

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG™

And The Silicon Warriors



MARTIN ADAMS

SONIC
THE
HEDGEHOG

**AND THE
SILICON WARRIORS**

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THE
HEDGEHOG

**AND THE
SILICON WARRIORS**

Martin Adams

Virgin

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Dedicated to Compuserve, for compuserVICES rendered.
And to Marc, Carl, Peter, Rebecca and Kerri;
they know why.

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THE SONIC STORY SO FAR

There was a time when Mobius was a peaceful world. And the Green Hill Zone was the most peaceful and pleasant and generally all-round cool place to hang out on the entire planet.

Mobius's inhabitants were, and are, talking animals of all types. The hippest, streetwiest dude of all was, and is, a hedgehog named Sonic.

And of course it just had to be Sonic who stumbled into the laboratory of Mobius's only human, the kindly but absent-minded Doctor Kintobor.

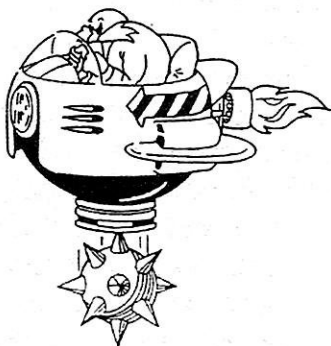
Dr K was perfecting a device – the Retro-Orbital Chaos Compressor – to attract all the evil on Mobius and contain it within six emeralds he called the Chaos Emeralds (neat name, Doc). He found the time to help boost Sonic's already radically fast footwork, too, and with the help of a special pair of drop-dead cool red trainers, Sonic exceeded the speed of sound. And he turned blue, of course.

Sonic superspeeded all over Mobius, searching for the Grey Emerald that would neutralise the evil contained in the Chaos Emeralds. But before he found it, Doctor

Kintobor's absent-mindedness brought disaster to the whole planet as he entered faulty data into the ROCC. The device exploded, releasing the Emeralds, scattering protective golden rings across the length and breadth of Mobius, and transmogrifying Kintobor into his exact opposite: the evil, power-crazed, obese and egg-loving Doctor Robotnik.

Robotnik's influence reached across the entire planet. Once-verdant landscapes were transformed into polluted wastelands. The evil Doctor's robots scoured the land for animals to imprison, and in particular for the one super-fast hedgehog who has the power to foil his plans – Sonic.

And Sonic has foiled Robotnik's plans – at least twice, by the time you read this book. But Robotnik is ineggshaus-tibly, eggsasperatingly resilient. Once again, he's back. And that means trouble for Mobius in general, and for hedgehogs with red trainers in particular.



ENTER

It was a dark and stormy night.

Neither moon nor stars penetrated the thick clouds that wallpapered the sky and poured raindrops the size of gobstoppers down to splatter solidly against the hard and cracked ground, parched and thirsty after a long, hot summer. The air was cold but fresh, filled with the sound of the rain as it tore through leaves and grass, splashed on rocks and stones, dripped from branches and gurgled as it ran into new streams, seeking out the lowest parts of the ground in which to make puddles and pools. Let's face it, it was not a night when anyone sensible or sane would want to be anywhere outside the warm comfort of their homes.

Through the tempest skipped a single figure, splashing from puddle to puddle. From time to time a ragged stroke of lightning pierced the sky above, throwing light across the heavens, making the clouds look like boiling oceans of grey-black mud and casting long, fat shadows around the figure on the ground. His clothes – a red shirt and black trousers – were damp and slick from the pelting rainwater, and clung to his bulbous body. The shirt barely covered his

fat egg-like torso and stomach, while the trousers flapped damply around his thin legs. Rain splashed on to his bald head, running down his nose and into his soaked orange moustache. Over the rumble of the thunder his voice boomed and roared.

'Ha ha ha ha ha!' he boomed. 'Ha ha ha ha! What a beautiful night for tyranny and villainy! At last, I, Doctor Ivo Robotnik, noted supergenius and erinacophobe – for it is I! – can test my final, ultimate and greatest plan without being observed and stopped by that prickled blue pest and his idiot companion! Ha! And if it works, planet Mobius will finally be mine, and I shall be emperor of everything! Mad, they called me! Mad! Mad! Ha ha ha ha ha!'

