

GeneX - The Nightmare Zone

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1. The Nightmare Zone

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The universe is a vast place. It stretches further than the furthest reaches of the imagination. Still, a single universe doesn't even scratch the surface of what's out there. Hidden in each universe is an entrance to countless other universes, dimensions, and realities. Some are nearly indistinguishable from others. Some have only slight variations from others. Still others are drastically different. Among the many alternate realities are a group inhabited by anthropomorphic animals. A common factor in many of these dimensions is a powerful force of good, an incredibly fast blue blur known in all such realities as Sonic the Hedgehog!

Some of these dimensions are places of light. Lands where, though trouble may rise occasionally, good generally triumphs in the end. In all things, however, there must be balance. For every light, there is shadow, and so there are universes of darkness as well. Places of corruption, malice, and evil. This story takes place in the world of GeneX Necros. It has a similar history to GeneX Prime. Perhaps you know of the tale these two universes share. (Detailed in "GeneX - Tails the Fox") After that adventure, these worlds become very different. GeneX Necros contains a hidden realm, absent from GeneX Prime. A realm of darkness, called the Nightmare Zone. Here, darkness reigns supreme, and this is where Dr. Eggman has moved his operations after his last plot for global domination failed...

Sonic was taking a nap on the roof of Tails Workshop in the Mystic Ruins. Things had become very quiet after Dr. Eggman seemingly disappeared. The only news lately had been about the mysterious disappearance of Sergeant Gunner, who had supposedly gone into a deep depression after his recent failures regarding the GeneX Experiments. Not that anyone cared. Gunner was a jerk, and everyone hated him by now. So, with nothing interesting going on, Sonic stayed in the Mystic Ruins, hoping that something exciting would happen soon. Suddenly, and without warning, a thunderstorm brewed in the area! Sonic woke up with a start as rain started pelting his face. "What the? It was supposed to be sunny today!" he grumbled, climbing down from the roof. "Sonic..." A voice called out to him. Looking around, Sonic noticed the Doomsayer at the bottom of the steps leading to Tails Workshop. "Hey... I saw you at Shadow Arcangel! What are you doing here?" he asked. The Doomsayer let out a menacing chuckle. "I'm just here to greet you. It's not every day that I find someone who is about to lose everything!" he said. Sonic raised an eyebrow. "Lose everything? What are you talking about?" he asked. The Doomsayer crossed his arms. "Terrible things are about to happen. After all, this IS the Halloween special! That said, I had to come, if only to wish you luck. You'll need it to survive!" he replied, blatantly breaking a few rules. (2BIT: I'm cutting your pay for that, Doomsayer!) With that, the Doomsayer vanished in his trademark hail tornado, and the

thunderstorm subsided. "OK... That was weird. Oh well. It IS Halloween..." Sonic muttered, turning to head inside Tails Workshop. Suddenly, he heard playful laughter behind him! "Wow, that storm came and went fast!" said a voice behind Sonic. He turned around and saw Char hovering in the air in front of him. "Bokkun couldn't make it, so I brought you the message today! Wait, actually, there is no Bokkun in this dimension... Never mind! Here's your message!" Char handed Sonic a small, flat hologram projector. A small hologram of Eggman appeared, but something was different about him today. He was wearing a uniform nearly identical to his usual one, but the red and black colors were reversed. His voice seemed a bit crazed and giddy. "Happy Halloween, my little blue foe! Hee hee hee hee... How've you been? Don't answer that, this is a recording. Anyway, I bet you're wondering what I've been up to lately... Well? Aren't you?" the hologram said, pausing for an answer. "Um... Maybe..." Sonic said, unsure if he was supposed to say anything. The hologram started talking again after a second. "Well, I assume you said yes. Wonder no more! Ready for this? I've conquered the Nightmare Zone! Nya-nya, nya-nya, nya!!" he said, taunting Sonic as though he thought Sonic would care. "C'mon, Eggman! That's the one place where I think your rule might be a positive influence!" Sonic said. The hologram wasn't finished. "Anyway, I'm inviting you to take a tour of my new empire, as well as a circle of your friends and mine! Well... Maybe they aren't my FRIENDS exactly... But whatever! I'm thinking you'd better come, Sonic! Otherwise, I'll be forced to do things you really won't like. And by the way, bring Tails with you. I'm not recording another message for that sidekick! Bye!!!!" With that, the hologram vanished. Char took the projector and looked at Sonic with concern. "I gotta confess something, Sonic. I think the doc's finally gone off the deep end. He's saying things. Doing things. I'm too scared to go back to the Nightmare Zone. After I deliver the rest of the messages, that's it! I'm leaving Eggman for good. I have one request to make of you. Eggman used to be so cool. I want you to try to save him from himself! Before the Nightmare Zone takes him completely..." the little Chao said fearfully. Sonic was hesitant, but just couldn't refuse a Chao. "I'll do what I can... Happy Halloween, little Chao!" he said, walking into Tails Workshop. Char flew away with a heavy heart, his normally cheerful demeanor completely gone. "It's not gonna work out... Aw, doc... What have you done!?"

Sonic soon explained the situation to Tails. "This totally reeks of a trap, Sonic. I don't think we should go. Besides, the Nightmare Zone's a no-fly zone. We won't be able to use the Tornado to get in and out. The dark magic there downs planes and other flying ships." Tails said worriedly. "So, we'll just park the Tornado at the border. What, you're not scared of ghosts, are ya?" Sonic replied. Tails looked at his feet. "It's not ghosts that worry me. It's the living monsters. No one who goes into the Nightmare Zone ever comes out, you know!" he said. "Char got out!" Sonic pointed out. Tails realized that there was no talking Sonic out of it. He went to a bookshelf in the room and pulled out a thick book. "Fine, but I'm taking this! 'Three Thousand Dos and Don'ts of Scary Scenarios!' It'll give us good advice!" Sonic rolled his eyes. "What kinda crazy book is that? Who wrote it?" he asked. "It was a collaborative effort of a bunch of people who watch a lot of horror movies. It should work here!" Tails said. Sonic felt it was just extra baggage, but if it made Tails feel better, he could bring it. With everything seemingly in order, Sonic and Tails boarded the Tornado and flew off for the Nightmare Zone...

Knuckles watched the Tornado fly by from Angel Island. By this time, Char had already come and gone. "Sonic's really going to the Nightmare Zone? I always knew he was nuts!" he said to no one. He sat down on the steps of the altar. "Let him have his suicide. Knowing Sonic, he'll probably make it out somehow anyway. I don't care what Eggman'll do if I don't go, at least he'll have to come to MY turf to do it!" Suddenly, Knuckles heard a strange sound coming from the Master Emerald! He jumped to his feet and looked around. "Heard that, eh, Eggman!! ...Huh?"

Eggman wasn't there, but the Master Emerald was. It seemed to be filled from the inside with a black smoke, and a red light shone through from the center! Knuckles peered into the emerald. "I don't know what's going on here, but it looks like there's a symbol in that smoke..." The symbol looked like Eggman's usual symbol, but more sinister and demonic! "Shoot! Char was right! Eggman's gone insane! The nightmares must've gotten to him! And he's sent them after the Master Emerald! He'll pay for that!" Knuckles growled, leaping into the air and gliding after the Tornado!

