

Rise of the Guardians

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Kapitel 5: Old wounds and new abilities

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Chapter 05 - Old wounds and new abilities

The night had already fallen in and the rocks to both sides of their uphill path were merely silhouettes against the moonlight but still they barely had made stops and continued following Spectre into the unknown. Sabre noticed that Locke was falling behind but he also felt more and more exhausted. Thunderhawk and Sojourner might have been used to running parcours through the city day by day and who knew what Spectre had been trained in but if they continued in that speed they would soon lose the two youngest Brotherhood members.

"Can we ... please rest? I don't think ... we can continue much longer", Sabre panted not daring to speak too loud in case enemies were in hearing range but the others still had heard him in the silence of the night, first slowed down a bit and then finally stopped.

"I think we have come far enough anyways and this looks like a good spot to rest", Spectre said. He was heavily breathing as well but else barely showed any sign of exhaustion. "I think we can even risk a campfire. The rocks protect us from any sight. Still I want to keep guard - just in case."

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"Do you think we can trust him?" Thunderhawk asked and stared into the flickering campfire. He and Sabre were the only ones awake. Sojourner and Locke were sleeping close to them while Spectre had disappeared between the rocks a good while ago and not been seen or heard since.

"I really hope so. We are following him into terra incognita after all. But then again why should he have been chosen by the Guardians and told to go to the Master Emerald by the Neo Walkers if he was our enemy? He might look threatening at first but, heck, he's Spectre after all."

The lavender furred male just slowly shook his head. "I'm still not sure what to think of him. He seems to know awfully lot about the Dark and the Death Legion. Is that really because he was spying on them for quite a while like he said or is he actually one of them and was sent to lead us into a trap? Enerjak must already have found out something that could threaten him was going on or else there wouldn't have been so many zombies in the Chaos chamber. They clearly weren't out for the Master Emerald. Just having a Guardian name doesn't automatically mean that he's also a Guardian. In

some villages Steppenwolf is still well known and honoured and there are also a lot of people named after him - still we don't have a Steppenwolf in our team."

"If he had wanted to finish us off he would have done it right in the chamber and not fought together with us", Sabre said. "Besides where does his knowledge of the Chaos Force come from if he wasn't chosen to be a Guardian? Edmund's bloodline has died out and meanwhile Dimitri's as well since all of the Grandmasters were either killed during the centuries-long battles or banned into the Twilight Zone long time ago. If his abilities weren't inherited where else has he gotten them? I'm sure Enerjak doesn't teach his followers how to use Chaos based attacks. My only explanation is that he is a chosen one too."

"And still I can't deny that I have a bad feeling about him", Thunderhawk said and looked around. "Where on Mobius is he anyways? Since we have started to rest he has been avoiding us."

"I think he is still out on guard duty", Sabre said and stood up. "But maybe it's better if I go out and look after him. He might be tired too."

Carefully Sabre climbed through the rocks always ready for an attack. He might have trusted Spectre but who knew what else was lurking in the darkness.

"Who's there?" someone suddenly whispered.

Sabre spun around but then sighed in relief when he recognized the figure in the moonlight.

"Good grief, Spectre, you startled me."

"I'm sorry but I had to make sure you weren't a Legionnaire without having to attack", the older male said and came closer. "Why have you left the fireside? Shouldn't you be asleep?"

"I only needed to rest a bit, not actually sleep and after a while I wondered if you might have been tired too. Don't you want to come back to the others? I can stay here and watch over you all for a while now."

For a moment Spectre hesitated and Sabre could read in his eyes that he really considered going back to the fireside but then the dark Echidna shook his head.

"I'm not sure if I'm even welcomed. You might trust me - more or less - and Locke does it for sure but the other two... Being watched with hostility is worse than staying all alone in the darkness."

"They barely know you yet so it's no wonder they are distant", Sabre tried to console him. "Just give them a bit more time and they will accept you too."

"They accepted you and Locke although it looks like you didn't know each other before", Spectre said. "This isn't just the distance someone would keep to a stranger. They are seeing a possible enemy in me. And at least in one point they are right."

He started rolling up one of his sleeves and in the moonlight Sabre saw the cold shine of metal.