A scar of lightning flickered across the sky and the hysterical genius glanced up. 'Time to test!' he roared, and the thunder roared back in answer. He pulled a small black box from his pocket, tapped a couple of numbers into the small keypad on it and pressed a large red button. For a second nothing happened and then, as rain pelted down on to the mad doctor's expectant face, a tiny point of red, green and blue light appeared in front of him, floating a metre above the ground. It hovered there, spinning, in the middle of the downpour, and then began to expand in size. In seconds it had grown into a red column topped with a flash of white, with blurred edges and fuzzy details, standing taller than Robotnik. For a moment longer the raindrops passed right through it, then as it crackled and a line of white electricity ran over its outline, pulling the fuzziness into sharp relief, they began to splash against its solidified body.

The white line rose upwards, passed over the figure's head and disappeared. In front of Robotnik stood a young man, heavy muscles bulging beneath his red karate suit. A mop of thick blond hair stood out on top of his head, but the rain was already beginning to slick it down over his scalp. His whole body moved as he breathed hard, staring fixedly



at the bald scientist in front of him. His whole body glowed slightly, as if it were filled with a strange electricity.

'It works! My beautiful device works! Ha ha ha!' crowed Robotnik, staring at the young man. 'They'll never call me mad again, not after my wonderful machine has sliced and diced and dragon-kicked them into pieces! So, my little road-warrior, are you ready for action?'

He gazed adoringly at the rain-slicked figure before him. The figure stared back with a rather less friendly expression, then took a step forward and dropped into a fighting crouch, and from that into a well-trained attack stance. Raindrops exploded against its back in little sparks.

'No! No!' yelled Robotnik, moving backwards away from the glowing figure he had created. 'Not me! You don't attack me, you idiot! Just because we're in the middle of a hurricane doesn't mean you can practise your hurricane punch against me!' Silhouetted against a streak of lightning, the red-clad figure took no notice. It ran towards the fat figure of the scientist, and one powerful fist blazed out through the sheets of rain, aiming deftly towards Robotnik's undefended chin.

It connected with a crack, and the rotund figure of the doctor flew upwards and backwards, landing with a splash and sliding a few metres across the muddy ground. He sat up as the figure approached, and stabbed desperately at the control box that he still held. The karate expert stepped closer, its body blazing as the pounding rain struck sparks of fire from it. Then, with a flash and thump like a bolt of lightning, the figure exploded into a thousand shimmering stars which crackled and spat as they faded into the rain.

Doctor Robotnik sat up in the mud and rubbed his bruised chin. 'Ah,' he said thoughtfully. 'Ah. Ow. Needs a few fine adjustments, I think. And,' he added, gazing at the spot where the red-clothed figure had stood just an instant before, 'some waterproofing too.'

A Shock to the System

'Ready, dudes?' asked Porker Lewis.

'Set,' said Johnny Lightfoot.

'Go!' shouted Sally Acorn.

Sonic the hedgehog leaped from his crouching position and shot off across the Green Hill Zone at incredible speed, his blue feet in their special friction-resistant red running shoes pounding out a rhythm of several hundred beats per minute across the grass-covered ground, still a little soggy from last night's rain. From behind him he heard a 'whoosh' as Tails (you remember, the cute orange fox who has been his friend and companion through several adventures) hurtled off in the opposite direction, spinning his twin tails behind him like a propeller to give him extra speed.

As he pelted away across the Zone, the wind rushing over his face, Sonic smiled to himself. He already knew that he would win the race easily, because he always did. Over short distances Tails could just about keep up with him, but in a lengthier race Sonic's longer legs, superior streamlining and, well, all-round coolness always gave him



the edge. In a really, really long race like this one, across all the Zones of the planet Mobius, it was almost inevitable that the younger racer would get distracted somewhere along the way and would stop to examine something, leaving Sonic to cruise home in an easy first place for the usual round of adulation and 'Thank-you, adoring fans' acceptance speeches.

Of course, he reminded himself as he zipped out of the Green Hill Zone and into the Marble Zone, past strange ancient temples and the entrances to networks of underground caverns, dungeons and halls, winning the race wasn't really the point. He and Tails were out on patrol, checking all over the planet at super-speed to see if they could find any trace of that arch-pain Doctor Robotnik, or any sign of what he was doing at the moment and how he was planning to attempt to take over the planet for the umpteenth time.