Soon, they reached the entrance to the Nightmare Zone. It was located somewhere in the forest near the Security Tower, where Copter and Puncy once stole a Chaos Emerald. There was no clearly defined border separating the United Federation and the Nightmare Zone, so Tails had to park the Tornado near the Security Tower. With Sergeant Gunner gone, no one would care. Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles were now exploring the forest. "We won't know when we're in the Nightmare Zone until we see some form of evil, like a monster or some magic thing." Tails said, his nose in the "Dos and Don'ts" book. "Let's see... Ah, number 1: Do remember to always, always, ALWAYS stay alert. Lack of attention may cause loss of life." Sonic looked a bit irritated. "We need a book to tell us THAT?! It's so obvious! Besides, we're always alert! Right, Knuckles?" he said. Knuckles looked over to Sonic. "Huh? What's that? I wasn't paying attention." he said. "C'mon, guys! This is serious! The Nightmare Zone is like a horror movie brought to life! You'll never know what's lurking out there!" Tails insisted. "Aw, we'll be fine! Just as long as we look where we're going!" Sonic said, too busy looking back at Tails to see what he was about to bump into! "Bwaaaaa!!! Monster!!! RUN!!!" They were all startled a moment, until they noticed that it was just a man in an alligator costume. Sonic recognized him after a moment. "Oh... It's just Gator." he groaned. Gator waved at them after calming himself down. (Sonic and friends had scared him, too!) "Didn't think 2BIT would forget me, did ya? I came with that girl you were with when I took you to that big tower place. She needed an escort, or something silly like that!" Gator explained. He stepped aside, letting everyone see Amy standing behind him. She immediately ran to Sonic and hugged him tightly, too tight for Sonic's liking. "Whoa! Lemme go, Amy! I can't breathe!" he shouted. "But I was lost and scared and this Gator guy's an idiot! I just came because Eggman's note said you'd be here!" Amy explained. Gator started walking away. "OK, my cameo's done! And you jerks didn't even wish me happy birthday!" he grumbled. "Your birthday's Halloween?" Tails asked. "No, silly, it's October 31st! Today I am 888 years old! Just like last year! Byeeee!" Gator said, leaving the story before scary stuff could start happening. Knuckles had grown impatient now. "Come on, guys! We're wasting time!" he grumbled. Sonic looked at Amy. "OK, you head back home now, Amy! This is waaay too dangerous for you!" he said. Before Amy could protest, Tails did for her. "Are you crazy!? Look here in the book, number 16! Don't ever send anyone on their own! The monster will kill off the lone person first! It's similar to number 1854: Do stay together. There's safety in numbers!" he pleaded. Amy nodded. "You heard the book! You wouldn't want to find out later that a monster ate me on the way home, would you!?" Sonic could tell there was no arguing this time. "Fine, but stay alert, Amy! That's rule number 1!"

The group wandered deep into the woods, and though they hadn't seen any monsters, they were soon filled with a feeling of dread that told them they had surely entered the Night Woods, the entrance to the Nightmare Zone. The trees had gone from being covered with orange leaves to being seemingly dead. A light fog covered the woods, and the clouds in the sky suggested that a thunderstorm could start at any moment. Worst of all, they each had an eerie feeling that they were being watched. "Do we have any idea where we're going?" Amy asked,

mostly just to break the silence. "No one's ever returned from here, so no one ever drew a map. So, what do you think?" Knuckles replied. Tails was still looking through his book. "Ulp... That's bad. Number 123 says 'Don't get lost.' After all, it makes it easier for monsters to find you!" he said. "Stop reading that!! We don't need a book to tell us how stupid it was to even come here!!" Sonic shouted very loudly. Tails raised his finger to his mouth. "Shhhh!! Number 11 says 'Don't make loud noises!' Monsters have ears, too!" he said. Sonic smacked himself in the face. "Monsters... monsters... WHAT monsters!? We haven't seen anything since we came into these woods!" he groaned. "BOO!!" shouted a voice up ahead. "YAAAAAHHH!!!" Amy and Tails both screamed at first. "Boy, you guys are jumpy! I might even go so far as to say cowardly!" said Rouge, who was standing ahead of them accompanied by Shadow. "Seems you all got the doctor's message, too." Shadow assumed. "Not me. He didn't think I was worth it or something." Tails said. Knuckles glared at Rouge. "I wouldn't be one bit surprised if you were already here when you got the message. This place suits you perfectly, bat girl!" he said. Rouge laughed at him. "You're cute when you're stupid. I was investigating Sergeant Gunner's disappearance when I received the message. Eggman promised me information. Since it was my only lead, I decided to go." she explained. "Seen any monsters around?" Amy asked. "That's just superstitious nonsense! There's nothing out here!" Shadow scoffed. Tails held up his book. "Number 67: Do believe in monsters! The one who doesn't believe is always first to die!" he warned. "Do shut up!" Shadow growled. "What's the matter, Shadow? Think he'll make it true by saying it?" Sonic asked. Shadow started walking away. "I don't have time for this!" he grumbled. Tails was about to protest, when Knuckles spoke up for him. "Sure you should be heading out on your own? Sounds like you're really tempting fate here, Shadow!" Sonic shook his head. "Don't bother, guys. If Tails's book is to be believed, Shadow's a goner anyway. He had a good run." he said. Amy and Rouge both looked irritated. "What's the matter with all of you!?" Amy yelled. "We're all heading the same way, anyway, so enough of this! Let's just go!!" Rouge added. With that, they all continued deeper into the woods together, whether they wanted to or not.

However, they were not alone. Something was following them, slowly and stealthily. It was so dark out that no one noticed it. Whatever it was, it was biding its time. The group had been walking for some time now, and spent much of it arguing and complaining. It seemed likely that any one of them might start a fight soon, so it was soon suggested that they take a break. They found a small clearing and set up a camp, with a fire in the center and fallen logs around it being used as chairs. "So, Shadow, seen any sign of Eggman before we met up?" Sonic asked. Shadow shook his head. "We hadn't been here long." Rouge told them. "You'd think Eggman would've sent a robot to show us the way." Amy said. "Yeah, or to pick us off." Knuckles added. "Maybe he's not even really here... Maybe he just wanted us all to get hopelessly lost..." Shadow murmured. "D-don't say that, Shadow!" Tails said nervously. Suddenly, a strong wind blew through the camp, blowing out the fire! "Aaaaaahhh!! We worked so hard on that fire!!" Amy screamed. Some creepy, impish laughter could be heard on the wind. "OK, NOW we're in the Nightmare Zone!" Tails said. "Don't be dumb! It's just wind!" Shadow growled. Knuckles nodded. "I'd have to agree. I saw scarier stuff at Pumpkin Hill." he said. Sonic climbed to his feet. "Well, fire's out. Now's as good a time as any to continue!" he suggested. As everyone stood up, a small army of rats ran through the clearing! "EEEEEEEEEEK!!!! RATS!!!!" Amy screamed, hopping up on the log she was sitting on. The rats' eyes seemed to be glowing red, and it was enough to creep most of them out. "Well, that settles it, we're not going THAT way!" Rouge said, pointing at the direction the rats were coming from. Shadow yawned. "Red-eyed rats. The Lost Ones are scarier." he said. Tails was shivering. "I don't know about that..." he said. Sonic was first to start leaving. "C'mon. Let's try to get somewhere before Rouge's

cousins swarm us!" he said. "Very funny! A swarm of rabid hedgehogs would be scarier!" Rouge shouted. As they all started following Sonic, Knuckles thought he heard something in the woods nearby. "Anyone else hear a rustling?" he asked. "Probably just the rats." Shadow said. They would have been willing to accept that explanation, if some bushes nearby didn't start shaking violently! All of them quickly backed away from the bush, cautiously waiting to see what would emerge...

