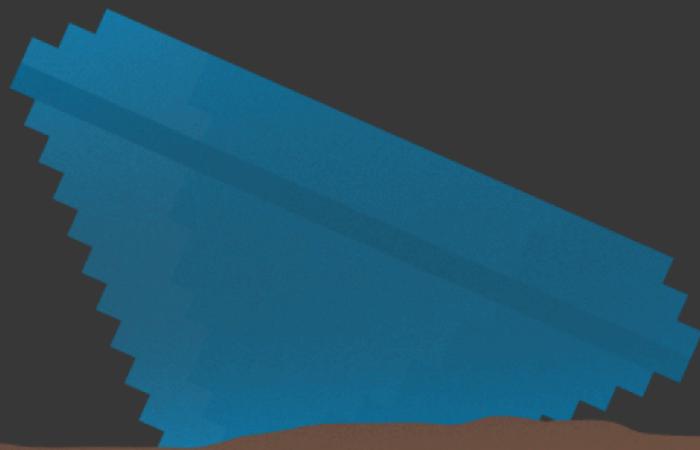


*DUO THE
DIAMOND*



Consequences Of Amnesia

One's Self Is A Mystery

“Mimic? Mimic!” A voice called out. “Where are you?” “Wha-” A dazed cat replied as he struggled to move. “Who-who are you?” “What are you playing at!” The voice demanded, it seemed to be coming from a device of some kind. “Do I need to repeat myself? Where. Are. You?” “I-I don’t know who you are.” The cat responded, a pain gripping his head tightly. “I don’t know what you want from me!” There was only a faint disgruntled noise as the connection was cut. “Ughhh.” The cat groaned as he turned around onto his back. “Oh, uhh, hi?” In front of him stood a hedgehog, wolf & lemur, all seemed intent to do *something* with him. “Who are you?” The cat asked. “Where am I?” The wolf approached the cat without saying anything. “Leave him be.” The hedgehog ordered. “He’s not a threat.” “He’s who we’ve been looking for.” The wolf countered. “Who *I*’ve been looking for.” “Wh-what?” The cat replied. “I-I don’t know any of you!” “Sonic’s right.” The lemur said. “We should leave him alone. Perhaps we’ve got the wrong person?” “I know what you want to do, Whisper, but we must figure that out later.” The hedgehog said, the cat presumed he was Sonic. “For now, he lives.” There was a pause. “Fine.” The wolf, whom the cat assumed was Whisper, said. “But if he goes back to his old ways, he’s gone.” “Sure,” Sonic responded, “I can work with that.” “I still don’t know what’s going on.” The cat said. “W-why are you all here?” “Well, I’m Sonic, that’s Whisper, & that’s Tangle.” Sonic said. “We came here since you had a pretty nasty fall from up there.” “Up there?” The confused cat responded as he stood up. “In the sky?” “Yeah, there’s an event going on up there, you were part of it.” Sonic explained. “You got hit by an Extreme Gear up there, which knocked you out & you fell down here.” “Oh, well, that explains why I’m here.” The cat replied. “But someone was calling me ‘*Mimic*’? You heard, didn’t you? My name is, Duo, I think? I can’t remember anything.” “I think it’s just a case of mistaken identity, that’s all.” Sonic assured. “No need to worry.” There was a long pause. “Here, you know what?” Sonic said. “I’ll take you to your room, it’ll be better than being out here.” “Thank you.” Duo replied. “But don’t you have something to do here?” “Nope, not at all.” Sonic responded. “I’ll take you down on my Extreme Gear, it’s a long way to the Restoration HQ from here.” “Okay then.” Duo replied as he followed Sonic to where he was going. “Bye Whisper! Bye Tangle!” The two didn’t respond as Duo & Sonic bolted off on an Extreme Gear.

So, This Is My Home?

"I am *never* doing that again." Duo said as they got off the Extreme Gear. "How was I on one of those things earlier?" "I'd say you didn't like it because you were scared you'd fall off." Sonic replied. "But we're here now at the Restoration HQ, where your room is." "It doesn't look like much." Duo responded. "Everything here is ruined, except for that shed there." "It doesn't look like much up here," Sonic replied, "But if you follow me, I'll show you where everything really is." Duo trailed behind Sonic as they walked into the small shed. Duo looked around, wondering what Sonic was doing. The floor beneath them began to move, Duo almost lost his balance. "The Restoration HQ is underground." Sonic explained. "This is just one of the entrances." "So you just walk into this shed & it takes you down to the Restoration HQ?" Duo asked. "That's cool!" "Not quite." Sonic responded. "You have to lift one of the tools on the wall a bit to activate the lift." "That... makes sense." Duo replied. "I didn't notice you doing that so I thought the floor was moving on its own." A moment later, the two reached the bottom, the doors opening to reveal the Restoration HQ proper. "Wow." Duo said, mesmerised. "This place is awesome!" "It's got everything you might need." Sonic said. "There's all kinds of work, plenty of places to stay, good food. I'll show you where your room is now." Sonic led Duo around the Restoration HQ, with Duo still in amazement at everything that the Restoration HQ had. "This is your room." Sonic said as he showed Duo a small flat. "It's got what you need, & it's yours until you leave the Restoration." "It's nice." Duo remarked. "I like it." "If there's anything you need to know, just ask someone around here." Sonic advised. "Everyone here will be willing to help." "Thank you, Sonic." Duo said. "I suppose you have somewhere to be." "It's no problem." Sonic replied. "I would show you around some more, but I've got to go. See ya!" Duo waved goodbye as Sonic left to do whatever it was he needed to do.