"I am a Dark Legionnaire", Spectre calmly continued. "But I never wanted to be one and it's making me sick when others are calling me that way. My mother had been killed by them when I was about eight years old and they had taken me with them. I could neither flee - where could I have gone - nor do anything against them - it would have been me alone against an army. So I kept my head down just for pure survival. But I could collect information about them in the hope I once would be able to use it against them. Unlike others they forced to join their army they never managed to break me. When I had these repeating dreams I finally saw a flicker of hope to get out of this hell. It had to mean something if I dreamed about being a Guardian every night

although I only experienced the terrors of the Legion by day and so I basically neglected my daily training routine to concentrate on hidden power living inside me. That's the reason why my attacks don't come uncontrollably most of the time unlike yours - I concentrated on them from the beginning and didn't suddenly have to attack or defend myself. Of course some of the others grew suspicious of me after a while - no one calls in sick for such a long time and locks himself up in his room without ever visiting the medical bay - but I wanted to take that risk. And when the Neo Walkers talked to me I finally saw my chance to escape had come. The houses of slavery are a bit outside the Legion camp and the slaves enter and leave it through an old tunnel system - a good slave is one who stays invisible and unheard unless their masters want them to show themselves. Of course they are guarded too a bit but while a Legionnaire leaving the main camp will be held up and asked inconvenient questions he would be widely ignored when leaving the barrack colony because picking a slave personally isn't forbidden. The only thing left to do after that was running and trying to be far away before they noticed my absence."

The whole time Sabre had listened silently and with wide opened eyes. He couldn't get rid of the feeling that Spectre still tried to hide something about his past - not just didn't tell it because then the story would have lasted forever but really hiding it on purpose. But then again, telling him about all this only hours after they had learned to know each other already had been a major act of faith.

"I'm only asking you not to tell about it to anyone else yet", Spectre said after a while. "Locke can hear it. He will understand. But for Thunderhawk and Sojourner it will be enough if they hear I'm a Legionnaire to stop listening and see their theories confirmed. I still want to wait until they trust me as well."

"I won't say a word about it to anyone else but Locke", Sabre promised and then he added, "Are you sure you don't want to come to the fireplace and take a rest?"

"No, not for now. Maybe I will later that night but so far I don't feel tired at all."

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Thunderhawk was still awake when Sabre returned. He was cutting around on a piece of wood that looked more and more like a boomerang. "Heck, where have you been so long?" he silently asked. "I was nearly afraid a Death Legionnaire might have eaten you."

He lifted up his boomerang as if he wanted to try it but then decided otherwise and lowered his hand again. Probably he was afraid to lose it somewhere in the darkness in case it didn't come back.

Sabre sat down between the sleeping Locke and Thunderhawk again.

"I just talked to Spectre for a while. Watch duty in a silent night can really be boring. He said he wasn't tired yet and wanted to stay out there for a bit longer but he will return later that night."

"That's good", Thunderhawk mumbled and concentrated on his boomerang again to see if it still needed improvement.

For a while they were sitting wrapped up in silence then Sabre said, "How did you two come to the thieves' gang? Locke told me some kids from the orphanage he grew up in joined street gangs."

"I wasn't an orphan", Thunderhawk replied, "but most of the time I felt like one. My oldies barely cared about me. They gave me a place to live and I didn't have to starve but else I always felt that I was the unwanted child. I guess they only didn't give me

away because else the neighbours would have talked bad about them or something like that, don't have any other explanation for it. No wonder I always was a troublemaker. I didn't bully other kids but I never listened to authorities and had no problems breaking rules. Soon after I dropped out of school I joined one of the thieves' gangs. Probably the first good decision I had made in my life because it was the first time I learned to accept a subordinate role to others and that some rules are there to be followed if you don't want to get into massive trouble with your own colleagues or end your life in a gang fight with a knife in your back."

Sabre remembered the daggers Thunderhawk had used during their fight against the zombies. The gun control law was very strict, thank goodness or else some of the gang wars would have gotten out of control but also other weapons could cause deadly wounds.

"Have you been in a lot of fights already?" he asked.

"Only a few and I never killed someone - only dealt a lot of cuts. Some zombies today were my first kills ever - if you really can kill something that's already dead. These daggers were mainly a tool instead of a weapon. If you stick them in small gaps between bricks you can use them as help for climbing."

With a sigh Sabre leaned back a bit and stared at the sky.

"It's somehow sad to know that all of those who have been chosen to be Guardians are outcasts in some way."

"The original Guardians were outcasts too", Thunderhawk said. "Wielding powers no other Echidnas possess or being seen as some sort of royalty doesn't sound normal to me. Besides I doubt all people approved everything they did. Maybe the Guardians chose us on purpose - because we would be different from others."

"What about Sojourner?" Sabre asked. "Why was he in the gang?"

Thunderhawk looked down on the Echidna sleeping at his side and Sabre could see a hint of guilty feeling in his eyes.