A robot slowly stomped out of the bushes. It looked similar to Alpha, but a bit rustier. It was green and black, and its eyes glowed a deep blue. It bowed politely to show it meant no harm. "Welcome. I am E-1X. Call me... Xenegg. The doctor has sent me to lead you to his palace." said the robot. Its voice sounded somewhat creepy, but it didn't appear to have any weapons. The group calmed down somewhat. "What do you know? He DID send a robot." Amy said. Knuckles thought the robot sounded like a butler. "All right, lead the way, Jeeves!" he said. Xenegg turned to his right. "Very good, sir. All of you, please keep up." As they started to walk away, Tails was looking through the book again. "Uh, guys? Number 124 says 'Don't trust butlers. They're usually evil!'" he warned. The whole group groaned in annoyance. "Of course he's evil! He works for Eggman! But he knows his way around here better than we do, and we'd like to find our way through here tonight!" Sonic shouted. Xenegg turned around. "If you please, do not shout. There are feral creatures in these woods. It would not do for you all to die before seeing the doctor." it said, "Now, follow me... but don't be slow." They all started following Xenegg. It seemed to them, though, that Xenegg would be rather slow himself. "You know, it's kind of hard for us not to be slow when we have to follow a rusty old robot! I'm a bit surprised you caught up with us before we found the palace!" Rouge said. Xenegg glanced back at her. Strangely enough, his glowing, robotic eyes seemed to be glaring. Suddenly, the robot rose into the air and started flying off through the woods at high speed! Sonic and Shadow quickly took off after it, with Tails, Knuckles, Amy, and Rouge doing their best to keep up! "Thanks a lot, blabbermouth bat! You made him run!" Amy shouted. "Quiet, quiet! Remember the book!" Tails warned. "I ain't scared! I'll make all the noise I want! HEY, MONSTERS!!! COME ON OUT AND GET US, YOU COWARDS!!!" Knuckles yelled, sick of hearing about the book. It seemed unreal that a robot as old and broken up as Xenegg could move so fast, but Sonic and Shadow were still quick enough to keep up. A smoky fog was making it harder, though, and Sonic was worried the others would get lost. "Hey, Xenegg! Slow it down a bit! The others can't run that fast!" he shouted. "There isn't time to waste. The hour is growing late, and it is immensely dangerous the closer it gets to midnight!" Xenegg said. Luckily, the fog was beginning to dissipate a bit, but it still wouldn't be easy for the slower members of the group to keep up. "We're stuck in a dark, rat infested woods, chasing an impossibly fast robot, through a fog, running into a trap.... I think I should've stayed home!" Amy said, panting from the effort of running. "Oh, well it could still be worse!" Tails said. "How?" Knuckles grunted. "Don't say it!!" Rouge shouted. Tails couldn't see the harm. "It could be raining!"

With a crash of thunder and a strike of lightning, a terrible downpour started as though reacting to Tails's words. "What, that book didn't warn you about THIS!?! NEVER say how it can be worse! It'll often end up happening!" Rouge yelled. Suddenly, they caught up with Sonic and Shadow, who had stopped at a large, dead tree. "Sh-sh-shadow... Did you just see what I think I saw?" Sonic said, eyes wide with surprise. "It seemed like Xenegg flew right through this tree... Then disappeared." Shadow explained to the group as they caught up. "What do you mean? The tree still looks solid..." Knuckles said. "Maybe he flew over the tree..." Amy said a bit nervously. "By the way, who turned on the rain?" Sonic grumbled, "Now my shoes are getting muddy!" They all started looking for Xenegg, but the robot appeared to be gone. "NOW where

do we go?" Tails asked. Another sudden wind blew through the area, followed by the same creepy laughter they'd heard earlier, only this time it was louder! "I think we've been followed..." Shadow said, realizing this sound couldn't be mere wind. The wind seemed to be blowing stronger, and each of them had to brace themselves to keep from being blown around! In a moment, it calmed down, but as they looked around, they realized they were not alone. Some white flames had appeared scattered about the air around them. They weren't touching anything! "H-how is that fire burning?" Tails wondered fearfully. Suddenly, the flames grew larger, and began to take ghostly shapes! Tails, Amy, and Rouge yelped with fear and alarm, while Sonic and Knuckles simply looked shocked. Shadow took on a defensive stance. "G-g-ghosts!! What do we do!?" Amy yelled. Knuckles raised his fists. "We fight 'em!" he said. Tails was looking through the book again. "Um... 2332.... Do not bother fighting ghosts. They're already dead, you can't hurt them!" he said. Sonic looked as though he had an idea. "There's only one thing left to do, then!" he said, "RUUUUUUN!!!!!" With that, they all ran off around the dead tree and headed off in the direction Xenegg had been going, half of them screaming. The ghosts began chasing them, attempting to fly into them as they ran! The ghosts were attacking so relentlessly, that they soon found themselves running off in different directions! Sonic soon found himself running alongside Knuckles, while in another direction Tails was running with Amy. Still heading straight was Shadow and Rouge, and most of the ghosts continued chasing them.

After a while, Tails and Amy managed to escape the ghosts. Unfortunately, they couldn't see Sonic or the others anywhere. "Ohhhh, great... We've split up... I think this was two numbers in the book for a reason!" Tails said. Amy was carrying her piko piko hammer now, ready to clobber anything that approached them. "Too late to do anything about that now, Tails. We'll just have to find the way to Eggman's place ourselves. I'll bet Sonic'll be there waiting for us!" she said. They had no idea where they were, though, and they had no idea how far they were from the palace. Soon, though, Tails had an idea. "I know! I'll fly up over the trees and see if I can spot the palace! Wait right here, Amy!" he said. Amy looked nervous. "All right... But don't be long..." she said. Tails jumped into the air and spun his tails, allowing him to rise up over the trees. A bird's eye view gave him a much better sense of the magnitude of their situation! The woods stretched for miles, and he could see eerie white lights coming from many of the treetops! It was surely more of the ghosts! Luckily, he could also see a large castle in the distance. It was a large, black palace, with a large central tower marked with Eggman's symbol. It was far, but not too far. If they hurried, they may even reach it before midnight! However, closer to their present location, Tails could see a crashed ship. "No way... It can't be!" he gasped, dropping back down to the ground. Amy could tell he'd seen something unexpected. "What is it?" she asked. Tails pointed in the direction of the crashed ship. "Shadow Arc. That big ship crashed here! I didn't think it could fly without the Chaos Emeralds..." he said. Amy thought about it. "Hmmm... That means that rat and his experiments could be here... But what about the palace? Did you see it?" she asked. Tails nodded. "It's in the same direction as Shadow Arc. Maybe Eggman sent a message to Bucky, too..." he said. At any rate, it seemed they were going to pass by the ship, so they might as well check it out. They walked hastily, but carefully, hoping not to get the attention of the ghosts in the woods. As they neared Shadow Arc, they were suddenly startled by a loud yell! "TAILS!!!" someone was shouting. Tails and Amy screamed, thinking it was something dangerous! They saw someone approaching them, so Amy raised her hammer and ran at the intruder! "Stay back, ghosts!!" she shouted! She hit someone, who promptly fell over. "OW!! OWWW!! UNCLE!!!" shouted Punchy, the person Amy had hit. Rainbow was right behind him. "See, One? I told you it was just Tails and someone!" she said. Behind her was Copter. "Well, well... I never expected to see you two in a place like

this. What're YOU doing here?" he asked. Amy helped Punchy up. "Sorry... We're a little jumpy after some ghosts caused our group to get separated..." she said. "Are you my mommy...?" Punchy said, dazed. Tails was relieved to see Copter for once. "We're here because of a message from Eggman... You didn't get one?" he asked. Copter shook his head. "We came here following Bucky. Me and Punch here still have issues with our apparent creator. It seems his ship crashed after flying over these woods. Did she say ghosts?" he asked. Tails looked up at the trees. "There are ghosts everywhere in these woods. They seem to hide in the trees until they're ready to attack." he explained. "Strange... We didn't see any." Rainbow said. "Hey, would you guys come with us to Eggman's palace? We'd rather not go alone." Amy asked hopefully. Punchy had now recovered from being attacked. "Absolutely NOT! I gotta get some answers from Bucky! Like who I REALLY am! I know I'm not just a clone!" he said. Rainbow smacked him lightly. "Don't be mean, One! They're offering to take us to a palace! Sounds like fun! I say we go!" she said. "After we check out Shadow Arc!" Copter insisted. Tails agreed. "Right! We'll go with you there, first! It's on the way, anyway!" he said. With that, the five of them started on their way.