Duo had a look around his room, it was modest, but he didn't mind. Duo sprawled out onto the bed, it felt much more comfy to him than the hard ground that he woke up on was. For a while, Duo wandered around the Restoration HQ, taking in everything around him as he went. "Hello there!" A wolfhound called out as they approached Duo. "You must be Duo, nice to meet ya." "Yeah, that's me." Duo replied. "What can I do for you?" "Ya don't need to do anythin'." The person responded. "I seen ya potterin' about & thought I'd see if ya needed anythin'." "I was just having a look around the place." Duo replied. "Sonic was right, this place has everything!" "You were speaking to Sonic!" The wolfhound said in astonishment. "Ya lucky wee scoundrel!" "Is there any work I can do?" Duo asked. "I should probably do *something* around here." "Hang on, were you not part of the Diamond Cutters?" The person questioned. "I swear I've seen ya with 'em before." "I was?" Duo asked. "I don't think I know who they are, then again I can't seem to remember anything at all." "They're a volunteer group, the members are Tangle, Whisper & Lanolin." The person explained. "Although if ya can't remember anythin' then that'd explain why ya don't know 'em." "I know Tangle & Whisper." Duo responded. "They were there when I woke up, they were looking for someone & mistook me for them." "Right..." The wolfhound replied, clearly in thought about something. "Well, since the Diamond Cutters aren't 'ere right now, you could come along with me. We've got plenty of work to do down at maintenance." "Sure!" Duo responded. "I'll come with you, but uhh, what's your

name.” “My bad, I forgot to introduce myself.” The wolfhound said. “I’m Vady, Vady Nureirn.” “Nice to meet you, Vady.” Duo replied. “Where’s this maintenance place of your’s?” “I’ll show ya where it is.” Vady responded. “It’s not too far from ‘ere.” The two wandered off into a deeper part of the Restoration HQ.

Gettin' To Work

“This is it!” Vady said as they entered the maintenance depot. “This is where we’ll be based for work.” “So, where do I sign up at?” Duo asked. “I don’t think I can just walk in without approval.” “Forgot about that part.” Vady responded. “Office is jus’ next door, I’ll get ya signed up.” Duo shadowed Vady as they quickly made their way to the maintenance office. “What’s up, Vady.” The receptionist said. “Who’ve you got with you?” “This is Duo, he’s looking for work.” Vady explained. “Thought I’d bring ‘im in with us.” “Not a bother.” The receptionist replied. “Duo, follow Vady ‘round for a week or two, then you can go ‘bout on your own.” “Sure thing.” Duo responded. “Suppose we’d better get started.” “We’re pretty sure there’s a heating pipe that needs replaced in the roof of the Diamond Cutters’ meeting room.” The receptionist said. “If anything needs fixed, go ahead & do that.” “Right ‘o, sir.” Vady replied. “We’ll get on whit’ it now.” The two left the office & headed back down to the maintenance depot.

The two grabbed what they needed & made their way across the Restoration HQ to the Diamond Cutters’ meeting room. Vady placed a stepladder down & got to work removing small parts of the ceiling. Duo placed the rest of the tools they brought on the table, but something caught his eye. There was a small photograph, four people were on it, one being Whisper, but there was a tear at the edge. “What’cha lookin’ at?” Vady asked. “Don’t think snoopin’ ‘round ‘ere is a good idea.” “It’s a photo, but I’m curious to know who’s in it.” Duo responded. “I’d also like to know where part of it is torn.” “Let me see.” Vady said. “Hrmm, I think that’s the old Diamond Cutters, don’t know much about them other than three are dead.” “Oh.” Duo replied sympathetically. “Do you know how they died?” “There was another one of ‘em, Mimic, he sold ‘em out to Eggman & got three of ‘em killed.” Vady explained. “Whisper survived, since then, she & Mimic have been hunting each other. Mimic would’ve been in that photo, but I’d assume Whisper removed ‘im from it.” Duo didn’t reply, he just continued to look at the photograph. “Far as I’m aware, Mimic’s still out there.” Vady continued. “He might try & go after the new Diamond Cutters, which might include you, but Whisper’s been through a hell of a lot so you’d be safe with her if that happens. I wouldn’t fear Mimic if I was you.” “Well, hopefully that never happens.” Duo said after a pause. “For now, let’s just get to work.” “Say, ya wanna come to a football match with me tomorrow?” Vady asked. “It’s only for fun, so I’d say they’d let ya play.” “I mean, sure.” Duo replied. “Why not.” “Good on ya, lad.” Vady responded happily. “We’ll get this sorted out, then I’d reckon it’d be time to get some sleep.” Duo nodded, setting the photograph down, then accompanied Vady as they inspected the pipes in the ceiling.

The work took a while, an entire section of pipe was badly cracked, but it was eventually fixed. “Well, that took a lot longer than I expected.” Vady said. “But we’re done now & can get some sleep.” “Where should we meet at?” Duo asked. “For the football.” “I’ll come down to your room at noon.” Vady replied. “I’ll take ya to the pitch.” “Sounds good.” Duo responded. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” “Bye!” Vady called out. “Jus’ make sure ya don’t lose track o’ the time!” Duo dandered off back towards his room.

The First Night

Back in his room, Duo made himself cozy as he snuggled into bed, embracing the comfort a proper place to sleep gave him. It wasn't long before he'd fallen fast asleep.

In his mind, he found himself on a hilltop, making his way to a lonely tree at the top; but he seemed to be... limping? "W-Whisper...? H-help..." He stuttered meekly. "We were ambushed... I barely got out alive..." There was no response. "She abandoned us?" He said, confused, as he picked up a weapon of some kind. "I mean... she would've heard everything..." He looked around for a moment. "If she ran the minute things went bad, she could be a klick from here in any direction!" He said, his voice changing as he spoke. "Eggman's going to filet me alive!" He stood for a moment, as if to contemplate something. "Then again... I have her wispon, & he wouldn't know my mask from hers." He said deviously. "... I can turn these in as 'proof'. That gets Eggman off my back, & there's nothing to fear from an unarmed coward. Ha! It should be criminal to be this smooth." He lifted the weapon, whistling to himself as he walked off.

Duo woke up in a cold sweat. That wasn't *him*, was it? What did it mean? Was this a memory? These thoughts didn't help the crappy physical feeling that was plaguing him. He strained himself out of bed, swaying as he walked to the door. Something caught his eye, in a mirror, his eyes were, black? Duo stared at the image for several seconds, blinking multiple times in the hope he had simply seen white as black, somehow. As he continued to stare at himself, something on his head morphed ever so slightly. "Gah!" Duo exclaimed as he dived into the bedsheets & formed a messy ball inside them.

Duo didn't move for goodness knows how long. "Duo? Ya alright?" Vady said as he approached Duo's room. "Heard there was a commotion in 'ere, jus' wanted to check if you're..." Vady stopped as he saw the mess Duo was in. "You know what?" Vady said. "I think I'll be back in a moment. Okay?" Vady slowly walked out of the room, leaving Duo lying in a heap.