There was a second purpose to the race, too. Back in the days before Doctor Ivo Robotnik had appeared on the scene to spread his robots and havoc across the planet, Sonic's friend and mentor, the scientist Doctor Ovi Kintobor had been trying to capture all the chaos energy on the planet, using six huge emeralds he had found and a machine he had invented, the Retro-Orbital Chaos Compressor. In a horrible accident in his laboratory – perhaps because Kintobor had never found the seventh emerald, which was supposed to neutralise the other six – something had gone terribly wrong and the Retro-Orbital Chaos Compressor had blown up, transforming the kindly, thin Kintobor into the, like, totally bonkers, egg-shaped and egg-obsessed Robotnik and scattering the ring-like components of the Chaos Compressor all over the planet.

Sonic had a theory that if they collected enough of the rings, they might be able to rebuild Kintobor's machine and use it to recapture the Chaos Emeralds, maybe even to drain the chaos energy from Robotnik and turn him back

into Kintobor. It was a wild idea and a long shot, especially as neither the hedgehog nor his foxy friend knew much about science or chaos save what they'd seen in a recent season of Mad Scientist movies that had been shown on the telly. Furthermore, there were only a few rings left around the zones now. Still, seemed worth a chance, and even on their own the rings did seem to have strange powers when it came to resisting chaos energy and the attacks of Robotnik's droids and robots. Sonic kept his eyes peeled for the slightest twinkle of anything that might be either golden or ring-shaped as he sprinted on.

The last of the Marble Zone's temples disappeared behind him as Sonic entered the Scrap Metal Zone. Once an industrial nightmare, the bare metalwork of this skysrise complex had been left untended to sit in the wind and the rain for years. Without paint or power it had rusted and decayed, its former traps and devices lying idle, its robot guardians gone. The metal platforms clanged ominously as Sonic's shoes pounded across them, and wind whistled across the high rooftops which had once been occupied by deadly Buzz Bombers, Crabmeats, Spikes and Rollers. Once it had been a hive of frantic activity, but now it seemed completely deserted, untouched and unvisited by anyone since Sonic had last sped through here a month or so ago.

He raced onwards, he legs pumping tirelessly until they became a blur of blue energy, the slipstream blowing over his face and through his aerodynamically arranged spikes, which let him attain the maximum speed possible: 761 miles per hour, or just over the speed of sound. The dull roar of a sonic boom followed in his path, echoing off the sides of the buildings as he zipped past and out of the zone. It was hard to make out the precise details of the zones at such high speed but Sonic knew each one so well that he would have noticed immediately if anything had changed.



The other zones zipped past: the Labyrinth Zone, the Starlight Zone, the Scrap Brain Zone, and then a sharp right turn to take the supersonic hedgehog back through another part of the Green Hill Zone, and from there into the remains of the Chemical Plant Zone, the Aquatic Ruin Zone, the ruins of the Casino Night Zone, the Hill Top Zone, the Mystic Cave Zone, along the beach of what had been the Oil Ocean Zone, and through the corridors and alleys of the Metropolis Zone.

Finally, almost four hours and one complete tour of the zones later, Sonic found himself standing by the crashed remains of Robotnik's Wing Fortress, on the border of the Green Hill and Emerald Hill Zones. The huge carcass of the once-mighty flying machine lay abandoned on the hillside where it had plunged after Sonic had chased Robotnik through it, destroying its central power core along the way. Without its pilot or power source, it had dropped like a three-hundred-metre stone and still lay here, like an immense whale that had mysteriously plunged from the sky. Ivy and creeping plants had begun to clamber up the steel girders of its skeleton, transforming the rusting monolith into a huge abstract sculpture in green and red. It looked quite neat.

Sonic twirled one of the five rings he had found so far around his index finger and sniffed the air. Something was different here, but he was not sure quite what it was. There was a strange smell on the breeze, a little like lightning or the fresh smell of sea air, but not so natural. He looked around. On the grass in front of him was a long muddy skid-mark, as if something fat and stupid had slid across it after being punched on the chin by something very strong. Beside it was a strange scorched mark that had blackened the grass around it in a speckled, star-like pattern. It looked fresh, but there was no sign of what might have caused it. Sonic shook his head, glanced at the sun, realised that if he did not get a move on there was a chance that Tails might

beat him back to the Green Hill Zone, and shot off across the hillside in the direction of his home.

Within less time than it takes to tell, he had screeched to a halt, already back at the place where he and Tails had started out on their patrol run. The zone was quiet and there was nobody around to welcome him back. Sonic looked around.

