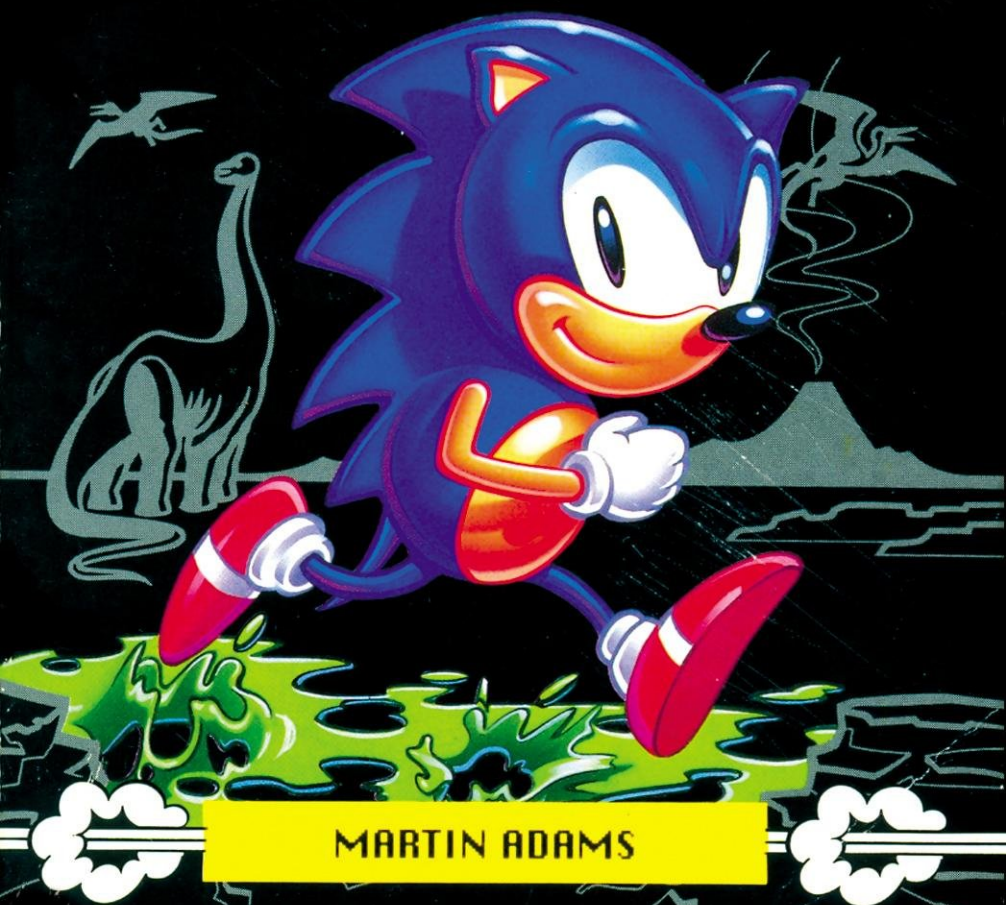


SONIC THE HEDGEHOG™

In The Fourth Dimension



MARTIN ADAMS

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THE
HEDGEHOG

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SONIC
THE
HEDGEHOG

**IN THE FOURTH
DIMENSION**

Martin Adams

Virgin

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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, streetwise 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.

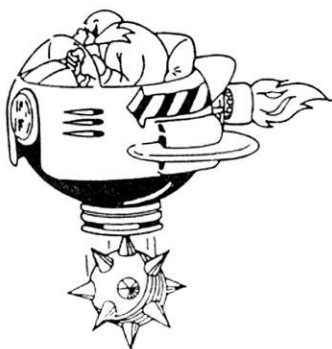
Dr K was perfecting a device – the Retro-Orbital Chaos Compressor – to attract all the evil on Mobius and contain it within six emeralds he called the Chaos Emeralds (neat name, Doc). He found the time to help boost Sonic's already radically fast footwork, too, and with the help of a special pair of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



PROLOGUE

There is a Green Hill Zone, far far away. Under it runs a series of caves and tunnels that nobody knows about. Well, none of them except one. And, as it just so happens, this one has just squeezed his bulbous form out of the equally bulbous aircar that he refers to as his Egg-o-Matic, and stands on two spindly legs in the middle of the largest cavern, surrounded by strange equipment and fascinating flashing machines.

