

LOST HEDGEHOG TALES – PART ONE

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Before I get into my plans of what might have been, I want to go back and look at what my intentions were leading up to the Super Genesis Wave. To understand where I was going with everything, I'd like to first explain how we got there. Or at least how I was trying to get there.

One of the things I love best in works of fiction in the long-term payoff. Intentional or not, it's when the author ties together elements from the entire life of the story to bring things together in an epiphany.

I managed to pull off one of those moments on the road between the milestone issues for *Sonic the Hedgehog #175* and *Sonic the Hedgehog #225*. When Enerjak leveled New Megaopolis, Dr. Eggman was forced to retreat to the Egg Bunker. While readers only saw an egg-shaped dome, I was intending for it to be the Death Egg II. Over the next fifty issues, the "Egg Bunker" changed hands but was always under construction. And when it finally launched, you could go back and see the groundwork had been laid.

The launch of the Death Egg II was to be the signaling of a major shift in the status quo. Up until that point in the comics, the Freedom Fighters had never truly faced a loss. They had overcome great challenges, but they'd never been set back. When Old Mobotropolis fell, they made a good life in Knothole. When they lost Old Mobotropolis to the Second Robotnik Invasion, they again made Knothole flourish. Sally recovered from "Endgame," Antoine and Bunnie got past Patch's sabotage, the robians were rescued, and so on.

The comic had settled into a comfortable pattern of "Sonic and the Freedom Fighters always come out on top." My objective between *Sonic the Hedgehog #225* and *Sonic the Hedgehog #275* was to break the team as badly as possible and watch as they put themselves back together.

Cruel? Sure. But by the end of the whole arc, there would be no question why this band of heroes always triumphed. I wanted to put them through the absolute worst case scenario, and then show how they managed to overcome all the odds. On the whole, it was meant to be a testament to the strength of their friendship, their courage, and their heroism.

Instead, I only got as far as the breaking point. So I ended up looking like a hateful madman. Whoops.

The first stumble, ominously enough, came at the very beginning. Sally's roboticization was supposed to be the final reveal of *Sonic the Hedgehog #225*. The most iconic of the Freedom Fighters, their leader through countless life-or-death missions, was now a tool for their greatest enemy.

Instead, we took a detour into "Genesis" for the Sonic franchise's fifteenth anniversary. Since this is a licensed book, I am at the whims of the license holder and direction of the editor, so the timing of the event was out of my hands. Ironically, there was talk at the time of using "Genesis" to reboot and update the comic to be more aligned to the games. I was resistant to the idea then. In retrospect, it would've saved me a lot of trouble in the long run. But what is life without its cruel ironies?

The result of "Genesis" was a double gut-punch for the reader: Sally was gunned down before the event, saved at the literal last second after the event, and then was roboticized. Ultimately, it set the tone for what I was going for – the heroes struggling against seemingly impossible and unfair odds.

It also introduced the idea of the Genesis Wave. Little did I know then how important that plot device would become.

We resumed course with *Sonic the Hedgehog* #230 and things proceeded smoothly enough until *Sonic the Hedgehog* #234. Sally was roboticized. Bunnie was deroboticized. Rotor was still off the team, sitting as a councilor on the Council of Acorn. Nicole was shaken and weakened thanks to Ixis Naugus's manipulation of the people. The only Freedom Fighter left who wasn't protected by SEGA's licensing armor was Antoine. And this is where the team finally broke. This is where Antoine died.

"Died?" you ask, looking incredulous and concerned. "He was only critically injured."

Hold on. *Lost Hedgehog Tales* explains the method to my madness. We've only just begun.

Going in, I knew roboticizing Sally would upset the readers. The entire saga was meant to upset and unsettle, but I knew she was going to be a big thing. Antoine's sacrifice was supposed to eclipse even that. If we went through with it, he would've died a hero and been the rallying point for Sonic and the others. Even if we held back on killing him off, his injuries served the same effect. The question we had going in was whether or not we really wanted to go that far – was it enough to leave him injured? Or was not following through a waste of Antoine's sacrifice?

The fans decided it for us. The fan reaction to both Sally's roboticization and Antoine's injury was bigger than I anticipated. It was enough that the editor and I agreed that it was better to have Antoine live. So, in a way, Sally – and the fandom - saved Antoine's life.

I can already sense the collective confusion and outrage. "You said you were going to put the team together again," you're thinking. "And you had a very public, very firm "dead is dead" policy in the book. How would killing Antoine work with any of that?"

That was all part of my long-term plans and we'll get to that later. But for now, whether dead or nearly dead, Antoine was out of the picture. Rotor resigned from the Council of Acorn in outrage over Nicole's exile, and Team Freedom and Team Fighters were born.

Team Fighters was put together with the intention of giving Tails and Amy some much needed page time and character interactions. Their mission was to provide Sonic support while they tracked Mecha Sally down and stopped her reign of terror.

But because the book had taken such a bleak turn, it was decided we needed a string of victories to promote a positive atmosphere. Now I couldn't have Mecha Sally succeed, or let the heroes fail. So because Team Fighters never lost a battle, Mecha Sally didn't really inspire that much terror.

Team Fighters began their mission and promptly ran into the next big stumbling block in *Sonic the Hedgehog* #237-238. We were gearing up for the "Secret Freedom" arc in *Sonic Universe*, and here they were supposed to meet a key figure: Hershey St. John.

