

Rise of the Guardians

Von Aqua111

Kapitel 12: Dayspring

Author's comment:

That's it, the last chapter. It's a bit shorter which means I'm ending with a chapter as short as I began. It's a bit of a strange feeling - it's not too long ago that I started growing to my Guardian avatars and now it's over again.

But at least it's not the end for my Echidna-plot bunnies. They have still been happily nibbling around on other plots even while I wrote Rise of the Guardians and hopefully another story - might it be about the Guardians or the Dark Legion again for a change - will be there soon.

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### Rise of the Guardians

#### *Chapter 12 - Dayspring*

The dust hadn't fully settled yet when Locke slowly opened his eyes. He blinked a few times then squeezed his eyes shut for a second and opened them wide again. No, it hadn't just been his imagination – the fine sand particles were standing still as if time had stopped completely. Then he noticed the soft mossy ground he was lying on. Where was he? Had they all been teleported again? Or had they really died and this was the afterlife?

Carefully he tried to sit up and winced when he felt something soft at his side but quickly turning his head he saw it was Sabre lying next to him. The older male had just regained consciousness and looked at him with half opened eyes.

"Have we made it?" he silently asked.

"I don't know", Locke answered unsurely and looked at the other Guardians not too far away.

"At least we are livelier than some people had wanted us to be the past few days", Thunderhawk replied drowsily. His eyes were still closed but a grin spread over his muzzle.

Now when the Guardians had awoken the sandstorm frozen in time slowly cleared up and they could see more of the surrounding area. Mossy rocks, short grass, here and there a tree - not the most abundant vegetation but compared to the barren wasteland Enerjak had created it was a paradise.

"Where on Mobius are we?" Sojourner asked.

"This place is merely a memory but one day the Forbidden Zone can look like that

again."

The voice that had spoken sounded familiar somehow but ... older.

The five Echidnas slowly turned around and stared at the five other figures that had silently approached them. If it hadn't been for a few little differences they might as well have looked at their own reflections.

"Being greeted by you ... does that ... does that mean we are really dead?" Locke asked but he sounded as if a yes as answer wouldn't bother him too much as long as he heard it from one of the original Guardians. Not much and he would have knelt down before them in awe.

"No, if anything then we are allowed to die now", his older self answered.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Sabre asked.

The Guardian Sabre scratched the back of his head. "Well, we hardly understand it ourselves but it was as if we were caught in a world in between for centuries. Our bodies were dead but Aurora's heralds never came for our souls. All this time we had the feeling we were still needed for something. And then, one by one, we were ... reborn ... somehow. But you had no memories of our past except for the last few minutes of our lives."

"What if it had been your destiny chosen by the Ancient Walkers?" Spectre said remembering his dream about them. "They might not have been able to keep you alive but they kept your souls from moving on to the next level because they knew about Enerjak's return and gave you a second chance. But no one might ever know if we defeated him once and for all this time or if he just had been locked away and is waiting for his next rise to power."

"I really hope that he's gone for good. Don't tell me all this stress was good for nothing", Sojourner quickly said.

"Well wasn't it a lot of fun after all?" the Guardian Thunderhawk said with a grin and crossed his arms behind his back.

"Oh yes, when you ignore the fact that our lives were permanently in danger it was the greatest thing that could have happened to us", Thunderhawk said and mirrored his older self. "When can we do it again?"

"That's not funny", the two Sojourners pouted.

Sabre suppressed a chuckle and returning his attention to the older Guardians he became serious again.

"But what will happen to us when you die? Will we still be the same? What about our abilities?"

"We only helped you to become stronger and more skilled that fast", Guardian Spectre explained. "No one can learn something he normally would need years to within just a few days except if he has a fully experienced Guardian living inside of him. You might lose some abilities but it's nothing you can't learn again within the next few years. Your personalities however are your own."

"Aw, and I thought our little nerdy boy will become a party dude without a tech freak Guardian inside of him", Sojourner chuckled and playfully nudged Locke's arm which the youngest Guardian only countered with a weak smile before he turned to the original Guardians and asked, "But ... does your death mean we will never be able to see you again?"