They soon reached Shadow Arcangel's crash site. Due to the fact that this was not the Mystic Ruins, there was no hole for the ship to fit into. Thus, the ship was still entirely above ground. Astonishingly, it appeared largely, if not completely, undamaged. "That ship's really built solid!" Tails said in amazement. "See any entrances?" Punchy said to no one in particular. "Maybe you should make one." Copter suggested. "Are you kidding? This thing didn't even get damaged in the crash, so I doubt I can break through it!" Punchy protested. Amy pointed to the front of the ship. "Wait, is that a door?" she asked. Rainbow ran ahead to investigate. It was a hatch of some sort, an alternate entrance for when the ship was above ground. "It's open a little..." Rainbow said, attempting to pull it open all the way. "It's stuck!" Punchy ran over and helped pull it open. Copter, Tails, and Amy arrived as Punchy and Rainbow were peering inside. "I can't believe this, but it's darker in there than it is out here!" Punchy remarked. Tails had taken out his book again, and found an entry. "Number 866: 'Do avoid dark, cavernous places. It's almost never safe!'" he said. Copter raised an eyebrow. "What the... Is that some sort of guide book?" he said. "Don't ask." Amy replied. Rainbow shivered a bit. "I know I've been in there before... But I got a bad feeling this time..." she said. Copter walked in first. "Don't be ridiculous! The only scary thing in here is Zipp! OK... and Vortex. And Bucky. And the Lost Ones, if they're still in here.... Whatever. I've never backed away from them before!" he said. Tails sighed sadly. "What a brave me. I'll miss him." he said. Amy grabbed him by the arm. "Oh, no you don't! There could be food and stuff inside! I'm hungry! Let's go, Tails!" she said, dragging him inside. Punchy and Rainbow followed. "I'm no coward! Outta my way you guys! I'll go first!" Punchy said. "Follow me, everyone!" Rainbow shouted, running out front. Behind them, something else was peering into the entrance to the ship. Its glowing yellow eyes were all that could be seen in the dark...

Meanwhile, Shadow and Rouge had lost the ghosts. At the same time, they were the first to reach Eggman's palace! "That was easy." Shadow said, feeling rather superior to the other "cowards" that were in the group earlier. "Looks like we're the only ones here." Rouge pointed out. Shadow looked around. "I guess I should go find the others before continuing. They may need my help... In running from their own shadows." he said. "Want me to come with you?" Rouge asked. "I don't need any help. Wait here, but stay alert. Who knows what Eggman is planning." Shadow replied, heading back into the woods. Rouge watched him go, then turned her attention to the palace. "Wow, how could we have so much trouble finding this big place? I

wonder if Eggman actually built it, or it was already here..." she said to herself. She walked to the entrance and opened the door. "There can't be any harm in looking around. I bet Eggman's just got a few of his typically useless robots standing guard. He's so predictable." She stepped into the large entrance room of the palace. It seemed unlikely that the place was built by Eggman, as there didn't even appear to be any lights inside, save a couple of dimly lit torches. It seemed almost like a tomb inside, with only a few creepy gargoyle statues as decoration. Across the room was a staircase that seemed to lead directly into the central tower. The place gave Rouge the creeps. "Char was right, Eggman's lost it. Why else would he start hanging around a place like this?" As she looked around, Rouge began to hear faint sounds coming from somewhere in the room. It seemed like something was stealthily moving around. "H-hello? Is that you, Shadow? No, I suppose not... Who's there!?" she shouted. The sounds of movement began growing louder, and Rouge was beginning to worry. "Eggman... I'm warning you... I'm, in no mood for jokes!" The sound continued to grow closer, but Rouge still couldn't see anything. Then, she came to a realization. The sound was behind her! She quickly turned around to face whatever was approaching her, but didn't even get a chance to see what it was...

Elsewhere, Sonic and Knuckles had managed to escape the ghosts as well. Those ghosts did not appear to actually be out to harm them. Instead, it seemed they were only interested in scaring them. Looking around the area where they'd stopped to rest, they spotted Xenegg. "Hey, where did you disappear to?!" Knuckles asked. Xenegg shrugged. "I told you all to keep up. You simply did not. Don't blame me." it said. Sonic recalled what he thought he saw earlier. "I could've sworn I saw you fly through a tree!" he said. "This is the Nightmare Zone, Sonic. You cannot trust your eyes, for the forest plays tricks. I flew above the tree." Xenegg said. Knuckles looked up at the lights in the trees. "Then... Are those ghosts a trick of the eyes, too?" he asked. Xenegg shook his robotic head. "No, they are quite real. Why, don't you believe in ghosts?" it asked. Sonic and Knuckles glanced at each other with uncertainty. Xenegg seemed to take offense to this. "There are worlds of things beyond what the mortal eyes can normally see! You'd do well to remember that! At any rate, those lights are the spirits that never returned from this zone... The souls of the damned. They are trapped here, stuck in an endless nightmare. If you are not more cautious, you and your friends will join them!" the robot warned. Sonic didn't like Xenegg's tone. "Hey, don't get mad at us! We wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for your boss!" he said. Xenegg calmed down a bit, but not completely. "Regardless, you have separated. It would be wise of you to find your friends quickly." Knuckles scratched his head. "Right... So, which way do we start..." he said. Sonic looked back where they came. "Maybe they went back to the place where we took that break..." he suggested. "I believe you will find your friends in that direction. Whether they still live or not will be up to how fast you get there." Xenegg said, pointing. Sonic grinned at the mention of the word "fast." "You know who you're talking to? C'mon, Knuckles, let's move!" he said. Xenegg had one last thing to say. "I cannot go with you. Not now. I have things to attend to. You are on your own, for now..." With that, Sonic and Knuckles left Xenegg behind.