As bald as an egg, his round face is decorated with an enormous moustache in a bright flaming red that matches his shirt almost perfectly. His black trousers seem to button almost exactly halfway up his large stomach, and his feet are large and pointed. Two things float in the air around him at all times: the horrible smell of rotten eggs, and a high-pitched chortling laugh which he will break into at a moment's notice.

In his left hand he holds a strange device. It is made of shining metal, about thirty centimetres long. Coils and curves twist around each other, and it hurts the eyes to gaze at it for too long. He waves it like a conductor waves a baton.

'Robots!' he shouts. A group of five metal figures, looking like large beetles standing upright on two hind legs, stride out from a tunnel. The fat figure slots the strange metal implement into a cavity in the chest of the first robot. A small door glides shut over it, hiding it from view.

'You have your orders?' the man demands brusquely.

'Yes, Master,' the robots reply tonelessly.

'How many times – ha ha ha! – how many times do I have to tell you? It's "Yes, your Supreme Imperial Highness President-for-Life, PhD"! Are you ready to change history?'

'Yes, Master.'

'Then go and do it!' The robots do not reply but, as one, they flicker for a moment like a badly tuned television, then vanish into nothingness. The would-be Supreme Imperial Highness President-for-Life looks around the cavern, grinning widely.

'At last! At last! Ha ha! Now, Sonic, you hyperactive herbivore – ha ha ha! At last I have the ultimate weapon! I have time on my side; and now, time will tell! Ha ha ha ha!'

1

BAFFLED, BOTHERED AND BEFUDDLED

It had been a long, exhausting adventure, but Sonic knew that the end was in sight when the enormous spacecraft swooped down through the clouds and zeroed in to hover above the patch of jungle where he was standing. Its six guns swivelled jerkily in their mountings, trying to get a good aim at him.

'Yikes! Watch out!' warned Tails. 'It'll fire three times, then drop a Mega-bomb.'

Sonic nodded grimly, concentrating on the task in hand. If he didn't get this one just right he was dead. He hefted a coconut and lobbed it skywards. It curved up in an arc, over the bulk of the huge ship, landed with a *Poink!* on the back of the ship, bounced off and fell back to the ground.

'That's no good,' Tails observed unhelpfully. 'You've got to hit its cockpit – the bit that looks like it might be eyes if the thing was a giant squid, which it isn't of course, but. . .'

'Tails?'

'Yes, Sonic?'

'Shut up!' Sonic hefted another coconut and hurled it expertly at the spaceship. This one sailed straight and true

and the massive alien craft flickered and shook from the impact as all of its guns fired at once. The hedgehog dodged away left, easily avoiding the salvo of energy beams, to the convenient pile of coconuts stacked nearby. He chucked two more into the air and dodged the next blast of beams, watching with delight as his missiles smashed into the top of the ship. Two of its massive guns were now out of action, their mountings coconutted into twisted metal.

The hedgehog darted from left to right, grabbed a final coconut, leaped high into the air and hurled it down with a wallop in the middle of the cockpit, smack between where its eyes undoubtedly would have been were it indeed a giant squid. Bright light exploded from every point in the ship and it promptly fell apart with a shaking, groaning roar that rattled the speaker of the Game Gear. Sonic stared down at its screen in surprise.

““YOU WIN”? You mean that’s all there is to it? I thought you said this was a tough game!”

‘It’s really tough. It took me weeks and weeks,’ Tails protested. ‘I just didn’t expect you to be so flipping good at it. *TreeMan II: Moss Perot’s Revenge* is a really good game when you get into it.’

‘But I did get into it,’ Sonic replied. ‘I got so far into it that I came out the other end. In an hour and a half.’ He put the sleek black shape of the Game Gear on a nearby rock. ‘I dunno, man, *TreeMan*’s just not a convincing hero, specially for a real champion like me. No way can I believe in a bogus wooden dude whose catchphrase is “I’ll be bark!”.’

Tails sniffled. ‘I’m sorry, Sonic. It’s just that you’re – well, you’re so good at everything and I try to be as cool as you but it’s really hard. I do my best. Really. Like at video games –’ He paused to blow his nose noisily on one of the twin tails that gave him his nickname. ‘But you’re so heroic and spiky and blue that a little orange fox like me has no hope of ever, ever being as good as you. . .’ His voice trailed away pathetically.