It must've been a couple more minutes before Duo finally rose out of his bed again, checking himself in the mirror. Nothing wrong. "What happened?" Vady asked. "Someone do something?" "No, it's not that." Duo responded quietly. "I um, had a dream last night, & I don't know what to make of it." "What was it?" Vady asked. "It'd be best if ya told someone 'bout it." "I was somewhere I don't recognise." Duo began. "I was someone I don't know. I mentioned Whisper in it, but also something about an ambush? I-I don't know why *I* had that dream. Maybe it's something I've forgotten? It could be, I still can't remember anything before yesterday, but it doesn't feel right. Whoever I was in that dream was working with Eggman, but I don't know or understand anything else from that dream." "Hrmm. That's... something..." Vady responded. "Not entirely sure what it could mean, but something else happened for ya to be lyin' in a heap when I found ya." "Umm, about that..." Duo said nervously. "When I woke up, I didn't feel good, & when I looked in the mirror, my eyes were black & I'm sure something changed physically about me. I got scared by it & ended up in that mess for cover." "Oh. That ain't good!" A concerned Vady replied. "Ya better get

that checked out soon!” “I should be okay... for now.” Duo responded. “Uhh, is that football game still on?” “Still have a while before we start.” Vady said. “Might help ya take your mind off things.” “That’s what I was thinking.” Duo replied. “But, how do I play football?” “Simple enough. Ya kick the ball into the net on the other side for a point.” Vady explained. “Pass the ball to your teammates & take it off the other team without using your hands or being rough. You’ll learn more details as you play, but that’s the gist of it.” “Doesn’t sound too hard.” Duo responded. “Suppose we’d better get going then.” “We’ve got time.” Vady replied. “If ya don’t feel well, ya can leave the pitch whenever.” The two began to make their way out of the Restoration HQ & up to the surface.

Scouts Versus Clydes

“Here we are!” Vady said as they came to a moderately sized football pitch. “Ain’t much, but it’s grand enough.” “How long until the match starts?” Duo asked. “Do we get to pick our teams?” “It’ll be a few minutes before kick off.” Vady answered. “My team, the Scouts, are down a man, so you’ll be joinin’ me. Before the match starts we can get some practice done if ya want.” “Sure.” Duo replied. “It’d be good to know how the game works *before* I play.” Vady led Duo onto the pitch.

“Who are you?” A person asked. “You for playin’?” “I’m Duo, I’ll be playing with the Scouts.” Duo responded. “I heard they need an extra player.” “You’ve come to the right place then!” The person replied. “I’m Lawrence Argon, the Scouts team captain. Do you know how to play?” “No.” Duo said quietly. “I don’t.” “That’s no bother!” Lawrence responded. “I’ll show you how to play, I’m sure Vady will too.” Vady nodded in agreement, then the two gave Duo a crash course on how to play football & Lawrence elaborated on any rules Duo wasn’t too sure about.

Once it was almost time for kick off, Duo joined the Scouts as a defender, while Vady was a striker. The whistle blew & the match was on. They played for the full ninety minutes, with Duo finding that it could get rather hectic at some points, but in the end, the score was six-three to the Scouts, with Duo able to take credit for one of their goals. “Well, how’d ya find that?” Vady asked after the match. “Did ya enjoy it?” “Yeah! I did!” Duo responded. “Although, I’m absolutely exhausted.” “Who isn’t?” Vady replied. “Also, nice job on that last minute goal! First match & you’re already scoring!” “Thanks.” Duo responded. “You reckon I could take it further?” “Absolutely!” Vady said ecstatically. “We’ve a tournament on in a week, I’d say you’d be allowed in if someone’s off. But for now, we both need some water.” Duo nodded & the two approached the bench with water bottles for the players.

There was a radio tuned into the ‘*Blast99*’ radio station, it was playing popular music, which Vady only tolerated. “We’ve had to interrupt the music to give you the latest news regarding the Clean Sweepstakes event that has been ongoing for the past couple of days.” A presenter said on the radio. “The CEO of Clean Sweep Inc, Clutch the Opossum, has been arrested by the Restoration after it was discovered that Clean Sweep Inc was disposing of waste in a manner that heavily polluted the environment & that Clutch was willing to endanger the lives of those participating in the Clean Sweepstakes event for personal gain. The arrest was preceded by an attempt by Clutch to hold several important members of the Restoration hostage, however, his plan was foiled by the swift intervention of Restoration personnel, in particular the ‘*Diamond Cutters*’ played a vital role in rescuing the Restoration leadership that Clutch had captured. There has been a notable absence in the Diamond Cutters’ ranks, as Duo the Cat has been reported as ‘*missing*’ since he was struck by an Extreme Gear yesterday; the Diamond Cutters have not been available for a statement regarding Duo.” The presenter continued to read the news, but Duo couldn’t help but notice Vady was staring off into the distance. “Bloody bastards!” Vady exclaimed. “They abandoned ya!” “What do you mean?” Duo asked. “I wouldn’t say they abandoned me.” “Ya said Tangle & Whisper were there

when ya woke up, didn't ya?" Vady responded. "Ya 'member that they're part of the Diamond Cutters? So were you! They knew damn well where ya were & they still said you were missin'! They swept ya under the rug!" "Okay, well..." Duo said. "I wouldn't go *that* far..." "It's what they did!" Vady replied angrily. "They're actin' like ya jus' vanished! When they get back I'm havin' a word with 'em..." "I don't think you need to do that." Duo responded. "Maybe they just... forgot?" "They bloody well didn't!" Vady retorted. "They're up to something, & I'm findin' out what it is." Duo didn't say anything, but Vady could read the worried look on his face. "I'll be fine." Vady said. "Hopefully I'll talk some sense into 'em when they're back. I'm away on down to my room to cool off, ya can come if ya want." "Sure." Duo replied. "Why not." The two left the area, heading back down into the Restoration HQ.

A ‘Friendly’ Talk...

Back in the Restoration HQ, it was barely a minute before something caught Vady's eye. "Ya know what?" He said. "I'll talk to 'em now." "Wouldn't it be better to talk to them later?" Duo asked. "You know, 'cool off' in your room?" "Well I've changed my mind." Vady replied. "Better now than give 'em time to come up with a load of shite." Duo didn't get a chance to respond as Vady marched off without him.