Hershey was originally intended to be under deep cover as a Dark Egg Legionnaire. She had faked her death and infiltrated Razorklaw's chapter of the Dark Egg Legion, but hadn't had an opportunity to report her well-being to her husband, Geoffrey. My plan was that she would've met with Team Fighters, learned of Geoffrey's

allegiance to Ixis Naugus, and promptly headed for home. I'll get into greater detail about that plotline later on.

The next hiccup in plans ended up being something of a blessing in disguise. The editor felt the three teams – Freedom, Fighter and Secret – needed a bigger push. He also wanted a triptych cover by Patrick Spaziante. So the time table was pushed back three months to write “Heroes.”

“Heroes” was originally slated to run *Sonic the Hedgehog* #239-241. The idea here was that Part One would focus on Team Fighters and Part Two would focus on Team Freedom. Their respective missions would've gone oddly well with unexplained events falling in their favor. Part Three would be the Secret Freedom Fighters' story, showing how they caused all the good fortune in Parts One and Two.

I don't know what happened to the covers, but what happened to the story arc was the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. Somehow or another, a cross-promotional deal was struck where an issue of *Sonic the Hedgehog* would be distributed as a prize for a McDonald's contest. How does that work? Let's break it down:

- Archie Comics produces *Sonic the Hedgehog*, a SEGA license
- SEGA produced *Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Summer Olympics* videogame
- The Olympics were at the time promoted, in part, by McDonald's.

And so there came a very pressing need for an Olympics-themed story whose length, content and release date were up to the whims of many people above my head – and the editor's. Without “Heroes” to act as a buffer, there's no telling what would've happened to the original plans.

So “Heroes” was cut down to two issues, with the Secret Freedom Fighter plots crammed in so it could tie into the *Sonic Universe* arc. *Sonic the Hedgehog* #241 became something of a buffer, but thankfully held one of the stories I needed to tell.

Sonic the Hedgehog #241's story, “Unraveling,” was originally plotted to be a series of back-up stories. Each of Naugus's scenes – the concert, confronting King Max, confronting Jules – were all meant to be individual five page stories. It came together rather nicely as an A-Plot, though. The only major change from my original plans was the ending. Originally, I had planned for Naugus to simply trick Geoffrey. Given his weakened state and desperate situation, Naugus would've played to the heroes' sympathies. The editor thought this was too weak of an ending, so we changed it to Geoffrey becoming possessed. This still worked within the rules set by the story, and would've still worked for my long-term plans, so it was all good.

The other half of *Sonic the Hedgehog* #241 brings us to that tenacious weed: the Krudzu.

The Krudzu was first introduced in *Sonic the Hedgehog* #1 as a one-off gag. It was a mechanical weed that grew uncontrollably but was weak to water. It was hinted at in passing once or twice afterwards, but nothing came of it. When it came time to write a self-contained story for Free Comic Book Day 2010, I had some fun and resurrected the mechanical plant as the Krudzu Hybrid Hydra. If it proved popular, I'd find a way to bring it back. If not, it would've stayed destroyed. That was the plan, anyway.

When plotting out the Olympics tie-in, there was a question of if we would – or *could* – include a tie-in story to the main plotline. That way, the millions of people who picked up *Sonic the Hedgehog* #242 through McDonald's would be drawn to pick up the

next issue. We needed a done-in-one adventure – something for Team Fighters to overcome on their way to the next big story arc, “Endangered Species.”

Why not the Krudzu? Of course! It had shown itself to be resilient, and it was gag villain anyway, so a brief scuffle with it would work fine. But the Olympics tie-in turned out to be a full issue, and the Krudzu subplot was written and couldn't go to waste.

So the whole thing was transplanted – nyuck, nyuck – into *Sonic the Hedgehog* #241 so that Sonic would still have a presence in his own book. With that, I thought we were done with the Krudzu for a while. Instead, it sprouted one last time in “Endangered Species.” That's a whole other kettle of echidnas, so we'll save it for later.

The “Road to 250” was pretty bumpy by this point, but the road washed out completely by *Sonic the Hedgehog* #247. A legal settlement meant the characters and plot points I'd been building off of were no longer accessible, completely undercutting all of the build-up to this point.

Fortunately, the unprecedented *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Mega Man* crossover fell into our laps with perfect timing. Capcom approached Archie with the idea to do a Sonic/Mega Man crossover, and SEGA was immediately keen on the idea. I now had four to five months to figure out a new direction for the book while I plotted the crossover. But at the same time I had to make *Sonic* and *Mega Man* work together. How? *Sonic*'s lore was already dense and now a snarled mess, and *Mega Man* hadn't gotten far enough to introduce most of its iconic characters. I needed an in-universe way to make everything mesh.

That's when “Genesis” waved from its spot on the bookshelf and whispered “Genesis Wave.” The end result was one of the most fun, and singularly most successful, periods of the book.

“Worlds Collide” fell dead center in the middle of “At All Costs,” a story that was supposed to be a turning point in the saga. Our heroes had fallen to their lowest, they'd fought to regain control, and now they'd begin to rise again. We had reached the moment when I was finally going to put our heroes in the upswing to counter everything we'd seen so far.

Except now I couldn't.

So how were things going to turn themselves around? What was I going to do for the two hundred fiftieth milestone, had we not had the crossover? In the next part I'll get into how our heroes would rescue Sally, restore Antoine, put the band back together and triumph over even death itself.