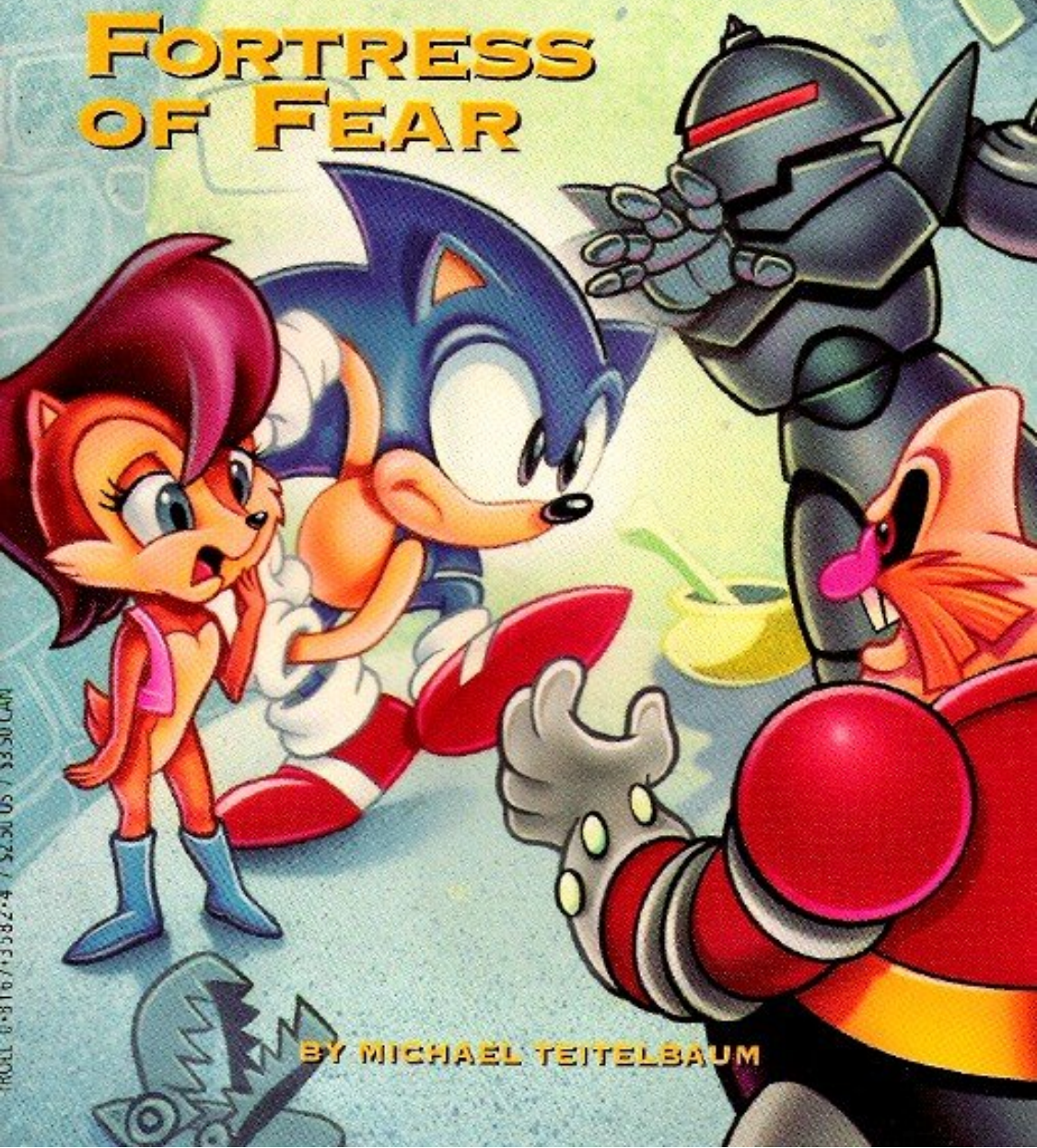


SONIC THE HEDGEHOG™

FORTRESS OF FEAR



BY MICHAEL TEITELBAUM

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Published by Troll Associates, Inc.

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Printed in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Produced by Creative Media Applications, Inc.

Art direction by Fabia Wargin.

Cover art by Greg & Gordie Wray.

This book is dedicated to Molly Jane.

Special thanks to Roy Wandelmaier, Bob Harris, Cynthia Wilkes, Susan Reyes, Cristina Tuason, Arlene Scanlan, and Dianne Drosnes.

Chapter

1

The planet Mobius was once a beautiful, clean, and safe place. Its citizens were happy. Its king was wise and fair.

But all that changed when the evil Dr. Robotnik kidnapped the king and made himself the dictator of Mobius. Robotnik turned the good king's magnificent palace into a dark fortress.

Now all is gray on Mobius. Dr. Robotnik's factories pollute the air and the water. Reading, Listening to music, and playing are against the law. So is any other activity that might be fun.