"To be honest, it was my fault that he ended up in this mess. If I had the ability to change the past then I would use it - even though it would mean that we probably never would have become such close friends - just to make this crap undone. I was already in the gang when I learned to know him and he was a kid of maybe eight or nine years. I was a teen, burglary wasn't a full time job and the other gang members weren't my jailers. I could do whatever I wanted with my spare time and so I hung out with other teens in the parks a lot and also learned to know Sojo. I don't know why I even got that stupid idea but one day I dared him to go with me on one of my trips and steal something as well. I don't remember what it was - just some cheap crap from a supermarket - I didn't want him to take anything more expensive since I didn't want him to get into too big troubles in case he was caught. Well, he was caught but I never expected what could have followed. He was still too young to get punished by the law so the worst he got was a lecture by the guy from the EST and he had to pay whatever he had stolen. But obviously his family didn't see him as too young to get his butt kicked out of the house. Unlike me he once had a family who cared about him - or at least he believed he was loved by them - but it all ended all out of sudden just because of some stupid dare. They didn't want to have him in their house for any longer because he had brought dishonour over them or some similar shit and furthermore they believed he would continue being a criminal once he had started. Obviously their 'love' didn't go far enough to deal with a child who committed even the smallest crime once - feeling dishonoured and getting rid of him was an easier way. I never felt guiltier my whole life. He was just a child and suddenly had no place

to live anymore because of me. Of course I offered him to live with me in my room - I couldn't have cared less about what my parents said about it anyways. At first I was afraid that Sojo would also see it as my fault and hate me for what I had done but he was just so thankful for every little bit of help I could offer. From that time on we were inseparable. I introduced him to the gang and taught him how to survive on the streets. Soon we were known as 'the twins' since we only existed as a duo."

Thunderhawk leaned back to look at the stars as well.

"I can't say that Sojo and I didn't have loads of fun together but sometimes I wonder if he couldn't have had a much better life, far away from the streets, if it hadn't been for me."

"Or he would have ended up in a boring office job, longing for more adventure his whole life long and you are actually his saviour", Sabre replied.

Thunderhawk laughed. "Yes, or that." He turned around so he could face Sabre. "And what about you and Locke? What makes you the outcasts and how did you learn to know each other?"

"Actually the story of my own life wouldn't even be that interesting", Sabre said. After hearing Spectre's, Thunderhawk's and Sojourner's stories he felt like an outcast among the outcasts - they all had their sad stories while his own life wasn't that much different from most other Echidnas.

"Doesn't matter as long as I know you a bit better afterwards", Thunderhawk replied. And so the younger Guardian started telling.

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Sabre slowly opened his eyes and tried to blink the bright daylight away. Beside him Thunderhawk was still fast asleep. Damn, had they really dozed off without waking up any of the others to take over their guard shift? But at least they now knew how far they could trust Spectre since they all were still alive.

"Has the first Sleeping Beauty finally woken up?" he heard a voice over his head.

He looked up and his mouth opened in surprise.

"Spectre! How in Edmund's name did you get up there? I didn't know you could levitate."

The dark furred Echidna was sitting in empty air several feet above their heads.

"Me neither", Spectre replied, "at least not until I jumped off one of the higher cliffs."

"You did what? Have you gone insane?"

Now the others had woken up as well and gave the oldest Guardian astounded looks too.

Carefully Spectre landed between them but instead of an answer he signalled them to follow him. They climbed up a small path between the rocks that ended abruptly at the edge of a higher cliff - not high enough to kill someone who fell down there but still hitting the bottom might have resulted in a few broken bones. Spectre held out a hand towards Sojourner.

"Do you trust me?" he asked.

The younger Echidna gave him a sceptical look.

"Well ... not really."

"That's even better."

Before Sojourner or anyone else could react Spectre had grabbed his hand and dragged him down the cliff.

Sojourner cried out and squeezed his eyes shut but when the expected impact failed

to appear he risked a gaze and his eyes widened when he saw they were gliding through the cliffs of the rocky hills. Spectre still held his hand but he either did it to help Sojourner navigate or just in case the younger Guardian could drop after all and didn't carry him. It was the Chaos Force inside his own body that held him in the air. He let out a loud laugh.

Spectre turned his head and smiled at him. "A great feeling, isn't it? But I advise you not to think about what you're doing or how you're doing it too much - at least not before you are able to control the Chaos Force a bit better."

When they landed again Sojourner stood a bit shakily at first and had to be supported by Thunderhawk but the grin still hadn't disappeared from his face.

"You know this also could have failed", the lavender furred male said with a hint of reproach in his voice.