Sonic looked at his little pal. He knew that Tails was not as good as him, and he knew why: because nobody else, anywhere, ever, was half as good at anything as Sonic the Hedgehog. But all the same, he felt bad to see his friend getting upset about it.

'Chill, little dude,' he said. 'You're still half my age, you've got plenty of time to get better. And let's face it, you've got the coolest teacher in the world to help you out. Now, what'll we do with the rest of this most triumphantly glorious afternoon?'

It was a glorious afternoon. The sun shone down from a pure blue sky, warming the Green Hill Zone, possibly the most beautiful area on the planet Mobius. It was an unspoiled paradise with gently undulating hills covered in thick green grass, decorated with attractive flowers and beautiful tall palm trees, and with plenty of cliffs, slopes, ramps, bridges and tunnels for the fast friends to race along, while streams, waterfalls and rocks made good obstacles for them to practise their jumping. There were even strange looped constructions where the two friends could perform their special stunts at top speed.

Sonic and Tails stood in the middle of this tropical splendour. A few faint wisps of cloud decorated the sky, and the whispering roar of the waterfalls could be heard in the distance as the streams poured down into the huge lake, where other inhabitants of the Green Hill Zone would undoubtedly be playing on a fine afternoon like this. Tux the penguin would be sporting with Joe Sushi, a grouchy but amusing walrus. Porker Lewis the pig would be teasing Johnny Lightfoot the rabbit, while Flicky the bluebird fluttered above their heads. Meanwhile, kind-hearted Sally Acorn the squirrel would probably have prepared a picnic for them all.

'Shall we go and join the others?' Tails suggested, cheering up a bit at the thought of some food.

'Good call,' Sonic agreed. 'Race you. Loser does all the

washing-up after the picnic!' He glanced around but Tails was already a blur of orange streaking towards the lake like a small furry thunderbolt. His twin tails were whirring like a propeller, giving him an extra boost of speed. In a second he was over the top of the next hill and almost out of sight.

'Give the little dude a head start,' Sonic smiled to himself. The hedgehog started running on the spot, spinning his feet faster and faster until his special running shoes were a blaze of red on the ground. Then he crouched down. His spikes curved over his back to form an almost perfect circle and his whole body started to spin on the spot like a blue flywheel. He had done this many times before and knew the exact moment to let himself go, which was . . . Now!

With a whoosh, he shot off across the bumpy ground, spinning over the grass at an incredible speed. Trees and bushes flickered past in a blur as he sped towards Tails. As the fleet-footed fox looked back to see where his friend was, Sonic hit a slight bump and flew up into the air, soaring over a stream and two trees to land back on his feet just in front of his pelting pal.

'Gotcha!' he shouted into the wind. 'And now I'm going to beat you!' He raced away towards the lake, but Tails was not going to lose so easily. Whirling his tails, he put on an extra burst of speed and gave chase.

As the two topped the last hill before the lake, they were almost neck-and-neck. Below them lay the sandy beach, the other animals lying in the bright sunlight in an array of fetching beachwear.

'I'll – beat – you – yet,' Tails panted, pounding his paws against the ground as fast as was foxily possible. Sonic smirked to himself and pushed up to top speed for the final sprint. He began to draw away from the frantic fox. Then, unexpectedly, his foot caught on something sticking up out of the ground, and he fell, sprawling, to the ground. Tails, hard on his heels, tripped over Sonic's leg and went flying.



He landed further down the hill and rolled out of control down to the bottom, across a stretch of open ground, over the beach, through Sally Acorn's carefully prepared picnic and into the lake. He hit the water with a great splash that drenched everyone, and sat up in the shallows, coughing and spluttering. Everyone was staring at him. He waded ashore, looking at his feet, unable to meet their angry gazes.

'Sorry,' he muttered apologetically, squeezing the water from his tails. 'Was an accident. Didn't mean to go so fast. Won't happen again. But – ' he added, cheering up a bit, 'did you see me? I beat Sonic! I don't think I've ever run so fast in my life.'

'Well done,' said Sally Acorn, her brown fur splattered with cream from one of the cakes that Tails had rolled through. 'Since you're now the fastest creature in the Green Hill Zone, you can do all the washing-up for the picnic. It shouldn't take a speed demon like you more than half a minute.'

'Aw no!' exclaimed Tails. 'Not fair! The *loser* was meant to do all the washing-up, that's why we were having the race. Sonic, you tell her.'