And that's not the worst of it. The citizens of Mobius, called Mobians, are being captured. They are taken to Robotnik's fortress in the city he

renamed Robotropolis. In this horrible place, innocent Mobians are forced into Robotnik's Ro-Bo-Machine. They are turned into mindless robotic servants who are made to work for the evil ruler for the rest of their days.

No one on Mobius feels safe anymore. Robotnik's team of robotic soldiers – called SWATbots – patrol the planet, rounding up Mobians to be brought to Robotnik's fortress. These are dark days indeed for the peaceful citizens of this once glorious planet.



In the dark depths of Robotnik's fortress, in a tiny jail cell, sat Rotor, the walrus. Rotor was a member of Princess Sally's brave band of Freedom Fighters. Sally was the daughter of the good King of Mobius. The Freedom Fighters were a group of courageous Mobians trying to get rid of Robotnik, free the king, and restore the planet to its former state of peace and happiness.

Rotor heard a sound and looked up through his cell's narrow bars.

Snively, Robotnik's assistant, led a woodchuck over to the cell door. He unlocked the door, shoved the woodchuck in, and locked the door behind the angry creature.

“Are you all right?” asked Rotor.

“As well as can be expected,” replied the woodchuck. “That is, for a Freedom Fighter who is about to be roboticized!”

“Freedom Fighter!” exclaimed Rotor. “I'm a Freedom Fighter too! But I thought my group was the only one!”

“So did I,” said the woodchuck, excitedly. “My name is Digger. I live with a group of Freedom Fighters on the western edge of the Great Forest. I was out on patrol when some Swatbots captured me.”

“My name is Rotor,” the walrus explained. “I belong to a group of Freedom Fighters who also live in the Great Forest. In a place called Knothole Village. We're led by Princess Sally and Sonic The Hedgehog.”

“Princess Sally? The daughter of the captured King of Mobius?” asked Digger.

“The very one,” replied Rotor.

“Other Freedom Fighters on Mobius...” said Digger, shaking his head in disbelief. His eyes opened wide. “Then the legend of the king's list is true!”

“What list?” asked Rotor. “What are you talking about?”

Rotor looked on in amazement as Digger paced back and forth in their cell and told an incredible tale.

“There is a legend that years ago, the good King of Mobius put together a list of the names and locations of all the Freedom Fighters on Mobius.

“According to this list, there are many groups of Freedom Fighters all over the planet. Until I met you today, Rotor, I thought that my group was the only one. I believed that the list was just a legend. But now I see that it's true.”

“This is very good news,” said Rotor when Digger had finished. “If all of these Freedom Fighters can be found and organized into one big fighting force, then our chances of defeating Robotnik would be much better.”

Rotor's face grew concerned as a terrible thought crossed his mind. "But if this list were to fall into the wrong hands," said Rotor. "It could mean —"

Rotor was interrupted by a sound outside the cell. From down the hallway came Snively, with a Swatbot on each side.

"Well, traitor," Snively began. "Your time has come. Your life of crime will soon be behind you. I, Snively, second in command only to the glorious Dr. Robotnik, will personally lead you to the Ro-Bo-Machine. In a few minutes your freedom will be history. Your only concern will be serving our glorious leader, Dr. Robotnik, in his Reign of Terror."

Snively took Digger from the cell, slamming the door in Rotor's face.

"Don't fret, walrus," Snively said to Rotor. "I haven't forgotten about you. When we are finished roboticizing this woodchuck, I'll be back for you. Then Dr. Robotnik will be free to turn his full attention toward the search."

"The search?" asked Rotor. "The search for what?"

"I suppose there's no harm in telling you. You'll



be a robotic slave in a few minutes anyway,” said Snively. “Once the two of you are disposed of, Dr. Robotnik plans to begin a full-scale search for the former king's legendary list of Freedom Fighters!”

Rotor's face turned pale.

“Swatbots!” shouted Snively. “Take the woodchuck away.”

The Swatbots grabbed Digger and began to drag him off.

“Don't feel lonely, walrus,” said Snively, smirking. “We'll be back for you shortly.”

Snively followed the others down the hall. As soon as he was out of sight, Rotor slumped to the floor of the cell. Horrible thoughts filled his head.

If Robotnik ever gets his hands on that list, he could locate and roboticize every Freedom Fighter on Mobius. He could take control of the planet forever! There would be no one left to stop him. I've got to tell Sally and Sonic about this. We've got to find that list before Robotnik does. But first, I've got to get out of this cell!

Chapter

2

Outside Robotnik's fortress, a blazing blue streak appeared on the night horizon. It moved at incredible speed toward the fortress' main entrance.

At the edge of the moat that surrounded the fortress, the blue blur came to a sudden stop revealing the fastest being on the planet – SONIC THE HEDGEHOG!

“Last stop, Ro-buttnik's fortress,” said Sonic to Bunnie Rabbot, who was riding on his shoulders.

“Please make sure you take all your personal belongings before leaving!” Sonic laughed at his own joke.