The Diamond Cutters had only sat down in their room to have a discussion when the door swung open & an angry wolfhound barged in, Duo standing nervously behind him. "All youn's got some explainin' to do!" Vady announced, the Diamond Cutters looking at him rather confused. "All youn's know what ya did, leavin' Duo in the dust, pretendin' ya never seen 'im!" Lanolin looked over at Tangle & Whisper. "Look." Tangle began. "I can explain." "Ya gonn' give me a bunch o' lies & I know it!" Vady retorted. "So tell me the truth & nothin' but the truth!" "We have reasons." Whisper replied, trying to keep calm. "If you'd give us a moment to explain." "Go on then!" Vady responded. "Out with it!" There was a moment of silence. "As I thought." Vady said. "Ya hav' to come up with your shite first. Now I don't wanna hear anythin' 'bout youn's abandonin' Duo again. Alright?" Vady marched off, Whisper got up & followed him, with an angry & determined look on her face. "Wait!" Tangle said as she got up & went out the door. "Whisper!"

"Uhh... sorry about that..." Duo said as he entered the now almost empty room. "I didn't want him to do that... sorry." "No no." Lanolin replied. "It's... alright." "No, you don't sound alright." Duo responded. "Is it what he said?" "No, it's not that." Lanolin said somewhat quietly. "Well, he didn't help. We've had some... *issues* lately, it's put a lot of strain on us, & he certainly didn't help with his attitude towards us." "I know it's probably not the best time to ask." Duo said. "But am I still in the Diamond Cutters or not?" "We can talk about your involvement in a couple days." Lanolin responded. "But for now we have to sort ourselves out first." "Oh, okay." Duo replied. "Suppose I should leave & you all do what you have to do." "Yes." Lanolin said in a sigh. "That'd be good." Duo left without saying anything else, then tried to figure out where Vady could've gone.

Revelations

Duo looked everywhere he could, but Vady was nowhere to be seen, the only place Duo hadn't checked yet that Vady could be was the maintenance depot. It wasn't hard to find Vady, he was sitting outside the maintenance office, hunched over as if he'd been defeated. "What's wrong?" Duo asked. "Are you okay?" "Aye, jus' had an argument with Whisper." Vady explained. "Didn't go well, it got very... *heated* at some points, but nothin' physical like. She'd said somethin' 'bout havin' reasons for leavin' ya behind, but I wasn't half payin' heed to what she was sayin' if I'm bein' totally honest. I'm sure I didn't miss much, probably jus' a load of shite." "I think it'd be best to start some work." Duo said. "Might take your mind off things." "I was jus' waitin' for ya for that exact reason." Vady replied. "They wan' us to inspect some girders on the ceilin' of one of the storerooms." "Doesn't sound too bad." Duo replied. "But is it only going to be us two? Wouldn't it be better to have more people working on this job?" "Aye, but they jus' wan' us to have a look first." Vady explained. "We don't need to do anythin' else ourselves. If anyone else is needed I'll run down & get 'em." "Alright then." Duo responded. "Suppose we should get started now." "Aye." Vady replied. "I'll show ya where we're goin'." The two wandered off, Duo wondering what Whisper had said to Vady.

They arrived at a large warehouse-like room, filled with absolutely anything & everything. Vady grabbed a large ladder for them to use. "Ya think ya can manage on your own?" Vady asked. "I can stick 'round if ya don't feel safe." "No thanks." Duo replied. "I'll be okay." "Well, if you're confident, I'll leave ya be." Vady responded. "But I'm helpin' ya get the ladder sorted first." The pair fumbled around with the ladder for a moment before they got it secured safely. "I can run down & get a safety harness for ya." Vady said. "If you're fear'd o' fallin'." "I shouldn't need it." Duo replied. "But thanks for the offer." Vady went to grab a ladder for himself as Duo scaled up to the ceiling.

Duo had a look at the girder, everything looked right, he was about to scale down when he heard someone else come into the room. "Well, this is awkward." Vady said nervously. "What ya doing 'ere?" "I was looking for Sonic." Tangle answered. "But I can't find him anywhere. Do you know where he might be?" "I know roughly where he is." Vady replied. "I'll bring 'im down to ya." "Thanks." Tangle responded. "I just need to talk to him." Duo heard Vady leave the room, Duo wanted to go down & apologise to Tangle about Vady's earlier outburst, but something was telling him to stay up here.

Vady would soon return with Sonic, Sonic sat down next to Tangle. "Is it 'bout me?" Vady asked. "Should I go?" "It's not about you." Tangle responded. "But it'd be better if you left us alone for now." "No bother." Vady replied. "I need to go now anyway." Duo heard Vady walk away, there was a moment of silence afterwards.

“So, what’s happening?” Sonic asked. “You don’t look too happy, what’s the matter?” “I need to talk to you about Duo.” Tangle replied. “We still don’t know what to do with him.” “Let me guess.” Sonic said. “Whisper wants to get rid of him completely, while you’re not fully convinced of that idea.” “Basically.” Tangle responded. “Whisper’s patience is about to run out after the guy that brought you here had an argument with her about Duo, she’s not in the mood for much now, especially any discussions regarding Duo, she’ll probably take matters into her own hands soon.” “It’ll be tough to convince her to leave Duo alone.” Sonic replied. “Given their history with each other, we’ll likely have to compromise & let her have her way with him if he goes back to his old ways.” “That’s what I’m worried about.” Tangle said. “What if he *does* go back to his old ways? What then?” “We’ll have to get rid of him then.” Sonic replied. “But until then, we leave him alone, & keep him in the dark about his past. If he asks about anything, just say that the guy on the Extreme gear that hit him was Mimic & that Mimic dropped their radio, which is why it was beside Duo when he woke up, you could also say that Mimic’s been caught if you want.” “I’ll tell Whisper about it tomorrow.” Tangle responded. “I don’t think it’s a good idea to say anything today.” Duo was left speechless up on top of the girder. The dream began to make sense to him. As his mind raced with possibilities, he almost fell off the girder & nearly knocked the ladder down, but he managed to stay out of sight. He sat for a moment as he pieced together everything. Once he’d figured out everything he could about himself, he peered down to where Sonic & Tangle were, they were gone. Duo hastily climbed down the ladder, scrambling together a note for Vady before quickly leaving.