The blue hedgehog had trotted down from the top of the hill where he had tripped, but his mind was clearly on other things. In his paws he held a strange object made of some kind of metal. It was about thirty centimetres long, twisted and rusted, with bits of moss and lichen sticking to it. He was staring at it carefully as he approached his friends.

'Hey, any of you guys recognise this?' he asked. The friends shook their collective heads. There was something very odd about the way that the lines of the metal curved and twisted around each other to form strange whorls and knots. Tails was certain that he had never seen anything like it before.

'It doesn't look like anything that Robotnik has ever made,' he said. 'It's much too intricate and complicated for

that. The only things that were left in the Green Hill Zone after the last time he tried to take over Mobius were a few springs, some of those computer screens and all the millions of bits from the robots you smashed. That definitely isn't any of them.'

'Smart thinking, my foxy friend. I was just gonna say that,' said Sonic. He turned to Porker Lewis, who was studying the device carefully. 'What do you reckon, Porkie? You're a boffin-type science dude.'

'Whatever it is, it's a single machine, not some part of a bigger device. That much is obvious. And the dial and button on its side don't work any more. Where did you find it?' asked the pig.

'On top of that hill. I was hitting terminal velocity, my foot hit this thing sticking out of the ground and boom. Wipe out!' Sonic grinned. 'That was why Tails beat me, so I hereby volunteer my most excellent and totally heroic washing-up skills to the aid of this picnic. Unfortunately.'

'You can *both* do the washing-up then,' said Sally, who was beginning to get annoyed. 'And there'll be plenty of it to do, after your small friend did his speeding steamroller impression through the middle of our picnic. Just look at the mess!'

She turned to point at the offending scene of chaos, but there was no mess to be seen. Nor, for that matter, was there any picnic. The lakeside beach where all the food had lain was completely bare and empty. There was a moment of complete silence as all the friends digested this fact, and then another silent moment as they realised that facts would probably be the only things they would be digesting this afternoon. The tranquillity was broken by Sally.

'Who did this?' she protested. 'That isn't funny! Whoever took all the food, bring it back right now! When I get my paws on –'

'Yo, Sally,' Sonic interrupted. 'Chill. Nobody took the food; it's just gone. Look at the sand.'



'It's sand, Sonic. Just ordinary sand.'

'No way! Look! The sand on our beach was always pure and white, like sugar. This stuff's all coarse and rough, and, um, there are sharp stones in it. And look closer. Where's the footprints?'

Everybody stared hard at the place where they had been laughing and playing a few minutes ago. Sonic was right. The sand, now a dirty grey colour, was completely smooth, with no sign of their tracks, spilled food or the path where Tails had rolled through the picnic and into the water. As the group stepped towards it, the new surface of the beach felt hard and gritty under their feet. The lake water that lapped against it in little waves looked more murky and unpleasant than it had done a minute before.

Johnny Lightfoot stopped and sniffed the air, his rabbit nose twitching. 'Does anyone else smell something nasty?'

Sonic took a deep breath, and almost choked on it. 'Yuck! Yeah! I recognise that unsavoury whiff, dude. Did I ever tell you gang about the place where Robotnik was pouring hot oil into the oceans to pollute them, last time he was pulling his megalomaniac stunt? He called it the Oil Ocean Zone. The water was so foul and full of gunk you could almost walk on it. Tails and I trashed all his machines up good, but the zone smelled just like this.'

Tails nodded. 'Yeah. I was very scared. But what could be causing it, Sonic? He had a huge factory in the Oil Ocean Zone, and there's nothing like that around here.'

Sonic bent down to look at a stone on the beach. 'I dunno. Porkie, you got any science-type clues about what's going down? Is it anything to do with this weird thing I tripped over? Did that activate something, maybe?' There was no answer. 'Porkie?' Sonic asked, picking up the stone and looking around. There was no sign of Sonic's piggy playmate.

'WHOOOOAH! Whatever it is, it got Porker! Everybody

stand very still!' instructed the hedgehog. He was feeling rather confused by these recent events, but he knew that as the Green Hill Zone's resident hero, it was up to him to take charge and show some leadership. Otherwise the other animals might start to panic, which would be a bad thing, and Sally Acorn would start to boss them around, which would give Sonic a headache.