“Come on, sugar,” said Bunnie, getting down off

his shoulders. “This is no time for jokes. We've got to get Rotor out of that fortress. It's such a horrible place. And I should know. Just being back here gives me the creeps.”

Bunnie recalled with horror how Robotnik had captured her and brought her to his fortress. He had put her into his Ro-Bo-Machine. When she was half transformed into a robot, Sonic staged a daring rescue.

Bunnie's body, legs, and left arm had become robotic. Her head and right arm were still those of a living rabbit. Her heart and determination were now twice as big.

“Our first problem is how to get across this moat,” said Bunnie, her thoughts returning to the present.

“No biggie,” said Sonic. “Hop back on!”

Bunnie climbed onto Sonic's shoulders.

“Now, hold tight,” said Sonic. “I'm going to use a Super Sonic Spin to glide across the water and get us over to the other side of the moat.”

“But what about those hungry-looking crocs?” asked Bunnie. She pointed to the water in front of them.

Swimming in the moat that surrounded the fortress were huge crocodiles. Their long sharp teeth glinted in the bright moonlight.

“Hey-y, no prob,” said Sonic. “Super Sonic Speed will take care of that. Now everybody, stand back. I wouldn't want anybody hurt once I start moving!”

Bunnie rolled her eyes to the heavens. “Sonic,” she said. “I hate to tell you, but there's nobody here except us.”

“I known, Bun,” replied Sonic. “It just sounds so cool when I say that!”

Sonic leaped into the moat, with Bunnie on his shoulders. Spinning at top speed, Sonic zoomed across the water's surface. He cut left, then right to outrun the crocs who snapped at his heels. Sonic was spinning so fast it was impossible to see Bunnie.



Suddenly a large croc leaped from the water headed right for them. “Look out!” shouted Sonic.

Bunnie raised her mechanical left arm and bopped the croc right in the snout. The stunned creature went flying back into the water.

“We made it!” shouted Bunnie, as they reached the far side of the moat.

“Of course we did,” said Sonic. “You're with me.”

Sonic ran along the far side of the moat, still carrying Bunnie on his shoulders. They soon came to the fortress' main entrance. There they were met by three Swatbots.

“Stop-and-surrender!” said a Swatbot. “Stop-and-surrender!”

“In your dreams, Bot-heads!” shouted Sonic.

“Time for me to kick a little Bot-butt!” yelled Bunnie. She did a gymnastic flip off Sonic's shoulders, landing a flying drop kick right to the first Swatbot's head. The bot smashed to bits.

“Way to jam, Bun,” said Sonic. “Now it's my turn!” Sonic went into a Super Sonic Spin. Before they

knew what hit them, the remaining two Swatbots were smashed to pieces.

“You work on the door, Bunnie,” said Sonic. “I’ll keep an eye out for any more Bot-heads.”

Bunnie started pounding on the large steel door to the fortress with her robotic arm and legs.

“I only hope we’re in time to save Rotor,” said Sonic.



In his cell, Rotor took off his cap. He removed a tiny micro-transmitter, which was hidden in the cap’s inner band. The transmitter sent out a homing signal on a frequency known only to his fellow freedom Fighters.

“I hope some of my buddies are close enough to pick this up!” said Rotor.

Just then, Rotor heard Snively’s high, whiny voice yelling from down the hall.

“Swatbots,” shouted Snively. “Bring the walrus to the Ro-Bo-Machine!”



Back at the front entrance to the fortress, Bunnie continued to pound on the huge steel door. With one final powerful kick, she managed to rip an opening in the door big enough for Sonic and her to slip through.

“Way to go, Bunnie!” said Sonic.

Bunnie pulled a small receiver from her pocket. The receiver was set to pick up the signal sent by Rotor's micro-transmitter. She flipped it on. It immediately pointed in the direction of Rotor's homing signal.

“This way, Sonic,” said Bunnie, pointing down a corridor.

“Hop on, Bun,” said Sonic. “Time to juice in a major way!”

Bunnie climbed onto Sonic's shoulders, and he took off down the corridor at Super Sonic Speed.

Following the homing signal, Sonic and Bunnie soon arrived at Rotor's cell. They got there just in

time to see one Swatbot holding the door, while another led Rotor out of the cell.

“It's juice and jame time, Bunnie,” shouted Sonic. “Hey Bot-heads. Let go of our friend!”

Sonic took out the Swatbot by the door with a swift Super Sonic Spin. The Swatbot holding Rotor raised his blaster, aiming it at Bunnie. Just as the Swatbot fired, Rotor pushed the blaster up.

The blast hit the ceiling. Rotor dove out of the way as stones poured down onto the Swatbot, crushing it under a huge pile.

“Hi, guys!” said Rotor. “Thanks for the rescue!”

“Hey, no prob, bud,” replied Sonic. “Grab on. Time to haul some serious haunch!”

The three Freedom Fighters formed a chain, with Sonic in the lead. Using Sonic's speed, they zoomed out of the fortress and headed back to Knothole Village in the Great Forest.