'The guys are probably not expecting me back so soon,' he told himself nonchalantly. There was no reason to worry. He had not noticed anything strange on his patrol, and the air smelled clean and fresh as always. Whenever Robotnik was trying one of his plans, there was usually the heavy odour of machine oil, industrial-grade lubricants, hot metal, exhaust fumes and pollution on the wind. Oh yeah, and rotten eggs, Sonic reminded himself with a grin.

There were no unusual sounds either: no clangs or thumps, or the chugging of small, badly designed robot motors. In fact, thought Sonic as he turned around on the stop, listening carefully, there was almost no noise at all. The wind in the trees, the gushing of the waterfalls . . . but that was all. Normally he would be able to hear his animal friends laughing and shouting somewhere as they played around, but the zone was quiet. Even the sound of Flicky the Bluebird's excited singing was nowhere to be heard.

Sonic glanced around, but there was still no sign of anyone. He was tempted to wait around for Tails to get back from his patrol so he could crow about having beaten the fox again – this victory made the score 164 to 1 – but he knew that his other friends were more important. He spirited away from where he had been standing, accelerating down the gently sloping hillside and on to the sandy beach beside the lake in the middle of the zone. With his feet churning in the soft surface and sending sprays of sand up into the air, he set off on a lap of the shoreline, slower than his normal pace but keeping a careful eye out for anything that might be a sign of one of his friends.



Nothing. Not a single sight, sound or scent of anything, apart from some paw prints on the sand, and even those looked like they were a few hours old. It was as if some giant thing had whisked his friends off the face of the planet altogether. The thought crossed his mind that they might be hiding somewhere, planning a surprise party for Tails and himself, but he quickly dismissed that idea. The hedgehog and fox had not done anything particularly heroic recently so there was no cause for a celebration; both the animals were orphans so they did not have birthdays or birthday parties. Besides, he remembered, both Chirps and Sally Acorn had had parties the week before, so all the inhabitants of the zone were feeling pretty partied out.

Sonic arrived back at the place where he had started out, and leaned into the wind, straining his ears in a final effort to hear something. There! In the distance, he could just hear a faint rushing sound, like a very fast aircraft, and it seemed to be getting closer, speeding over the hills and valleys of the zone towards him. He braced himself, ready to leap into a super-sonic spin attack at the first sign of danger, and started in the direction the sound was coming from. A streak of orange and white appeared over the brow of a hill and Sonic relaxed as Tails hurtled up to him and screeched to a stop in a long skid, leaving slick green marks on the grass.

'Yo, whassup?' said the fox, panting slightly after his long run. 'Hey, I found these in the Aqua Lake Zone.' He opened his paw to display nine gold rings. 'How many did you get?'

'Just five,' replied Sonic, handing them over. 'I must've found almost every single one by now – in the zones I patrol, anyway. There can't be many left for us to find.'

'How many have we got now?' Tails asked.

'Come on, dude,' Sonic sighed. 'We've got eight hundred and seventy so far. Add five and nine to that, what do you get?'

'A million?' the fox asked hopefully.

Sonic sighed again. One day he would have to check out his suspicion that if he looked up 'loveable idiot' in a dictionary, he would find a picture of Tails. The fox was a good friend and a good runner – well, okay, he was an excellent runner, almost as good as Sonic himself – but he was younger than the hedgehog, and his lack of experience and knowledge did mean that sometimes he let Sonic do all the thinking. Sonic knew that Tails looked up to him as a hero, but that was not a good enough reason for the young fox to rely on his friend to always come up with the answers.

'A million? Little dude, you're either a doofus or an optimist,' Sonic said in reply. 'One thing's for sure: it won't be enough to rebuild the Retro-Orbital Chaos Compressor yet. We'll need every single ring on Mobius for that, and then some. Hey, did you see anything strange while you were zooming around your part of the planet? Like, for instance, the others?'

The fox shook his head. 'Nope,' he said. 'No sign of anything at all. It was all really quiet. Why? Has something happened?'

'Listen up,' said Sonic. Tails pricked up his ears and stared attentively at Sonic, as if waiting for him to say something. Nothing happened for a few seconds, then the fox turned to his hero, a confused expression creasing his furry features.

'What am I supposed to be listening for?' he asked.

'Nothing.'

'Well, I couldn't hear it,' said Tails. Sonic stared at him, trying to work out whether he meant that he had heard nothing, or whether not hearing nothing meant that he had heard something after all.