As Tails, Amy, Copter, Punchy, and Rainbow explored Shadow Arcangel, they noted that there appeared to be no sign of Bucky or his experiments. In fact, there were no signs of life at all. It was eerie. "What do you think happened to everyone?" Amy asked after a while. Copter shrugged. "It's taken us a while to track this ship down. They could've abandoned it a while ago." he said. Tails was constantly looking through the book, hoping to be ready if anything happened. "Number 4: Do be cautious, even in seemingly empty places. The emptier it seems,

the more likely it is that a monster's hiding out somewhere." he read. "Are you reading that thing in any particular order?!" Punchy asked. Tails didn't respond, but it seemed clear he was flipping pages at random. Rainbow seemed particularly creeped out by the situation. "I got a bad feeling about this. Like there's some evil thingy following us..." she whispered. Copter laughed out loud. "Puh-lease! You guys are taking that dumb book too seriously. There's no such thing as monsters... well, unless you count the Lost Ones." he said. They had by now entered the room with the containment unit that once held Kosmo the Morph. "Let's look around in here. If we don't find anyone, we'll check the control room next!" Punchy suggested. It was a large room, so they each looked around individually, with Tails sitting with his nose in the book near the entrance. Amy had walked over to check out the containment unit, which was still opened. It was dark inside, but she could see lights. "Hey, guys! I think I've found.... some... thing..." Her voice trailed off as she squinted to see inside the cell better. "It's probably nothing. After all, what would be in there now?" Copter said from where he was standing. Suddenly, Amy's horrified shrieks pierced through the room, causing the others to jump to action! Tails approached with the most caution. "N-Number 2666... Don't run toward screams, that'll only allow the monster to get..." His voice trailed off as they saw inside the containment unit. Amy was lying on the ground, eyes shut. Copter walked over and examined her. "Oh... God... She's... dead. Her neck's broken...." he said, horrified! Rainbow had begun to cry. "But... she's so young... Younger than me! Why..." she sobbed. Tails held back tears as he read the book. "2667... Don't waste time mourning the dead. Escape before you die, too..." he said. Looking into the cell, Copter saw a pair of glowing yellow eyes! "...RUN!!!" he shouted as the apparent monster jumped after them! They wasted no time running away, they didn't even have time to get a good look at the monster! All they could tell was that its body appeared blacker than night!

Without once looking back, the group ran as fast as their feet would carry. Copter was leading the way, as he was the only one who quite remembered the way back. "What... is that thing!?" Punchy shouted as they ran. "A monster! What have I been telling people about this whole time!?! Now, because no one listen to me... Amy..." Tails said angrily, bursting into tears as he continued to run. "Don't worry, Tails... We'll think of something... Maybe we can even save her..." Rainbow said, hoping to comfort him. "Don't lie, Rainbow! She's dead! There's no saving the dead!" Copter yelled. It was a harsh reality, but he felt they had to face it. Looking back, he slowed down a bit. "I don't think it's following us..." he realized. "It's probably hiding so it can get the drop on us again..." Tails said fearfully. "Maybe it's not a monster. Maybe Pinky just scared it, and it thought it was defending itself..." Rainbow suggested. Punchy resumed heading for the exit. "I'd rather not think about what it's doing. Let's listen to the silly book for a change and get out of the place with the monster!" he said. They all agreed, and resumed running. They had to survive, after all. They had to warn the others that this place really was dangerous.

Sonic and Knuckles had been wandering in the direction Xenegg had sent them. Every place in the woods looked pretty much the same, though. They couldn't tell if they were on the right track, or if they were going in circles. "Man, it was a dumb idea to come here... Why'd I do it again?" Knuckles wondered aloud. "Aw, this place isn't as bad as all that. Sure, there's a few ghosts, but not much else. Get ahold of yourself, Knuckles!" Sonic said. Knuckles was thinking about what had happened to the Master Emerald. "I wonder what Eggman did exactly... I've never seen the Master Emerald do anything quite like that..." he said to himself. Sonic suddenly gasped with alarm as he and Knuckles reached Shadow Arc's crash site! "That was unexpected! What's this ship doing here!?" he said. "And why the heck would they land it in the middle of nowhere?" Knuckles wondered. Sonic remembered what Tails had told him. "Ships

can't fly in the Nightmare Zone! It must've crashed... But it sure looks like it landed normally! There's not a scratch on it!" he remarked. After a bit of thought, they realized that this had to be the place Xenegg was pointing to. "The others could be here... Somewhere... Maybe they went inside." Sonic suggested. Knuckles looked around. They were standing at one side of the ship, and it was pretty large. "See any entrances, Sonic?" Knuckles asked. "I'll find the entrance. You look around the outside of the ship. One of us should find the others." Sonic said. Knuckles wasn't sure about this. "Do you really think we should split up? As stupid as Tails's book seemed, I think it DID make some good points. I mean, I know I'll be fine, but... You might need my help!" he said, only half serious. Sonic rolled his eyes at him. "You really think I'm gonna have trouble dealing with rats? 'Cuz that's the most dangerous thing I've seen in these woods so far!" he pointed out. Knuckles started walking off toward the rear of the ship. "Fine by me, Sonic! Don't come crying to me if you find out why this place has such a spooky reputation!" he shouted. Sonic ignored him and ran off in the other direction.

Though he'd never admit it, Knuckles had been somewhat spooked by the events of the night. As a result, once Sonic was out of sight, he began moving more cautiously. "No harm in being careful. After all, it IS true that everyone who came here never came back, and I don't think it was because they liked it here!" he thought, carefully surveying his surroundings. It was quiet. Perhaps a bit too quiet. "Is anyone there? Anyone? Anything? Ghosts? Rats? Shadow?" Knuckles shouted, hoping to flush out anything dangerous that might be in the area. He didn't like the idea of something sneaking up on him, after all. Since there was no response at all, he felt a bit safer. "Sonic's probably right. Nothing dangerous here! People probably never came back simply because they got lost, not because something attacked them!" he said to himself. Quickening his pace, he soon reached the back end of Shadow Arc. "Nothing, huh? I guess the others went inside this ship. I don't know why they'd do a thing like that, though. It's more dangerous in there than out here!" Suddenly, Knuckles thought he heard something nearby. "What's that? Sounds kinda... familiar... Is that you, Sonic?" he said, looking around. He couldn't see anything, but he could still hear something. The sound seemed to be coming from the ship. "Is someone... Up there?" Knuckles shouted, looking up at the top of the ship. He couldn't hear anything anymore, and there didn't seem to be anything up there, either. "Maybe it's just my imagination... Might as well just continue looking elsewhere." he thought, starting to head for the other side of the ship. Suddenly, he tripped over something and fell! "Whoa!!! Owww!! What was that!?" he shouted, starting to stand back up. Nothing appeared to be there for him to trip over. "Lousy rats..." he grumbled, starting to walk away again. This time he was keeping his eyes on the ground ahead of him, and noticed a black tentacle shoot over from behind him and trip him over again! "OWWW!!! That's it!! I know you're there, monster!! Come on out and fight!!" Knuckles shouted, rising to his feet again and turning around to face his attacker. Within moments, Knuckles's screams could be heard in the area, but no one was within earshot...

Meanwhile, Sonic had found the entrance that Tails and the others had used to enter Shadow Arc, but no sooner did he enter than the others, led by Copter, arrived in the area! They were out of breath, and seemed to be upset. "Hey, guys... I didn't know you three were here!" Sonic said, referring to Copter, Punchy, and Rainbow. "What's up? Something happen? Was it that rat, Bucky?" he asked. Tails started crying. He just didn't have the heart to tell Sonic what had happened, so Copter did it for him. "Bucky ain't here. I don't know where he is, but something in here... killed the girl hedgehog..." he said with difficulty. Sonic was shocked. "Wh-what!? Amy... N-no!! That can't be!! You're lying! That's such a sick lie!!" he found himself saying. However,

he could tell from everyone's expressions that it was true. He next found himself grabbing Tails by the arm. "Who did this, Tails!!? Where is he!?" he yelled. "I-it was a monster... It seems to have disappeared, but we just couldn't help running..." Tails said, ashamed that they left Amy like that. "Leave the kid alone, Sonic! There's nothing we could've done!" Punchy shouted. "Let's just get out of here..." Rainbow suggested. They mostly agreed that was best, and since Sonic was outvoted, they quietly exited the ship together. "I have to go back in... I have to..." Sonic said. Tails tried to change the subject. "Uh, Sonic? Where's the others?" he asked. "Well, Knuckles was looking around out here for you. As for Shadow and Rouge, I don't..." Sonic started to say, but was interrupted by a voice calling out to them. "Sonic!! Over here!!" It was Shadow's voice! "Well, the gang's all here." Sonic said. "Shade sounds awful serious! We better hurry! Follow me, everyone!" Rainbow said, running off ahead of them! Tails chased her first. "Don't go off alone!!! Why won't anyone listen to me!???" he yelled. The rest of them followed close behind, though Sonic was hesitant. He wanted to go back, to see if anything could be done for Amy, but it seemed that there just wasn't time.