"Get the dried blood out of your coat, grow a beard, look in the mirror and then you will see at least one of us", Guardian Sabre responded. "Well, maybe growing a bit older might also help. Or take a look around to see the rest of us. You might not be related to us - except for Spectre since he's Moritori's son after all - but you couldn't

look more like us."

"Probably another one of these strange ideas from the Ancient Walkers - just like letting me be reborn as the real son of this cockroach", Guardian Spectre added with a forced crooked smile. "I hope you will remain loyal to yourselves further on and not try to be our copies in more than looks."

"Don't worry, Thunder and me have a few little ideas what to improve in that mess called the Brotherhood should it continue to exist", Sojourner grinned.

"Please, no", Spectre sighed but he did so with a little smile on his face.

"Do me a favour and take better care of Lara than I was able to do", Guardian Locke whispered, so silently that only the younger Locke could hear him.

"I will", was the younger male's silent reply.

"If everything is said and done then let's do it", Guardian Sabre said. "Our lives for yours."

He and the other original Guardians reached out their hands and the younger males took them. The colours of the world around them blurred and slowly faded into black.

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When Sabre opened his eyes dust mixed with slight drizzle rained down on him. Beneath him he felt earth and rocks. At the horizon, half hidden by clouds the first rays of the rising sun could be seen.

They were alive... Enerjak was defeated and they were still alive. Sabre wanted to let out a laugh but that only resulted in a coughing fit when he breathed in dust.

"Dammit, if being a Guardian means I have to wake up on dirty floors every few hours then I want to quit", he heard Thunderhawk curse.

"Another day ... and Enerjak is really gone..." Locke silently said when he got up and looked at the first sunrays. "I have seen so many dawns but I never really saw them as a symbol for new hope for the Echidna kind ... or even the start of a new era."

He turned around and his gaze held a bit of sadness.

"But with Enerjak and probably also the Dark Legion gone the Brotherhood will come to an end too, won't it? We are more or less useless now."

Sabre knew what was going on inside of his younger friend. And probably inside of Spectre as well though the dark Echidna never would have admitted it. In the past few days they had grown together like family and friends the same time - two things neither Locke nor Spectre had most of their lives. What would happen if they dissolved the Brotherhood now?

But before Sabre could think of an answer Sojourner responded, "Can hippos fly? Of course not. Why would the other Guardians have left us some of their abilities and the chance to relearn some of the others if they were useless anyways now?"

Without taking his eyes off the highlighted clouds Spectre added, "Enerjak is defeated for now but who knows when he will return. And if not he then there will be others. This island still needs its Guardians."

"And even without new dangers there are still a lot of wounds to heal, the city and the towns to be repaired and rebuilt", Thunderhawk continued.

"Haven..." Locke said lightly dreamful. "I want to see Haven again. It can be repaired and then we can use it as our base or even our new home."

He returned his gaze at the sunrays.

"But most of all I want to see Lara again."

"And I want to be with Kali again", Spectre silently said.

Sojourner suddenly turned to look at the others. "Hey, will we just stand here and watch the sun the whole day long or finally go and realise our dreams?" He spun around and dashed away. "The last one in Echidnaopolis is a desert mummy."

"Oh no, you will never be able to win a race against me", Thunderhawk called and followed hard on his friend's heels.

Sabre gave Locke an amused look.

"What do you think? Will they be able to keep that speed until Echidnaopolis?"

"Not sure", Locke replied. "But if they are we shouldn't miss it. Come on!"

And with that the two youngest Guardians followed the others as well.

At first Spectre only raised his eyebrows but then with a suppressed grin he teleported himself away only to reappear a few meters ahead of the others and started running in the direction of Echidnaopolis too.

"Hey, teleporting is unfair", Thunderhawk shouted.

"You don't have a chance against me anyways", Spectre called back. "Sooner or later you will have to stop for air while the one with the cybernetic lungs can run for way longer."

"You have WHAT? Please tell me this was just a joke."

But Spectre only laughed and sped up a little more. When had he ever felt that free? Probably never in his whole life. But he was willing to learn.

Before them the wasteland of the Forbidden Zone and soon the grass fields stretched for miles, wide and open as their future. Together they had faced the darkest nights and somehow fought their ways through it. Whatever destiny was still holding for them they would face it too, together.