He looked around the small group of friends who stood cowering on the beach. A dark cloud had blown in front of the sun, throwing gloomy shadows over the area, making them look more forlorn than they probably were. Sonic counted their heads to check who was still there: Tails; Sally Acorn; Flicky the Bluebird; Johnny Lightfoot; Chirps; Tux; Joe Sushi; and there was someone else.

'Porker?' he called hopefully, but as the new figure turned to look at him he realised it was someone else and his heart sank. 'Hey, who are you, and what are you doing here instead of my pal Porker Lewis?' he asked.

'Stop fooling around, Sonic,' Chirps said. 'It's Carrie.'

'Carrie?' asked Sonic, looking at the newcomer. She was large, standing several centimetres taller than the others, and she had powerful limbs and big buck teeth, built for gnawing. Her tail was long and thin. She looked like a fat rat, except that she was too big and her claws were rather too long and sharp. 'Carrie?' asked Sonic again.

'Yeah, Carrie who?' Tails demanded uncertainly.

'Carrie the Coypu, you twit,' answered Sally Acorn. 'She's lived in the Brown Hill Zone longer than you have.'

'The WHERE?' exploded Sonic and Tails in unison.

'Oh, stop it you two,' Sally said. 'The Brown Hill Zone. Here. Home. Who's this Porker Lewis bloke you were talking about?'

'Yeah,' Flicky added. 'Porker who?'

Tails turned to Sonic. 'I have absolutely no clue what is going on,' he whispered, 'but I don't like it at all. Are they having us on? Please say it's all a big joke.'



'Okay. It's all a big joke, dude,' replied the hedgehog, his face solemn. 'But I have a really bad feeling that this joke's on us. I think we're in deep, deep, serious, really deep trouble right now. Look at this.' He held out the large pebble he had picked up from the beach and turned it over. On the underside, etched into the stone in shallow grooves, were the words *Copyright © Robotnik Industries*.

'Crikey!' Tails exclaimed.

As if in answer, a rumble of thunder sounded in the distance. The clouds were growing thicker and darker, dimming all the colours in the zone and shadowing it with greys and blacks, but as the two animals looked around they could see that the nearby hills were, in fact, brown. With a sound like a shotgun, the heavens opened and thick rain mixed with icy hail began to pour out of the skies. The group broke and ran from the beach, sprinting for the shelter of some nearby palm trees. The trees did not look nearly as tall or healthy as Sonic remembered, but they did offer some protection from the downpour.

'I've never seen hail in the Green Hill Zone before,' Tails blurted, scampering up to the tree a few paces behind Sonic.

'What do you mean? It rains and hails here all the time, you silly boy.' It was the newcomer to the zone, Carrie, who appeared from behind the tree-trunk. 'I'm worried about you two. You've been behaving very oddly,' she continued, sidling up to Tails and running fingers tipped with sharp claws through the white quiff of hair that stood out from his forehead. 'Especially you, darling. Are you feeling all right?'

'Ow! Gerroff!' spluttered the indignant fox. 'I'm not all right at all, I'm fed up. First Sally's nasty to me even though I won the race, then everything starts disappearing or changing, and you appear out of nowhere –'

'I did not appear out of nowhere! I've lived here for ages, and we've been engaged to be married for simply yonks

now!' exclaimed the coypu. 'Are you sure you're not feverish, my sugar plumpkin?' Sonic caught one glimpse of the fox's startled expression, decided that discretion was the better part of valour and ducked down onto his knees. There was something he wanted to check.

The ground the base of the tree was soft from the rainwater that was dripping through the leaves overhead. Carrie was having a battle keeping hold of Tails as he wriggled in her muscular arms, and every so often moved her feet to keep her balance. Sonic looked down at the impressions she had left in the muddy ground. There, as he suspected, was a reversed copyright © symbol imprinted in the earth. There must be a mark like that on the bottom of her foot! That meant that somebody had made her, or at least was claiming they had made her, and on planet Mobius there was only one villain villainous enough to think they could get away with that.

'Robotnik!' yelled Sonic to the unheeding air. 'What have you done this time, you heinous fiend? I'll get you! Me and Tails will track your mangy hide down to the farthest corner of –'

'Tails,' Carrie interrupted, 'is going nowhere until he's had a nice hot bath. And I'll thank you to remember that his name is Miles Prower, and it's only his nasty common friends who call him Tails. It's not nice to make fun of someone just because they're different to you. And another thing, you so-called hero, I will not have you taking my beloved fiancé gallivanting off on another of those stupid adventures of yours. He might catch his death of cold.'