Shadow was waiting halfway toward the back of the ship. "Follow me. There's something you all have to see." he said, leading them to the back of the ship. There they found Knuckles, lying face down on the ground. He was dead! "That monster moves fast..." Punchy said, somewhat solemnly. Rainbow started sobbing again. "I didn't want you to get that gem this way, One!" she said. "I thought I heard a scream coming from here... But I was too late." Shadow said, feeling like a failure. Sonic glanced at the body of his friend, and found himself angrier than ever. "So, it's true... There is a monster... And it's killing our friends. This whole thing WAS a trap! Well, watch out, Eggman!! I'm gonna avenge them!" he vowed. Copter was listening for something. "Anyone else hear a... growling... sound...?" he asked. In a moment, everyone heard it, for it was getting louder! "It's here! The monster's here!!" Tails shouted, looking through the book, "Aha! Number 2... Don't just stand there! Run, dummies!! Don't try to fight the monster!" Upon hearing that, Rainbow was the first to run. "No monster's going to get me!!!" she shouted. Tails and Punchy followed her, and then Copter joined them. "You hedgehogs are nuts! I'm outta here!!" Copter yelled. As the glowing yellow eyes emerged from the darkness, Sonic and Shadow realized that it was probably best to run for now. "We should see the others to safety! Let's go, Sonic!" Shadow said, leading the way as the two of them ran after the others! This time, it seemed the monster was following them, though in their haste they could only tell that the monster was a large, black creature. "We should get to the palace! We can lock the monster out there!" Shadow suggested, "It will buy us time to think of a plan!" Sonic glanced at Shadow. "One problem, where IS the palace!?" he asked. Shadow looked ahead. "I think we're running towards it!" he said. "That's lucky..." Sonic remarked.

The monster was surprisingly fast, and was beginning to catch up to them. "How can it move like that!?" Shadow wondered aloud. Sonic sped up a little. "I can outrun it, but the others can't! We have to slow it down somehow!" he shouted back at Shadow. Realizing that he was right, Shadow came to a stop. Sonic stopped a second later. "What are you doing, Shadow!?! Didn't you see what that thing did to Knuckles!?" he shouted. Shadow nodded. "That is why I must slow it down. You get the others to safety! I can take care of myself!" he ordered. Sonic didn't like it, but it seemed useless to argue. He resumed running towards the palace, knowing full well that he might never see Shadow again. The monster was getting close to Shadow's position. "I'm ready! Do your worst, creature!" Shadow yelled, ready to fight. However, the monster seemed to stop moving. It was too dark to see from where he was standing, but Shadow could tell there was some sort of delay. "What's the matter? Are you afraid of me? Well, that's too bad, because you'll have to go through me to get to the others! Nobody likes a

cowardly monster, so come out already!" he shouted impatiently. Suddenly, the creepy laughter that they'd heard shortly before the ghosts appeared started up again. It sounded almost as though the spirits were taunting him. "What's so funny? This forest is weird..." he said. The laughing voices responded this time! "We ghosts do not laugh, we just try to scare. In this haunted wood, darkness fills the air. Our creepy tricks are our way of warning. But for you, it's too late, you won't see the morning. Tee hee hee hee..." This short poem, sung in a playful fashion by the spirits of the woods, created a strangely malevolent feeling in the area. Shadow backed away a few steps, looking around in an attempt to see the singers. "Right... They're just trying to scare people... I guess I should just go..." As Shadow turned around to leave, the meaning of the poem became more clear, as the monster, which was behind him the whole time, finally made its attack!

Sonic caught up with Tails, Punchy, Rainbow, and Copter at the entrance to the palace. The door was left open. "I think Shadow and Rouge were here earlier. Rouge might be waiting inside." Sonic said. "So, who wants to go inside first?" Copter asked, noting how all of them were hesitant. Sonic was the first to enter. "C'mon, guys! We either go in there with Eggman, or stay out here with that monster. I think the choice is obvious!" he said. This sounded logical, so the rest of them followed close behind. The torches in the entrance room had been extinguished, so it was darker inside than before. Despite the dark, it didn't take long for them to spot Rouge. She was lying on the floor in the middle of the entrance room, her wings bent and broken. Tails rushed over to examine her. "Broken neck... Just like Amy..." he said gravely. "Hmmm... Is there more than one monster? Maybe it's still in here..." Punchy said, looking around. "No. There is only one monster in these woods tonight." Xenegg had appeared at the stairs leading into the central tower. "Ah, a robot! Now, there's something I can handle!" Copter said, ready to fight. Sonic held him back. "Chill, Copter! It's just a rusty butler!" he told him. "Did you see what happened here?" Rainbow asked the robot. Xenegg looked at Rouge's body. "The monster killed her first. Judging from the size of your group, it would seem that it has been... busy." Copter attempted to attack Xenegg again, but Sonic was still holding him back. "Heartless robot!! How dare you talk about our losses like that!! I oughta..." he shouted. Xenegg flew back to the central tower. "Master Eggman is waiting. If you wish to settle this, head for the top of the tower." the robot suggested. As Xenegg left the area, the group began discussing what to do. "This whole trip was a trap. Maybe we should try to get out of here while we still can." Tails suggested. "But if we go back, the monster will get us!" Rainbow protested. Punchy looked thoughtful. "I wonder... Do you think Eggman has a way of controlling the monster? It would explain... a lot." he said. Sonic looked to the stairs leading to the tower. "Only one way to find out! Let's get going! Time to put an end to Eggman's twisted plan!"

Thus, another journey began. It was a large tower, so it would take a while to reach the top, but none of them would back down at this point. It seemed apparent that Eggman's intention was to have that monster murder all of them, and they weren't about to let him get away with it. Strangely enough, there seemed to be no robots in the tower, other than Xenegg. "Did Eggman think the monster would get us before we got here?" Tails wondered as they reached the third floor of the tower. "He might have all his robots waiting near the top of the tower." Punchy pointed out. "Yeah... After all, this doesn't appear to be a base he built. Any robots he has here are probably his only defense." Copter added. Each floor of the tower consisted of two large rooms, decorated similarly to the entrance room. Some rooms had stone tables, old empty chests, and various other objects, likely left by the previous tenants of the tower. The whole way, it was eerily quiet, and though Xenegg had gone the same way as them, they never

caught up to the robot. They entered the second room of the third floor, which appeared to be a sort of library. "Say, where do you guys think Xenegg went?" Sonic asked as they looked around. Tails was reading the book again, and had found some information. "Here... Number 246: Don't forget to explore when you have a chance. Castle libraries and similar places often have secret passageways that can be used as shortcuts and escape routes. But... Number 247 says... Do be very cautious. You may not be the only one using the secret passages!" he said. Copter began looking at the book shelves. "I get it. Xenegg may have used a secret passage to get up the tower faster! Good thinking! Let's find one!" he suggested. With that, all of them began moving books around in an attempt to find a shortcut. The library was rather large, though, so they split up to search faster. As PUNCHY searched, he found the same book Tails was reading on the shelf. "What do you know? Eggman has a copy of that, too! Maybe it gives good advice after all..." he said, reaching for the book. However, it turned out to be a lever, and not a real book! The shelf slid out of the way, revealing a passageway! "Hey, guys! I found something!" PUNCHY shouted. As everyone began heading toward PUNCHY, they suddenly heard him scream! Something lifted PUNCHY up and threw him across the room with tremendous force, smashing him into a bookshelf and knocking it over! "ONE!!!" Rainbow shouted, rushing to her friend. It was already too late, though. PUNCHY, like Knuckles before him, was dead. "Oh, that idiot!! He let the monster in here!!" Copter shouted, dashing for the stairs. Tails followed him, but Rainbow wasn't moving. Sonic grabbed her by the arm and dragged her to the steps. "C'mon! There's no use staying here!" he shouted. "But... One..." Rainbow sobbed. Sonic was forced to carry her up the steps in order to protect her from the monster.