“Duo!” Vady called out as he & some more workers entered the storeroom. “Duo? Where are ya?” Something caught Vady’s eye, a note; he lifted it up to get a better look. *‘I just learned about my past. I need a moment. I’ll be in my room.’* Vady stared at the note for a moment, then bolted out of the storeroom.

D a m a g e d D i a m o n d

Back in the Diamond Cutters' meeting room, the Diamond Cutters were almost ready to start the discussion about Duo. Whisper's mood had improved, but still wasn't the greatest. *Knock knock*. The door slowly opened. "So, uh, I know this isn't the best time to say this..." Duo began as he refrained from properly entering the room. "But, I need to say it. I know about my past." The room was surprised by Duo's statement, Whisper's mood appeared to deteriorate. "I thought I could've stuck around, joined you three & worked like I used to before I got knocked out." Duo continued. "But, honestly, I feel betrayed by the decision to hide my past from me; I understand *why* the decision was made, but I don't agree with it, it's not right... I would've found out eventually." Duo noticed how Whisper looked to be getting closer to her breaking point. "I can tell I'm not wanted here." Duo said. "So, I'm officially leaving the Diamond Cutters. I'll not bother any of you anymore, especially you, Whisper, I'll try to not to even look at you, I know you want me dead, but please, don't do it." The room was quiet, it seemed Duo's assurance to Whisper didn't do anything. "I'll be going now." Duo said as he backed away. "Bye." He shut the door, not looking back as he wondered what the Diamond Cutters would make of the situation, he feared it might not end well for him.

Duo slumped down onto his bed, there was only a short moment until he was interrupted. "Duo!" Vady said as he came up to the door. "What happened?" "I'm Mimic." Duo responded bluntly. "I don't like it, but it's who I am." "That can't be true." Vady replied. "Who told ya?" "I overheard Sonic & Tangle talking, they wanted to hide my past from me." Duo explained. "I figured out in my mind that my dream last night was something Mimic did. I think Whisper's gonna kill me now that I know about my past." "I wouldn't go *that* far." Vady responded. "Sure, she'll probably hate you more now, but I don't know about her killin' ya. Look, if she tries anythin', I'll do my best to help ya out." "Thanks." Duo replied quietly. "I'm for bed now, this day hasn't gone well..." "That's what I'd recommend." Vady said. "We'll sort something out in the mornin'. I'll see ya then." Vady left the room, Duo tucked himself into bed.

The Second Night

Duo was restless, it took goodness knows how long before he finally dozed off. In his mind, an image flashed in his vision. It was from his perspective, everything around him was pitch black, except one thing: Whisper was lying on the ground, a serrated knife in her back.

Duo awoke in a cold sweat, all lights were turned off, except a faint teal glow at his door. The light slipped out of his sight. Duo got up, his hand fumbling around the bedside locker he had. He carefully approached the door. Someone was quietly patrolling the corridors, perhaps the source of the glow that was in his door. Curiosity got the better of him & Duo carefully walked behind the person, making sure to not make any noise. “Duo... put down the knife...” Vady said from behind Duo. “I don’t know what you’re at with a knife at this time of night, but put it down.” Duo looked over at Vady. *What knife?* Duo questioned in his mind. He looked at his hands. The same serrated knife he’d seen flash in his mind for a split second was in his grasp. He looked up at the person he was following, they too had stopped. Duo was much closer to the teal glow than he’d anticipated. It finally clicked in his head, it was Whisper he was following.

Duo began to panic, dropping the knife as he hastily stepped back from Whisper, he raised his hands slightly in an attempt to convey non-violence. His eyes darkened. A teal electric-like bolt flew out from Whisper. Duo barely dodged it, then began to run for his life. The shot almost struck Vady as well, Duo ran past Vady, Vady quickly weighed his options, then booked it alongside Duo.

“Follow my lead!” Vady instructed. “Don’t waste any time!” “I don’t want to be like him!” Duo cried out. “It’s not me!” “Hold yourself together!” Vady ordered. “Your life depends on your ability to run! Try not to get yourself distracted & follow me!” The two thundered down the halls of the Restoration HQ, Whisper hot on their tail. Vady made a sharp turn, hurdling over a railing, Duo following suit. The pair made twists & turns anywhere they could in an attempt to throw off Whisper’s pursuit, the question of Whisper’s whereabouts was typically answered by a shot narrowly missing them. “Split up!” Vady ordered. “Once you’ve lost her, get to the surface! We’ll meet at the garden shed entrance!” Duo acknowledged Vady, the two then split off, Duo taking a turn while Vady continued forwards. Vady noticed a couple bricks set aside for maintenance of a wall, he picked one up, lobbing it at Whisper. He missed. Whisper returned fire, Vady barely came out unscathed.

After what felt like hours of non-stop running, Duo finally made it out of the Restoration HQ without Whisper following him. He slowly approached the entrance that Vady had told him to go to, he sat down on a nearby bench to recover. “Jeepers...” Vady said, exhausted. “Well, that’s over with. Oh dear, ya don’t look good at all...” “Why?” Duo asked as he began to panic more. “What’s wrong?” “You’re... changin’...” Vady responded. “You’re not half yourself. I mean, physically.” “N-no!” Duo stammered. “I-I... I can’t! No!” “Breathe, breathe.” Vady instructed. “You’ll do no good to yourself if you’re panickin’ like that.” “I can’t be him!” Duo exclaimed. “I don’t wanna be him!”

“You’re not like Mimic at all.” Vady comforted. “Ya wanna do good in the world, ya wanted to work with those he hated, ya did everythin’ he wouldn’t without realising it. As for the physical change, I don’t know what can be done, it doesn’t seem permanent, which is good. I think it’s only caused by stress, we’ll have to find some way we can avoid stress for ya, but for now, we’ll take it slow, get yourself calmed down first.” “T-thanks.” Duo said. “Why... why did this have to happen?” “I don’t know...” Vady responded. “Some things in life jus’ aren’t fair, but we’ll make it through, I believe in it.” Duo looked at Vady, simply grateful someone was there for him. Something cold touched Duo’s head.