"I know but I had to take the risk", Spectre said and when Thunderhawk glared at him he quickly added, "Listen, in the worst case I still could have caught him but I had to take one of you by surprise to confirm my theory. I thought about it the whole night. We have to find a very quick way how we can learn to unleash and control our powers. Everything I know I learned by myself too but I needed several days for it and we don't have that time. And then I remembered our battle in the Chaos chamber. We used attacks we never had used before simply because we had it in us the whole time."

He suddenly turned around and shot a small Chaos blast at Sabre. It was only a very weak attack and he would barely have felt it if it had touched him but instinctively he activated his shield.

"You see?" Spectre continued. "Drop a baby into water and it will start making swimming movements without ever having learned it. So I dropped myself off a cliff and the Chaos Force caught me. Our instincts help us unleash our powers and if we concentrate and remember the feeling we will also be able to control them soon. You can try that right now if you want to, Sabre. Just close your eyes and ... *feel*."

Sabre closed his eyes and tried to concentrate on something although he wasn't even sure what. What had the Chaos Force felt like? He imagined another attack and tried to defend himself against it. His skin tingled lightly as if sparks of electricity were dancing over his fur.

"It really works", he heard Locke whisper.

Sabre opened his eyes and found himself surrounded by a faint green glow. That shield was so weak it would have been destroyed if a butterfly crashed against it but it was something he had created with his own will and he knew he could also make it last as long as he wanted. He looked around and caught Spectre's eyes. A smirk curled the dark furred Echidna's lips.

"It's a beginning", he said.

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Another time Locke's chest was hit by a Chaos blast. It was just a very weak one but still it made him stumble and fall. This time he remained sitting on the ground.

"There's not use in continuing this training", he bleakly said. "I will never learn it."

Sabre who had been his training partner for the past few hours knelt beside him and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't give yourself such a hard time. Not even you can learn everything at the speed of light. We're all beginners. Just look at me. I would barely stand a chance if a

goldfish attacked me."

He had hoped to cheer Locke up a bit but the boy only gave him a saddened look and said, "But at least you have already used the Chaos Force several times and I don't even want to mention how much Sojourner and Thunderhawk have improved."

Sabre watched the other training battle and had to admit Locke was right. The 'brothers' were still lacking strength but they compensated it with speed and knowledge how to attack as a duo without having to exchange words to let the other know what to do next. Spectre had a hard time blocking all their attacks.

"Maybe it's also because of me that you haven't been able to use Chaos based abilities yet", Sabre said. "I simply don't look threatening enough. When I attack your instincts don't tell you to defend yourself because I look as if I wouldn't even harm a fly."

"Time out!" Spectre called and walked over to the two youngest Guardians. "What's the matter?"

"He's a bit down because he wasn't able to do any Chaos attacks yet", Sabre answered.

"I'm a lost cause", Locke mumbled.

"No one is a lost cause until I say so", Spectre answered.

"But it's true. I have learned so many things about the Guardians and the Chaos Force and now I feel like I know nothing at all. Everyone is able to use at least light attack or shielding abilities on his own and I couldn't even do anything when the desert mummies attacked me. And you ... you seem to know absolutely everything. You have learned it all on your own and now even are skilled enough to teach others. I can never be that good."

"No one expects you to catch up with someone who had several more training hours than you on your very first lesson. Besides I also have some major lacks in my knowledge about the Chaos Force. For example I'm a total dead loss at shielding. I can counter attacks with own attacks but that's not the same and won't defend me as good as a real shield. Now please get up again."

Locke sighed deeply but followed his wish.

"And now give me your hands. Don't worry; I won't drag you down a cliff until you want me to."

If that had been an attempt to cheer the boy up Spectre had failed as much as Sabre.

"Getting pushed into a threatening looking situation is just one way to learn. I used another one by remembering how it felt to use Chaos energy in my dreams and recalling that feeling during my wake hours. Or maybe a combination of both might help you too. If you have forgotten how it felt in your dreams I can help you remembering it."

A faint glow appeared around their hands. Locke closed his eyes so he could better concentrate on it. A good minute later Spectre slowly went back a few steps and let Locke's hands slip out of his.

"I will let go now but keep that feeling memorized and your eyes shut for a little longer."

The dark Echidna went back a few more steps then he lifted up a hand and shot a blast towards the youngest Guardian. Locke's hand moved up fast. Before even his eyelids had fully snapped open he had countered with an own attack. The two Chaos forces contacted and bounced off in different directions.

"Congratulations", Spectre said with a smirk.

Sabre punched the air. "You did it!" he called and his reaction caused Sojourner and

Thunderhawk to exchange amused looks.
The corners of Locke's mouth twitched and he showed one of his rare little smiles.