'You didn't hear anything?' he asked.

'That's right,' said Tails.

'Goo – I mean bad, dude,' Sonic said. 'Because while we



were racing around the planet seeing if there was anything out there, all our friends who were right here have vanished.'

'Do what?' Tails blurted. 'They can't have - ' He stopped, his head cocked to one side, listening intently for a moment. His expression was serious. 'You're right, cobber,' he said. 'Odds bodkins! I suspect foul play. Elementary, inspector! It's got to be Robotnik.'

'Slow up, dude!' Sonic exclaimed. 'We don't know that yet. Let's look at the evidence, shall we? Fact one: our friends have disappeared. Fact two: the only person we can think of who'd have a reason to do a really nasty thing like that, because he did it before, is Robotnik. Oh yeah. Case closed, I'd say.'

'A big ten-four to that, good buddy,' said Tails. 'We've gotta get hip and dig his crazy scene, find his pad, cash his chips and then everything will be copacetic. It'll be very.'

Sonic gazed at his friend with an expression that was either amazed confusion or confused amazement. 'Are you feeling okay, small furry pal?' he asked gently. 'Do you want to lie down for a while?'

'Top o' the world, ma,' Tails said perkily. 'Never felt better.'

'Then why are you talking in gibberish, dude?' exploded Sonic, his patience with his friend finally reaching its end. Their patrol had drawn a blank on rings and Robotnik, his friends were missing, and now his sidekick was speaking some weird language from the planet Weird. It was almost too much for one hedgehog to bear before lunch.

Tails looked at the ground, then into the sky, at the ground again for luck, then finally met Sonic's gaze. 'We-ell,' he said. 'You know you've been saying I should read more books, like dictionaries, so I'd learn more? Well, I did.'

'Oh.'

'I borrowed a book from Porker Lewis, like you said.'

'Oh.'

'It was a dictionary, like you said.'

'Oh.'

'It's really good. It's called *A Dictionary of Out-of-Date Slang*.'

'Oh great,' Sonic grated. 'We've only just started on this adventure, I've no idea of what I'm meant to be doing yet, and I've got a sidekick who's going to be talking Martian at me for the whole of the rest of the book.'

'What book?' Tails asked.

'You're too young to understand,' Sonic smoothed hastily. Then a thought struck him. 'Have you been out near the crashed Wing Fortress recently, expanded vocabulary-type dude?' he asked.

'Not on your nelly, sergeant-major,' said Tails.

'Properly, please.'

'Nope – er, no I haven't, Sonic. Not for a while. Why? Do you think it's where our friends are? It's big enough for someone to hold them prisoner in there,' observed the fox.

'Possible, dude, but wrong. I saw some strange marks on the grass and there was a funny smell in the air as I passed it when I was coming back here – and I beat you again!'

'In that case you must have been going too fast to see anything properly,' objected Tails. 'We do the patrols to check the zones for Robotnik activity, remember, not to see who can do it fastest.'

'Hey,' Sonic said, 'that may be why you do it, but I know I'm a hero. I can cope with anything that Robotnik can throw at me. I'm too cool for him.' He ran a gloved paw over his spikes, preening them back into the smartest possible arrangement on his head and back.

'Not cool enough to stop your friends disappearing,' Tails reminded him. 'Are you going to show me this wild and crazy stuff by the Wing Fortress, or are you chillin' here?'



'Okay,' said Sonic. He was about to say something else, but Tails had already dropped into a running crouch, spun the twin tails that gave him his nickname for a turbo-boosted takeoff, and sped away between the palm trees. Sonic dashed after his friend, and overtook him within a few hundred metres. That was not too hard, because Tails had abruptly stopped running and was staring at something that lay under the overhang of a nearby cliff. Sonic came to a dead halt and jogged back to where the fox was standing.

Tails pointed at the object of his attention with one white-gloved paw. 'Look,' he breathed. 'It's one of Kintobor's old computer monitors, and it's working.'

Sonic looked. Tails was right: the screen of the machine was glowing brightly and showing the message 'ENTER DATA NOW' in large white letters. Under the screen the keyboard looked like it had been out in the rain for about four years, which it had, but otherwise the machine appeared to be in perfect working order.

'It can't be,' Sonic breathed. 'I mean, yeah, there are loads of these old computers lying around, but the information-gathering programs that Kintobor used to run on them went *phut* when the Retro-Orbital Chaos Compressor blew up, and most of the machines ended up with either gold rings or weird science-type power-up devices inside them. Even if this one doesn't, it shouldn't be working. This makes no sense at all, dude.'