Duo looked at Vady, but he was looking off into the night. Duo slowly turned around, afraid of what was there. He stared down the barrel of a wispon. “No!” Duo cried out as he plummeted down onto the ground. “Please!” Whisper didn’t budge. “What the fuck are ya playin’ at!” Vady aggressively demanded as he walked up to Whisper. “Ya fuckin’ wanker!” Vady grabbed Whisper’s wispon, throwing it to the ground. “Ya heard what we said! Didn’t ya!” Vady shouted. “Now you’re here to kill the poor man when he’s in the middle of a fuckin’ crisis! If ya wanna fuck around you’ll find out when your lyin’ on a bed for a month! Ya hear me! Now fuck off!” Whisper didn’t say anything or move. “Go ahead then.” Vady said. “Kill me. See where that gets ya. Kill me for the crime of protectin’ someone vulnerable. I don’t care ‘bout your past with ‘im, he’s innocent now, & if ya kill ‘im, ya better take me with ‘im else I destroy your life. But what’s that? Ya kill an innocent, your life falls apart anyway. What will it be?” Whisper didn’t respond. “I know damn well what’ll happen if Mimic comes back.” Vady continued. “But he’s not here, is he? If it’s jus’ me & Duo, & if I suddenly vanish for no reason, then you can know Mimic’s back. ‘Til then, if ya try anythin’ against Duo, I’ll be after ya ‘til ya know ya fucked up. Now piss off.” Whisper stood for a moment, before lifting her wispon & walking off.

“T-thanks.” Duo stuttered. “You saved my life!” “It’s not a problem.” Vady replied. “I hate those mercenary types anyway, the idiots believe any problem is solved by violence. I came here to stay away from those types of people...” “What do you mean by that?” Duo asked. “What happened?” “Ya see, my homeland has been fightin’ itself for decades now...” Vady explained. “There’s no reason for it, people of different communities grew up hating each other for the longest time because of historical disputes that are centuries old & have been propagandised beyond belief. Roughly twenty years ago it boiled over into massive riots & attacks against members of different communities, it’s technically not a full-on conflict, but it might as well be... I came ‘ere to escape that hell, to escape the violence, but there’s always someone who wants needless bloodshed...” “Maybe we can help your homeland.” Duo suggested. “You’ve helped me a lot, why shouldn’t I help you?” “It’s too risky, besides, I’m not hopeful peace will come easy.” Vady replied. “For now, ya need to sort yourself out. We’ll take a walk ‘round the forest, then we’ll head back & get some sleep.” Duo nodded & the two wandered off.

Asserting Control

The sun began to rise as Vady & Duo reentered the Restoration HQ. Duo's physical changes had reverted. Duo went to his room, then went to take a nap.

In his mind, Duo was in a metallic base of some kind. He looked around, but there was nothing he even remotely recognised. "Look what we have here..." Duo looked around for the source of the voice. "My alter ego, here to try & prove he doesn't need me." "I don't need you!" Duo responded. "We're nothing alike!" "I wonder why..." The voice replied. "Perhaps it's because I needed to conceal myself & invented you to do that." "I'm my own person!" Duo countered. "You're not me, & I'm not you!" "I know otherwise..." The voice responded. "You are nothing without me. You wouldn't exist if I didn't let you." "Then why am I still here?" Duo retorted. "If you can get rid of me so easily, why haven't you?" "That's exactly what I'm here to do." The voice replied. "I have some *loose ends* to tie up..." Duo stood on guard, waiting for the inevitable strike to come.

Mimic leapt out from a shadow, knife in hand. Duo dodging the knife & punching Mimic in the gut. Mimic recoiled from the hit, before Duo booted him full force on the kneecap. The knife slipped out of Mimic's hand, Duo picking it up. "Go ahead." Mimic said. "Finish me." Duo stood for a moment, before chucking the knife across the room. "I'm not like you." Duo remarked. "We're separate, & will remain so."

Duo awoke with the same crappy feeling he had when he had his first dream. He looked in the mirror, his eyes were white. A feeling of excitement came across Duo, had he finally done it? Was he finally free? He certainly hoped so. "Duo!" Vady said. "You're finally awake! I've got a counsellor for ya to visit 'round 'bout now." Duo followed Vady as the wolfhound showed Duo to the counsellor's room.

"You must be Duo." A blue terrier said. "Welcome. I'm Loyde Hendrikson, nice to meet you." "Nice to meet you too." Duo replied as he took a seat. "So, what are we doing, Mr. Hendrikson?" "Please, just call me Loyde." Loyde responded. "I've been told a bit about your past, & I'll be giving you some advice so you can distance yourself from that chapter of your life." "Will I be coming back here again?" Duo asked. "Just so I know now." "Yes, you'll be coming back here for a good while." Loyde answered. "Now, I want you to try & get one thing done now to get it out of the way for later, it won't be easy, but it must be done: reconnect with Whisper." "But, how?" Duo questioned. "She hates me!" "The question is..." Loyde said. "Do *you* hate her?" "No." Duo replied slowly. "Not really." "Then it won't be too hard." Loyde assured. "Whisper may have built a wall between you & her, but you haven't built a wall of your own. If you don't build that wall, you can slowly dismantle hers & defy your past by establishing a friendship with the person they hated." "It'd be nice, but..." Duo responded. "I just don't think she'd ever want to become friends with me." "At the very least, make sure you're not enemies." Loyde replied. "What I want you to do, is to reach out to her & chip away at that wall she's built bit by bit. Do you think you could do that?" "Yeah." Duo said nervously.

“I think so.” “That’s good.” Loyde responded. “Go up to Whisper & try to make a fresh start with her.” “If that fails?” Duo asked. “What then?” “Move on to one of Whisper’s friends.” Loyde replied. “They’d likely be more amenable to you.” “Thanks for the suggestion.” Duo said. “I’ll try that now.” “Not a problem.” Loyde responded. “Good luck!” Duo took a deep breath as he walked down to the Diamond Cutters’ meeting room.

Mending The Rift

Knock knock. Duo slowly opened the Diamond Cutters' door. "So, uh, Whisper, sorry about last night." Duo began. "I wasn't thinking & I understand your reaction. I was just wondering if we could make a fresh start, I'm sorry for what Mimic did, I know why you don't trust me, but we can move on together." Duo held out his hand to Whisper, she didn't budge. "It's for the better." Duo said. "We don't even need to be friends, just not be enemies." Still, Whisper didn't move. "Please, Whisper, if you'd even show up to one of my counselling sessions, that'd be great!" Duo begged. "Please." Whisper still did nothing. Duo was about to leave, but just as he went to lower his hand, Tangle took the handshake with him. "Well, it's a start." Duo said. "I wish all of you luck. Goodbye." Duo walked out of the Diamond Cutters' room, hoping that he'd someday tear down the wall Whisper had built & that he'd never, ever, become Mimic once more.