The monster had vanished back into the secret passage, and there was no way of knowing where it might pop up next. It seemed their only chance was to keep moving, so that's what they did. The monster's growls could be heard periodically as they made their way towards the top of the tower, but they kept moving and stayed together. Copter had observed that the monster seemed unwilling to attack them as a group, so they did not split up again as they climbed the tower. Rainbow was more quiet than any of them during the trip. PUNCHY's death had apparently had an intense impact on her. "Are you going to be all right?" Sonic asked her as they began nearing the top of the tower. "I don't know... But I don't think One would want me to give up, so I won't. Don't worry about me." she said. They were on the twelfth floor, and Tails had stopped them to read the book's number twelve. "Do avoid the number thirteen, and other unlucky things. You need all the luck you can get!" he said. Copter quickly defused the book's warning. "Does the ground floor count, or just the tower floors? The tower started one floor above the entrance!" he said. Since they didn't know what floor they were technically on, they decided to ignore the book. "That's just silly superstition, anyway!" Sonic said as he led the three other survivors to the thirteenth floor, which was the highest floor of the tower!

They burst into the next room as though expecting a fierce battle, but instead they found a sort of office! A red carpet covered the floor, and directly across from the entrance was a large table, covered with odd scraps of paper and a few minor gadgets. Eggman was passed out on a throne by the table! "Eggman!! Wake up!" Sonic shouted. "Did the monster get him?" Tails wondered fearfully. "Nope... He's just fainted." Copter observed. "Tubby looks kinda... peaceful..." Rainbow muttered. "I can assure you, that's not the case!" Came a voice behind Eggman's throne! The owner of the voice walked around the table to face the intruders, but his face couldn't be seen until a bolt of lightning flashed by the windows behind Eggman's throne, illuminating the room! The man before them was none other than Sergeant Gunner! "So, you're behind all this, you fur hating slime!" Copter growled. Gunner looked a bit regretful. "It's both of our faults... Robotnik and me. After you freaks handed me that defeat, I was devastated. I... ran

away. I stole Shadow Arcangel from Bucky, who was away when I did, and I crashed here. Eggman was already in this castle, and he had big plans for conquering this zone...." he began. Sonic, Tails, Rainbow, and Copter sat down on the floor to listen, as they were tired from the long trip up the tower. Gunner soon continued. "I had taken various books from Bucky's private library. Eggman and I found one in particular interesting... The Book of Nightmare. It was directions... Dark spells... To be used in the Nightmare Zone. Eggman had captured a strange, black creature, that Copter faced in the Chaos Shrine... Shadow Chaos! It was perfect for our experiments..." he explained. Sonic thought about the book. "Sounds like it was a recipe... A recipe to make a monster!" he realized. Gunner nodded. "We fused Shadow Chaos with the power of darkness, and it became Nightmare Chaos! But this zone is evil... More so than we were. The dark power drove us mad! Eggman sent you those messages as his final act before the darkness overwhelmed him, and he's been like this ever since. Hehehehehe... I fear I will join him soon... But at least you furry freaks will die before I do! Nightmare Chaos!!! Appear!! End the charade of hiding, and kill these disgusting wretches!!! KIIIIILLL!!!!!!"

Several bolts of lightning and thunder crashed around the tower as Gunner's madness was revealed in its entirety. Without warning, Nightmare Chaos burst into the room, forcing Sonic and the others into action! With the lightning illuminating the room, they could see that the monster indeed resembled Chaos, but was twice the size that it originally was, and its back was covered in large, black spikes. Its hands ended in writhing tentacles, and its power had already been made painfully clear throughout the night prior to this point. It started by chasing after Rainbow, but Copter blocked its path. "I beat you once, and I'll do it again!!" he shouted, to which Nightmare Chaos responded by grabbing him in its tentacles and quickly snapping his neck! "Two!! NOOO!!!" Rainbow shrieked, overwhelmed by the sight of her only remaining friend being murdered. Suddenly, before Nightmare Chaos could do anything else, a swarm of Wrongos surrounded it! Illusi appeared in the room on top of the table and ran towards Rainbow. "I finally tracked you down! As you know, I've been watching you and Punchy, but I lost you once you entered the Nightmare Zone! My biggest regret is that I am so late, but I WILL save you!" the shrew said, grabbing Rainbow and teleporting out in a puff of smoke! With Illusi's disappearance, the Wrongos vanished as well. "At least Rainbow's safe now..." Tails said, wishing that Illusi had taken himself and Sonic to safety as well. Nightmare Chaos was still holding Copter's body, so it threw the body away, right through the windows and onto the balcony on the back side of the tower! Sonic and Tails were on their own. "Well, this beast sure is good at murdering one helpless innocent at a time, but let's see how it handles two! It's payback time!" Sonic declared. Tails invoked the power of the tailband Copter had left him with after their last adventure. "I got your back, Sonic! Let's get him!"

A dangerous battle began, with Nightmare Chaos flailing its tentacled hands at Sonic and Tails, attempting to grab them as it had grabbed each of their friends! Sonic took off at high speed, skillfully avoiding the monster's attacks. Tails used the power of the Tailband of Chaos to smash the tentacles into a gooey mess when they came after him. Soon, Sonic saw his opening, and launched the strongest homing attack he'd ever done! Nightmare Chaos splattered into a slimy black mess, stunned. By the time it would regenerate itself, Sonic would be ready to hit it again, and the cycle would continue until the monster was destroyed, since Nightmare Chaos was so slow. "Face it, ya big drip! You're just no match for us!" Sonic said triumphantly. Gunner couldn't believe it. "Once you finally know the terrifying truth, you just turn around and smash my monster!? It's not possible!! NOOOO!!!!!!" the defeated old man screamed. "Stay together. That book really was ingenious, wasn't it? We never should have doubted it. It was just fear and doubt that gave that monster its edge!" Sonic realized. Suddenly,

a clapping sound was heard by the entrance to the room. "Good show... But what is it about you?! What makes this annoying blue hedgehog so powerful!? WHY WON'T YOU DIE!?!?" Sonic and Tails glanced over at the source of that aggravated yell. "Xenegg!?" Tails gasped. The robot floated into the room, with seemingly nothing lifting it! Gunner seemed most surprised by this intruder. "Wh-what are you!? Eggman didn't bring any robots with him!" he shouted. Sonic thought back. "Wait... Eggman passed out right after sending the messages! He couldn't have sent Xenegg to meet us! Aw, I don't believe this! The butler did it!" he said in surprise and annoyance. Xenegg was staring at Gunner. "You don't remember me, sir? It was I who gave you the Book of Nightmare! Ah, but the Nightmare Zone does play its tricks. I remained hidden as I did it all. I planted the book for you to find. I called out to you from here, led you and my creator to the Nightmare Zone. I did everything." the robot explained. "But why? What did all of us ever do to you?" Tails asked. Xenegg glared at him. "I was getting to that! You see, I am NOT a BUTLER! I was created as the first of Robotnik's E-X Series robots. Special robots, built with a special something hidden away inside us. As the first one, I was the test. My first mission, was a training mission. Ultimately, I was to destroy you, Sonic! But first, I had to prove my worth by battling a rogue robot, E-123 Omega! A task that proved beyond my mortal abilities... I was destroyed... But as some sick joke on Robotnik's part, I, a robot, had a soul! So, in case your tiny hedgehog brain doesn't get it yet... I am a ghost!!" Sonic thought about what Xenegg said. "So, this is all about revenge, eh? I bet you even had Omega lured here!" he said. "Yes! I did, I destroyed the one who destroyed me! But even as a ghost, I have my program. One thing I must do before my spirit can move on... The one thing Robotnik never could do! Kill Sonic the Hedgehog!!!"