Sonic did his best to ignore this, and peered out into the cold rain. It seemed to be easing a little, judging by the size of the splashes on the surface of the lake. As he watched the watery surface, something huge, black and scaly rose to the surface, thrashed there for a moment and sank back into the depths.



'Scratch escape route one,' he muttered to himself. Things were looking worse and worse by the moment, and he knew that something had to be done as soon as possible before they got unbearably bad. Right now it looked as though Tails had got his hands full, or rather Carrie had got her hands full of Tails, and he would have to go it alone. 'Catch you later, dude!' he shouted, and sprinted off into the storm.

The heavy rain pelted down on him, slicking his spikes back against his skin and making it very uncomfortable to run. What made it worse was that he had no real idea which direction he was supposed to be running. All he knew was that he wanted to find Robotnik as soon as possible, destroy the evil machines he was using to cause all this insanity, get things back to normal and then go and finish the picnic which had mysteriously disappeared only a few minutes ago.

In the distance, against the dark sky, Sonic caught a glimpse of a strange green light. He put on an extra burst of speed, his red shoes slipping slightly on the mud which plastered the side of the hill he was speeding up. He was soon at the top, where he paused, trying to ignore the shocking state of his trainers, and looked around. The green light seemed to be coming from a small opening in the cliff face, halfway down the hill. Sonic jumped his way down: the rocks were a little slippery with rainwater but he was as sure-footed as a goat in mountain boots, and within moments was inside.

The cave was warm and dry, curving back into the hillside. Deep inside it, something was making a humming, pulsing noise, almost like a heartbeat, and the light was stronger back there. Sonic ventured in, feeling his way along the stone wall, towards the source of the light and sound. Just as it was becoming quite painful on his eyes, he turned to a corner to see – nothing. There was a huge circle of green light, suspended in the middle of the cave,

and in the middle was absolutely nothing; not an empty space, but even less than that. It looked grey and flat, except that it seemed to recede back into the distance, further than Sonic could see. Weird to the max!

A hand touched his shoulder and he whirled round, to see a strange spiky shape, not unlike himself. 'Hey, who are you?' he asked. 'What is this place? And what on Mobius – ' pointing at the circle of nothingness ' – is that?'

The figure stepped out of the shadows. 'The name's Eric, Eric the Echidna. I'm something of a hero in these parts. Perhaps you've heard of me?' He was covered in dark spines, almost like a hedgehog, except that his nose was much longer and more pointed. From time to time a long tongue flickered out of his mouth to play over his lips. Sonic felt very suspicious. He could not say exactly why but his years in the hero business had taught him that working on instinct was often the best way to go. Besides, this spiny impostor was nowhere near as cool as he was. The hedgehog stepped back a pace, away from the echidna and towards the circle of nothingness.

'Pleased to meet you, dude – I think,' he said. 'Okay if I just take a look at your right foot? Security check.'

'No problemski – *dude*,' replied Eric. His foot lashed out with astonishing speed. Sonic just had time to recognise the © symbol on its underside before it caught him in the midriff and catapulted him backwards into the circle of grey nothingness.

The surprised hedgehog felt himself sucked towards and into the vacuum in space and time. For a moment he clung to the edge of the nothingness, his fingers desperately trying to get a grip on the green light that flickered around it, and then the grey void surrounded him completely and he was gone.

Far away, sitting in his Egg-o-Matic, a certain bald mad scientist with an orange moustache stared at the screen in



front of him. On it was a picture of the cave, with the patch of nothingness swirling in the centre. As he watched, the spiny figure of the echidna strode into the middle of the screen and looked up at where the camera must be fixed.

'No problemski, doc,' reported the figure on the screen. 'That Sonic was a push-over, a real wuss. He's gone for good.'

'Good! Good!' exclaimed the scientist. 'You have done tremendously well, my lookalike friend. Ha ha! Now, with that pestilent pest removed from Mobius, and with my chronology resculpting well underway, I am almost ready to take my proper place once more – as the ruler of all Mobius! Aha ha ha ha! You know what they say – he who laughs longest, laughs last! And thanks to you, Eric, I have plenty to laugh about! Ha ha ha! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!'

The lunatic's mocking laughter rang out, on and on, until it seemed as if it would never stop. Without a hero to save the planet Mobius, perhaps it never would.