'I know,' Tails said as he stared at the screen. 'I'm too young to remember the computer system when it was running properly, but I've never seen a computer that didn't have a power-up in it. What do we do?'

'We go and ask Porker Lewis what he thinks – no we can't, because we don't now where he is. Nuts,' said Sonic. 'Why is there never a boffin around when you need one?' He sat down on a nearby rock and put his chin in his paws, thinking hard. Next to him, Tails straightened up and flexed his fingers.

'This situation calls for a hero,' he said.

'Yeah, dude, and he's sitting here,' Sonic muttered, but Tails was already striding over to the computer. Sonic leaped to his feet, about to dart towards his friend and drag him back, but before he could start running the fox bent down and pressed a button on the keyboard. The message on the screen flickered and changed.

'DATA ACCEPTED, ANALYSING SPECIMEN,' it read. A thin beam of white light stabbed out of the front of the monitor and fixed itself on the tip of the fox's left ear. Tails gave a short, sharp yelp and froze solid, his mouth open and his eyes staring at the machine which held him. The beam of light whipped across his ear, backwards and forwards, as if scanning it, and then moved downwards to cover the rest of his head, and then his body, arms and legs.

Sonic stood back, unable to decide whether he should sprint in to try to grab his friend from the beam and risk being paralysed and analysed too, or watch to see what happened. The latter seemed safest; and besides, the beam did not seem to be harming Tails at all.

The white light ray reached the toe of Tail's right foot and disappeared back into the screen. The words there flickered and changed again.

'ANALYSIS COMPLETE. ACCEPTING SPECIMEN.'

'Noooooooo!' yelled Sonic, diving across the ground towards his friend, but he was already too late. As his arms closed around Tails, the fox's orange body flowed out of his grasp as if it was made completely of smoke or light. It began to twist its shape, becoming thin and flat, then disappeared with a faint *whoosh* and a sigh into the machine's screen.

Sonic stared at the machine in disbelief. The message flickered one last time, changing to 'SPECIMEN ACCEPTED AND STORED' before switching back to the way it had been when the two animals had first seen it, with



the message 'ENTER DATA NOW' displayed in large white letters.

Sonic's thoughts spun like a whirlwind. Normally he would have smashed the computer into a billion pieces, but having seen his best friend sucked into it, he wasn't going to do anything that might damage the slim chance he had of rescuing the fox.

He sank down to the ground in front of the computer monitor, being careful not to get too close. Was it a heinous trap, or was the machine malfunctioning in some weird way? If he touched the keyboard, would he be sucked into it as well? Had his friends been sucked into this computer – or were all the old monitors on the planet working like this? Perhaps Robotnik had been sucked into one as well, which was why they had heard nothing from him for so long. Did this have anything to do with the strange marks he had spotted near the Wing Fortress? Most important of all, was Tails still alive inside the computer, and was there any way of getting him out?

If only he hadn't teased him about not being a real hero! Sonic knew that Tails looked up to him, but he also knew that the fox wanted to be just like him, and every time he failed it only increased his urge to prove himself a real hero in front of Sonic. That must have been what he was trying to do when he went up to the computer. Unfortunately, as Sonic knew, there was more to being a righteous hero than just being brave and foolhardy in the face of the unknown: and now the fox had learned that, to his cost.

Sonic looked up at the screen. It still displayed the words 'ENTER DATA NOW', but as he watched it flickered slightly. The hedgehog was instantly on his feet and backing away, ready to spring in case anything like a beam of white light should appear from it, but instead the letters of the three words wavered and shimmered. Some disappeared, leaving the rest reading 'ENT AT NO' for a second, and then they too vanished. The screen went

black, but patterns of static and lines of interference jumped across it. Slowly a wavering, fuzzy image began to appear in the middle. It was very small, but it was also very orange.

'Tails?' said Sonic in a tiny voice. The image grew a bit bigger, and the familiar face of his friend became clearer. It was grainy and bitty, but Sonic could make out his friend's expression of panic.

'Sonic?' crackled a voice from the computer's tiny speaker. The mouth of the picture of the screen moved, slightly out of synch with the words.

'Sonic, are you there? It's dark in here, and I can't get out. There are other things in here with me. And I'm scared.'