Suddenly, a watch that Gunner was wearing started beeping. "It's midnight... Time for my snack..." Gunner said sleepily. Xenegg's body suddenly became transparent and smoky. "Yes!!! The time has come! Nightmare Chaos! Through the power of the Book of Nightmare, give me form! Ha ha ha ha ha ha!!!" Xenegg shouted, lifting Nightmare Chaos with him as they flew out to the balcony where Copter's body was thrown! Suddenly, Eggman woke up, and Gunner seemed to regain some energy as well. "Wha... What!? Where are we? Gunner...?" Eggman said, a bit dazed, "Oh, now I remember! We're in the Nightmare Zone! We were under a spell! Follow me, Gunner, I'll lead us out!" With that, Eggman and Gunner ran for the exit, stopping briefly to bid farewell to their foes. "So long, freaks! Enjoy your nightmare!" Gunner growled. "Try to survive. I want the privilege of destroying you myself!" Eggman added.

Now, it was just Sonic and Tails, facing off against the result of Xenegg's mad scheme for revenge. They could see through the window that Xenegg's metallic frame had covered the body of Nightmare Chaos, changing its tentacles into metal claws, and its eyes now glowed red. Sonic was wishing he had the Chaos Emeralds with him, but he'd have to make do without. Tails frantically turned to the last page of his book as he followed Sonic out to the balcony. "We need the biggest piece of advice this book can give, and I bet they saved the best for last! Number 3000... Do NOT read this book during the scary scenario! You should have studied beforehand! ...oh shoot..." Distracted by reading the book, Tails couldn't react in time to avoid Nightmare Xenegg's attack! The monster slashed Tails across the chest with its claws before even Sonic could run to save him! His body was caught on the huge claws, so Xenegg quickly threw it over the balcony, leaving Sonic all alone.

There are two possible endings to this story.
Below is the first, the Darkspine Sonic ending.

"Y-you... monstrosity... What have you done!?! My friends... all of them... I'll... I'll..." Sonic was stuttering, he couldn't compose himself. Nightmare Xenegg laughed at the lone hedgehog, his voice having turned to a monstrous, gurgling, mechanical nightmare. "Look at the mighty Sonic now! You know you've already failed! After all, what do you have if not your friends? You are nothing, and now I shall end your pitiful, useless life at last!" Sonic was now more enraged than he'd ever been in his life. His hatred for Xenegg was infinite. A pair of glowing objects nearby caught his attention. They were the two Tailbands of Chaos, which had fallen from Tails and Copter when they died. Sonic wasn't sure if he could use them, but he ran to them and placed them on his wrists like bracelets. The power of his anger invoked the power of the tailbands, but in an unexpected way. Rather than Super Sonic, the rage within him transformed him into Darkspine Sonic, a form he had only previously used in the world of the Arabian Nights! "That's it, Xenegg... It's time for my nightmare to end, and YOURS to begin!" Sonic roared, ready to end this. He charged at Nightmare Xenegg with all the power inside him, but to no avail! Xenegg still stood, and quickly began flying after him! Darkspine Sonic tried again, but simply bounced off. Xenegg smashed his metallic fist into Sonic, sending him flying a fair distance. Still, he couldn't give up. He wouldn't! With all of the power he could muster, Sonic soared at Nightmare Xenegg. The monster didn't even try to dodge, it simply laughed as Sonic bounced off of him once again. What was worse was that Sonic felt as though he was getting weaker. "What's going on?! Why can't I hurt you?" he said in despair. Xenegg laughed as a bolt of lightning crashed into him and simply bounced off. "Fool! We are in the Nightmare Zone, and you are using darkness on me! I used the Book of Nightmare to absorb dark energy, so your attacks are simply making me stronger! Ha ha ha ha!!" He was right, too. Sonic felt the power of his new form quickly draining away. He dropped to the ledge as he reverted to his normal state. "Y-you... monster..." he muttered feebly. As Xenegg's monstrous form began dropping slowly towards him, Sonic began blacking out. Nightmare Xenegg landed on the balcony in front of him, and then picked Sonic up in his claws. Sonic's eyes grew dark as he began to lose consciousness. The final thing he heard was the victorious laughter of a spirit completing the dark task it remained on the world for and finally passing on to Hell...

Next is the alternate ending, the Super Sonic ending.

With his friends gone, the thought crossed Sonic's mind to despair. To give in, and let Xenegg win. After all, in a way, hadn't he already won? "You... you killed Amy. Tails. Knuckles. All of my closest friends, and some others as well..." Sonic muttered, weighing his options. Xenegg laughed at the lone hedgehog, his voice having turned to a monstrous, gurgling, mechanical nightmare. "And you can do nothing about it! How does it feel, Sonic? The sting of failure. The knowledge that your death is near. I imagine you now know the despair I felt, and it was all your fault!! I'll kill you!!" Sonic had fallen to his knees at the start of Xenegg's speech, but now rose up. "That's what this is? You blame me for what Eggman forced you into? And then you retaliate by murdering countless innocents!?! For all this, I can't let you win. It may not be fair for Eggman to force you into these things, but what about Omega? He didn't let Eggman control him. He could see Eggman for what he really was, and he chose not to let him get away with it. He had more of a soul than you ever did, or ever will, even if you could come back as a ghost!" he shouted, noble as ever. Xenegg's metallic soul was unmoved by his words. "It still stands that you lose! With the power of the Book of Nightmare, I absorb all the darkness in this zone! You cannot win!" the monster roared. Sonic looked utterly serious. "You're wrong, Xenegg. Because, I have a power greater than your darkness. My friends. They gave their lives to protect each other, and to protect me. And I'm thinking that the light of their friendship could even shine through in the Nightmare Zone!" Suddenly, a bright light shone forth from the two

tailbands that Tails and Copter dropped after dying. The ghosts of Sonic's dead friends were hovering over them, and the light channeled through the bands changed Sonic into Super Sonic! The ghosts were pointing inside the castle, to the Book of Nightmare! "So, that book gives you power, does it?" Sonic said. Xenegg screamed as he realized what Sonic was about to do. Super Sonic flew into the room, grabbed the book, tossed it into the air, and slammed it with all his might! The pages of the book were scattered to the winds, and Xenegg screeched loudly as his power vanished, and his new body exploded! Super Sonic dropped to the balcony. "That takes care of him..." he sighed. Still, his friends were gone. That was something that would not be easy to get over, but as the sun rose over the Nightmare Zone for the first time in history, Sonic got a strange feeling that anything was possible.

The End

...OR IS IT!? BWAHAHAHAHA!!!

Happy Halloween!