Back In The Ranks

R e - e n l i s t m e n t

Three weeks after being knocked out & the less than stellar interactions with the Diamond Cutters, Duo mentally prepared himself; Vady had reasoned against it, but Duo felt it was just what he had to do. Marching his way down to the Diamond Cutters' meeting room, Duo braced himself for what would likely be an absolute disaster given what he wanted to say.

Knock knock. All eyes inside the room turned to face the door. "Uhh, hi?" Duo began nervously. "Can I uh, ask something?" The three Diamond Cutters sat in silence. "I think that's a yes." Duo said slowly. "Could I... join the Diamond Cutters." There was a brief period of silence. "...*Sure.*" Lanolin replied. "If it's what you want to do..." "Oh, uh, thanks." A surprised Duo responded. "I expected that to be a *lot* more difficult. Thanks! Do you mind if I stay then?" "It'd make sense." Tangle answered. "We're leaving for training in a moment, you came at a pretty good time." "I suppose so." Duo replied. "Do I need to bring anything with me?" "No." Whisper responded in her usual quiet tone. "But could you bring Silver down here? He should be coming through the main entrance soon." "No problem!" Duo said enthusiastically. "I'm just glad we can work together again." Duo departed the room & headed out to meet Silver.

"So, how'd it go?" Vady asked not far from the Diamond Cutters' room. "By the look of it, not bad at all." "You bet!" Duo replied. "It went *way* better than I expected it to!" "Good on ya lad!" Vady responded. "Ya headed out with 'em now?" "Not yet, they sent me to bring down Silver for them." Duo explained. "But after that, we're off to training! Speaking of that, I need to be on my way, see you later!" Duo turned to continue in the direction he was headed. "See ya!" Vady called back. "That's odd, Silver should know where to go, there's no reason they should want 'im gone, unless..." Vady thought for a moment. "They better not've..." He continued to himself. "They're right bastards if they did..."

Duo waited by the entrance for a short moment until a silvery hedgehog came into his vision. "You're Silver, right?" Duo asked the hedgehog. "Whisper wanted me to bring you down to Diamond Cutters' room." "That's strange, Whisper knows I know where their meeting room is." The hedgehog replied. "By the way, yes, I am Silver." "Nice to meet you! I'm Duo, but you probably already knew that." Duo responded as he shook Silver's hand. "Long story short, I got knocked out three weeks ago, had a whole thing with the Diamond Cutters & learned about my connection to Mimic. I can't remember anything from before I got knocked out, which is probably a good thing." "I'm assuming you only recently rejoined the Diamond Cutters." Silver said as they began to navigate the Restoration HQ. "They're a good lot, but the whole Mimic situation & your direct connection to him causes a *lot* of strain on them as far as I know." "My very existence causes strain for them." Duo joked. "But I'm glad we can move on now." The pair dallied down the various corridors that comprised the Restoration HQ, Duo wondered why Whisper sent him to get Silver, if he already knew where to go, perhaps Whisper wanted him gone for some reason? But it could also just mean nothing.

The Three Diamond Cutters stood outside their room as Duo & Silver arrived. “We’re heading to the Sapphire Plains for training.” Whisper explained in her typical quiet tone. “Follow me.” The wolf led the way for the other four to an exit much closer to them. Once outside, it was a short march to where they needed to be.

Tension During Training

The specific section of the ‘*plains*’ they arrived at was much more reminiscent of the prairies, but it would suffice. The group approached a narrow river valley that cleaved the land in half, the drop down was at least seventy foot, but there were a couple ‘*islands*’ that were roughly the same height as the surrounding land & they had some foliage & trees on them, the land itself dipped down a couple feet on the other side of the valley. Telegraph poles stood on either side of the valley. “So... we’re crossing *this*?” Duo questioned. “How are we meant to do *that*?” “You can approach it anyway you want.” Whisper began. “You can cross by jumping between each island, by using the wires beside us, or climbing down the cliff here & climbing back up the other side..” “Uhh... you go first?” Duo nervously replied. “It’s your idea, after all.” “Look, I’ll catch you if you fall.” Silver said to no-one in particular. “You might as well *try* & if it doesn’t work I’ll bring you to safety.” There was a moment of awkward silence as nobody volunteered to cross the gap. “Here, I’ll go first.” Tangle said with a veneer of confidence. “Here we go!”

The lemur leaped over to the nearest platform in the valley, latching her tail onto a rock to stop herself. Tangle hurled herself to the next island & onto a tree branch, she swung herself around the branch a couple times before letting go & landing in a roll on the other side. “You know, it normally doesn’t just work like that.” Tangle said after taking a moment to breathe. “But I’m not complaining!” “Alright, I’ll go next.” Duo said to everybody. “Here goes nothing.”

The cat took a run up & jumped across the gap at the last moment, landing on the same platform Tangle had at first, although Duo barely made it. Duo followed Tangle’s path onto the exact same tree branch Tangle used, he copied her motion of swinging around several times to gain momentum & flung himself to the other side. His chest slammed against the dirt cliff face as only a single hand held his weight & prevented him from falling. Panic gripped the cat as he stared down towards the drop below him. *Okay, breath Duo, breath.* He thought to himself. *Just don’t think too much about it & you’ll be okay.* Duo continued to hang there for a moment, then placed his other hand on the ledge to give himself more grip, & swung himself up & around to solid ground.

“Ah, I did it.” Duo sighed with little breath. “I did it! I am never doing *that* again.” “Nice work!” Tangle complemented. “I didn’t think you’d make it at the end, but here you are!” “Tangle! Take Duo down to the next area!” Lanolin called out. “We’ll be with you in a moment!” “Alright!” Tangle replied. “The next thing we’re doing is agility training, Duo, so you don’t have to worry about any more gaps to cross.” The two wandered off, with Duo attempting to normalise his breathing.

