I'll go tell the others.” Sonic zoomed off, whipping up more dust as he went.”

Sally thought about her dream for a moment, then returned to the maps and charts.

Chapter

2

Rotor the walrus was busy in his workshop down in Knothole Village. The Freedom Fighters depended on Rotor's skills to invent new gadgets that would help them on their missions against Robotnik.

WHOOSH! Sonic sped into Rotor's workshop and stopped next to his friend. “Hey, Rotor, what are you working on, pal?” asked Sonic.

“I'm putting the finishing touches on a Magnetic Field Generator,” said Rotor. “I call it an MFG.”

“Sounds cool!” said Sonic. “What does it do?”

“If it works like I planned, the MFG should create a very powerful magnetic field,” explained Rotor. “It should do a number on any Swatbot we run into on our Missions.”

“Awesome!” exclaimed Sonic. “Have you tried it yet?”

“I was about to test it for the first time when you showed up,” said Rotor.

“Well, let her rip!” said Sonic.

Rotor switched on the MFG. It hummed loudly. Green and blue lights on the device flashed. Instantly, every metal tool in Rotor's workshop came flying toward the machine – right at Rotor!

Sonic sped into action. Outrunning the speeding tools, he grabbed Rotor and pulled him to the ground, safely out of the way. The tools hit the MFG with a loud bang and stuck right to the machine.

Suddenly, Sonic and Rotor heard a scream. “Hey!” the voice shouted. It was Bunnie Rabbot, another of their group of Freedom Fighters. Bunnie was a rabbit, but she had been sent through Robotnik's Ro-Bo-Machine and partially changed into a robot. Sonic rescued her before the transformation was complete, although Bunnie's body, legs, and left arm had become robotic. These

parts of Bunnie were now attracted to the MFG's strong magnetic field.

Bunnie came flying into the workshop. Her right leg hit the MFG with a loud clang. She stuck there, staring down at Rotor and Sonic.

“What in all of Mobius is going on here, Rotor?” Bunnie shouted. “And will someone please get me down of this thing?”

Rotor got up and switched off the machine. Bunnie crashed to the floor, along with all of Rotor's tools.

“Sorry about that, Bunnie,” apologized Rotor, as he picked up his scattered tools. “I guess the MFG works just fine.” Rotor filled Bunnie in on what the machine did and what he planned to use it for.

“That's all right, sugar,” said Bunnie, brushing herself off. “Anything that will stop a Swatbot is okay in my book, even if it did take me on a bit of a ride!”

“I'm glad you're here, Bunnie,” said Sonic. “Sally sent me to get you two guys. We're ready to head out and start our search for the other Freedom Fighters on the list.”



“Well, what are we waiting for?” said Bunnie.
“Let's hop on out of here and hit the road.”

Soon, Sonic, Bunnie, and Rotor joined Princess Sally and Antoine. Traveling steadily, the brave group of Freedom Fighters quickly made its way out of the Great Forest.

They hiked through open country until they arrived at the area called the Great Unknown. Within this region was a huge mountain range. They began a long trek up through the mountains. When they arrived at the entrance to a large cave, Princess Sally called a halt.

“According to my map,” said Sally, checking the yellowed piece of paper, “this is the entrance to the Caverns of the Mountain. This is where our search will start.”

“There's only one prob, Sal,” said Sonic. He pointed to a huge boulder that blocked the entrance to the cavern. “This oversized pebble here!”

All five Freedom Fighters put their shoulders to the boulder and pushed. But even with the added

power of Bunnie's robotic arm, they couldn't budge the boulder.

“Oh, dear,” said Antoine. “This is no an encouraging start, your highness.”

Sally was staring at the boulder. She noticed sunlight glinting off the boulder's surface. “I'll be this big rock contains some metallic ore,” said Sally.

“Great, Sal,” said Sonic as he rolled his eyes. “Nice time you picked for a geology lesson!”

“No, Sonic,” said Bunnie. “I think I know what Sally's getting at. Maybe Rotor's MFG could attract the metals in the boulder. It sure gave me a wild ride!”

Rotor set up the MFG a short distance from the boulder. “Stand back, everyone,” he warned.

Rotor switched on the device. Sure enough, the huge rock rolled right toward the MFG. The boulder nearly flattened Rotor, who dove out of the way at the last second. The entrance to the Caverns of the Mountain stood open before them.



Inside the dark, damp cave the Freedom Fighters walked single file along a winding narrow path. They were led by Sonic, who carried an oil lantern. It was the only source of light in the pitch-black cavern.

“If there are any Freedom Fighters in here,” said Sonic, “they sure picked a creepy place for a hideout.”

A fluttering of wings echoed through the cave. “Did you hear that, Princess?” asked Antoine.

“Yes,” replied Sally. “I’m not sure what it is, though.”

Suddenly the cave was filled with bats. Hundreds of the flying creatures swarmed around the Freedom Fighters.

“Bats!” shouted Antoine. “I hate bats!” he panicked and started to run.

“Wait, Antoine! Don’t!” yelled Sally. But it was too late. Antoine lost his footing on the slippery cave floor and slid down a steep incline, disappearing into the darkness below.

“Antoine!” called Sally into the gloomy blackness.

But she heard nothing.