The remaining Diamond Cutters stood in silence for a moment. “Would youn’s ever cut it out?” Vady complained as he marched down towards them from a hilltop, with Whisper showing visible frustration at his appearance. “That’s at least three cases of attempted murder against Duo now.” “Why are you here?” Whisper questioned. “Leave. Now.” “What if I don’t leave? What’cha gonna do then? Kill me?” Vady retorted. “Now, answer this one question: are ya gonna stop tryin’ to kill

Duo for no reason?” “We’re not trying to kill him.” Silver answered. “I would’ve caught him & put him somewhere safe if he fell.” “But did ya?” Vady countered. “When he was holdin’ onto that ledge what did ya do? Ya stared on & watched ‘im as he had to get ‘imself to safety. Some ‘I’ll catch ya if ya fall’ that is.” “Had he slipped off the ledge I would’ve caught him.” Silver responded. “Besides, he still made it, didn’t he?” “Well I know damn well ya didn’t wan’ ‘im to!” Vady replied angrily. “I don’t know much ‘bout ya, but I know ya know this lot & would side with ‘em any day over Duo.” “Look, nothing bad will happen to Duo, okay?” Silver said, somewhat annoyed. “If anything does happen, it will affect us as well.” “Ya see, I jus’ trust youn’s to *not* harm Duo.” Vady responded. “If anythin’ bad happens, I’m a witness to it & I *will* involve myself in it. Now before anythin’ unwanted happens I’m leavin’ youn’s alone, but jus’ remember I’m watchin’ youn’s.” Vady quickly removed himself from the group & headed back towards the hills he’d come from.

Duo & Tangle had just now made it to where they were to wait for the rest of the group to catch up with them. The area was mostly open, but there were a good number of natural obstacles & a steep hill with a cave entrance to the side of them. “This place might look a bit intimidating.” Tangle began. “But don’t worry, you don’t need to climb any cliffs & you won’t be in any danger.” “You’re lying & I know it.” Duo sighed, with Tangle giving him a confused look. “The way you said that, the way you phrased it, you won’t reassure me like that if you didn’t know something would happen.” Tangle took a breath as if to say something. “Don’t even bother.” Duo said dejectedly, sitting down against a rock. “I just... I just want people to be open with me, to tell me the truth. Almost everyone views me with suspicion, they think I am Mimic, while I am his creation, & him by extension. I wasn’t even really a person until a couple weeks ago, but people act like everything Mimic did I did when it’s just not the case. I had no say in what Mimic did, I didn’t even exist as my own person then to begin with, & I only have the faintest glimpse into his memory, but I can’t make sense of what I remember him doing. I just wish people, such as you, had been open about my connection to Mimic earlier, I just wish people would be honest with me. If you want me gone I’ll go, but I just want you to tell me the truth, I just...” Duo slouched his head down into his arms. Tangle sat down beside him, but said nothing.

A Sudden Interruption

The rest of the Diamond Cutters found Tangle & Duo sitting in silence, with no-one quite sure what to make of the situation. The thud of heavy metal on dirt caught everyone off guard. “Oh-ho-ho-ho! What do we have here?” Eggman said from the safety of yet another robot of his. “A rag-tag team that has way too many divisions to count, I doubt I have to do much before you inevitably crumble under the weight of your own conflicts with each other.” The Diamond Cutters huddled together as Eggman let out another villainous laugh.

A robotic fist smashed down where the Diamond Cutters were as they dived down in different directions. Duo hid behind a rock for cover, unsure of what to do. “Come ‘ere ya fattie!” Vady’s voice called out. “Fight me like ya mean it!” Vady flung a long piece of cable around one of the arms of the robots, grabbing both ends & pulling with all his might. “There’s no need for that type of language.” Eggman calmly remarked as he lifted the cable into the air & Vady along with it. “Derogatory statements have no place in the world.” “Do ya think I give a shit?” Vady retorted. “Now get your coward arse out of that fuckin’ shitty robot!” “Unfortunately for you, I don’t have the time for that.” Eggman replied. “Now I-” Eggman was interrupted by a sudden psychokinetic force holding the robot’s arm in place. “-Have to deal with the rest...” Eggman continued. “Great.” Vady let go of one end of the cable & dropped down onto the ground. The wolfhound darted off to where Duo was.

“I’ve got a plan.” Vady said as the others held off Eggman. “I’ll distract ‘im while you wrap the cable ‘round his legs. Got it?” Duo nodded & the two rose up from behind the rock. “You’re not for losin’ me that easy!” Vady shouted at Eggman, while Duo bolted underneath Eggman’s robot & hoped he hadn’t been spotted. “Just try me!” “You never learn, do you?” Eggman asked rhetorically. “Ah well, if it’s what you want...” A fist smashed down in front of Vady, with the wolfhound barely not getting flattened. Vady hastily clambered up the fist & onto the arm. “Hey knobhead!” He taunted as he knocked on the glass on the top of the robot. “I’m still ‘ere!” Eggman wrestled at the controls to swat the pest off of his robot, only for his mighty machine to come tumbling down. “You win this time!” Eggman called out from the Eggmobile that originally served as the robot’s controls, but now served as a means of escape. “But you won’t be so lucky next time!” “Oi! I’m not done with ya!” Vady shouted back as he attempted to pursue Eggman. “Come ‘ere & give me an honest fight!” Vady gave up the chase as Eggman quickly departed to somewhere unknown.

“Well.” Vady began as he turned to face the Diamond Cutters “If that doesn’t prove Duo’s worth, I don’t know what will.” “Fine.” Whisper said quietly. “He can stay.” “Thank you!” Duo exclaimed as he hugged Whisper, who didn’t seem to take it too well. “Sorry, was that a bit much? My bad. I’m just happy to move on now. Is this what you do all the time?” “This is what we do most of the time, some of the time.” Tangle answered. “That doesn’t sound right... we do this a lot, but not all the time. There, that’s better.” “Well, good luck out there.” Vady said to Duo. “I’m glad that you’re gettin’ back on your feet. As for me, I’d better stay away since I’ll probably jus’ cause trouble, but if

ya need me, ya can come & talk to me at any time.” “Thanks.” Duo replied. “I’ll see you later, Vady.” “See ya, Duo.” Vady responded. “Best of luck to ya.” “Best of luck to you too.” Duo repeated as the two shook hands. Vady wandered off back towards the Restoration HQ, while Duo accompanied the Diamond Cutters home.